Doctoral School of International Relations and Political Science

The effects of Web 2.0 online platforms on diplomatic activities

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Abstract

The megatrend of digitalization has changed practically all domains of human civilization. The realm of diplomacy – albeit hesitantly – also allowed modern tools, like those of the Web 2.0 age, to enter its modus operandi; and with it, the profession has changed irreversibly.

This research is an attempt to explore the transformative effects of Web 2.0 platforms on diplomatic activities, assessing how social media, direct messaging, videoconferences, and digital interactivity in general have reshaped the norms, structures, and daily practices of diplomacy in the 21st century. Using a grounded theory methodology and a geographically representative global sample of semi-structured interviews with active diplomats across all continents, the research identifies and categorizes key changes brought about by the digital turn.

The qualitative results show that the adoption of Web 2.0 tools has not only reconfigured the outward forms of diplomatic activities but also its inward processes, it has substantively altered its contents, institutional routines, and internal logic – marking not a linear evolution, but a paradigmatic shift from hierarchical, state-bound procedures to more horizontal, interactive, immediate, and public-facing forms of engagement and management. The study traces the evolution of transparency and accountability within diplomatic entities, showing that digital platforms have made diplomatic operations considerably more accessible and open to public scrutiny, but also that this new transparency has not evolved equally in contested, high-impact issues, and this new accountability may not necessarily have measurable consequences. Finally, the research systematically catalogs the enhanced risks associated with Web 2.0 diplomacy, organizing them into five categories: reputational faux pas, strategic goal displacement, cybersecurity threats, including espionage and leaks, psychological and operational burdens on diplomatic personnel, and the proliferation of misinformation.

While mapping this transformation, the study offers a set of global best practices and forward-looking recommendations, making its findings applicable to both diplomatic practitioners and scholars of international relations.

Keywords

Diplomacy, Web 2.0, social media, digitalization, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, foreign policy, transparency, accountability

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Abbreviations

AI	Artificial intelligence
ATT	Arms Trade Treaty
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative (一带一路)
CD	Corps Diplomatiques / Diplomatic Corps
CTA	Central Tibetan Administration
EEAS	European External Action Service
EU	European Union
IO	International Organization
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OAS	Organization of American States
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to express my thankfulness to my mother, who – paradoxically yet naturally – has been even more emotionally involved in the success of this doctoral research than I myself am. It was she who broke with the mainstream and took her six-year-old son to English classes in 1985, and the rest is history.

I am confident to say that without my supervisor, Dr Péter Marton, this doctoral dissertation would not carry significant scientific value. Having recently arrived from diplomacy to academia, from being a practitioner to being a researcher, I most certainly did require a change of mindset, and without an attentive supervisor who is not afraid to be principled, I would not necessarily have been able to catch up with the requirements of high-level scientific research. Dr Marton woke me up to the necessary rewiring of my approach without hesitation, and supplied guidance at short notice whenever needed – for which I am deeply thankful. Likewise, without the theoretical insight and contextual observations of Dr Viktor Friedmann, this work would not be of a high academic standard. Despite their university workload, my supervisors provided me with all the attention, helpfulness, and supportive criticism necessary to create a quality paper in the form of this dissertation.

I would like to thank all the diplomats who contributed to this research as interview participants with their insight; I would like to thank all the diplomats who contributed to the initial ideas of this research through countless friendly yet professional conversations; and I would like to thank all the diplomats of the international community who contribute to a more interconnected and cooperative world through their work day by day.

Further appreciation is due to the innumerable coffee shops in countless countries on four continents, where I have written parts of this dissertation, and to the welcoming people of Tunisia and China, where I have written most of it. To my peers who took time out of their busy schedule to read the drafts of this work (K. K and M. H, you know who you are); and last but not least, to my students at the Budapest University of Economics and Business, who – year after year – never cease to inspire me.

Foreword[1]

When in 2012, during my second diplomatic posting[2] I approached my Ambassador with the idea of creating an embassy Facebook page, he objected very strongly, saying that we are a serious institution, not a "*tabloid agency*" (sic!); and that "*childish social networks have no place at Embassies*" (sic!).

In 2016, during my third diplomatic posting[3], my idea of creating an Embassy Facebook page was welcomed by my Ambassador, insofar as saying "*well, I don't like social media and I don't have any of it, but since many are jumping on the bandwagon, more and more Embassies are also appearing online, let's do it, let's not fall behind*".

Finally, in 2020, when during my fourth diplomatic posting[4] I organized an interview in the leading daily paper of the host country, my ambassador told us "*Yes, I'll appear in the print version, but please focus on how we will multiply the reach online, on Facebook and Instagram, while I put it out on my Twitter!*".

This piece of diplomatic insight shows how much has changed in the world of diplomacy, in line with the megatrend of digitalization. Throughout my path as a diplomat, I had the fortune to personally experience the slow but irreversible paradigm shift that followed the conquest of Web 2.0 platforms, and perhaps nothing paints a more accurate picture of it, than the above examples of diplomatic leaders' behavior. I believe that these changes in diplomatic activities are comparable in their scope to those caused by the Treaty of Westphalia[5] in 1648, or the Vienna Congress[6] in 1814-15[7].

Thus, when I turned from active duty diplomacy to academia, from practitioner to researcher, I knew I wanted to dig deeper into these changes and show a comprehensive picture of how Web 2.0 online platforms affected diplomatic activities on all levels, globally.

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[1] A set of personal thoughts, constituting an integral part of the dissertation, but not of the scientific text itself.
[2] Ambassador Iván Gyurcsík in September 2012, at the Embassy of Hungary in Warsaw
[3] Ambassador Péter Jakab in January 2016, at the Embassy of Hungary in Bangkok
[4] Ambassador Katalin Tóth in September 2020, at the Embassy of Hungary in Lima
[5] The Peace of Westphalia is the name for peace treaties signed in October 1648 in Westphalia. They ended the Thirty Years' War and through the creation of the idea of the nation-state, practically established the foundation of modern diplomacy.
[6] The Congress of Vienna was a series of international diplomatic meetings to discuss and agree upon a possible new layout of the European political and constitutional order and established ways of diplomatic interactions.
[7] This opinion is by no means a scientific hypothesis in this text, that is why it is placed in this Foreword. For a further reference of the comparison, see Chapter 4.5.1.

Talking to my students about these changes reminds me time and again that it is not only our social contexts that change continuously. With every generation, our perception of change changes as well, and those who enter the world of diplomacy today, take online functioning for granted. Therefore, I am especially content that this dissertation can also serve as a chronicle of the changes when diplomacy made the big leap into the digital realm, breaking with millennia-old traditions, and moving on to pastures new.

1. Introduction

1.1 Objectives of the research

Digitalization, the communication revolution, Web 2.0[8]… these phenomena have changed the world for all human beings (Fukuyama, 2018). We all experience it in our everyday lives and at official local, national, and international levels alike. This irreversible tendency has been examined and explored in many civilizational fields, but up to the present day, relatively little has been researched about the transformative effect that Web 2.0 has caused in the world of diplomatic activities. The basic objective of this dissertation, therefore, is to present the different forms and levels of these causal changes.

A fundamental objective is to trace the evolution of how diplomacy adopted these technological advancements. Understanding this tendency is indispensable to be able to present the comparison between traditional, old-school diplomatic practices and modern, Web 2.0-driven forms and methods; and ultimately comprehend how digital tools are reshaping diplomatic norms and protocols.

The ultimate analytical objective is to understand how online tools have altered the reach and engagement of diplomatic entities worldwide. This includes examining the ways in which digital platforms modified the form and even the content of diplomatic activities. Another point of focus is the influence of online presence on the democratic qualities of diplomatic functioning. The objective here is to assess whether new tools have contributed to more transparent and accountable institutions on the international scene. Furthermore, no serious analysis would be complete without presenting the drawbacks and/or risks, which have emerged with the rise of Web 2.0 diplomacy. It is an objective, therefore, to compile these wide-ranging new risks that online presence has generated in international affairs.

An additional objective of the research is to identify best practices in the areas of diplomatic activities studied here, concerning the changes that took place in cause-and-effect relation with Web 2.0. In doing so, this dissertation aims to add applicability to the scientific findings and aims to contribute to the ongoing development and refinement of digital diplomacy practices worldwide.

As this dissertation focuses on changes in a particular field, it must be stated through what timeframe the research is looking at the occurring tendencies when identifying these changes.

[8] For definitions, see Chapter 2.4.

This research examines diplomatic activities from the second half of the 2000s to the first half of the 2020s, for the following reason: The inter-related tendencies of digitalization have infiltrated the world of diplomacy at a time when they have already become integral parts of human life, and this period mostly coincided with the explosive spread of Web 2.0 platforms, a.k.a. the second half of the first decade of the 21st century. Therefore, when this study presents comparative questions, hypotheses, examinations, and conclusions, then today's reality is compared with that of the years between 2005 and 2010, when the toolkit of Web 2.0 began its conquest in the official institutions and fora of international relations. Obviously, the detailed chronology shows a different timeline for each country or international institution. Still, with the adequate simplification of such scientific research, it can be said that the discussed changes refer to the causal changes of the last more or less 15 years.

This research intends to dig to the depths of the subject, not only addressing the "front page" issues of high-impact[9] global diplomatic interactions but taking a look at the whole spectrum of diplomatic activities[10]: all aspects of the work that diplomats and other actors of international relations do day by day, from the highest level, history-altering diplomatic milestones to the tedious, minor, altogether low-impact everyday drills of embassies and Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) worldwide.

[9] It is important to define this term as used in this dissertation, as it will be relevant in multiple lines of thought in later Chapters. In the context of this work, "high-impact" diplomatic activities refer to such activities of diplomatic actors, which carry a quality of opposition of relevant parties or collision of interests, and as a result, significant domestic political and media coverage; as opposed to "low-impact", politically non-contested diplomatic activities, which are generally out of the public eye, but which make up the overwhelming majority of diplomatic activities. These activities are carried out to the satisfaction or neutral acceptance of all relevant parties, and without collision of interests.

[10] For definitions, see Chapter 2.4.

1.2 Significance of the research[11]

The megatrend of digitalization and its effect on different public domains is an ever-evolving field, certain branches of which have been researched more, some less, and to this latter group belongs the topic of this dissertation. Modern communication has been evolving at such speeds that even better-scrutinized areas need to be readdressed regularly, let alone the effects on diplomacy, which have so far not been in the crosshairs of social scientists. It is therefore one of the fundamental significances of the research that uncovered novelties shall be presented to both the academic and the diplomatic community.

Speaking of which, this particular research offers a unique chance to connect practice and academia, diplomats and researchers – a connection so frequently desired, yet less frequently achieved in everyday higher education.

Deeper understanding

There is a prevalent approach to online diplomacy in most scientific publications (e.g. Leonard, 2002; Bátora, 2008; Gilboa, 2008; Cull, 2011; Seib, 2012) that discusses changes limited to the format of diplomacy, and the affected branch limited to "public diplomacy"[12]. What gives this research a good chance of providing a deeper understanding is that it examines both the several types of changes Web 2.0 tools have caused and the depths to which these changes have penetrated the entire spectrum of diplomatic activities. This dissertation intends to provide a comprehensive analysis of the online tools and platforms shaping diplomacy, the actors affected by these changes, and rigorously examine how the changes manifest themselves in the work of both diplomatic entities and the diplomats of the world.

The novelties brought about by this research are the results of its basic methodology. As explained in detail in Chapter 2, the principles of grounded theory guide the creation of this work, and such a qualitative interview process with diplomats (sampled to be geographically representative with a global coverage) has not been done before in previous literature. Since the main body of knowledge and data on the examined topic lies with the many practitioners of

[11] One shall not claim significance of one's own work until the completion and subsequent evaluation of said work. Therefore, every element of significance of this research listed here is not more than a potential or a possibility at the time of submission. Only time and practice will determine if the desired significances will indeed come to existence, or will fail to manifest in reality.

[12] Public diplomacy is the practice of engaging with wider foreign audiences to strengthen ties, build trust, and promote cooperation, which penetrates the target societies deeper than classic, government-to-government diplomacy.

diplomacy worldwide, this grounded approach can be considered as one of the significances of the research.

Applicability

This research is hoping to be directly applicable in the profession of diplomacy, and in it lies its major significance.

Policymakers of different diplomatic entities shall be able to use the results of this study to develop concepts that may render diplomatic activity more effective through the streamlined use of digital tools. By being informed about the consequences of Web 2.0 in their own fields, diplomats can adapt their everyday functioning to remain effective[13] in an ever-evolving domain, where this efficiency or the lack thereof may separate success and failure.

Specifically, this dissertation offers a collection of best diplomatic practices from across the planet, from online crisis response to digital cultural diplomacy, from virtual conference organization to immediate data collection, from messaging app solutions to distance treaty management. This content – after careful adaptation to their own specific diplomatic realities – may serve for the willing leaders and diplomats as a menu of options for how to develop their organization's work or their personal professional output. If just one diplomat, ambassador, or high-level diplomatic leader incorporates a good idea presented in this document, the research will not have been in vain.

More generally, taking a holistic look at the globally present implications of Web 2.0 in diplomacy can drive innovation in international cooperation in more efficient and faster ways, and can also help promote the step-by-step establishment of new norms governing digital diplomatic functioning.

Other elements of significance

This research also draws attention in a structured way to the risks and challenges naturally arising from online functioning, as experienced in the reality of diplomats worldwide. The significance of this lies in the potential to help diplomatic leaders act in a prophylactic way, thus substituting damage control with risk avoidance. If just one diplomatic faux pas or hacker's attack is avoided,

[13] While in most cases the adoption of new policies or new methods may require a longer timeframe to bear fruit, in the case of Web 2.0 tools the effect is to be felt almost immediately, but certainly in the short term. Therefore, such a step may actually increase the efficiency of the given diplomatic entity with no delay.

if just one ambassador finds a better balance between “real” and online diplomacy[14], the research will not have been in vain.

Although it is not among the initial objectives of the research, but the resulting dissertation may serve as a resource for theory development. Empirical observation and theoretical thought generate and inspire one another in social science, therefore, experts on international relations theory may use such a comprehensive overview of the effects of digitalization in their work to keep updating and modernizing the latest theories.

Also not one of the original goals, but the research may play a humble role in promoting democratic principles. This study examines if, and if yes, then how online diplomacy may have affected the transparency and accountability of diplomatic activities and entities. With its comprehensive overview of this aspect, the document may be of use to diplomatic leaders who wish to consciously advance the prevalence of these values in their domains.

Finally, a less relevant, psychological aspect of the significance of this research is that throughout the interview process, I experienced that even diplomats themselves rarely take a comprehensive look at their work from a theoretical standpoint. Many still carry old-school visions of what diplomatic work constitutes, and after the interview, they experienced a sense of revelation, redefining their own professional identities as being modern, multidisciplinary, and ever-evolving – as opposed to the classical sentiment surrounding diplomacy as being traditional and bureaucratic. I wish all practitioners reading this work to experience the same revelation, filtered through their everyday realities.

[14] For the multiple different types of risks, see Chapter 4.4.

1.3 Research question

In the early stages, it was only clear what the topic of this project shall be. Still, multiple paths remained open for the specific research question or questions, which – as opposed to the vague and general "topic" – already constitute elements of the scientific part of the text.

With the conceptual work progressing, it became clear that the dissertation would address multiple specific hypotheses (see Chapters 1.4 and 2.1.3), therefore, the research question had to serve as a single umbrella over those hypotheses, while still being accurate and standing the test of time. Throughout the research, not only the findings, but in line with the application of grounded theory (see Chapter 2), also the interview questions and the hypotheses have been repeatedly modified, but the research question needed to remain the same all along, as it served as the fundament the dissertation would be built on. Also, the same research question was communicated to all interview participants, and all further primary and secondary research was conducted from the angle of this one, unchanged research question.

Therefore, after careful consideration, based on the above and previously stated objectives, the basic research question of this dissertation has been identified as:

In what ways and depths have Web 2.0 online tools transformed diplomatic activities?[15]

[15] For related definitions, see Chapter 2.4.

1.4 Hypotheses

As the research resulting in this dissertation has followed the approach of grounded theory[16], the hypotheses have evolved throughout the process, in line with the adequate methodology. To get an in-depth understanding of the thought process behind the changes and their stages, see Chapter 2.1.3.

After multiple stages of finding the most accurate substance and wording, the hypotheses have been identified as:

Changes in form and content

The adoption of Web 2.0 tools by diplomatic actors has reshaped their diplomatic activities, both in their outward and inward form, and also in their substantive content, signaling a paradigmatic shift, moving the profession beyond its traditional structures.

Changes in transparency and accountability

The more actively a diplomatic actor engages with Web 2.0 tools, the more it exposes itself to increased public scrutiny, enhancing both the transparency of its operations and its susceptibility to horizontal accountability mechanisms.

Risks

The intensifying use of Web 2.0 tools by diplomatic actors amplifies an evolving set of risks, enhancing technological, reputational, and procedural vulnerabilities that challenge traditional safeguards of diplomatic conduct.

[16] See Chapter 2.1

2. Methodology, theoretical framework

2.1 Grounded theory

In the research leading to this dissertation, the methodology guided by the principles of grounded theory – a qualitative approach developed in the 1960s, and refined through numerous applications (Cutcliffe, 2000) – has been used.

2.1.1 Applicability of the grounded approach

Grounded theory (for definition, see Chapter 2.4) has been known since its beginnings for its systemic data collection procedure and analytics, aimed at continuously developing the examined concepts (Petsinis, 2023). The theory has been designed primarily to explore new phenomena or research areas with insufficient theoretical coverage with the strategic approach to ensure the credibility and validity of the research findings (Cutcliffe, 2000; Corbyn, Strauss, 1990). The decision to use a grounded methodology in creating this dissertation was strengthened by my personal experience as a diplomat, being aware that the many different aspects and layers of changes that Web 2.0 caused in diplomatic activities are carried in the day-by-day realities of diplomats around the world.

The profession of diplomacy has been and will continue to be shaped and developed by its practitioners themselves – therefore, what best allows the emergence of new insights directly from the data is the exploratory nature of grounded methodology. The grounded approach facilitates the generation of concepts grounded in empirical data, aligning with the objective of presenting a substantive set of hypotheses, which accurately presents the reality of changes in diplomatic activities in the context of Web 2.0 (Scott, 2009). The iterative[17] nature of grounded theory-based data collection and analysis (Cutcliffe, 2000; Corbyn, Strauss, 1990) comfortably allowed for a multi-stage refinement of the basic concepts of the research, enhancing the depth and validity of its findings.

Based on practices of grounded theory, my personal experience in diplomatic service was also built into the research and provided significant empirical data (Glaser, Strauss, 1967). Some

[17] The iterative process is the building, refining, and improving of a project, theory, or initiative based on previous outcomes. In the iterative design one plans, builds, tests, learns, then plans again, fine-tuning the original set of empirical data with the initial outcomes of the tests. (Cambridge Encyclopedia)

specific examples from my personal notes and memories are mentioned in this dissertation in very limited numbers, but to avoid any possibility of bias or conceptual imbalance, these experiences only reached the methodological stage of coding when supported by multiple other sources, primary or secondary.

Despite its systemic procedures, grounded theory – as all qualitative methodologies in Social Science – inevitably faces the classic dilemma: the tension between objective, subjective, and intersubjective perspectives. While aiming for empirical validity (and analytical clarity), the act of expressing and interpreting human experience, especially one as colourful as diplomatic practice, cannot be fully detached from personal cognitive filters. Therefore, the question arises: will the findings of this research present the reality of diplomatic activities, or the personal approaches of the many diplomats participating in the interviews? Objectivity is a methodological goal (ideal), but it must be reconciled with the necessarily subjective lens through which interviews are conducted and data are coded (Denzin, Lincoln, 2018). Yet it is actually at this intersubjective level (where the participant and the researcher construct meaning) that the value of grounded theory emerges, and where this study aims to draw its depth.

In acknowledging this dynamic, one must note that in many fields like economics, politics, psychology, and most certainly, diplomacy, when the practitioners of a discipline alter their conception of what the discipline is, the discipline itself becomes altered (Carr, 1961). By treating diplomacy not only as a state-bound, top-to-bottom elite domain, but also as a daily, interaction-based, ever-evolving profession, this dissertation aims to study it through its practitioners' experience. Therefore, this research naturally does not promise absolute truths, but it tries to provide robust, grounded insights into how Web 2.0 transformed diplomatic activities. The subjective elements (inherent in qualitative methods) do not invalidate its findings, rather, they contribute to an honest and comprehensive understanding of the profession's realities.

2.1.2 The grounded method in practice

In alignment with the principles of grounded theory, the research design employed the above-mentioned iterative process, including data collection, sampling, coding, memoing, and feedback.

Data collection in grounded theory should be flexible (Cutcliffe, 2000; Petsinis, 2023). For this research, data was primarily collected through semi-structured interviews with several diplomats. The interview guide[18] was designed to explore the participants' experiences, perceptions, and

[18] A pre-written set of questions to begin the interview with, and then move on to a mutually flexible discussion depending on the first set of information conveyed by the participant. For the specific interview guides, see Annex I.

interpretations of the research question from all possible aspects. As the multiple-round interview process is the key part of the grounded methodology, both in general and in this research, Chapter 2.2 discusses the application of the grounded approach in the interviewing process in depth.

Apart from the interviews, within the realm of primary data collection methods, the online presence of several countries' diplomacies has been analyzed in detail on the three most used platforms in general, and, when necessary for additional empirical information, on other platforms as well. The many Facebook, Twitter/X, and Instagram profiles of diplomatic entities and leaders also served as ideal sources of practical examples when addressing a particular sub-topic in most aspects of the examined changes.

It is natural, but it should be noted at this time that a further set of data was collected from secondary sources through an extensive literature review (for details see Chapter 3.1). The relevant publications were analyzed to support the theoretical background of the research and to supplement and cross-examine the data collected from the above-mentioned primary sources.

These latter methods were involved in the research not simply to gather more information, but as tools of triangulation, to cross-reference findings, and to reduce the potential influence of bias and subjectivity (for the related methodological dilemma, see Chapter 2.1.1).

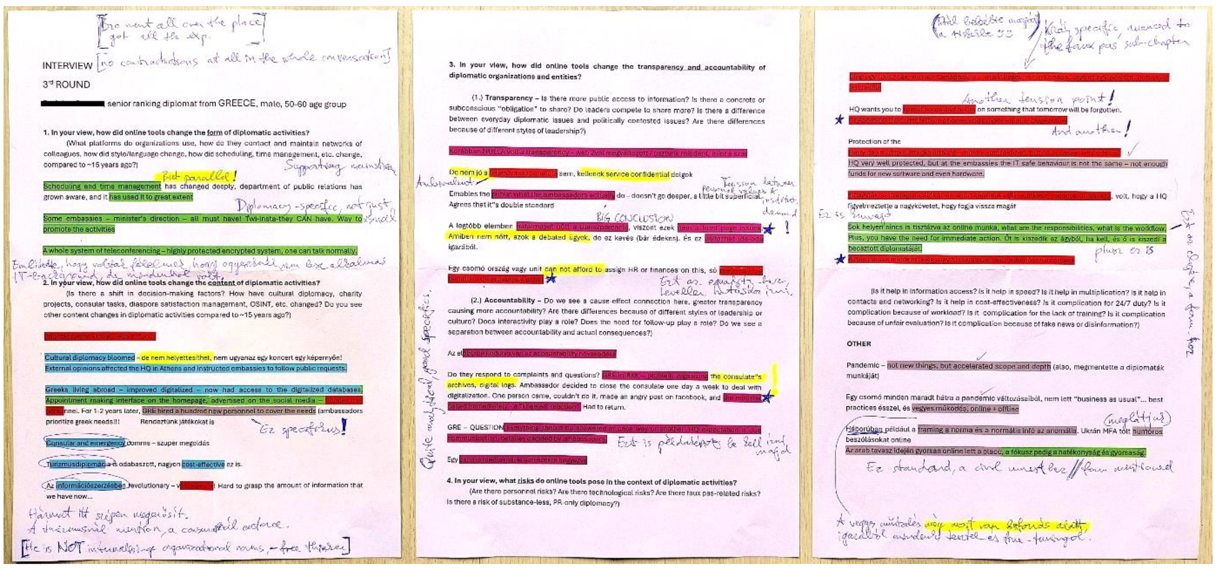
The coding process

Coding is the fundamental process in grounded theory that involves identifying, phrasing, isolating, and categorizing raw incoming data (Scott, 2009; Böhm, 2000). It is the analytical core through which empirical data are transformed into structured insight. In this research, coding unfolded iteratively alongside data collection, following the established grounded theory logic of emergent design. It was carried out in three interconnected stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

In the open coding phase, the notes[19] of each interview were examined line-by-line to break down the text into elements of meaning with initial colour codes. These were either labelled using in vivo codes – terms drawn directly from the participant's language – or conceptually named based on interpretive assessment. Codes were assigned without imposing predefined categories, allowing the initial material to speak for itself. Special attention was paid to expressions that signaled practical change, emotional response, or unintended consequences of digital transformation. Over a hundred such open codes were generated across all interview rounds.

[19] To facilitate the maximum potential honesty, interviews were not recorded, instead, real-time notes were taken, followed by an immediate review with extended note-taking after the interview has concluded.

In the following axial coding step, these open codes were re-examined and organized into clusters based on underlying relationships. The aim was to identify categories and subcategories with a cohesive element. For example, individual codes like “boom in charity activities”, “appearance of tourism diplomacy online”, “ease of OSINT”, etc., together with more theoretical codes like “like-hunting attitude”, were linked together into a broader axis around “changes in content. Similar axial groups created categories like “changes in form”, “personnel risks”, “changes in transparency”, etc. These middle-range abstractions helped to bridge the descriptive raw data with emerging theory.



2.1.2/1. The on-paper manifestation of the coding thought process. One example from the third round of interviews (anonymized and blurred) to exhibit colours identifying code groups and case examples; notes and stars signaling context and directly quotable elements. (Own illustration, 2025)

Finally, in the selective coding phase, these categories were cross-referenced with secondary data and third-round incoming raw data to form a coherent structure, which led to the synthesis of the various Chapters and sub-Chapters within the findings of the research.[20] It was in the first half of

[20] A brief methodological insight #1: In the creation of this dissertation, at the time of these chapters emerging, I followed the method I consistently teach to my students at BA and MA levels of thesis writing: create the Word document that will eventually evolve into your final thesis as soon as possible, at the beginning of your research. I created the file before the very first interview, and it has been evolving ever since, it has been restructured and re-written in minor and major ways multiple times, but it has always provided a sense of purpose and accomplishment that “I have my dissertation in front of me”, even when it was far from its final form. On the contrary, if I had just been collecting research material in different notes and preparatory documents, it would have produced a sense of lagging behind, as “I haven’t even started the actual writing”. Once the document exists, it feels natural to “fill it with substance”, but if it doesn’t, it is hard to even think in a coherent structure.

the third round of the interviewing process (see Chapter 2.2.3), when the theoretical saturation[21] of data happened, and from which point no new categories or codes emerged.

The process of coding is not isolated from other methodological processes of the research, but if one attempts to visualize it in clear steps, it will look like the following:

Interview with notes /
Follow-up notes
    Highlighting topical codes with colours and notes
    (open coding)
        Grouping codes into categories
        (axial coding)
            Cross-referencing, synthesizing structural units
            (selective coding)
                Incorporating into analysis /
                Referencing in the text

Memo, comparison, feedback

Memoing is an integral part of grounded theory (Böhm, 2000; Petsinis, 2023), but even without a theoretical aspect, it has been more than useful to continuously write reflective notes about the coding process, capturing early interpretations, code definitions, theoretical connections, and even doubts or shifts in emphasis. These memos kept emerging insights, connections, and decisions away from oblivion and served as a vital tool for developing and refining the emerging structure of the findings.

Data, phenomena, codes, and categories were continuously compared and cross-referenced throughout the research to ensure the credibility and validity of the findings. This – once again, iterative – comparison helped identify correlations and exceptions alike, and ensured that the distilled hypotheses and findings were grounded in the empirical reality of the diplomatic world.

Some participants in the first two rounds of the interview process were invited to provide feedback on the emerging findings during the execution of the third round, specifically focusing on debated or yet unclear elements, to ensure accuracy and alignment with their experiences.

[21] As Bryant and Charmaz put it, theoretical saturation is at the stage where gathering more data about a topic reveals no new properties, nor yields any further theoretical insights about the emerging theory.

Additional discussions with research peers also provided external perspectives and fresh sets of eyes for critical feedback.

In retrospect, grounded theory proved to be an adequate choice of approach for this research subject. The multiple-round interview process has greatly enhanced both the comprehensive nature and the depth of the findings. The first round created the foundations and helped establish a solid structure, the second round gained the biggest amount of substantial information with the help of the detailed follow-up questions[22], and the third round helped the most in clarifying debated or yet unconfirmed questions and aspects.

Referencing

In this dissertation, the system of referencing is the standard APA[23] citation format.

2.1.3 Evolution of the hypotheses

As mentioned before, grounded theory requires the researcher to create their hypotheses based on incoming data, approach them flexibly; and adapt them mid-research, if new data suggests that the wording, focus, aim, or details of the current hypotheses can be made more accurate. Below is a brief description of the process of finding the most adequate set of hypotheses for this research.

The beginnings

In the early stages of this research, well before my dissertation process started, I started to work with two initial sets of statements. One set, which I considered to be the list of "generally accepted changes", and another set, which was intended to constitute my future hypotheses. This early approach looked like the following:

The general consensus is that:

- The transformation is obvious, the format of diplomacy has changed,
- Diplomacy came out of the shadows,
- Diplomacy is closer to the people, more accessible and understandable,
- The multiplicator effect of Web 2.0 has improved diplomacy's efficiency.

[22] See Annex I.

[23] APA is the most widely used citation system in Social Sciences, details to be found in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 7th edition (2020).

The hypotheses were intended to be that:

- Web 2.0 tools have changed not only the format but the contents, too,
- They made diplomacy not only more accessible but more transparent, too,
- They have increased the accountability of diplomatic entities, too.
- These changes have an overall positive effect on society as a whole.

I certainly realized that the last statement is far from any scientific standards, as far as such a dissertation can go. The social benefits of any such phenomenon may and should be analyzed, but the scope of this study does not allow for this follow-up examination, therefore the last statement was dropped from the set.

Before the interview process

After consultations with my advisor, it also became clear that a comprehensive analysis on the topic shall not treat some of the changes as “generally accepted”, while other changes are “to be proven”. Therefore, I restructured the statements into one set, all to be examined in the research and presented in the findings of this dissertation.

Also, having understood that every element of the hypotheses must be accurately defined in the text, I left behind some of the above statements, which were phrased in scientifically undefinable ways, like “out of the shadows”, or “closer to the people”.

In this new set, the list of statements was the following:

- Web 2.0 tools have changed the form of diplomatic activities,
- Web 2.0 tools have changed the content of diplomatic activities,
- Web 2.0 tools have increased the transparency of diplomatic activities,
- Web 2.0 tools have increased the accountability of diplomatic entities.

Creating hypotheses and refinements based on the collected data

The first round of interviews (for details, see Chapter 2.2.1) produced a large quantity of empirical data, followed by the due process of coding. In light of the results, and in line with the principles of grounded theory, a set of hypotheses was created and later continuously re-evaluated to reach a set that best represents empirical reality in the research process.

The first such relevant observation was that all the interview participants considered changes in transparency and accountability very closely related, as in a cause-effect relation, therefore instead of working with the two, originally separate statements, I merged them into one hypothesis.

In the same manner, following the input of the interview participants, the changes in form and the changes in content were merged into one hypothesis. These two are also mostly cause-effect-related (albeit not in all cases), and for the structure of the dissertation, it seemed adequate to put these two types of changes into one hypothesis, to be discussed in consecutive Chapters.

The third major change was the inclusion of a completely new element in the list. Having discussed the aspect of risks and challenges of Web 2.0 diplomacy throughout the interviews, it became clear that this should be addressed at a higher level than just “an additional Chapter”. For the balanced nature of the research, the risks also deserve a place among the main focus points of the dissertation, therefore this aspect has been elevated to the level of a hypothesis.

This way, instead of the previous four statements, the research went on with three hypotheses, but with three that better represent both the research focus and the underlying reality. Further corrections have been made to fit the scientific standards of a hypothesis being a supposition made on the nature of the relationship between variables. At this point, the list became the following:

- The more a diplomatic actor has incorporated Web 2.0 tools in its diplomatic activities, the more these activities have transformed in their form and content,
- The more a diplomatic actor has incorporated Web 2.0 tools in its diplomatic activities, the more transparent these activities have become, and the more the given actor’s accountability has been enhanced,
- The more a diplomatic actor has incorporated Web 2.0 tools in its diplomatic activities, the more risks these tools have generated for the given actor.

Later interviews proved this set of hypotheses to be functional. Having collected all the incoming data from all sources, in line with the logic of grounded theory, a final fine-tuning of the wording took place to ensure it was adequately descriptive and carried the highest level of accuracy. The ultimate set, not needing further modifications, as incorporated into the research as its hypotheses (presented in Chapter 1.4), is the following:

- The adoption of Web 2.0 tools by diplomatic actors has reshaped their diplomatic activities, both in their outward and inward form, and also in their substantive content, signaling a paradigmatic shift, moving the profession beyond its traditional structures.

- The more actively a diplomatic actor engages with Web 2.0 tools, the more it exposes itself to increased public scrutiny, enhancing both the transparency of its operations and its susceptibility to horizontal accountability mechanisms.
- The intensifying use of Web 2.0 tools by diplomatic actors amplifies an evolving set of risks, enhancing technological, reputational, and procedural vulnerabilities that challenge traditional safeguards of diplomatic conduct.

With that, the need to reach a saturated[24] and stable form (Glaser, Strauss, 1967) of the hypotheses has been fulfilled.

[24] The term saturated in grounded theory refers to the point at which additional data no longer yield new theoretical insights or properties of a category. This concept was introduced by Glaser and Strauss, who described saturation as the stage when "no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category". In the case of hypotheses, saturation refers to the state when no further refinement adds to the accuracy and validity of the proposed statements.

2.2 Interviews

In grounded theory, the qualitative interview process is fundamental in every aspect of the research; therefore, below I present the relevant context concerning the many interviews that took place during the creation of this dissertation[25].

As previously mentioned in Chapter 2.1.2, anonymous interviews were conducted with diplomats as primary stakeholders, in a semi-structured way, in three rounds. The interview guides of the three rounds can be found for further reference in Annex I. The interviews took place between November 2023 and February 2025, the majority through online videoconferences, at times in person[26].

To accumulate the raw empirical data in a scientifically well-founded way and consequently come to generally valid conclusions, it was essential to conduct the sampling with a geographically even global coverage. Some in social sciences fail to avoid shortcomings of research by gathering data only from their cultural region[27]. In this case, diplomats from all continents, from big, medium-sized, and small countries, developed and developing alike, were recruited. Likewise, participants were chosen in gender parity, with a variety of diplomatic backgrounds, as this colorful and multidisciplinary profession has many branches. All participants have worked in multiple thematic or geographical areas of diplomacy. To avoid any potential bias, no participant was chosen from the ranks of my own nation's, Hungary's diplomatic entities, or from any other institutions I worked for before.

The sampling process continued from round to round until theoretical saturation was reached in the first part of the third round of interviews[28]. As no new themes or codes appeared anymore,

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[25] A brief methodological insight #2: Conducting and analyzing these interviews has been done in a hybrid, digital-analog way. Most interviews happened across continents and different time zones, through videocalls. Notes were taken in separate Word documents during the interview, and further explanatory notes and memos were added immediately after the videocalls to avoid the loss of any empirical data. The process being anonymized, apart from the consent forms, the only place I have written the names of the participants (only to help my own recollection) were paper printouts of these notes. Then, after every round, having all printouts at hand, I read through them several times, comparing the information, and conducting the coding process of grounded theory, sometimes with color markers, on papers spread out all over the living room. At the same time, I was typing in both structural and substantial ideas in a pre-written way into the body of this document, to be further addressed in the actual writing process.

[26] For details see the list of interviews at the end of this dissertation in the Sources.

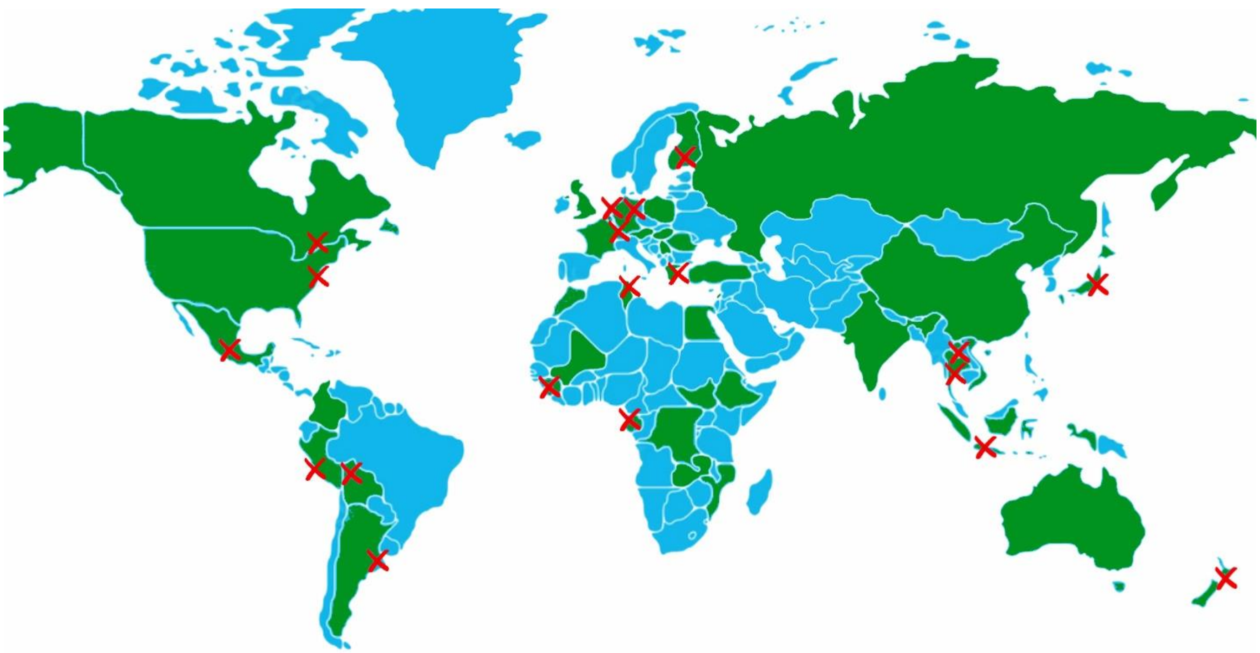
[27] Usually the developed Western bubble.

[28] In social sciences it remains an open debate what sample size to use in each primary data collection procedure. In heterogenous groups the general suggestion is over 20, with homogenous groups it is around 12. My global sampling suggests a heterogenous group, but they are highly homogenous in their profession as diplomats, therefore the most reliable indicator was indeed saturation to determine the satisfactory sample size.

and saturation is the primary indicator of an adequately sufficient sample in qualitative research, especially in grounded theory-based projects (Hennink, Kaiser, 2022), this branch of primary data collection was concluded after the third round.

Results and findings acquired with such sampling were further complemented and cross-referenced by data from non-state diplomatic entities, like international organizations (IOs), quasi-state institutions, international NGOs, etc., through interviews based on the same interview guides used for interviews with national diplomats round by round.

To adhere to ethical standards, all interview participants were thoroughly informed of the purpose of this research and assured that their contributions would be used solely for academic purposes, in an anonymized manner, referencing only the country of their origin or the relevant organization they represent (e.g. iGER, iUN, iJAP, etc.), and in the list of sources basic statistical information about their person and diplomatic experience. To ensure these standards, the participants have signed interview consent forms[29], kept in the records of this research.



2.2/1. Geographical representativeness of the interview sampling. The country of origin of every participant (or HQ of an international organization) is indicated by a red X; the countries of previous or current foreign services of every participant are indicated by green color.

It is important to note that every interview participant, even the most junior diplomat, has knowledge and has previously gained insight into the functioning of multiple diplomatic entities, like their own national MFA, their host countries' MFAs, different diplomatic partner embassies, international organizations, or other partners. Throughout the interviews, they shared their

[29] For the text of the consent forms, see Annex II.

experiences about diplomatic activities in general; therefore, the primary data gained from the interview is not limited to the national diplomacy of the participant, but a variety of entities. Furthermore, apart from giving factual examples and yes or no answers, participants gave their detailed analytical insight on raised questions, sometimes raising further related sub-topics themselves, based on the aforementioned knowledge of a wide variety of diplomatic entities. Therefore, these interviews were not simply data-gathering drills on the basis of grounded theory; they were, at the same time, expert interviews, each conducted to address the whole of the research question and all hypotheses. Also, consequently, in the case of specifically mentioned examples, the referencing of the interview (see above) does not necessarily refer to the given example's origin, but to the source of the information, the interview participant, who provided that piece of information[30]. Wherever the example can be linked to a particular diplomatic entity, I have provided this information for further validity of the research. But in cases when an interview participant refrained from disclosing this link for any reason, the example is mentioned as a real-life, but not institutionally identified piece of phenomenon, with reference to the information source only.

It has been suggested in Chapter 2.1.1, but the importance of it can not be overstated: The knowledge that can answer the research question is carried by the community of the world's diplomats. Existing literature is as important here as in any other research, still, the overwhelming majority of publishing scholars are experts on foreign affairs, not on diplomatic work. Unless one has worked inside an embassy, an MFA, an international organization (IO), etc., one can not be familiar with the nuanced changes of the very profession evolving behind the doors of these institutions. Thus, the research topic of this dissertation and the practitioner nature of the participants of the interview process organically belong together. This, and the above detailed global sampling principles, ensure the validity and reliability of the incoming raw data, of the uncovered codes and categories, and consequently, the findings of this study.

2.2.1 Round one

Based on the above, the first round of interviews featured six participants. One each from the continents Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, and South America, and one from the most comprehensive international organization, the United Nations. The participants were all familiar with the diplomatic environment of multiple regions and institutions (for details, see the list of interviews at the end of this dissertation).

[30] Meaning that the referencing, eg. (iGER), or (iTUN), etc., only means that it was that interview participant sharing the information, but the information itself may be about any other diplomatic entity they have professional knowledge about.

To avoid any potential bias, the initial questions of these interviews have not been based on my personal experience of the examined changes, but on secondary sources, e.g. the pre-existing literature in the field; and a general, wider approach.

The first round participants were the following:

- A mid-ranking German diplomat (female, 40-50 age group) with foreign postings in Asia and Europe (12 November 2023). Referenced in the text as (iGER).

- A mid-ranking Argentinian diplomat (male, 40-50 age group) with foreign postings in Africa, Asia and Aus/Oceania (17 November 2023). Referenced in the text as (iARG).

- A senior Japanese diplomat (male, 50-60 age group) with foreign postings in Europe and Asia (19 November 2023). Referenced in the text as (iJAP).

- A mid-ranking Mexican diplomat (female, 40-50 age group) with foreign postings in Asia and North America (24 November 2023) Referenced in the text as (iMEX).

- A junior Equatorial Guinean diplomat (male, 30-40 age group) with a foreign posting in Africa (5 December 2023). Referenced in the text as (iGNQ).

- A mid-ranking United Nations diplomat (female, 40-50 age group) with placements at the Geneva and New York HQ, and multiple foreign postings in Africa (20 December 2023). Referenced in the text as (iUN).

The first round certainly set the ball rolling, bringing in a lot of empirical data to be analyzed, coded, and categorized. The in-depth experiences and opinions of the participants provided plenty of information to identify the main lines of the findings and all the topics to be addressed in further detail later. Following the principles of grounded theory, the first actual set of hypotheses was drawn up based on these findings.

2.2.2 Round two

The coding process of the first round made it possible to not only fine-tune the hypotheses as explained before, but also to upgrade the accuracy of the interview guide, and include new inquiries based on the incoming data.

An important experience of the first round from the psychological aspects of methodology was that when the participants learned that the questions were not about high-level international politics, but the everyday activities of their own lives and their personal experiences, they all became more invested in the discussion, thus providing proper, deep insight, instead of just "surviving" the interview with some brief and standard answers. This encouraged me to make the second round interview guide two-layered. On the first layer, the updated initial questions were listed[31], to be asked from the new participants. Then, on the second layer, a multitude of sub-issues and specific questions were kept ready to go into further details, if a participant showed a willingness and openness similar to those in the first round – for a more nuanced and better-grounded understanding of the given issue.

In the second round – keeping the aim for global coverage – one diplomat each from the continents Africa, Asia, Australia/Oceania[32], Europe, and South America was interviewed; an official of the European External Action Service, the diplomatic arm of the most advanced supranational international organization, the European Union; and an official of the World Wildlife Fund, one of the major international NGOs involved in diplomatic cooperation. The second round participants were the following:

- A mid-ranking diplomat of the European External Action Service (female, 40-50 age group), who earlier served as a junior diplomat of Finland with foreign postings in Asia and Europe (2 April 2024). Referenced in the text as (iEEAS) or (iFIN) depending on the context of the particular piece of information shared/referred to.

- A senior New Zealand diplomat (male, 50-60 age group) with foreign postings in Europe, North America, and Asia (20 April 2024). Referenced in the text as (iNZL).

- A senior Bolivian ex-diplomat (female, 50-60 age group) with foreign postings in South America and Europe (5 May 2024). Referenced in the text as (iBOL).

- A mid-ranking official of the World Wildlife Fund (female, 40-50 age group) with placements in Asia and Europe (23 May 2024). Referenced in the text as (iWWF).

- A mid-ranking Sierra Leone diplomat (male, 30-40 age group) with foreign postings in North America, Africa, and at the African Union ECOSOCC HQ (1 June 2024). Referenced in the text as (iSLE).

[31] See Annex I.
[32] Being the only continent missing from the first round

- A mid-ranking Laotian diplomat (female, undisclosed age group) with foreign postings in Asia and Europe (14 September 2024). Referenced in the text as (iLAO)

By the end of the round, not only enough empirical material was gathered to go into detail in most sub-topics of the research, but it also became clear, which issues draw unanimous or close to unanimous opinions, and which are more debated or unclear.

2.2.3 Round three

The previous observation gave birth to the decision to change the interview guide once again for the third round. It seemed to be a waste of time and opportunity to ask the participants those same questions that have previously resulted in unanimous agreement across the board, in all interviews. Therefore, these issues were left off the menu, and instead, the focus was shifted to questions and topics that required further examination[33].

In the third round, to add the finishing touches to the global coverage, one diplomat from Africa, Asia, Europe, South America, and North America, and one diplomat from the European Union (Commission) were interviewed. The third round participants were the following:

- A junior Indonesian diplomat (female, 30-40 age group) with a foreign posting in Europe (27 September 2024). Referenced in the text as (iIDN).

- A senior Greek diplomat (male, 60-70 age group) with foreign postings in Europe and Asia (7 January 2025). Referenced in the text as (iGRE).

- A mid-ranking Canadian diplomat (female, 40-50 age group) with foreign postings in South America, Europe, and NATO. Referenced in the text as (iCAN).

- A mid-ranking Peruvian diplomat (male, 30-40 age group) with foreign postings in Europe and North America. Referenced in the text as (iPER).

- A mid-ranking diplomat of the Council of Europe (female, 30-40 age group) working at HQ in Strasbourg. Referenced in the text as (iCoE).

- A mid-ranking Tunisian diplomat (female, 30-40 age group) with postings in North America, Asia, and UNESCO. Referenced in the text as (iTUN).

[33] See Annex I.

2.2.4 Further interviews

In parallel with the first round, three further interviews have been conducted, on different thematic issues, not in the anonymous way of the grounded methodology, but in the standard procedure, with experts of the given topics.

One interview on the application of the grounded theory, one interview on the generational aspects of digitalization, and one on related IT and cyber-security issues took place during the first round, addressing important sub-topics of the research. These are detailed in the Sources Chapter at the end of this dissertation, and referenced in the text with names, in the classic APA format.

2.3 Web 2.0 profiles' analysis

When talking about the analysis of social media profiles, it is easy to make the mistake of just scrolling away in the sea of the existing 50 000+ diplomatic social media profiles randomly and leisurely, while claiming to be conducting primary research. To avoid this sub-standard way of data collection, the focus throughout this work has been on adequate sampling.

Accordingly, the same sampling principles were used as with the interviews[34]. Furthermore, as it is possible to examine many different profiles without logistical and organizational difficulties, the aim has been more than simply leaving the bubble of the Western cultural sphere, the aim has been a reasonably complete geographical and representational coverage, further complementing this aspect of the interview process.

The natural goal was to target empirical data from all sub-regions of the world. Therefore, in case no interview took place with a diplomat of a certain geographical sub-region (e.g.: Central Asia, Caribbean, etc.), more diplomatic profiles from the given region were included in the sampling. Further entities' profiles were examined upon mentions gained from interviews, which created a connection between the two main primary data collection methods of this research.

As detailed later in this work[35], there are numerous relevant diplomatic actors. To make the sampling representative, the examined profiles were mostly of the following actors:

1. Embassies and permanent representations,
2. MFAs and international organizations,
3. Ministers of foreign affairs and general secretaries of IOs,
4. Ambassadors.

To add to the comprehensive nature of the dissertation, further diplomatic profiles of international NGOs, quasi-state entities[36], and individual diplomatic actors have also been examined.

As also detailed later in this work, the relevant primary Web 2.0 platforms, based on the overwhelming mentions by the interview participants and these platforms' leading global penetration numbers, are:

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[34] See Chapter 2.2.
[35] See Chapter 4.2.
[36] In this research, under the group quasi-state entities, the online diplomatic profiles of the Central Tibetan Administration, the Republic of China (Taiwan), and the Palestinian Authority were examined.

1. Facebook,
2. X/Twitter,
3. Instagram.

To further add to the comprehensive nature of the dissertation, occasionally further platforms have been examined as well, like YouTube, TikTok, instant messaging platforms, LinkedIn, etc, as referred to by the interview participants, or as referenced on the primary platforms.

The above-mentioned examinations have almost exclusively taken place in the form of content analysis. On occasion, some numerical data like reach or engagement metrics or posting frequency have been observed, but in line with the research objectives, the focus was on qualitative understanding, therefore, no big data-style quantitative analysis has been conducted.

Content types, themes and topics, similarities and differences between actors and platforms, style and language, interactivity, and chronological changes have been examined as empirical data, then cross-referenced with other sources, and finally built into the findings of this dissertation. The goal of this research method was not to conduct a comparative analysis but to show changes that took place in diplomatic activities courtesy of Web 2.0 platforms. In line with this aim, numerous real-life examples of the changes mentioned in the interviews have been gathered through this method. Theoretically, it would have been possible to uncover new types of changes as well, but in practice, the interview process brought to light a saturated set of codes and categories in this aspect, therefore, the examination of the profiles naturally did not bring forth new categories.

To avoid any personal bias based on my diplomatic service, or the overrepresentation of one particular national diplomacy's profiles, no Hungarian diplomatic entities have been included in this research. In line with the principles of grounded theory, my expertiese and related experiences have been cross-referenced with incoming empirical data, and used as general background knowledge, but never as decisive information to base conclusions on.

Specific examples from Web 2.0 platforms used as illustrations in this document have been selected based on multiple sources: partially from cases uncovered during the above detailed primary analysis, partially from specific cases mentioned by the interview participants, and sometimes from better-known cases described in the relevant literature[37].

[37] A brief methodological insight #3: For full disclosure, on rare occasions, pure luck has also provided me with good examples of specific topical points, while searching for examples of something else.
#researcher's-luck #long-live-alexander-flemming

From a methodological perspective, a lot of the work spent combing through the actual Web 2.0 profiles, served as a means for triangulation towards objectivity, from the basis of the intersubjective material gathered through interviews. Wherever possible, raw interview data were cross-referenced not only with pre-existing literature, but with the online realities as well, thus strengthening the validity of the findings of the research.

2.4 Definitional questions

It does not come as a surprise that in Social Sciences, definitions of the same term can be many, at times even significantly different. It is not a shortcoming of Social Sciences, quite the contrary, it opens up space for scholarly debate and gives ground to the dynamic evolution of conceptual understanding. However, in any scientific inquiry, especially one as empirically rooted as this dissertation, clarity and consistency in definitions are fundamental.

To avoid any possible contradictions and to ensure the findings are solid and specific, below are the definitions of relevant terms, as they are meant and used in this doctoral dissertation.

Web 2.0

The concept – and with it, the term – of "Web 2.0" was popularized by Tim O'Reilly in the early 2000s to label the second generation of internet development characterized by interactivity, user-generated content, and collaboration (O'Reilly, 2005). Unlike the static, read-only architecture of Web 1.0, Web 2.0 platforms facilitate a participatory culture where users contribute content, interact with one another, and shape the digital environment in real time (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Examples of Web 2.0 features include social networking sites or social media sites, blogs, instant messaging services, wikis, video-sharing sites, image-sharing sites, collaborative consumption platforms, mashup applications, and collaborative tools.

In the context of this research, Web 2.0 refers to both this technological infrastructure and this sociotechnical phenomenon that has significantly reshaped how humans and their institutions engage with each other and with broader audiences.

Diplomatic activities

Traditionally, diplomacy has been conceptualized as high-level, government-to-government negotiation, mostly carried out by elite representatives of sovereign states (Berridge, 2015). However (apart from this definition taking into account only the interactive parts of the profession, and not all activities related to it), modern diplomacy is multidimensional, involving a wider set of actors and a broader scope of activities. Hocking and Melissen (2015) introduced the idea of a "new diplomacy" that includes public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, digital diplomacy, and even non-state diplomacy.

One of the intended values of this research is to observe this term with a wide angle, to avoid the mainstream approach that only presents high-level diplomacy as diplomatic activity. This study acknowledges that what is presented in the news is just the tip of the iceberg, and the work of diplomats goes deeper and wider while carrying out their duties. That includes not only formal negotiations and treaty-making but also public communication, cultural representation, service provision to citizens abroad, report-writing, internal institutional coordination, and general day-to-day office work. A broad definitional scope enables full exploration of how Web 2.0 tools manifested their impact; therefore, in the context of this research, the term "diplomatic activities" refers to all activities that diplomats, diplomatic organizations, and other actors of international relations do in their official domain.

Transparency

The academic discourse on transparency has been dynamic over the past few decades, especially in the context of democratic governance. Florini (2007) defines transparency as the release of information by institutions that is relevant, reliable, and timely, enabling external actors to monitor and evaluate institutional behavior. This view is echoed by Meijer (2013), who emphasizes that transparency is not merely about data availability but also about the communicative process that enables accountability (see below). These definitions have become foundational in governance studies, serving as a basis for assessing the openness of public institutions. In the context of this study, Wiseman (2011b) adds that in diplomacy, where secrecy has historically been the norm, the emergence of transparency as a democratic expectation represents a significant cultural and operational shift.

Scholars such as Gregory (2011) and Manor (2019) have emphasized that digital tools lower the cost of information dissemination and thus facilitate more institutional transparency. The increased visibility[38] enabled by Web 2.0 platforms turns transparency from an abstract norm into a measurable and observable trait. This understanding also aligns with the European Union's definitions in its open governance framework (European Commission, 2018), where proactive communication and public participation are seen as integral to transparency.

In the context of this research, transparency refers to the level of openness and clarity with which a given diplomatic entity conducts its activities. A diplomatic entity can be considered more transparent if it shares more information about its operations and tasks in a consistent manner, and/or if the public has better access to this information. This draws on the above theoretical framework but tailors it to the empirical realities of diplomatic practice. The information shared

[38] Visibility, in this context, refers to the degree to which the actions, statements, and institutional presence of a diplomatic entity are observable by external audiences, particularly through digital channels. It implies not only being seen but also being perceived and monitored, often in real time, thereby turning traditionally opaque diplomatic functions into public-facing performances. Visibility is less than transparency, but it is one of the prerequisites of it. Interview participants sometimes referred to it in the practical sense as "being closer to the people".

may be any relevant data connected to the given entity's diplomatic activities, and may include publishing mission statements, policy documents, itineraries of foreign visits, real-time crisis communication, or the facts and details of the daily work of diplomatic leaders etc.

Adopting this broad definition allows the research to track structural and behavioral changes in diplomatic institutions. It helps identify not just whether information is accessible, but whether it is communicated clearly and consistently. Furthermore, such a wide angle allows future theoretical researchers to review and cross-reference the findings of this dissertation with their own observations, and potentially narrow the definition to the extent they deem necessary.

Accountability

Accountability has also been a core concept in public administration and democratic theory, with scholars like Bovens (2007) defining it as a relationship where an actor feels obliged to explain and justify conduct to a forum that can pose questions and impose consequences. This accountability framework encompasses multiple dimensions—financial, administrative, legal, and political—making it especially relevant for analyzing complex public institutions like foreign ministries and international organizations.

In diplomacy, accountability has traditionally been considered an internal or elite-bound mechanism. Yet, some have examined how digital communication technologies facilitate external forms of accountability by expanding the range of actors who can demand explanations, such as civil society, the media, or even foreign publics (Schedler, 1999; Heise, 2013). The digital public sphere, enabled by Web 2.0, thus introduces both a new layer of exposure and a new set of expectations, turning diplomats from hidden servants of the state into potentially answerable public figures.

In the context of this research, accountability refers to the public's ability to hold a given diplomatic entity responsible for its activities or lack thereof. A diplomatic entity can be considered more accountable if there are more, or more efficient ways of scrutinizing its operations and undertaken tasks, or if a wider range of actors can engage in this scrutiny, or if the entity is more responsive to questions, feedback, requests, or concerns of the public. This definition draws upon both formal and informal accountability mechanisms. Formal ones include parliamentary oversight, audits, and official evaluations, while informal mechanisms consist of media critiques, public debate, and digital engagement via social media platforms (Heise, 2013).

Choosing this broader definition means that in this study, "being able to hold responsible" is the key phrase, as opposed to "taking responsibility". This wide definition of accountability is particularly useful for this research, as it enables the exploration of whether digital diplomacy practices promote a deeper sense of public ownership and trust, or merely create an illusion of engagement. By recognizing both vertical (hierarchical) and horizontal (peer and public) accountability dimensions, this definition provides a comprehensive lens through which one can assess institutional responsiveness and integrity in the digital age. Also, like in the case of transparency above, a wider definition enables future researchers to evaluate the entirety of these results and fine-tune their own definitions as they see necessary.

Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory is a qualitative research methodology aimed at generating theory directly from systematically gathered and analyzed data. Originally developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in their foundational work, The Discovery of Grounded Theory (1967), it was introduced as a response to the dominance of hypothesis-testing methods in social sciences. The core principle of Grounded Theory is inductive reasoning: instead of testing pre-existing theories, researchers allow patterns, concepts, and ultimately theoretical insights to emerge from raw empirical data. The methodology is especially suitable for studying yet unexamined phenomena, where grounded, data-driven insight can be effective over a top-down conceptual approach (Charmaz, 2014).

While the original approach of Glaser and Strauss emphasized objectivity and systematic coding procedures, later scholars have introduced significant interpretive variations. Kathy Charmaz proposed a constructivist version of Grounded Theory, which recognizes the researcher's role in interpreting data and co-constructing meaning (Charmaz, 2014). Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss (1990) further developed a more structured, coding-intensive variant, introducing axial and selective coding to deepen the analytic process. These differing interpretations have led to a spectrum of grounded approaches—from positivist to constructivist—but all share the emphasis on theory emerging from data through iterative analysis.

Despite these variations, the mainstream academic definition still centers on Grounded Theory as a rigorous, inductive methodology that prioritizes theory development grounded in empirical realities. It involves key methodological elements such as theoretical sampling, constant comparative analysis, memo-writing, and coding. As Scott (2009) and Bryant & Charmaz (2007) note, the strength of Grounded Theory lies in its adaptability and its capacity to reflect social processes as experienced by participants, making it particularly valuable in disciplines such as sociology, international relations, and public administration.

3. Literature review, theoretical framework

3.1 Literature review

As one would expect, such modern tendencies related to digitalization and Web 2.0 have not yet generated the amount of scientific literature comparable to that of better-established areas of social sciences. While it is indeed true that comprehensive publications on the topic of this research are scarce and relatively new, one may still find a wide range of related literature[39], practical and theoretical alike, which can serve as an academic foundation for such a dissertation, and efficiently complement primary empirical data.

The pioneers of such literature came along in the early years when even the terminology of these new tendencies had not been established. Although Web 2.0 and its concept were yet to be invented, both Mark Leonard and Anne-Marie Slaughter had visionary thoughts on the development of diplomacy in 2002 and 2004, respectively.

In his work “Diplomacy by Other Means”, Leonard discussed how international relations might be conducted in the new, digitalizing world. He already emphasized the impact of technology on diplomatic practices from the standpoint of faster and more dynamic communication and enhanced public participation.

Slaughter’s book “A New World Order” explored the shifting landscape of global governance, including digitalization among the reasons for the swift changes in transgovernmental networks. She claimed that traditional nation-state diplomacy must change, as increased connectivity will decentralize power, enable non-state actors to emerge in global discourse, and informal channels will become just as important as traditional ones.

Leonard and Slaughter both argued that easier networking will soon speed up diplomatic interaction on all levels of the hierarchy, emphasizing that the diplomatic communities will face the task of adapting to this new reality. Nevertheless, their thoughts addressed the communication revolution's consequences, not those of the yet-to-emerge Web 2.0 phenomenon.

At the end of the first decade of the 21st century the world of diplomacy has finally embraced the new tools provided by the latest tendency of digitalization. Web 2.0 has arrived both to our

[39] To see the details of every item mentioned in this review, see the Sources at the end of the document.

homes, and to MFAs and Embassies worldwide[40], consequently, the related body of scientific literature also started to take shape.

In his 2008 work, "Foreign Ministries and the Information Revolution: Going Virtual?," Jozef Bátora raised multiple key topics related to this dissertation, in the context of how digital technology influences diplomacy. After stating that the information revolution has indeed changed diplomatic practices, he argued that it has enabled foreign ministries to engage more directly with audiences – foreign and domestic alike. He was the first to argue that this phenomenon may lead to greater transparency, courtesy of more readily accessible information, therefore diplomats may soon be expected to be more open to engagement with all kinds of actors, including non-state entities, or even individual citizens. Bátora also mentions predictable changes in policy-making, as there is more (and more real-time) access to data, allowing for more dynamic responses to relevant global events.

In 2010, Joseph S. Nye approached our topic from the angle of global power in his paper “Cyber Power”. Although purely political in its scope, he correctly predicted the ability of an international actor to incorporate cyber tools (both hard and soft) into its toolkit to be decisive in future diplomatic interactions. His paper also highlights the increasing number of international actors gaining access to global power, courtesy of brand-new Web 2.0 opportunities.

Philip Seib focused on the immediate nature of Web 2.0 functioning in his 2012 publication “Real-Time Diplomacy: Politics and Power in the Social Media Era”. He introduced the concept of “real-time diplomacy”, in which social media platforms facilitate instantaneous communication and information exchange between governments, diplomats, and the public. This immediacy has transformed how diplomatic activities are conducted and how quickly information and responses can spread globally. Similarly to others, Seib underlines the widening scope of actors in diplomacy from presidents all the way to grassroots movements and draws attention to challenges like misinformation and information overload.

Apart from repeating some theses of the above researchers, Nicholas Clifton clearly stated in his study “Integrating Diplomacy and Social Media” in 2013 that diplomatic communication has changed beyond a doubt, and traditional barriers have diminished, resulting in a more engaging, more dynamic, albeit less predictable diplomatic reality. He was the first to realize the potential advantages of Web 2.0 tools in crisis management, courtesy of their direct and immediate qualities circumventing traditional hierarchical workflow. Clifton also foresaw that diplomatic leaders need to embrace innovation to prevent their organizations from falling behind their peers.

[40] Although of course, as mentioned in this study multiple times, it has arrived to our homes with lightning speed, and it has arrived to the diplomatic realm slowly, carefully, step-by-step.

Two similarities interestingly characterize all of the above-mentioned scientific work. Firstly, with little exception, they addressed diplomacy in the meaning of “foreign policy”, meaning that their focus, concern, or even examples all belong to the highest-impact level of diplomacy. In consequence, very little is said about the everyday work of the majority of diplomatic entities and diplomats of the world. Also, most of the focus is on a few major international actors, thus lacking a comprehensive nature.

Secondly, whenever any change in the substantial contents of diplomacy comes up in these texts, it routinely refers to the narrow realm of public diplomacy, leaving most branches and areas of this wide, multidisciplinary profession out of the analysis. Certainly, the boom in public diplomacy is the most obvious of all, some, like Eytan Gilboa or Nicholas Cull, even made it the exclusive focus of their examinations (Gilboa, 2008; Cull, 2011), but singling out this particular branch can not show a comprehensive reality, and the above-detailed works also stopped short of opening up their scrutiny to the entirety of diplomatic activities.

Recent years have brought a higher number of significant publications on online diplomacy, already with detailed knowledge of the latest developments of digitalization, including the emergence and deep social penetration of Web 2.0.

In 2017, Olubukola Adesina published her paper “Foreign Policy in an Era of Digital Diplomacy” in which she echoes much of what Bjola and Holmes have claimed but also takes a deeper look at how foreign policy formulation and implementation have changed due to digital tools. She argues that foreign policy has become more vulnerable to public scrutiny and pressure. The novelty in Adesina’s work is that she proposes national diplomacies to develop digital strategies and invest consciously in the cybersecurity of their systems.

Brian Hocking and Jan Melissen argued in 2015 in their paper “Diplomacy in the Digital Age” that the transformation is not just about adopting new technologies but also about changing the nature of diplomatic practice itself. The main theme in their work is the concept of "networked diplomacy", as digital technologies facilitate the creation of complex, multi-level networks that involve a wide range of actors, including non-state actors. In our age, these networks challenge the traditional state-centric model. Hocking and Melissen even suggest that the future of diplomacy will depend on how well diplomatic institutions and practitioners can adapt to the demands of today’s rapidly changing digital environment.

In the further developing field of digital diplomacy, few have contributed as substantially to both the theoretical foundations and practical implications as Corneliu Bjola, Marcus Holmes, Ilan Manor, and James Pamment. Their works, both individual and collaborative, cover the thematic spectrum of early digital foreign policy. Building upon each other's insights, they constitute much of the backbone of contemporary research in this domain.

A central theme across their findings is the transformation of diplomacy from a closed, elite-driven process to an increasingly performative and interactive one. Marcus Holmes was at the forefront of theorizing diplomacy as a social performance. His co-authored work with Bjola, Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice, in 2015, establishes an early (and for current researchers, influential) framework that claims digital diplomacy is not simply a change in medium but a paradigmatic shift in the structure of diplomatic interaction. They argue that internet platforms allow for redefinitions of the diplomatic domain, where immediacy, publicness, and transparency change both internal workflows and external expectations.

Bjola, in his solo work Digital Diplomacy and International Organizations (2020), extends this argument into the institutional realm, investigating how international organizations such as the UN and EU adapt to digital pressures. He evaluates how digital tools enhance or undermine legitimacy, particularly in crisis communication and conflict narratives. His conceptualization of "normative power" in digital diplomacy serves as a valuable analytical lens, relevant not only for state actors but also for IOs and NGOs seeking visibility and traction in global debates.

Ilan Manor brings a more empirical and communications-focused approach to the table. In his 2019 work The Digitalization of Public Diplomacy, he conducts a systematic analysis of social media accounts, arguing that digitization has not only increased the volume of communication but also reshaped its tone and interactivity. Manor introduces the idea of "diplomatic narrative battles", where state actors engage in content wars to shape public perception. His later work emphasizes that mere presence on social media is not equivalent to digital success, as that depends on the quality of storytelling, institutional coordination, and contextual sensitivity.

James Pamment's contributions intersect strongly with questions of strategy, policy design, and digital ethics. His 2013 work, New Public Diplomacy in the 21st Century, addresses the operational side of digital diplomacy. Pamment also critiques the over-celebratory tone often adopted by digital diplomacy advocates and calls for a more realistic view, highlighting the bureaucratic constraints, resource gaps, and reputational risks that may accompany digital engagement. He is one of the few scholars to discuss key performance indicators in digital diplomacy, cautioning against vanity and populism in place of meaningful engagement.

In their co-authored and co-edited project from 2018, Countering Online Propaganda and Extremism, Bjola and Pamment navigate the darker side of digital diplomacy: how governments counter misinformation and malicious influence. This work broadens the field's scope by introducing cybersecurity and strategic counter-communication into the digital diplomacy canon.

Importantly, it identifies the blurring boundaries between strategic communication, information warfare, and public diplomacy.

In 2022, Manor and Pamment edited a special issue of the journal Place Branding and Public Diplomacy, titled "At a Crossroads: Examining Covid-19's Impact on Public and Digital Diplomacy". This issue investigates how the pandemic has affected public and digital diplomacy, highlighting the challenges and transformations faced by diplomatic actors during this period.

Already at the time of this research, Bjola and Manor edited the prestigious Oxford Handbook of Digital Diplomacy in 2024. The handbook features contributions from leading experts in the field – including, of course, Holmes and Pamment – who delve into how digital technologies are utilized to achieve foreign policy goals and how diplomats adapt to the digital age. Topics covered include the establishment of foreign representations in technology hubs, challenges faced by foreign affairs departments in adapting to digital technologies, and the use of digital tools as a means of exerting influence. The handbook employs a multidisciplinary approach, incorporating theories from international relations, diplomacy studies, communications, sociology, internet studies, and psychology, to provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of digital diplomacy and the evolution of diplomacy in the digital age.

All four scholars stand by the notion that Web 2.0 diplomacy is not a passive process of adaptation but an active arena of creating meaning and contesting norms. Their works form a relatively detailed map of the digital terrain that modern diplomacy must navigate, and serve as an academic foundation for researchers who follow.

One final collection to be mentioned, which was published during this research, is the special issue of The Hague Journal of Diplomacy, titled "Advancing a New Research Agenda on Digital Disruption in Diplomacy" (2024), edited by Karin Aggestam and Constance Duncombe. This issue explores the hybrid nature of contemporary diplomatic practices influenced by digital technologies, covering areas such as peace-making, inter-state signaling, domestic politics, digital communication, public diplomacy, and popular culture.

Such a literature review can not go on endlessly, but it is fair to mention some other researchers who contributed not only to the body of literature on digital diplomacy but also to this very dissertation. As referenced later, Amelia Arsenault, Ali Fisher, Muhammad Ittefaq, or Alfredo Rodriguez Gómez have addressed areas like the communication potential of the new tools, the possible path forward for diplomacy, and some of them discussed particular sub-fields or geographical areas through their work on the topic.

Also, "celebrities" of foreign affairs like Francis Fukuyama, or Henry Kissinger weighed in on digital diplomacy. In his 2021 article "How to Save Democracy From Technology" Fukuyama highlighted the paradox that while these technologies can increase transparency, they also pose risks by concentrating power in the hands of a few corporations, thereby threatening democratic processes. Kissinger expressed concern in his 2022 work "The Age of AI and Our Human Future" about how the digital age might destabilize the global order, as new technologies could erode the principles of sovereignty and national interest that have historically guided diplomatic interactions. Although today's researchers may and shall strive to learn from such legends of diplomatic thought, these publications were not scientific ones, they remain in the journalistic realm.

In two contemporary studies in 2023 and 2024, Nadiia Derkacz and Diana Szűcs explored the development of two national online diplomacies, those of Ukraine and Spain, respectively, thus providing interesting secondary information topically similar to the primary information gathered through the interview process of this research.

Finally, interesting insight can be gained from handbook-style background documents like ministerial strategies of particular countries, online texts of the discussed platforms like Facebook's own booklet called "Digital Diplomacy on Facebook Guide", or other multimedia surfaces'[41] similar documents.

I would like to hereby acknowledge and appreciate the above and numerous other authors, for without their findings, this research could not have been possible to be conducted in a comprehensive manner.

Own publications

It must be mentioned in this Chapter that as my research has been ongoing for a few years now, I myself have published a number of studies, which cover some areas of this doctoral research – preliminary results, country-specific case studies, or a topical approach.

Although all these previous publications are interview-based and peer-reviewed, the interviewing process at the time did not follow the exact same interview process of the current dissertation. Therefore, following scientific principles, upon the usage of their findings, they shall not be referred to as interviews with the given entities (e.g., iTHA, iMYA, or iCTA), but as publications (e.g. Görömbölyi, 2021; Görömbölyi, 2022a; etc.), in the standard APA referencing system.

[41] E.g.: YouTube, Soundcloud, etc.

As the line of my related publications constitutes a single comprehensive research, all previous findings are organically built into the findings of this dissertation, therefore, there is no need for separate reviews as part of this Chapter.

3.2 Theoretical framework

Before turning the focus of this study to the findings on the core research question, a further contextual foundation can be laid down by presenting an overview of how Web 2.0 appeared in governmental entities in general (Chapter 3.2.1), and how the communication aspect of diplomacy evolved before the rise of Web 2.0 (Chapter 3.2.2).

3.2.1 Web 2.0 in government

The appearance and use of Web 2.0 in the governmental sector represented and represents a significant shift in how the official sphere interacts with technology and its citizens (West, 2011). The evolution of this phenomenon was gradual, full of experimentation with these new forms of engagement, and up to the present day it is still continuously adjusting to keep up with emerging challenges and opportunities.

Early 2000s: The beginnings of Web 2.0

Web 2.0 began gaining traction in the early 2000s[42], primarily in the private sector and the younger generations of the general public, championed by platforms that supported interactive experiences and user-generated content. Governmental adoption of Web 2.0 technologies started slowly for two sets of reasons: Well-managed and efficient public institutions are often cautious with new technologies due to concerns about security, privacy, and reliability. Less well-managed and less efficient public institutions are generally slow to evolve, as – contrary to the private sector – there is no "punishment" for inefficiency. Leaders of such institutions are more keen on safely avoiding changes that higher leaders may disapprove of, than on developing and modernizing their domain. This risk avoidance leads to complacency that results in public institutions generally lagging behind their private sector counterparts in modernity and efficiency (Hinkley, 2023).

Mid 2000s: Initial adoption and experimentation

Around the mid-2000s, some forward-thinking government entities began to see the potential of Web 2.0 to enhance – among other factors – citizen engagement and improve services (Newman,

[42] MySpace and the first messaging platforms like MSN Messenger can be considered as pioneers of this era, but the real social penetration was done by Facebook, starting in 2004-05, reaching all segments and age groups of society.

2010). In multiple countries[43], for instance, different forms of the term "Government 2.0" started to be used around this time to describe the use of government practices that fostered openness, transparency, and collaboration (West, 2011). Innovations included the launch of blogs, public comment forums, and video streaming of public meetings to increase public participation.

2010s: Institutionalization

The 2010s saw a significant expansion in the use of Web 2.0 technologies by governments worldwide. The U.S. led the way with several initiatives, such as the Data.gov portal launched in 2009, which aimed to make government data more accessible to the public. The U.K.'s Government Digital Service was established in 2011 (and fully modernized in 2017) to enhance the digital transformation of government across the country, focusing on making government more accessible through technology.

3.2.1/1. UK minister for the cabinet Francis Maude inaugurates the new data.gov.uk portal for the citizens (8 December 2011)

Social media became a standard tool for public institutions, not just for emergency communications but also for daily interactions with citizens. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and later Instagram allowed governments to take their first steps in broadcasting important information quickly and gathering feedback from the public more efficiently.

Late 2010s to the present: Deeper engagement

More recently, governments have moved beyond mere adoption to the sophisticated integration of Web 2.0 technologies, including the use of big data analytics. The role of mobile technologies has become increasingly central (Clarke, 2017), with many governments developing apps to facilitate easier access to public services, from renewing licenses to reporting local issues like potholes or broken street lights.

[43] For instance, Australia, Estonia, India, Singapore, South Korea, UK, to name a few.

Challenges and adjustments

Although the results and benefits of this process are numerous, ranging from enhanced citizen engagement through modern and efficient public services to collaborative governance, the integration of Web 2.0 in the governmental sector has created various challenges, too.

3.2.1/2. Jamaica's Consumer Affairs Commission aims to educate citizens on the importance of cybersecurity (2022)

With increased data sharing and connectivity, concerns over data privacy and security became more obvious. Governments across the globe have tried to ensure the protection of sensitive information and to maintain public trust, utilizing modern technological and legislative security measures.

While Web 2.0 has the potential to increase citizen engagement, it also risks widening the gap between those with and without access to digital technologies and skills. In the first decade of Web 2.0, ensuring inclusive participation required targeted strategies to bridge this digital divide[44]. Today, with the overwhelming social penetration of smart telecommunication devices, the concern of the digital divide has withdrawn, giving way to the concern of a divide in digital literacy.

The decentralized nature of Web 2.0 has indeed posed challenges for governments used to hierarchical structures. Some[45] have developed new governance models that accommodate more fluid, horizontal modes of communication and decision-making, while others[46] simply accepted that there is a new, decentralized domain within the traditional realm of government.

Theory in the context of Web 2.0 use in governmental institutions

Network Theory[47] offers a particular angle, through which to analyze how connections and interactions within networks can enhance cooperation and communication within public services

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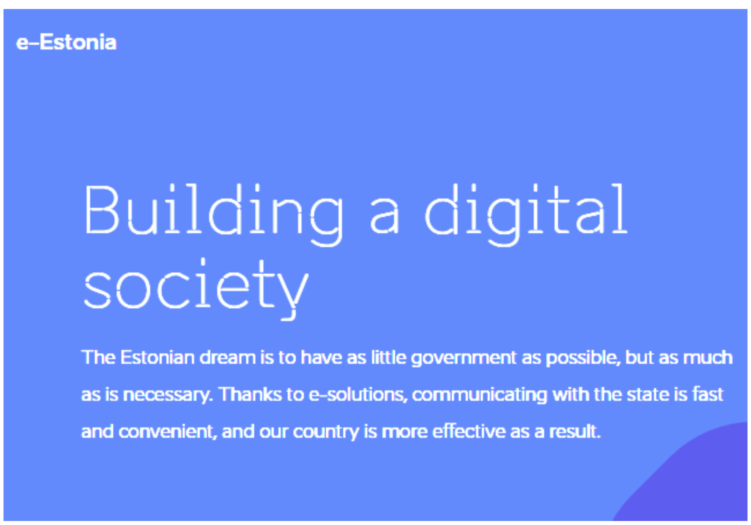
[44] Digital divide is the unequal access to digital technology, primarily the internet, but also physical equipment like smartphones, laptops, etc. The digital divide enhances inequality by hindering access to information and resources.
[45] E.g. Germany (GER, 2023)
[46] E.g. Japan (JAP, 2023)
[47] Originating from mathematical and physical modeling, network theory examines how nodes (individual actors, points, or elements) and links (relationships or interactions) structure themselves within a network. This theory is

(Newman, 2010; Clarke, 2017). As more entities and individuals participate in the examined Web 2.0 platforms, the value of the whole network increases, and the benefits increase exponentially as the network grows. Identifying central nodes like key information sources or highly engaging individuals, and analyzing information flow can help optimize the network for better service and better communication (Barabási, 2003).

Governmental use of Web 2.0 is not static, it evolves as more users join the network, as the technology develops, and as the needs and behaviors of the members change along their common interests. Network theory suggests that Web 2.0 in the governmental sector signifies a shift towards the more interactive, responsive, and efficient governance.

Democratic Theory [48] in our context involves understanding how digital platforms and technologies influence democratic processes and public engagement. Web 2.0 tools can significantly enhance public participation in governmental decision-making, as they allow for broader and more direct public engagement about policies, laws, and other issues (Wilhelm, 2002). This engagement can be seen as an extension of participatory democracy, where citizens can feel empowered to contribute their views and influence government outside of cyclical voting mechanisms.



3.2.1/3. Estonia's interactive portal inviting citizens to engage in legislative procedures, public debates, and more. (2024)

Mentioning some examples of this approach, Estonia's e-government initiatives now invite citizens to participate in the legislative process online, while Brazil has used participatory budgeting forums to allow citizens to decide how certain parts of public budgets are spent (Touchton, 2019).

The incorporation of Web 2.0 enables a more deliberative form of democracy, providing spaces for debate where diverse perspectives

instrumental in understanding various complex systems, from biological ecosystems to social interactions, and in recent times, technological frameworks like Web 2.0 (Newman, 2010).

[48] Democratic theory is a subfield of political theory that is primarily concerned with examining the definition and meaning of the concept of democracy, as well as the foundations, obligations, challenges, and overall desirability of democratic governance. Generally speaking, a commitment to democracy as an object of study and deliberation is what unites democratic theorists across a variety of academic disciplines and methodological orientations (Oxford Bibliographies).

can be shared and considered. This aligns with the ideals of deliberative democracy, where the quality of democratic governance is enhanced by the depth and inclusiveness of public deliberation before decisions are made.

Public Choice Theory[49] with its realist approach argues that Web 2.0 in the governmental sphere could theoretically lead to better policy outcomes as politicians and high-ranking bureaucrats may feel more pressure to act in the public's interest due to heightened scrutiny and the potential for direct feedback from constituents (Jarvenpaa, 2003). However, Public Choice Theory also warns of the potential of these tools to manipulate public opinion. Governments could use Web 2.0 platforms to shape narratives that support their interests (or the interests of specific groups), rather than the general public.

Leading bureaucrats might have resisted the adoption of Web 2.0 tools that threatened to increase scrutiny of their actions or reduce their control over outgoing information. According to Public Choice Theory, this resistance might have stemmed from a desire to maintain power and autonomy rather than from a motivation to achieve better outcomes for the public (Eriksson, 2022).

3.2.2 Diplomatic communication

Since the beginning of this profession, throughout centuries, if not millennia, diplomacy has been a secretive practice involving closed-door negotiations between state representatives, with little to no public disclosure. The general public had minimal direct interaction with diplomats or insight into diplomatic proceedings (Görömbölyi, 2023; Bjola, Manor, 2024). With the rise of print and later broadcast media (radio and television), governments began using these platforms to shape public perception and opinion about foreign policy. Governments in this period did release selected information to influence domestic and international audiences, marking the beginning of more public-facing diplomatic communication. However, the outgoing public messages did not cover the actual range of diplomatic activities, quite the opposite, they simply enhanced political leaders' political narratives – the topics just happened to be of an international nature.

During the later decades of the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union expanded the role of diplomacy to include strategic outreach to foreign audiences, a practice the world of diplomacy has known ever since as public diplomacy (Critchlow, 2004). This included cultural

[49] Public Choice Theory treats politicians, bureaucrats, and voters as self-interested agents, who are motivated by personal gains (such as reelection, increased budgets, or job security) rather than purely by public interest. This perspective helps analyze various government inefficiencies and policy outcomes by examining the incentives and constraints faced by these agents. (The Concise Encyclopedia of Economics)

exchanges, broadcasting, and other initiatives aimed at gaining popularity or at least positive recognition abroad. It was a significant shift from government-to-government communication to engaging directly with the population of other countries.

Our current era has transformed diplomatic communication more radically. Web 2.0 arrived, which enabled direct and instantaneous communication between state officials and the global population. Today's diplomatic efforts are increasingly public and interactive, with an emphasis on a broader dialogue that includes civil society and the global community. This approach helps governments to not only disseminate information but also to gather feedback, better understand, and gauge public sentiment more effectively.

Diplomatic communication to the public – courtesy of modern technologies – now plays a crucial role in foreign affairs, influencing everything from international relations and trade agreements to global public opinion on critical issues. The effects of this tendency constitute the core research question of this dissertation.

In the context of diplomatic communication, Constructivist Theory[50] suggests that the way countries understand and represent themselves and others plays a critical role in shaping their foreign policy, their diplomatic engagements, and their respective communications. Constructivism claims that the identity of a nation – how it sees itself and how it wants to be seen – shapes its foreign strategies, including public relations. These efforts are designed to project the self-image to the international community, which can include emphasizing certain cultural values or historical narratives (Erbas, 2022). Based on this, constructivist approaches in diplomatic PR logically involve more engagement with international civil society and the public, instead of merely targeting state officials. Following the constructivist theory, this approach understands and explains diplomacy as a social construct that ever evolves with the interactions between diverse actors, making it an ideal research topic concerning Web 2.0 use and all related causal effects.

[50] In international relations, constructivism is a social theory that asserts that significant aspects of international relations are shaped by ideational factors. The most important ideational factors are those that are collectively held; these collectively held beliefs construct the interests and identities of actors (Oxford Bibliographies).

4. Findings of the research

4.1 Web 2.0 in foreign relations

Since the historical beginnings of modern governance at the end of the 18th century[51] as a way to manage and control public life, it has been a natural phenomenon to utilize all forms of communication to have information delivered from leaders and aspiring leaders to the general public. Getting the message through has always been of primary importance for politicians, to create and dominate narratives about public issues, and eventually, gain votes, or – depending on the political system – any type of public support. Diplomacy, however, has not functioned that way (Wiseman, 2011a). Since its beginnings, it has mainly been the domain of the highest tiers of the elite, managing relations with neighboring or later even faraway sovereigns, to trade, form alliances, or avoid conflict. For millennia, the citizens of any given country had nothing to do with foreign policy, and no leader had the specific intention to widely and regularly communicate information on diplomatic activities to the general public. In other words, diplomacy was conducted behind closed doors, and whatever happened behind closed doors, stayed there, carefully hidden from the public eye (Pamment, 2013).

Therefore, if in the previous main Chapter (specifically 3.2.1) it was established that governments, in general, adopted the new toolkit of Web 2.0 with a delay compared to the private sector or the citizens themselves, one must recognize that the diplomatic world has done so with an even greater delay.

4.1/1. The MFA of Thailand announcing the creation of their Facebook profile in a brief post. Facebook, November 2010

Still, the opening happened. The 20th century made the world significantly more globalized (Friedman, 2005). In the post-WWII years, with the dawn of television, information started reaching people in a considerably higher dose than before, and in many countries this time coincided with the emergence of democratic principles, like accessible information on public functioning, public spending, or public policies in any sector. These tendencies strengthened steadily, and, as a result, by the time the Internet was born, people became more interested in issues and even details of foreign affairs.

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[51] As Jürgen Habermas, Hannah Arendt, Immanuel Wallerstein, and others date the birth of modern political systems in nation states, based on government and opposition, to the late 18th century.

The breakthrough came courtesy of – of all the actors of international relations – the world's foreign ministers (iMEX; iGER; iJAP; Bjola, 2015, Manor, 2019; Görömbölyi, 2023). When asking the question of what made these leaders break with the millennia-old tradition of behind-closed-doors diplomacy, one realizes that they represent the intersection between political leadership and the professional world of diplomacy. They are the leaders of their countries' diplomatic services, but they are – in an overwhelming majority – politicians, members of a ruling government seeking re-election, or at least public support.

One of the many such examples was minister of foreign affairs of Ukraine Kostyantyn Gryshchenko, who – during his second term between 2010 and 2012 – introduced the concept of social media into Ukrainian diplomatic discourse, used Twitter himself, and incentivized the use of Web 2.0 tools at Ukrainian embassies worldwide (Derkach, 2023). Another example and leading figure in this aspect was US secretary of state Hillary Clinton (see Chapter 4.2.2).

4.1/2. The MFA of Uzbekistan announcing the creation of their Facebook profile in a post. Facebook, August 2014

The online appearance of the ministries and ministers was a state-of-the-art step to influence global narratives and shaping international perceptions. But at the political level, it was equally important for the ministers that engaging on Web 2.0 platforms provided a seat to MFAs at the table in case of domestic online debates, and a toolbox to influence the flow of information, counter (or even promote) political misinformation, thus gain approval within the electorate.

Furthermore, Web 2.0 communication channels, like instant messaging platforms and mobile video calls immediately increased efficiency in the workflow along the chains of command (iUN, iARG, iGER, iLAO, iNZL, iSLE, iJAP), which is a development any minister will wholeheartedly support.

The online toolbox, therefore, opened up, and the time of Web 2.0 diplomacy has come.

4.2 Online toolbox and the performance of the core actors

Albeit in regionally different proportions, it can be concluded that within this toolbox the leading position of Facebook in diplomatic activities is clear. Although its hegemony in individual use throughout the global community of netizens has decreased, and in particular regions even overtaken by either Instagram or Twitter/X, in diplomacy, it has remained the default go-to platform, as it provides a comfortable fusion of options more balanced than the other two (iGER, iFIN, iLAO, iARG, iJAP). Twitter/X and Instagram are unquestionably second and third in importance. In Anglo-Saxon regions, Twitter/X organically became embedded in most official communications (iMEX, iNZL), while in Asia Instagram has recently grown to strong positions, especially through attempts to engage with younger generations (iJAP, iLAO, iARG). Any platforms, these three and others alike, can carry carefully crafted and useful content, it depends on the given diplomatic entity, how much attention and resources it can, or is willing to allocate for online presence.

4.2.1 Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFA)

If one examines randomly selected Web 2.0 profiles of randomly selected MFAs of the world, there is a good chance one will encounter a well-maintained and balanced page. In the last decade and a half, it has been quite the journey for MFAs to achieve this level, but the picture is mixed (Ittefaq, 2019; Szűcs, 2024). A scrutiny of ministry profiles using a sample including all major regions and numerous countries to examine their use of Web 2.0 tools will show that their level of adaptation can be significantly different (Manor, 2016)[52].

The most advanced examples – typically from the most developed countries – are MFAs who use the possibilities of web 2.0 platforms to the fullest extent possible. They have a well-thought-out strategy, helping planning and execution of related tasks. They allocate both financial and human resources for these tasks. Among others, the US Department of State, the German Auswärtiges Amt, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the South Korean Oegyobu, or New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade all belong to this group.

[52] Ilan Manor has taken a qualitative and quantitative approach to compare MFA social media profiles, looking into factors like content strategy and post frequency, engagement metrics, network growth, message framing, and crisis communication. This comparative analysis is reflected in the description of MFA profiles in this dissertation.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) of India is a good example that online excellence is not the exclusive domain of the developed North. Generally considered part of the Global South[53], India's sheer size, diplomatic weight, and recent IT successes are duly mirrored in its online profiles. On the MEA homepage, a neatly organized toolbar shows that the institution is active on 8 different Web 2.0 platforms, namely Twitter/X, WhatsApp, Facebook, LinkedIn, Youtube, Flickr, SoundCloud, and Instagram – with millions of followers and rich content. Upon clicking on any of these, a user-friendly interface guides the visitor to the adequate link, based on thematic choice. A similar experience, albeit with lower numbers and 5 used platforms awaits at Brazil's Ministério das Relações Exteriores; and at China's Wàijiāobù, which is naturally equally active on its internally used platforms like Weibo, Douyin, or WeChat. Despite efforts, this research has not found examples of MFAs of any of the least developed countries[54] (LDCs) having such a robust and high-quality online presence.

4.2.1/1. The Twitter/X profile of Japan's MOFA with 100K+ followers, 15K+ posts, and more than a decade of experience

This first group of MFAs typically utilize complete teams or even departments (iGER, iJAP) for online activities, they typically use more than the three main platforms, and constantly review the possibilities of the ever-changing online landscape, keeping up with technological development, often pioneering in using new tools.

Following them comes the vast majority of the MFAs of the world, which perform well, they follow the zeitgeist of online functioning, but for one reason or another, they are only able to partially exploit the opportunities offered by Web 2.0 platforms. Such reasons may be the lack of financial or human resources, lack of leaders' will, lack of strategy or experience, fragmented or duplicated content creation, or even just too much focus on one platform (e.g. maintaining Facebook at a high level, but fully or partially abandoning other surfaces).

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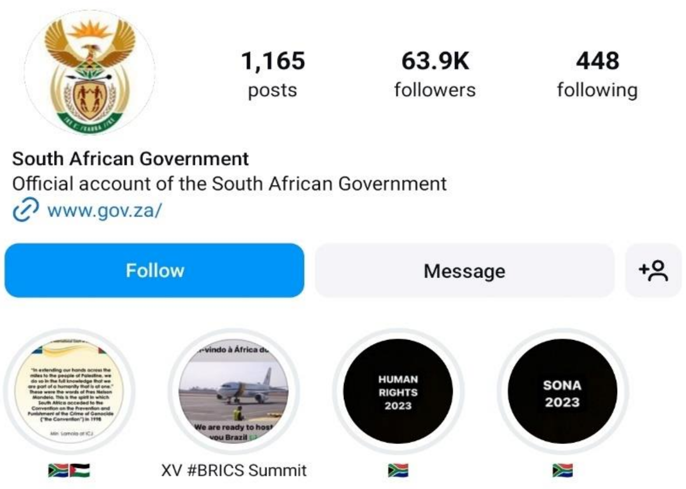
[53] Global North and Global South are terms that denote a method of grouping countries based on their defining characteristics with regard to socioeconomics and politics. According to UN Trade and Development, the Global South broadly comprises of Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, most countries of Asia, and most of Oceania.

[54] Least developed countries (LDCs) are developing countries listed by the UN, recognized by the WTO that exhibit the lowest indicators of socioeconomic development. At the time of research (December 2023) 45 countries were classified as LDC.

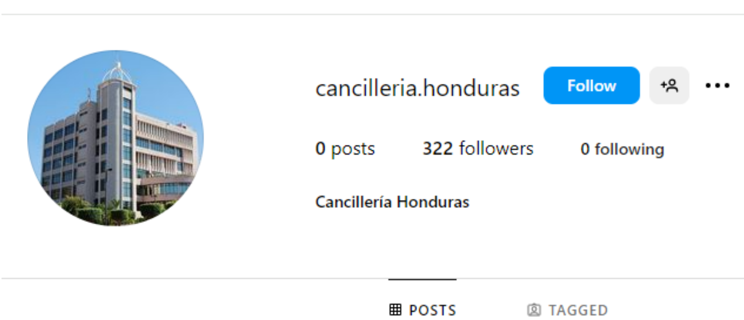
This group, consisting of more than a hundred MFAs, is naturally very diverse, as they have different geographic, cultural, and economic backgrounds, and their leaders may have equally diverse reasons to make related decisions. Upon examination it is observable that the central Facebook page of these entities is generally well-maintained, it is clear that serious attention and work has been put into it, with dedicated managers and colleagues. The contents are likely balanced with alternating posts about political, cultural, and current affairs, typically modern in both style and content. It is common to display the broadest thematic palette, from positive news related to the given country through the presentation of the essential elements and actualities of foreign policy to ministerial job advertisements. These MFAs also show diversification between platforms, but usually within the framework of the three main ones, using Facebook for their main output, Instagram for visuals of country promotion, and Twitter/X for brief diplomatic messages.



4.2.1/2. The Instagram profile of South Africa's MFA with numerous posts and followers, and a wide range of topics

Several of these MFA profiles show dynamic progress, which is sometimes the result of new leaders arriving on the scene, intending to introduce visible and efficient changes (iNZL, iFIN, iMEX). As the years pass, more and more countries catch up with the leading pack, as – given the nature of digital reforms – changes can be significant even in the short term.

Finally, there are MFAs, characteristically but not exclusively from among the LDC group, which exhibit a significant lag behind the leading group in many aspects – technology, financial resources, training, language, etc (iBOL, iLAO, iUN, iIDN). These profiles usually lack user-friendly structure and substantial content, many times they operate by simply sharing official press releases, and their updating is rare, sometimes even non-existent. It is a common theme among these MFAs to create certain profiles and later abandon them for the reason of lack of attention or human resources. There certainly is a level of



4.2.1/3. The Instagram profile of Honduras' MFA with zero posts and only a few hundred followers. Instagram, as accessed in October 2024.

development among their ranks, but it is slow, unstructured, lacking strategy and concept, and the priorities of the leadership generally do not include online goals (iBOL, iUN, iMEX, iSLE, iGNQ). It is not impossible that such an MFA could introduce dramatic reforms and bring about a comprehensive package of online diplomacy, but the realistic chances are considerably smaller than those of the previous group of MFAs.

A good – or in this case, a bad – example is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Sierra Leone, which has created its Facebook profile in May 2021, and occasionally posted – albeit exclusively about the minister's meetings with photos of handshakes – until July 2023, since when there have been no updates on the profile[55]. The ministry has created its Twitter profile, but it has no more than 237 followers and a complete lack of updates since July 2021[56]. The cover photo on the MFA's Facebook page, which only shows the lower side of the foreign minister's face (meaning a profile picture cut in half in a rather unfortunate way) is further proof of the low standards of this particular MFA's attention to Web 2.0 diplomacy (iSLE).

Despite efforts, this research has not found examples of MFAs of any of the developed countries[57] (DCs) demonstrating such lags and systemic drawbacks in their online presence.

It is worth taking a brief look at language usage on central MFA profiles[58], which generally shows flexibility in line with the posted contents. English, as the lingua franca of the 21st century, rules supreme on the overwhelming majority of examined profiles. An interesting example regarding the lead Web 2.0 language of an MFA is France, which has long been known for its pride in its language, and up until the 20th century, French has widely been considered the language of diplomacy. The Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France overcame this dilemma in a creative way, becoming one of the very few MFA HQs maintaining two main Facebook profiles – one in French with 537k followers, and one in English with 55k followers[59]. The potential to do this, of course, is not usual and is generally restricted to the biggest, most developed foreign services (see above).

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[55] As of the time of access, October 2024.
[56] As of the time of access, October 2024.
[57] Developed countries are sovereign states that have a high quality of life, developed economy, and advanced technological infrastructure relative to other less industrialized nations (IMF). In 2023 the IMF classified 40 countries in this category.
[58] This research does not address built-in translation settings of the major social networks, as those are optional, they appear at the users' end and do not cause behavioral differences at the end of the posting entity.
[59] As of the time of access, November 2024.

4.2.1/4. The Facebook profile of Somalia's MFA partially using Arabic on the occasion of the Islamic holiday of Eid al-Fitr

Apart from English and the national language(s) of the given MFA HQ, this research has only found one diplomatic occurrence of another language being used, and that is when the given HQ honors a foreign partner's national day or religious holiday, and as a courtesy, posts a brief congratulatory note including a short message in the language of the target country.

The own language of the given MFA usually appears in cases of consular information, own national holidays, cultural events, elections held worldwide, typically in cases when practical information must be conveyed to own citizens (iMEX, iNZL, iARG, iFIN, iLAO).

4.2.2 Ministers of Foreign Affairs

If the online scene concerning MFA HQs shows a colorful variety, this is exponentially true for the profiles of the many foreign ministers of the world. As we are talking about human individuals here and not institutions, it is obviously a private decision, largely dependent on the personal character of the given leader, if, and if yes, then to what extent they wish to use Web 2.0 online tools in an official manner. This personal decision must be respected by both researching scholars and the general public alike, however, a foreign minister is such an important, emblematic face of the foreign policy of a country, that in the third decade of the 21st century, it is practically an obligation to represent as a minister through modern channels (iEEAS, iIDN, iGER, iARG, iMEX). Along the past decade and a half, year by year, many ministers have realized this imperative.

4.2.2/1. US Secretary of State John Kerry's first official tweet in office. Twitter/X, February 2014

One of the flag-bearers of digital diplomacy was former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton[60], who – during her term – actively promoted digitalization in the State Department. Still, she did not yet have a private ministerial social network profile. It wasn't until her successor, John Kerry, that a sitting US Secretary of State actively engaged on Twitter. Kerry, who served as Secretary from 2013 to 2017, was the first US diplomatic leader to post official tweets while in office.

[60] In office between 2009 and 2013.

Examining many foreign ministers' profiles, it is hard to find two identical ways of dealing with online content. Some post themselves, but the majority employ a colleague or even a team to manage their personal profiles[61]. Sometimes this team overlaps with the one managing the MFA surfaces, but some ministers prefer to keep it separate and trust only their personal assistant with the private profiles (iNZL, iARG, iGER, iFIN). Some ministers' profiles show commitment and attention, and there are some, who only post every once in a while, or restrict their activity to sharing the HQ's posts. Some are active on all three major platforms, while others focus only on Facebook or Twitter, and, albeit rarely, some still keep away from social media even in the current day and age (Görömbölyi, 2023).

A surprising example in this aspect is Thailand, which has gained significant economic advantages through being a regional leader in digitalization, and is proud to run the Thailand 4.0[62] grand strategy. The current MFA profiles are exemplary, well-kept, and state-of-the-art, what's more, they even introduced pioneering ideas establishing a chatbot and an online radio[63] accessible from the homepage of the MFA and all Web 2.0 platforms, focusing on foreign policy and global news. However, their foreign ministers seem reluctant to embrace social media. Long-time minister Don Pramudwinai (in office between 2015-2023) had his profiles created, but then abandoned them, and was notorious in the Corps Diplomatiques (CD) for "not liking computers"[64] (iARG). After a change of government, his successor Parnpree Bahiddha-nukara (in office between 2023 and 2024) has not created official profiles, and his personal Facebook profile has not been updated a single time during his tenure. His successor, incumbent Maris Sangiampongsa has created an official Facebook page, and is posting photographs of his activities, but – as of October 2024, his page has a few dozen followers altogether. Due to his previous service in the USA, his Twitter/X profile has more than 2000 followers, but he has yet failed to even change his official position from ambassador to minister in the "about" section of the profile.

There is an inherent difference between MFA HQ profiles and those of the foreign ministers. It lies in the different angles being "institutionally official", and "personally official". Although the style of MFA posts has become more casual throughout the years (see Chapter 4.3.1), it still

[61] It does not constitute part of this research, but this – who works alone, who with an inside team, and who with their trusted outside people – has been a well-researched bureaucratic-political topic. Different choices here result in consequences relating to ministerial autonomy, institutional control, actual output, etc.
[62] A 20-year economic development strategy introduced by the government of PM Prayut Chan-o-cha, focused on innovation, research and development with special emphasis on digitalization.
[63] Saranrom Radio – URL: www.mfa.go.th/saranrom
[64] A brief methodological insight #4 – This is one of the instances in which my own experience led to a confirming follow-up question in one of the interviews. During my diplomatic posting in Bangkok, this piece of information was well-known among diplomats, but I only included the example in the findings of the research after an additional source (the Argentinian interview participant, who also served in Thailand during the tenure of minister Pramudwinai) confirmed it.

carries an official aspect to it, therefore the presentation of the given content usually follows the general journalistic and protocol guidelines of a news piece or a press release. The minister's profiles, however, have no such restrictions whatsoever, and the same topic may receive a very different form in its presentation (Horváth, 2023). Most ministers use it to seem accessible and human, therefore occasionally showing insider information, backstage peaks, or simply a less official view on the given content (iGER, iNZL, iGNQ, iBOL).

4.2.2/2. The Twitter/X post of the Polish MFA about the official visit of minister Radosław Sikorski to Holland, and one of the minister's multiple tweets about the same event in October 2024.

An everyday example of this phenomenon can be seen on the Twitter/X profiles of the Polish MFA and foreign minister Radosław Sikorski[65]. On 28 October 2024, the minister paid an official visit to the Netherlands. The Twitter/X account of the MFA[66] posted two tweets about the visit, the first being a preliminary overview of the program, and the second with a photo of the two ministers' press conference, and a brief note declaring excellent bilateral relations, and a mutual understanding on most issues that Europe and the West currently face. Sikorski on the other hand posted a series of tweets about different human aspects of his program. One tweet shows him hugging a senior Dutch World War II veteran, who fought alongside Polish liberation forces. Another shows him paying respect with a wreath at a military cemetery. Another shows the two ministers sharing a casual laugh before or after their press conference. And yet another shows the fans of Dutch football club Breda honoring Poland – in memory of the 1st Polish Armored Division fighting German troops in and around the city in 1944. Relating to these visual elements, Sikorski shares his personal thoughts on European security, in a clear reference to Russia's ongoing war on Ukraine.

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[65] Who has actually been very active promoting the digitalization of polish diplomacy in his first ministerial period between 2007 and 2014.
[66] @PolandMFA

One natural characteristic of ministerial profiles is that the world of interior politics can be unpredictable, so ministers may come and go overnight. In such a case the new ministers will make their own decisions about Web 2.0 profiles. The previous ministerial profiles will not migrate to the new person, those of the outgoing minister will transform back to simple "civilian" profiles[67]. These changes however may prove to be turning points, as the new leader may introduce a paradigm shift in the Web 2.0 mindset of the given MFA. If the outgoing minister has not been too tech-savvy, with the arrival of the new leader a radical improvement of the MFA's online activities may take place (iFIN, iJAP, iSLN).

A good example of this is when Urmas Reinsalu assumed the position of minister of foreign affairs of Estonia in 2019. The relatively young (44 years old at the time) incoming minister emphasized digital diplomacy from day one, revamped the MFA's homepage and Web 2.0 profiles, assigned a team to draw up an online strategy, and encouraged online engagement across the board[68]. Compared to his predecessor Sven Mikser, Reinsalu brought about a completely new school of digitalization, using a wide palette of tools, assigning both financial and human resources to the related tasks, and as a consequence, bringing Estonian online diplomacy on a par with far bigger and richer MFAs of the world[69].

This research has not found an example of the opposite happening, namely, when a digitally active outgoing foreign minister's achievements would be turned back by an incoming minister, who would not put emphasis on online functioning.

4.2.3 Embassies

Embassies (and other foreign representations) are the most important actors in a country's Web 2.0 diplomacy (iMEX, iGER, iLAO, iARG, iNZL, iSLN, iBOL, iIDN; Pamment, 2013). It is the embassies that can "spread the message" worldwide, and it is the embassies that can tailor elements of communication to the style, taste, and language of the host country or international organization. While the HQ is mostly the brain behind the online activities of the MFA, the widespread web of embassies constitutes the many far-reaching arms of the system, which ensure a worldwide reach and coverage (Görömbölyi, 2023; iFIN, iJAP, iMEX, iLAO). Embassies are so

[67] Unless the minister has specifically created an offical one in parallel with their private one, but this is the minority, most ministers simply use their pre-existing profiles in a more conscious form during their term in office.
[68] Reinsalu even initiated an Estonia-US Digital Cooperation Agreement, signed in 2020, which aimed at bringing digital potential to less developed areas of the world through different forms of international aid.
[69] Source: https://2020.egovconference.ee/; www.hindustantimes.com

important in this aspect, that – as a good example – the MFA of Indonesia introduced a yearly award for the Indonesian embassy with the best managed social network profiles (iIDN).

Individual countries run many representations worldwide (this number is above 100 even in the case of medium-sized countries, considerably more in the case of bigger, or more developed countries[70] (Lowy, 2024), these being mostly embassies, but also consulates-general, consulates, cultural institutes, representations at international organizations, etc, all with their own defined online presence. This is a formidable communication arsenal in the hands of national-level diplomacy (Szűcs, 2024). Maybe the Web 2.0 profiles of the HQ have more followers than single embassies, and maybe they can gather more engagement and a bigger reach on a single post. But if that post is meant to be spread worldwide, then the many embassies can provide a boom in both reach and coverage, incomparably greater than that of the HQ.

Based on the above number of representations per country and the number of countries, one can see that worldwide there may be approximately 20,000 representations altogether. Naturally, at such a number, research may not produce overall truths valid for every entity, only general observations and conclusions. Having examined well over a hundred embassy profiles, the clearest observation is that by the end of the 2010s, regardless of the geographical or cultural backgrounds of either the countries of origin or the host countries[71], Facebook became the dominant platform of foreign representations, and it has been holding its leading position up until the present day. Facebook profiles serve as the foundation for presence in the host country's online sphere, a platform promoting whatever content the embassies intend to share, and a documenting tool of the offline activities of the representations, generally used in a comprehensive, well-thought-out way (iGER, iJAP, iNZL, iSLE).

Similarly to MFA HQs, but to an even greater extent, the use of Instagram compared to Facebook is more unpredictable. Some countries' embassies run substantial Instagram profiles, but there are many representations in the world, which do not use this particular tool. It is a reoccurring phenomenon (not observed in the case of Facebook) that an understaffed or underfunded embassy creates its Instagram profile, after the creation one can see a committed, active timeframe, in which regular or irregular updates and postings are made, but with time this regularity fades and the profiles become more and more inactive (iIDN, iARG).

[70] The top five countries in this regard are China (274 foreign representations), the USA (271), Turkey (252), Japan (251), and France (249) – as of 2024.

[71] In the case of foreign representations, ambassadors, and diplomats, in diplomatic terminology the phrase *country of origin* refers to the country that the given representation represents, also the country of citizenship of the ambassador and the diplomats. The phrase *host country* refers to the country where the given representation, ambassador, and diplomats are seated and accredited, or only accredited.

Although Twitter-diplomacy, as a term, made its way into public discourse[72], at the embassy level the use of Twitter/X is even more sporadic than that of Instagram (iMEX, iGER, iIDN). This is primarily the result of two factors. The first is simple, the strictly limited length of each post also limits the variety of occasions when an embassy can make use of it. The second reason is cultural. In host countries, where Twitter/X is more widely used, like Anglo-Saxon areas or Western Europe, embassies feel more incentive to create and use a profile; while in other regions like Central Europe or parts of Asia, where Twitter/X is not a leading platform, they can easily omit the use of this particular tool, as it does not provide such outstanding opportunities for multiplying reach, and missing out on it is not such a backdraw compared to other members of the local DC (iMEX, iIDN, iLAO, iBOL).

4.2.3/1. The Facebook profile of the Embassy of Malaysia in Cairo, with important basic information to establish the foundations of the online presence of the representation in the host country.

A lack of sufficient HR resources and the overworking of available diplomats is a common, everyday occurrence in the diplomatic world (for related risks, see Chapter 4.4.4). This results in a further reason that cements the leading position of Facebook use at embassies, namely, if the number of the embassy staff simply doesn't allow for additional tasks to be addressed, then the logical decision will not be the running of a secondary social network profile, but to play it safe and make sure the Facebook page is well attended and of decent quality (iLAO, iFIN, iNZL). As mentioned above, in certain instances, it does happen that the representation creates the Instagram or Twitter/X profile before making this necessary decision, which then generally results in partially or fully abandoned surfaces. It is an important question to consider what serves the promotion of the country of origin better: if "for good measure" these additional profiles exist but are abandoned and thus potentially induce a negative user experience, or if – realizing the unsustainable nature of the task – the embassy does not even create them at all.

[72] Not the least because of a particular US president known to stir up controversy with his tweets.

A standard example of a solid set of profiles is the Embassy of Malaysia in Cairo[73]. Their Facebook page has been running since 2013, they have amassed a healthy 19,000 followers, and they regularly post diverse content, on average 5-7 times a month. This profile is the pillar of all Web 2.0 activities of the Embassy, and as such, it provides the followers with all the necessary basic information about the embassy (which would not be possible on the other two platforms due to their different content design). The Twitter/X and Instagram profiles of the embassy are nothing to be ashamed of, they are well kept since 2017 and 2022 respectively, but these platforms are very clearly in the shadow of Facebook, with much less attention paid to them. On Twitter/X the embassy has 900, on Instagram a little over 1000 followers, and on both surfaces the updating rate is approximately 1-2 new posts a month.

Language use has been discussed in the case of MFA HQ profiles, and it is no less interesting to examine the embassies' choice of language, as in their context the cultural settings of the host country matter at least as much, if not more, as the country of origin. It is generally true that embassy profiles run in the language that is the commonly used language of the CD in the given capital (iNZL, iMEX, iLAO). This might mean the language of the host country, but it might also mean English, depending on the on-field practicalities. It does prove to be discriminative towards more rarely spoken, or more difficult-to-learn languages, but the embassy's decision must follow the reality of international language use, to serve the goals of connectivity and country promotion. As a very common example, if one looks at the embassy profiles of Egypt, it can be seen[74] that while it does operate in the host country's language not only in the Anglo-Saxon World, but also in Algeria, Lebanon (Arabic), Spain, Peru (Spanish), France, Senegal (French), it operates only in English in host countries like Indonesia, Korea, Sweden, or India. Likewise, the embassies of Denmark post[75] in the local language in Chile, France, and Russia; but turn to English-only functioning in Czechia, Iran, Poland, or India.

Certainly, this attitude varies widely. If an embassy has the resources to operate its profiles in multiple languages, it is an additional show of respect, and always a positive message towards the host country. This is why, for example, the embassies of Italy can function in both Korean and English in Seoul, or in French and English in Yaounde[76]. The examples are diverse worldwide, and whichever school the given representation follows, it only takes a momentary decision to make an exception and use another language, fitting with the upcoming post.

[73] At the time of access, November 2024.
[74] At the time of access, September 2024.
[75] At the time of access, November 2024.
[76] But they still function only in English in Yangon, Bratislava, or Colombo. At the time of access, November 2024.

4.2.3/2. The Instagram profile of the Philippine Embassy in Beijing, the Facebook profile of the Finnish Embassy in Tehran, and the Twitter/X profile of the Ethiopian Embassy in Islamabad

It is an interesting observation of this research, that even in countries where certain or most social networks are illegal, blocked, and theoretically non-accessible, some embassies still operate profiles. These surfaces would – in theory – be non-sensical, but the embassies can indeed share important information, consular or other, with their own citizens traveling to the host country, or with anyone in the host country using VPN services and being interested in the activities of the embassy.

For the embassies, it is of utmost importance to have close cooperation with the HQ in online matters. The colleagues in the capital provide strategy and general guidance about the use of Web 2.0 platforms or the necessary content, which helps keep the balance between the direct instructions of the HQ and the adaptation to the host country's cultural environment. It is a unanimous opinion among the interview participants of this research that finding the "golden middle path" in this respect is crucial. Suppose an MFA's approach is too controlling and strict, not giving embassies a scope of interpretation and creativity. In that case, it may result in schematic, bureaucratic, and non-creative embassy platforms globally. On the other hand, if the HQ does not provide strategy or any guidance, it may result in dysfunctionality, an un-harmonized visual presentation, and superficial substance at the level of the embassies' platforms. Closely related to this is the efficient sharing of the workload avoiding duplications. Some content on embassy platforms is necessarily created at the embassy, but some – like country promotion materials shared globally – are uniform or close to uniform regardless of which embassy posts them. Therefore, if the HQ creates content and sends it to the embassies with one click, it can save a lot of precious work hours for their own diplomats worldwide.

A good example of the mismanagement of this was when Argentina won the FIFA World Cup in 2022. For all Argentinian embassies, it was obvious that this great achievement would be posted on all their platforms, and they were waiting for the HQ to send the content. It never came, so with a delay, all Argentinian representations created their own content on the same identical topic, making 130+ diplomats do the same task simultaneously, instead of having one single colleague at HQ prepare and send the material to all embassies and consulate generals (iARG). A positive example can be found on the platforms of Swedish embassies worldwide, as their HQ in

Stockholm regularly provides shareable material on major international happenings in Sweden or lighter content on cultural topics (iFIN).

4.2.4 Other actors

Although the above discussed actors are the fundamental ones on the online stages of classical international relations, they are by far not the only ones. Multiple types of other actors add to the depth and the variety of Web 2.0 diplomatic activities, both within, and outside the national structures of foreign affairs.

4.2.4.1 Others within the national structures

As the years have passed and Web 2.0 diplomacy evolved, others have joined the activities online with their official, or semi-official profiles[77]. Characteristically, as their domain is at the crossroads of substantial diplomacy, diplomatic communication, and politics, many spokespersons of MFAs joined the ranks of diplomats active online. Most use their platforms as an efficient tool for multiplying the reach of press conference materials through sharing, but many go further than that and post additional materials on current affairs or country promotion.

4.2.4/1. Twitter profile of Hua Chunying, spokesperson of the Chinese MFA between 2012-2024.

One such example, who had a significant effect on the overall online output of her MFA is Hua Chunying, spokesperson of Chinese diplomacy between 2012 and 2024[78]. Soon after her entry into this position, she co-created the concept of “wolf warrior diplomacy” (Huang, 2022), and has striven ever since to enhance the Chinese MFA’s footprint

[77] An interesting group of actors are the heads of state and heads of government of the world, who regularly post matters of foreign policy on their profiles. However, as these posts primarily belong to political communication rather than diplomatic activities (even though sometimes the border between them is blurry), in this study they are not examined in detail. Any further research into those surfaces would be an interesting multidisciplinary study, beyond the scope of this dissertation.

[78] Officially she is not spokesperson anymore, as she has been promoted to Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, but she keeps overseeing the communication activities of the MFA, and current spokespeople, Mao Ning and Lin Jian are both her students and subordinates – at the time of access, December 2024.

across Web 2.0 platforms (Ji, 2021). Her Twitter/X profile alone has 2.7 million followers[79], and the large number (13.000+) of posts indicates a professional team behind these efforts.

Occasionally, some lower-level, thematic organizational departments or units also appear online with their own profiles. Today, there are numerous such instances. Such examples can be seen on the Facebook page of the Consular Services Department of the MFA of Uganda, sharing useful and sometimes essential travel updates and warnings; on the Twitter/X page of the Department of Overseas Development of the MFA of Ireland, detailing international aid and development projects with impact assessments and future planning; or on the Instagram page of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the US State Department, promoting people-to-people connections, study programs, and cultural exchange activities[80]. The appearance of such units online is generally the result of one of two occurrences: either the given department or unit has plenty of human resources to manage extra tasks, or/and the minister of foreign affairs has ordered the given department or unit to create and manage the Web 2.0 profile. A mid-ranking leader rarely assigns precious manpower to a task that does not bring high-level recognition or approval (iARG, iNZL, iFIN).

A special category is the online activity of ambassadors. The overall picture here is even more colorful. These profiles are undeniably private, but most ambassadors are quick to harvest the free chance to gain even more diplomatic recognition among the CD and more professional praise at the HQ – therefore they will use their platforms to share and create professional content (iARG, iGER, iMEX, iGNQ). The added value in this is that in addition to the transmission of official or semi-official messages, these platforms serve as an excellent tool for more direct posts showing the human face of diplomacy, sometimes even through behind-the-scenes visuals or information. Ambassadors typically alternate between personal and official content, but while spokespersons usually operate with simple sharing of MFA materials or with other formal content in formal or quasi-formal language, ambassadors typically use a casual style and wording, even in the case of official events and information.

4.2.4/2. A Twitter/X post from Miles Armitage, ambassador of Australia in Ankara, promoting the screening of an Australian film in Turkey. October 2024.

This way ambassadors are in direct control of two sets of platforms, their own, and those of the embassy (iNZL, iGER), therefore their attitude – as it was mentioned in the Foreword of this

[79] At the time of access, September 2024.
[80] All at the time of access, November 2024.

dissertation – is a major factor in the development of the online activities of their institutions. It is, however, also a responsibility to find the ideal balance between offline and online activities. As later presented in Chapter 4.4.2, some ambassadors do fall into the trap of exaggerated online PR, hindering their embassies' in-depth offline work in the long run.

Depending on each national diplomatic service's structure, more MFA-related actors[81] may be present online. Development agencies', foreign affairs institutes', cultural institutes', and others' social media profiles enrich the global scene of online diplomacy, and function with a variety of modus operandi, under the guidelines of the MFA, and under the direct (ambassador-like) control of the leaders of these units or institutions.

4.2.4.2 Others outside the national structures

International organizations (IO)

4.2.4/3. The Twitter/X profile of the international organization Comunidad Andina (Andean Community), which is active on 5 Web 2.0 platforms.

Some of the most important actors in international relations are international organizations, and the communication revolution has not avoided them either. Albeit with certain characteristics[82], IOs have slowly embraced the benefits of online functioning similarly to MFAs (iUN, iEEAS), and even the structure of their online behavior resembles the national level. IO HQs show similar responsibilities and online output as MFA HQs do, and individual representations of these organizations show similarities with embassies worldwide (iMEX, iEEAS). In the course of this research, many IO profiles were

[81] The examples listed here are "within the system" in most countries, meaning that the institutions (cultural or foreign affairs institutes) are under the direct supervision and budget of the MFA. However, in many cases they are independent actors, or possibly even under the supervision of another state organ (e.g. Ministry of Culture). This, however, does not change the fact that they are active in the realm of online diplomacy, their procedural ways and substantial activities are different case-by-case; and that their directors' control over the online output is much like that of ambassadors' control over embassies' online activities.

[82] One such characteristic is the bureucratic slowness and usual inefficiency of IOs, which results in less enthusiasm from the mid-level leaders. As a national foreign minister can order their subordinate ambassadors to perform at a short notice for political gains, or an ambassador may constructively perform to gain positive internal feedback or appreciation from their minister, in IOs these factors don't come to play, therefore there is less incentive to create and maintain substantial social media profiles, and as a result, the related tendencies move slower than at the national level (iUN).

examined at both HQ and representation levels, and they have consistently shown the characteristics of national MFA HQs and embassies.

One major difference that must be noted at this point is that as IOs function in line with their mission laid down in their founding documents, and have no underlying culture or society to promote (as national MFAs do), the online content of IO profiles generally shows a narrower variety, closely related to the basic tasks of the given IO (iUN), and only occasionally moving to non-related topics; which instances are usually connected to the host country, or ongoing cooperations with third parties.

Quasi-state entities

An interesting group of examined international actors is quasi-states, political entities that do not represent fully autonomous sovereign states with their own institutions, but show certain characteristics of countries. Quasi-states can be very different in their backgrounds. As examples, in this research, the Web 2.0 activities of three such entities were examined exactly because of their differing statuses within the International Community: the Palestinian Authority, the Republic of China (Taiwan), and the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA). The first one is officially recognized by dozens of countries, but de facto controls only fragments of its territory. The second one is recognized by only a handful of countries, yet de facto it is a fully functioning system with all criteria of statehood. The third one has no recognition nor control of its claimed territory, it functions as a classic government-in-exile.

As quasi-states strive for statehood and the recognition arising from it, they act in every way like countries, thus sending the message that their intention is to gain full recognition, and aiming to prove that they have the means to represent their claimed countries. This results in online activities similar to those of countries, especially as the advantages of digital communications specifically fit quasi-state entities. While for state actors these advantages like cost-effectiveness, HR-effectiveness, global reach, flexibility, and ease of dissemination (Kela, 2024) are important, they would still be able to achieve some of their communication goals offline, albeit with slower and with more necessary investment of finances and manpower. But quasi-state actors are not part of the traditional diplomatic world, they generally do not have a seat at the table, they are not invited to the classic fora of global diplomatic life, therefore have no or limited access to traditional diplomatic communications. So for them, the potential offered by online tools is not simply important, but fundamental[83] in their quest to show the world their existence, their state-like character, and express their ideas and messages (Görömbölyi, 2022b).

[83] As Tenzin Lekshay, spokesperson of the Central Tibetan Administration told me in an in-depth interview conducted for a publication (Görömbölyi, 2022b), "If our leader can not have his 15 minutes at the UN General Assembly, if we are not invited to Asian diplomatic summits, if there are no independent Tibetan news agencies in

Because of this situation, these entities have successfully multiplied their communications from close to zero to a highly developed level, so with the adoption of Web 2.0 platforms, quasi-states have experienced a boom in their international reach even greater than classic national diplomacies (Bat-Oyu, 2024; Görömbölyi, 2022b). The example of the foreign affairs of the CTA shows this exactly. Working from Dharamshala, India, where the CTA has been hosted for decades, the institution has for long been largely unknown to the international community, but with the use of social networks and real-time chat platforms as tools for networking, it has efficiently engaged with Tibetan and interested non-Tibetan communities worldwide, sharing its otherwise silenced narrative with an unprecedented reach. It has since been successful in drawing in celebrities[84] to cooperate online and echo the messages, and it has been successful in maintaining global awareness and sympathy for the hardships the people of Tibet face. Probably the biggest achievement of the CTA's online efforts was the launch of Voluntary Tibet Advocacy Groups, or V-TAG[85]s. This is an online initiative started in 2021 to encourage as many Tibetans as possible to engage in the Tibet movement in their respective countries of residence (Görömbölyi, 2022b). Fifteen years ago there would have been no means to involve or organize these people in a coordinated manner to advance the diplomatic efforts of such an entity. But because of Web 2.0 tools, nowadays it is natural to see this level of global reach and efficiency.

4.2.4/4. The Twitter/X account of the MFA of the Republic of China

Overall, it may be said that while national MFAs and IOs do not depend on Web 2.0, so for them, such tools are essential but not existential in their communications, in the case of quasi-state entities these are truly existential in the quest for worldwide recognition, and the chance to convey their messages and articulate their interests on the world stage.

existence, obviously, starting our Facebook page was like a breath of fresh air, allowing to overcome decades of isolation".

[84] From Richard Gere to Tiger Woods, from John Cleese to Uma Thurman, many Western Buddhist public figures have expressed their support, shared posts, or offered their help for the Tibetan cause.

[85] More information on V-TAGs at https://tibet.net/tibet-advocacy-group/

International NGOs

Some of the most important links between the world of diplomacy and the civil sphere are international NGOs. Usually established along thematic missions like human rights, climate action, development, education, culture, etc., they regularly cooperate with governments, international organizations, and each other to achieve their goals through individual projects, or day-to-day work. They have long been considered to be actors in international relations, utilizing digital platforms to influence diplomatic agendas (Nye, 2010; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), and they have been one of the first such, that used Web 2.0 platforms extensively (Martens, 2010).

In their line of work, NGOs have been using online tools for many reasons and goals. What constitutes diplomatic activities among these are not necessarily the direct communication and campaign elements, but rather those instances when the given organization engages state-level stakeholders, or even international organizations through Web 2.0 channels, using the public nature of these platforms. This can include promoting discussions on current international issues, sharing expert reports or opinions, openly lobbying for their defined mission, or in any way trying to influence decision-making processes (iWWF).

4.2.4/5. Environmental NGO WWF promotes climate action on Instagram, using the hashtag of COP29 to channel the message to global decision-makers. November 2024.

An example of how online platforms can amplify global NGO efforts and influence international decision-making on critical issues is the campaign of Amnesty International promoting the Arms Trade Treaty [86] (ATT) in 2013. The organization used Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube to raise global awareness about the impacts of unregulated arms trade with campaign hashtags like #ArmsTreatyNow to pressure governments to act. They organized an online petition on Change.org to collect grassroots support, which resulted in millions of signatures worldwide and was repeatedly presented to decision-makers together with visual testimonies of victims of illegal arms trade. Amnesty International brought in other NGOs like Oxfam and Control Arms, to coordinate a global campaign of over 100 organizations,

[86] The ATT is a global treaty aimed at regulating the international trade in conventional arms to prevent their misuse and curb human suffering. Amnesty International, alongside other NGOs, played a critical role in advocating for this treaty's adoption by the United Nations in 2013.

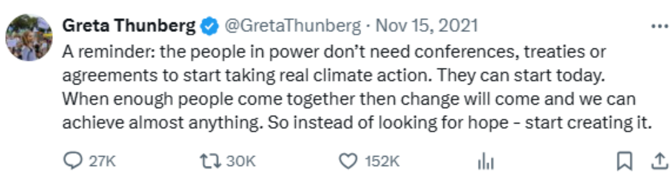
amplifying each other's messages; and by tagging UN representatives, leading diplomats, and policymakers, they directly engaged with those at the negotiations (Marcus, 2013). The public and subsequent political pressure contributed to the eventual adoption of the ATT, which has since been signed by over 130 countries worldwide.

Individuals

In December 2006, Time magazine surprised most of its readers by naming "*You*" as their "Person of the Year", instead of a politician, celebrity, or public figure (Grossman, 2006). The cover of the magazine featured references to Web 2.0 tools like Facebook, blogging, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media platforms. The unexpected move was initially mocked, but since then, it has proven to be visionary (Derkach, 2023).

Individuals have been considered potential actors in international relations for some time (Osée, 2019), but the ideal time for such influence between an individual and diplomacy came with the boom of Web 2.0 platforms. Earlier it was concluded that quasi-state entities got a significant boost from Web 2.0 platforms, but in the case of such individuals, this change has been even more extreme. Its scale is best visible through particular examples.

Greta Thunberg started out as an ordinary Swedish student, and her enthusiastic idea of protesting in front of the Swedish Parliament at age 15 in her 2018 "Skolstrejk för klimatet" ("School Strike for Climate") was nothing more than what countless other youngsters attempt for noble causes. It was her social media platforms that multiplied the message first in Sweden, gathering a solid core fan base, and once the message went viral in English, millions of followers took to the streets in what became the largest climate protest in history with 4 million people joining worldwide in September 2019. Thunberg's Twitter/X and Instagram profiles have been fundamental in gaining her global recognition, and the amplifying effect of shares – with hashtags of global decision-makers – made her not only a household name globally, but earned her invitations to the highest global climate events (Hook, 2021). Greta Thunberg's widely shared "Our house is on fire", and "How dare you" speeches at the 2018 COP24 and the 2019 UN Climate Action Summit, respectively, may have positioned her as a legitimate global voice for climate action, but without Web 2.0 platforms, her participation in diplomatic activities would not have been possible.



4.2.4/6. Greta Thunberg's post on international climate action on her Twitter/X profile, with 150K+ likes, 27K+ comments, and 30K+ shares amplifying the reach. November 2021.

Malala Yousafzai was a typical Pakistani schoolgirl in the Swat Valley, with an enthusiasm for pursuing education, when she started blogging on a BBC platform at the early age of 11 in 2008, detailing life under Taliban rule. After some of her posts went viral, she was invited to in-person presentations as a teenager and soon became the voice of her generation of girls striving for education. She started using Twitter and Instagram to amplify the reach of her message, sharing updates about her advocacy work, speeches, and meetings with international organizations and global leaders involved in international education cooperation (ABC, 2014). The hashtag "BooksNotBullets", popularized by Malala made waves in the form of initiatives channeling military spendings towards education. After having survived a Taliban assassination attempt, she became the youngest person ever to receive the Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts to promote equal education (Yousafzai, Lamb, 2013). Before the age of Web 2.0, the world would not have heard about her existence, and she would currently not be able to contribute her voice and activities to such a significant global issue day by day.

4.2.4/7. The Malala Fund campaigning on Facebook for better funding for education. July 2015.

Before the Web 2.0 era one had to be internationally famous in their own right, e.g. like Henry Kissinger[87] or Bono[88], to have initial access to any classical platform, from which they could influence international decision-makers or the international public opinion as individuals. As one can see from the above examples or the case of numerous others, now even an initially unknown individual can make a similar impact – provided they have a substantial message and some well-managed social network profiles.

Finally, it must be noted that individual actors do not even need to be personally known or be identifiable to make a difference in international relations. To have a short insight into what "nameless" individuals may contribute to diplomatic activities or foreign policy through Web 2.0 tools, see Chapter 4.5.2.

[87] Henry Kissinger was US secretary of state between 1973 and 1977 and US national security advisor between 1969 and 1975. He later on became an author and publicist.

[88] Bono (Paul David Hewson) is an Irish musician-songwriter, lead singer of the world famous band U2. He regularly used his fame to promote important international social issues.

4.3 Changes and tendencies

After having seen the online functioning of the different diplomatic actors, it is time to present the changes in diplomatic activities in line with the hypotheses (see Chapter 1.4) of this dissertation in the following sub-Chapters.

4.3.1 Change in form

There is unanimity among the interview participants of this research and related literature (Pamment, 2018; Eggeling, 2023; Beltrán, 2021; Bjola, Manor, 2024) that Web 2.0 tools have changed the form of diplomacy. In what ways and to what extent – that is another question.

New genres in diplomatic activities

First and foremost, diplomacy can utilize new genres of communication, which as little as 15 years ago would not have been imaginable. Until the Web 1.0 era, diplomatic entities and leaders had formal speeches and statements, press conferences, press releases, written editorials, interviews, radio and TV broadcasts, or basic websites with similar characteristics to analog media, as options for communication. In comparison, diplomatic entities and diplomats[89] today have all social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, X/Twitter, and others) for posts, stories, and tweets; modern, interactive websites, blogs, live streams, webinars, or even public Q&A tools at hand to communicate their messages (iFIN, iNZL, iBOL, iIDN, iARG, iGER, iUN, iWWF).

These new genres allow MFA HQs, embassies, diplomats[90], and any other actors of international relations to engage with wider, potentially global audiences directly; and also make richer communication possible in the form of dialogues with feedback and public discussions instead of traditional one-way information transfer.

This set of new genres, however, have created a new layer of options, but have not substituted the pre-Web 2.0 genres of communication. They co-exist, allowing the decision-makers at all levels to choose, depending on the momentary priorities (iUN, iJAP, iARG). When efficiency and reach matter, they can choose the Web 2.0-based genres. When accuracy and depth matter more, they can choose the classic ways. Another reason why analog genres may shift to the background, but

[89] Referring to their official domain, not their private activities.

[90] It varies by nation or institution if individual diplomats have the authority to post official content without prior approval of their leaders. This sentence refers only to diplomats, who have such possibilities.

never go entirely extinct is that those are the only official and legally referenceable platforms of institutional communication (iJAP).

One example of how new Web 2.0 genres may be introduced into a country's diplomatic toolkit is how Indonesian online diplomacy evolved. Former Indonesian president Joko Widodo[91] came to power through direct election in 2014 with a strong message of closer government-to-people relations. Upon assuming office he instructed his ministers to embrace direct communication tools, which were to be found in the form of modern Web 2.0 platforms. Under the leadership of the young[92] incoming minister Retno Marsudi, the MFA has created many social media profiles, which have been maintained and developed ever since. Following the presidential guidance, Retno gave her yearly foreign policy report speech at university campuses around the country every year, engaging in yet another new genre, live online broadcast, streamed on the MFA's platforms both on Youtube and Facebook for domestic and international viewers alike (iIDN).

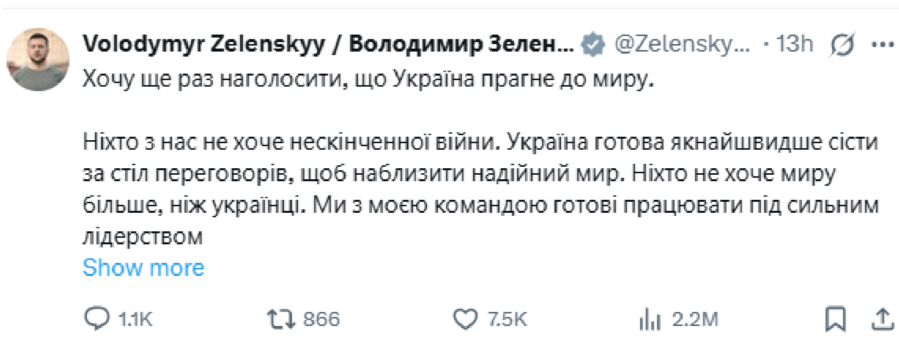
4.3.1/1. Webinar on the channel of the Guyanan MFA, organized through Zoom, streamed live through Youtube, September 2021

These new genres of communication have brought about important new aspects to diplomacy. While earlier genres primarily targeted governments, elites, diplomats, and other officials; those facilitated by Web 2.0 platforms engage societies on all levels, without borders or any restrictions, thus enhancing both the accessibility and inclusivity of diplomacy (Seib, 2012; Clifton, 2013). Another novelty of the new tools is that horizontal quality has now complemented the previously hierarchical, or at least linear, communication, courtesy of Web 2.0 interactivity and multiple new actors engaging in the given communication at will (Hocking, Melissen, 2015). This, consequently, affects the level of accountability of diplomatic entities, as described in Chapter 4.3.4.

Taking stock of these new genres, a natural typology shows. There are real-time/ephemeral genres (social media posts, instant messages, stories and temporary updates, live streams, and online broadcasts), there are interactive /participatory genres (Q&A sessions, crowdsourced engagement, horizontal formats for discussion and interactivity), there are multimedia genres (interactive websites, webinars, videoconferences), and hybrid communication genres (mixing

[91] In office between 2014 and 2024.
[92] This is subjective, of course, but at 52 years of age, Retno certainly was younger than average incoming ministers.

classical and Web 2.0 communication tools). Although the fine-tuning of utilized communication genres is continuous, as one interview participant phrased it, “diplomats of our age have so fully settled into these new genres that if tomorrow they were to disappear, most leaders would be unable to carry out their duties anymore” (iBOL).



4.3.1/2. Ukrainian president Zelensky's X/Twitter post reaching out to US president Trump in March 2025.

In one of the most obvious examples of the late Web 2.0 era, when Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky reached out to US president Donald Trump after their unsuccessful first meeting in March 2025, he chose to do it not through an official letter, not through a note verbal, not through a press statement or press conference, not through embassy channels, not through a televised speech, but through an X/Twitter post.

New style

There is also unanimous agreement among the interview participants that the style and language of diplomacy have shifted from the official towards the casual because of Web 2.0 tools, to achieve the desired reach and accessibility. First, this tendency started just to not “sound” odd on platforms where official talk would stand out negatively (iGER, iNZL), and soon the casual style seemed natural for content-creating diplomats. The success (more likes, more follows, more engagement) of friendlier posts made it clear that the way forward is to break from protocol and speak the people’s language (iMEX, iGER, iGNQ, iNZL).

4.3.1/3. Casual, friendly style in the Facebook post of Finland's Embassy in Washington. December, 2019.

With this change in style, both online diplomatic activities, and the online manifestation of offline diplomatic activities became more accessible, more understandable. This partially originates from the genres themselves, as “even the same text feels closer and more human in a chat than in a note verbal, or in an Instagram post than in a press release” (iMEX). But naturally, the language of the texts has changed significantly, it became way less bureaucratic, way less official, which helped interested users find a personal connection. This then brought measurable online success, and the tendency continued generating itself with even more casual content both on social networks and direct Web 2.0 communication tools (iBOL, iJAP, iUN, iNZL; Szűcs, 2024).

The use of micro-tools, like cross-referencing, tags, and hashtags make the style of diplomatic posts even further distanced from the official while contributing to the reach, engagement, and overall success of each post (Szűcs, 2024). Moreover, the emojis arrived. It may seem paradoxical that the profession with the reputation of adhering to the most sophisticated protocol and etiquette norms and classical formalities, uses the most informal, and some would say even childish elements in its Web 2.0 toolkit, but the reality is that in recent years even the emojis made their way into online diplomatic communication. Just as the mere usage of social networks has been opposed for a while[93], only to break through later and overtake parts of the diplomatic realm, in the same way, emoji use was opposed strongly by leaders exactly for being too informal or too childish for “the seriousness of the institution”. But as soon as the first instances happened with some more obvious graphics like the “like” or the “handshake” emojis, and diplomatic leaders started seeing them appear in their peer’s posts, this opposition also broke down, and as of today, when relevant, emojis constitute a standard part of any online diplomatic post (iEEAS, iMEX). The most common ones are still the basic, standard emojis, but there are plenty of examples for other, easy-to-understand types as well.

4.3.1/4. The results of a short emoji-search on the Instagram profile of three distinct actors: the MFAT of Ireland, Mao Ning, spokesperson of the Chinese MFA, and the WWF (from the WWF, only COP-related posts). December, 2024.

Directly humorous (per intention) posts have also been used to complement standard styles of public outreach, or direct nation-branding (Fedor, Fredheim, 2017). In one well-documented instance, Russia’s MFA openly intended to make fun of US accusations of meddling in elections, through Facebook and Twitter posts “offering espionage and election meddling services” to the public (Hemment, 2022).

[93] For a real-life example, see the Foreword of this dissertation.

4.3.1/5. Humorous (per intention) tweets from Russia's MFA and its Embassy in London, making fun of British comments on Russian election meddling and British PM Theresa May's confrontative stance. May 2017, November 2017, Twitter

A very significant aspect of these changes in style is that they filtrated back into the offline realities of diplomatic life. Those who created, and those who accessed and read the more casual and human online materials, carried some of this new tone into their next diplomatic interactions, online or offline, be it a meeting with the host country's officials, a report written to HQ, or average conversations among the CD at various events. Slowly but surely, this penetrated virtually every corner of diplomatic life, and although at different levels throughout the spectrum, today's style is more casual in both online and offline fora than it has been before the emergence of Web 2.0 tools (iGER, iFIN, iMEX, iARG, iIDN, iSLE).

One does not act in an official, protocol-defined way with one's friends, and it is a natural consequence of social networks that an ever-growing percentage of diplomats' counterparts (host nation MFA officials, CD diplomats, NGOs, other cooperating partners, even consular clients, etc.) become social media friends. The level of these interactions is certainly varied, but the tendency has an overall effect on diplomats' behavioral style, bringing it closer to casual and further from the official (iARG). The protocol requirements of direct interaction have been loosening for years, but Web 2.0 platforms have boosted this tendency (iIDN, iGER, Horváth, 2023). "In an age when the average diplomat on a foreign posting is routinely Facebook friends with relevant diplomat colleagues of the host country, in an age when the average diplomat can give likes and hearts on family photos of the host country's foreign state secretaries or directors, and they in return can give likes and hearts on the average diplomat's posts about their dogs and cats, travels, or any private life situations, the official meetings between these actors will never more be guided by an official language, but instead a friendly and cozy approach" (iGER).

It would be a comfortable assumption for this phenomenon to be halted or at least limited in the case of diplomats from traditionally rival countries, but this research had encountered numerous examples of the opposite, when such online friendships contributed to the positive human connection between British and Argentinian, Polish and German, Chilean and Bolivian, Hungarian and Romanian, or Turkish and Saudi Arabian diplomats (iGER, iARG, iBOL)[94]. What indeed does limit this tendency is potential cultural differences or direct rules of certain diplomatic services. As two interview participants pointed out, they have experienced the change in diplomatic behaviors worldwide, but also some exceptions around their own domain, where more rigid social norms didn't allow the loosening of style in diplomatic interactions (iLAO, iJAP). One of them has also pointed out that to their knowledge, a particular country's diplomats are specifically instructed not to let friendly relationships develop with their official contacts (iJAP)[95].

There has also been a change not only in the verbal and written style but also in the dress code becoming more casual than before (iARG, Horváth, 2023). While the effect of Web 2.0 tools on this tendency is not directly tangible, if friendlier attitudes and behavior in diplomatic exchanges play a factor in it, and these at least partially are the result of online tools, it is the logical conclusion that Web 2.0 platforms have indirectly affected this tendency as well.

Since in the context of this research, the definition of diplomatic activities is „all activities that diplomats, diplomatic organizations, and other actors of international relations do in their official domain" (see Chapter 2.4), it must be mentioned that all the above changes in style manifest even in the diplomatic workplaces (MFA or IO HQs, foreign representations, etc.). In a different extent case by case, but in the internal context of these institutions the decrease in official language and behavior, the loosening of protocol, and the ever-increasing casual form have in the last decade and a half become not an anomaly, but the standard (iMEX, iGER, iFIN, iNZL).

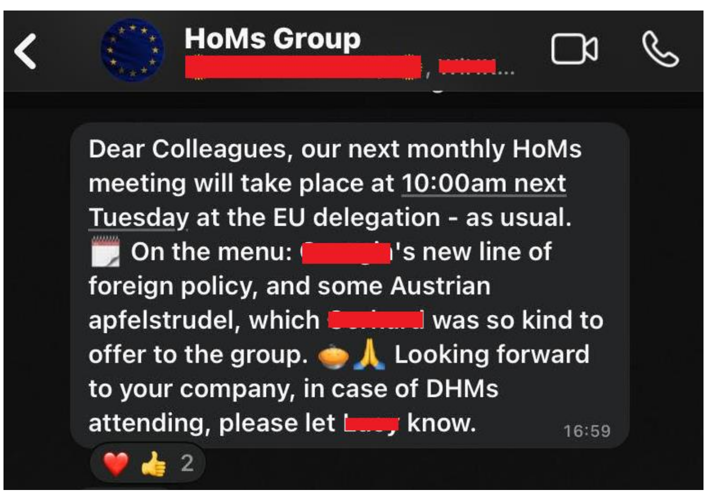
New ways of networking and direct communication

Deep changes have taken place in the ways how diplomats network and keep in touch with each other and with outside cooperating partners. Not only was there unanimity among the interview participants about these changes having taken place, but most have emphasized that among all changes, perhaps this has affected their everyday lives the most. In the pre-Web 2.0 age, diplomats had analog correspondence in the form of letters and memos, face-to-face meetings,

[94] This is symbolic as well, in the sense that as globalization and Web 2.0-facilitated global communication have traditionally been decreasing historical rivalries through knowing and understanding each other and direct people-to-people contacts, it has a similar effect on human interactions at the diplomatic level.
[95] The Japanese interview participant has openly chose not to name the mentioned country, but gave unmistakeable hints that it may be its powerful rival on the western shores of the East China Sea.

telephone calls, and in the later years, emails to communicate. Today, video calls, videoconferences, and multifunctional messaging applications, which are always at hand (or pocket), present a radically different environment. Messenger, WhatsApp, Signal, Zoom, Teams, GMeet, Telegram, to name just a few, that have in recent years been everyday tools in the hands (quite literally) of diplomats worldwide.

In a hierarchical organization (and diplomatic entities are highly hierarchical in their structure) if a leader has the practical option to request faster delivery from their subordinates, they will request it. If that can go to the extreme, and close to immediate delivery is practically possible, that will be the requirement. In most cases, that is exactly what happened in the diplomatic world. First, after an event, a meeting, or something mentionable, Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter posts were required to be created and posted after the official report had been sent to HQ. Later, these became the priorities. Then, having seen that their peers were posting sooner, no one wanted to fall behind, so nowadays leaders frequently require their colleagues to be ready with the content (both text and visuals) a mere few minutes after the substance of the content has concluded (iGER, iARG, iIDN, iSLE). It has become a daily occurrence in the CD that “not only does the deputy head of mission take the photos of the ambassador shaking hands with his official host, not only do they take notes during the meeting, but need to be ready for inspection with the draft Facebook post in the car, on the way back to the embassy, and after the ambassador’s nod, they must post it before they are back in the office” (iARG).



4.3.1/6. An EU ambassador announcing the monthly Heads of Mission meeting through WhatsApp, instead of the previously usual note verbal form. October 2024.

In other aspects, naturally, instant messaging platforms and video calls save a lot of time, while they are practically considered the “face-to-face conversations of the 21st century” (iIDN). Compared to the age when only real face-to-face was possible, diplomats now take care of the overwhelming majority of minor, low-impact, or preparatory consultations through Web 2.0 communication platforms (iEEAS, iUN, iMEX). This relieves them from significant logistical arrangements and travel time, which may even be considered as serving environmental sustainability (iGER). An additional boost came when fully encrypted chat clients came to the scene, like Signal, on which many diplomats conduct safe exchanges. Certainly, all involved participants need to be on the same page concerning the official or non-official nature of these chat discussions, otherwise, misunderstandings may occur about agreed-upon topics or details. While classic communications may be referenced officially, chat messages may only serve as orientational when unwanted contradictions arise (iJAP). For the peace of mind of diplomats, classic tools are always there to reach back to, so in case one senses that there may be some misunderstanding, mismanagement, or even negligence on the side of the partner, a follow-up email, a real-life meeting, or in more important cases, a note verbal can always officially clarify situations.

The above angles examine direct messaging and video calls between colleagues working in the same workplace or the same host country/capital. Naturally, these platforms have an even more significant effect on distance interactions. For those who need frequent coordination between faraway counterparts, these tools have grown irreplaceable in recent years. In the UN system, just like many other international organizations, planning, exchanging experiences, and sharing best practices are conducted globally. For example, "if the South Sudan WHO branch could not conduct a Nepal – Bangladesh – South Sudan videocall about an ongoing issue at short notice, and then wouldn't be able to follow it up in the assigned WhatsApp group, it would seriously decrease those projects' efficiency" (iUN). The mixing of pre-Web 2.0 and Web 2.0 communication channels is standard practice for all diplomatic actors, especially those who integrate internal communications and contact with outside partners. In such cases, the usual solution is to have an initial in-person meeting, a detailed email, or even a letter to give impetus to some main themes of cooperation, and then all details, revisions, and follow-up are conducted through instant messaging apps and occasional video calls (iEEAS, iUN, iWWF). In the experience of the EEAS, outside partners are even more likely to swiftly react to casual short messages[96] than to more officially worded, longer texts, like emails or letters (iEEAS).

The new direct communication possibilities are especially important for smaller, underfunded, or understaffed national diplomatic services, which don't maintain foreign representations in many places, therefore, even the basic diplomatic connections are difficult to maintain. Earlier, these relations were upheld through occasional travels by accredited ambassadors or diplomats visiting the partner countries' MFAs, and sometimes other partners. Now, precious resources can be saved by using Web 2.0 platforms, and smaller countries do indeed have a wider reach (iGNQ, iLAO, iSLE).

The world of diplomacy is yet to experience online presentation of credentials by incoming ambassadors, but online direct communication tools have served as fora for all levels of diplomatic interactions from presidential or ministerial level bilateral talks to the signing of multilateral agreements[97].

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[96] This is, of course, a natural human reaction. If one feels that the "tone" of the communication allows for a short, to-the-point, casual

[97] For the relevance and pioneering aspect of this, see Chapter 4.5.1.

New rhythm

Another aspect of the immediate expectations is that diplomacy has become a 24/7 profession, in which no work/life balance remains[98]. There are some exceptions, like some international organizations, or even national entities like the MFA HQ of France, or some Japanese representations (iUN, iJAP), but most diplomatic leaders want immediate action at any given time of the day (iMEX, iEEAS, iGER, iSLE, iBOL; Seib, 2012). This may be a reasonable expectation in case of emergencies, like natural disasters or unexpected security events, when citizens do rely on fast and accurate Web 2.0 embassy or MFA communications. But when it is simply serving the interests of the mid-ranking leader, for example, “the diplomats shall be reachable on their smartphones and react at night or on weekends, just so the ambassador can send some material to HQ faster than others, it can put a long-term burden on the work environment” (iARG).

This is one of the most important changes in the form of diplomacy: instead of the slow, planned, and measured profession it used to be before Web 2.0, diplomacy today is an instantaneous world with immediate expectations and immediate deliveries (iMEX, iNZL, iIDN; Leonard, 2002; Onditi et al, 2023). Depth and thoroughness became secondary to speed and efficiency. As one interview participant put it: “Earlier, any diplomat, who was on the move, sitting in taxis between meetings in two distant parts of Cairo, going to or coming back from a cultural event on board the Japanese shinkansen, or having just left the office for a lunch break, they were off the chess board, temporarily useless for the ambassador and the whole embassy team. This is no more, as not only are they reachable at all times, but also, in the obligatory presence of their smartphone, they naturally deal with minor diplomatic interactions like managing incoming messages, providing information, ticking off smaller tasks from their to-do lists, so by the time they arrive back to the office, they can engage in more important tasks” (iMEX).

The new rhythm affects the relationship between HQs and Embassies as well. Historically, slow communication methods required that ambassadors operate with a high level of independence. With the rise of high-speed communication[99], HQs could exert tighter control over diplomatic missions. However, the rise of Web 2.0 and digital diplomacy has introduced new dynamics that, in some respects, have restored a degree of autonomy to embassies (Pamment, 2013). With immediate engagement in a more networked form of diplomacy, embassies may engage in real-time communication without always awaiting directives from HQ. This phenomena is naturally subject to different leadership styles in different institutions, or even different cultures. While in

[98] For the risks arising from this change, see Chapter 4.4.4.
[99] Meaning the radio transmitter, the telephone, and the telefax first, followed by other analog communication infrastructure, and finally, the first generation of internet-based communication platforms.

some foreign services semi-autonomous decision-making, together with semi-independent outgoing communication is encouraged, other countries or other institutions try to maximize coherent communication[100], and require in-advance coordination, even if it causes the embassies a delay compared to more instantaneous partners, who "posted immediately" (iGER).

[100] Or simply stronger central control.

4.3.2 Change in content

At the start of this sub-Chapter, it must be made clear that the term "content" here means the actual substance of diplomatic activities, the topics, the issues, the matters diplomacy deals with; and not the "content"[101] that – in the everyday online world – refers to material uploaded to internet platforms.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, one of the secondary aims of this research is to show the variety of changes in diplomacy caused by Web 2.0, to show that these changes are much more than simply a "boost in public diplomacy", as the superficial observer may conclude. Apart from the other categories of changes detailed in other Chapters (see 4.3.1, 4.3.3, 4.3.4, 4.3.5, 4.4), this Chapter shall present that even concerning the changes in content, where public diplomacy has an obvious and important presence, there are many other elements to speak about as well.

Change through attitude

Before diving into the major specific topics constituting content change, there is a theoretical reason why content change has been inevitable in diplomatic entities' work. The growing attention of diplomatic leaders to satisfy both their superiors and the interested public has brought a new element, online potential, into the decision-making processes. When asked if the presence of Web 2.0 tools affects the everyday or strategical decision-making of diplomatic leaders at different levels, some interview participants (iARG, iGER) highlighted, while others (iBOL, iFIN, iGNQ, iIDN, iMEX) agreed that since these tools are part of the "environment", leaders must, and indeed do take them into account when making decisions – including decisions of diplomatic content, meaning what issues, what activities, what topics shall the given entity include in the daily, weekly, or more strategically, in the yearly work plan. As one example, the ambassadors of the European Union have spent a designated workshop during one of their meetings in Brussels discussing how they can best take into consideration the online input of EU embassies' profiles' followers in the medium-term planning of the representation's programs and events (iEEAS).

Ideally, the potential offered by Web 2.0 tools (visibility, popularity, reach, etc.) does influence but does not rule this decision-making. Through the example of an average embassy, it is desirable that the ambassador pays attention to the benefits of social media use, and creates synergies between substantial offline diplomatic content and their online presentation (iARG,

[101] As online personalities are called "content creators", it is best to forego any possible misunderstanding and clarify what this research means by diplomatic content.

Szűcs, 2024). There are ambassadors, who – for some reason – do not consider this a significant factor. It can happen for legitimate reasons, for example, in representations of international organizations, where the mandate for activities is rather narrow, therefore there is not much scope of movement as to what the content will be. Even in such entities, there is new content made possible by Web 2.0 (see later in this Chapter), but in the planning of the priorities, the ambassador is not even considering any modifications (iUN). And it can happen for a number of other reasons, like generational differences (Steigerwald, 2023), fear of initiating changes (iJAP), cultural background, or simple laziness (iLAO, iMEX). At the other extreme, there are ambassadors, who become too obsessed with online presence, so much so that they prioritize the Web 2.0 output of the embassy, the "like-hunting" attitude overwrites substantial diplomatic goals, and the work of the embassy becomes more PR than valuable diplomacy[102] (iARG, Horváth, 2023). Fortunately, most ambassadors find the golden middle path, and exploit the advantages of social networks, while still focusing on the real (non-virtual) goals and policies of the bilateral relationship between their countries and the host countries (iMEX, iARG, iFIN).

The mere fact that online factors are considered in the content planning of diplomatic work consequentially means that content-related decisions are different from what they would be without Web 2.0 tools, or different from what they used to be before Web 2.0 tools emerged. Therefore, even before listing the actual examples, it can be stated that the Web 2.0 tools have – in different depths depending on the specific entity – indeed changed the contents of diplomatic activities.

Boosted areas

As leaders became aware that their organizations' or entities' activities were more and more being conducted in front of the public eye, and they began to feel the daily transparency[103] resulting in external opinions about their work, they gradually shifted their focus towards issues, causes, activities – in another word: content – with potentially good PR. If, for instance, a foreign minister, or an ambassador prioritizes activities that the general public usually considers valuable, right, and noble, then their publication "pays well" in the online sphere. Thus, there is a significant incentive to take up issues deemed important and positive by society (iFIN, iSLE, iMEX, iGRE)

[102] For the related risks, see Chapter 4.4.2.
[103] To be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.3.3.

A good example of this is the exponential growth of charity projects in the CDs throughout the world. At the dawn of Web 2.0, such activities were rare, usually only organized by big countries' embassies, or connected to yearly occasions, where all the representations would come together and do a bit of charity together[104]. Compared to that, in recent years embassies have seemingly been competing, who can do more and better charity work in the host country. This is highly publicized on their social media platforms, and the incoming praise and appreciation is the talk of the CD in the following days (iARG, GER, iFIN). One interview participant "heard the ambassador being jealous of [the other country's ambassador] getting 200+ likes for his charity activity's Facebook post, so he instructed his staff to come up with a charity project and make sure it gets more likes" (iARG). Thus, the presence and importance of Web 2.0 platforms caused a new type of content to be included in the activities of this embassy.

4.3.2/1. The Facebook post of the ambassador of Ireland in the Netherlands, on the charity event he participated in. September 2024.

Another tendency that has been blooming in diplomatic activities worldwide courtesy of Web 2.0 is to embrace important social priorities like human rights, equality, tolerance, and anti-discrimination. The advocacy for values is not a novelty in diplomacy in certain targeted forms in countries facing challenges concerning given values, but in recent years these topics have become everyday occurrences regardless of the socio-political environment because they are trendy, and bring an abundance of online appreciation (iEEAS, iMEX).

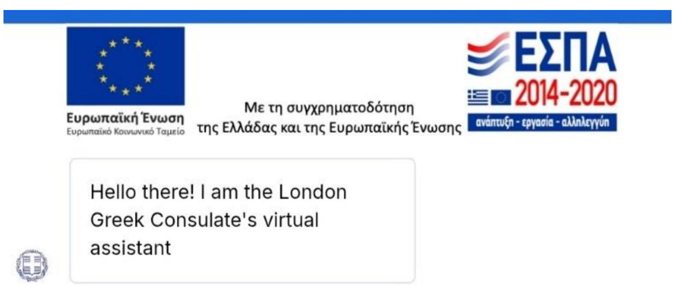
4.3.2/2. The Facebook post of the Spanish Consulate-General in Sao Paulo, promoting an event on equality, organized by the Cervantes Institute. March 2024.

[104] Usually called the Diplomatic Fair, organized around Christmas, when – in a representative venue, under the patronage of a royal or governmental figure – embassies are assigned a stall, where they sell their national products so the revenue can be donated for a noble cause in a coordinated manner.

Environment protection is also one of the content areas that has not been at the forefront of diplomatic life before Web 2.0, but as it is a certain success among younger netizens, and is at the crossroads of international cooperation and social importance, in recent years it has been turning up regularly on the agenda at HQs and embassies alike (iIDN, iWWF, iUN). The MFA of Thailand, for instance, swept up a round of hearts and likes in March 2021, when it joined the Earth Hour initiative organized globally by WWF, raising awareness of climate issues, and apart from advertising participation on social media, all the ministry had to do was to turn off their lights for an hour, when the building was empty anyway (iWWF). The MFA of Indonesia put in just a little more effort for a big social media stunt in November 2022, when visiting G20 leaders were dressed in uniform t-shirts, attending the coastal mangrove forests with gardening equipment in hand, drawing attention to plastic pollution and to the natural treasures of Indonesia in one fell swoop. The activity was streamed live and widely shared on social media on all Indonesian diplomatic platforms (iIDN).

A whole other group of diplomatic content started blooming as a consequence of the changing expectations of the users themselves, especially in the diasporas of different nationalities living in host countries, who slowly realized that Web 2.0 platforms facilitate a new depth of interaction with their country's diplomatic representations (iMEX, iFIN, iJAP, iGRE).

Consular services, which previously have been static, highly bureaucratized, in-person, and mostly paper-based, have gone through a radical transformation. Its level is different for each country, but it can generally be said that most cases are now manageable online, many times on MFA or embassy homepages. While these are traditional Web 1.0 platforms, Web 2.0 also contributed to the reforms: scheduling and appointment-requesting applications, direct messaging functions, and chatbots have significantly streamlined consular work (iMEX, iJAP) and decreased in-person client service requirements (iNZL). Interestingly, consular entities routinely advertise their new features on their social media platforms partly due to the pressure not to fall behind and partly due to pride in their achievements. That way, potential clients, usually members of the local diaspora, do not only learn about the new opportunities when in need, but well in advance, making the services more user-friendly and accessible (iJAP, iARG).



4.3.2/3. The chatbot on the homepage of the Greek embassy in London

Some of the best examples of Web 2.0 potential resulting in enhanced diplomatic content are the extraordinary situations affecting citizens, like natural disasters, security issues, or potential logistical hardships. While tourists and expat citizens could turn to their embassies or MFA HQs even before the Web 2.0 era (strictly during working hours), with social networks and direct messaging opportunities diplomatic entities are proactively putting out useful consular information that can help tourists and expat citizens avoid, or if not avoidable, solve difficult situations (Bátora, 2008). From emergency contact numbers to area closure details, from early warnings to recovery assistance, HQs and embassies are providing important online service in situations ranging from earthquakes to political protests, from major traffic obstacles to terrorist attacks, from extraordinary weather events to disruptions in public services (iGRE, iSLE, iFIN, iNZL). As an example of this new practice, the MFA of Spain has doubled its New Delhi[105] embassy consular staff after the great 2015 Nepal earthquake. Half of the temporary staff was sent to Nepal to directly manage Spanish citizens affected by the tragedy, but half were tasked with the continuous updating of all online platforms to provide all interested Spanish citizens with up-to-date information, important logistics, and travel advice (Szűcs, 2024).

4.3.2/4. Emergency information provided on Facebook by the UK embassy in Ankara after the 2023 earthquake in southern Turkey, February 2023.

As through time this became the norm, users are now expecting such automatic assistance by default, even submitting complaints when the embassy's reaction is delayed for some reason. MFA leaderships have noted this change in citizens' approach, and are now directly instructing their consular officials (iARG, iSLE, iMEX).

Travel information in general has become an important element of embassy profiles, even without emergencies. Previously, when representations received citizens' information requests about host country tourist attractions and hints, they kindly replied that such assistance is not among the tasks or responsibilities of the foreign service, and those interested can find information on different tourist websites of the host country. Later, some ambassadors acknowledged this as a legitimate interest, and embassies started occasionally sharing related material. These naturally proved to be popular, and popularity generated more content.

[105] If a country does not have an embassy in a given partner country, it can accredit its embassy posted in a nearby country. In this case, as Spain does not have an embassy in Kathmandu, their embassy in New Delhi is accredited, and responsible for Nepal issues.

Eventually, this became the new norm: another new diplomatic content in the focus of embassy work during the main tourist seasons. (iMEX, iGER, iFIN, Szűcs, 2024).

Diaspora management and community outreach have also reached new heights courtesy of the accessibility of Web 2.0 platforms. As soon as embassies started sharing useful information targeting their diaspora living in the host countries, the number of such followers skyrocketed, resulting in an increased interest in related posts, and also, occasional requests and suggestions from citizens on how the embassy could best attend to their needs (iGRE, iSLE, iMEX, iGNQ, iBOL). It is a common occurrence among diaspora communities of the world that they consider their treatment as the primary task of the embassy, which it is naturally not (bearing in mind that management of bilateral diplomatic connections, country promotion, and consular protection are the main tasks of an embassy) (iGRE, iJAP, iMEX, iBOL). The diplomatic staff may inform the diaspora of this, but ambassadors know well that some citizens may then complain, sometimes through official, occasionally through private channels, and this might paint a negative picture of the embassy at HQ. Therefore, ambassadors frequently prioritize the diaspora's expectations, and introduce new elements in their online and offline activities to please the members and (where applicable) leaders of the diaspora (iGRE, iMEX, iSLE). An adequate example of this unfolded at the Embassy of Mexico in Ottawa. There, the embassy thought it would be a kind gesture towards the local Mexican community if they shared educational material for children that would help keep cultural connection with their roots. Encouraged by the popularity of this, the ambassador decided to provide a webinar on culture shock to help newly arrived Mexican workers adapt to local customs. After this, however, diaspora members started demanding further attention, forcing the ambassador to assign one of his diplomats entirely to diaspora management, providing content on psychological assistance, banking, labor law, and job seeking knowledge and skills, medical treatment, and Spanish language study materials, to name only a few areas (iMEX).

Community organizing among the diaspora and cultural promotion of the country often go hand in hand, as cultural events organized by embassies equally target their own citizens and interested crowds of the host country. It may be the most well-known aspect of this dissertation that with Web 2.0 platforms, cultural diplomacy has come to the forefront of diplomatic activities. There was a unanimous agreement among the interview participants of this research that it is unprecedented how the reach of cultural diplomacy multiplied in the age of Web 2.0.

"15 years ago if an MFA or an embassy organized a concert of the – let's say – most famous violinist of their country, it was a great success if they filled the concert hall, and they could write in their report that – let's say – 250 people had attended the event. The same today would be attended by the 250, plus, if the organizers streamed it live on their different platforms, and posted the recording on YouTube, eventually the reach will be in the tens of thousands!

Furthermore, while 15 years ago they did not spread the appreciation of their national culture to a single new person (as those attending would have already liked the given music), today many new people would casually listen in out of simple curiosity when learning about the live stream, or seeing the post about the YouTube video, because it is only one click away. This way, cultural diplomacy is doing what it needs to do: popularize national cultural treasures among the general public of the host country" (iGER).

Every interview participant mentioned the cost-effective nature and easiness of conducting Web 2.0 cultural diplomacy (for further aspects of this, see Chapter 4.5.1). All acknowledge that old-school, offline cultural diplomacy will always coexist with new platforms, after all, "the experience of the Russian Alexandrov Army Choir, or the Taiko Drummers of Japan is somewhat different if watched live or on a smartphone" (iGRE), but also add that being able to share a link with a short text and generate thousands of views and hundreds of engagements with those few minutes of work and quite literally no expense involved, is a benefit of Web 2.0 platforms that has revolutionized cultural diplomacy (Cull, 2011; Aggestam, Duncombe, 2024). The possibilities connected to frequency have changed as well, as earlier an MFA HQ would organize maybe a dozen cultural events a year, while embassies would organize just a few. And today they can keep posting cultural elements every day if they wish to (iPER, iGER, iJAP). Because of this, they can be creative and venture to all the corners of cultural life, "from avant-garde literature to flashmobs, from modern experimental design to art movies" (iFIN). An example of diplomacy embracing fringe culture could be witnessed in Oslo in 2011, when after some host country netizens' requests received by Norwegian embassies abroad, the MFA HQ organized a short training for diplomats on Black Metal[106] music, so they could satisfy the online interest of foreign citizens on this famous, albeit extravagant product of Nordic culture.

4.3.2/5. The Norwegian embassy in Estonia promoting the concert of a Norwegian Black Metal band in Tallinn on Instagram, October 2024

One participant added that on the Web 2.0 platforms, diplomats do not even worry about copyright issues[107]; they just find visual content for the assigned topic and post it after the boss's approval. After having said this, they asked for the information to be off the record. In subsequent

[106] As the genre was born in Oslo in the 1990s, made famous worldwide by bands like Mayhem, Emperor, Satyricon, or Burzum.
[107] This behavior, of course, can be widely seen across other realms of human activities as well.

interviews, this question was raised sometimes, and without exception, the participants went off the record with a smile, suggesting “I can neither confirm nor deny this”.

Different target groups prefer and value different topics on diplomatic platforms, but generally speaking, cultural material brings way more online appreciation than political or economic issues (iBOL, iSLE). This, coupled with the ease and efficiency of creating cultural posts, has led to a significant renaissance of cultural diplomacy in the Web 2.0 era (Gilboa, 2008; Cull, 2011).

Tourism diplomacy has shown similar growth in the last 15 years as cultural diplomacy, albeit not to the same extent (iARG, iGRE, iIDN). Until the mid-2000s, in line with the nature of tourism diplomacy[108], MFA HQs had not focused on this branch, and even foreign representations only included tourism promotion elements among their activities once or twice a year, usually connected to major tourism fairs organized in the host country. Similar to cultural diplomacy, the ease and cost-effectiveness of Web 2.0 platforms have catapulted tourism diplomacy to the forefront of embassies’ country promotion activities. With a few clicks and a short text, the beauties or specific tourist destinations of the given country reach thousands of followers at no cost whatsoever (iIDN, iGRE, iLAO, iGNQ). It is especially beneficial for lower-income countries with outstanding natural beauties, as they cannot afford paid touristic campaigns, but can utilize the advantages of their embassies’ social media platforms (iLAO, iGNQ).

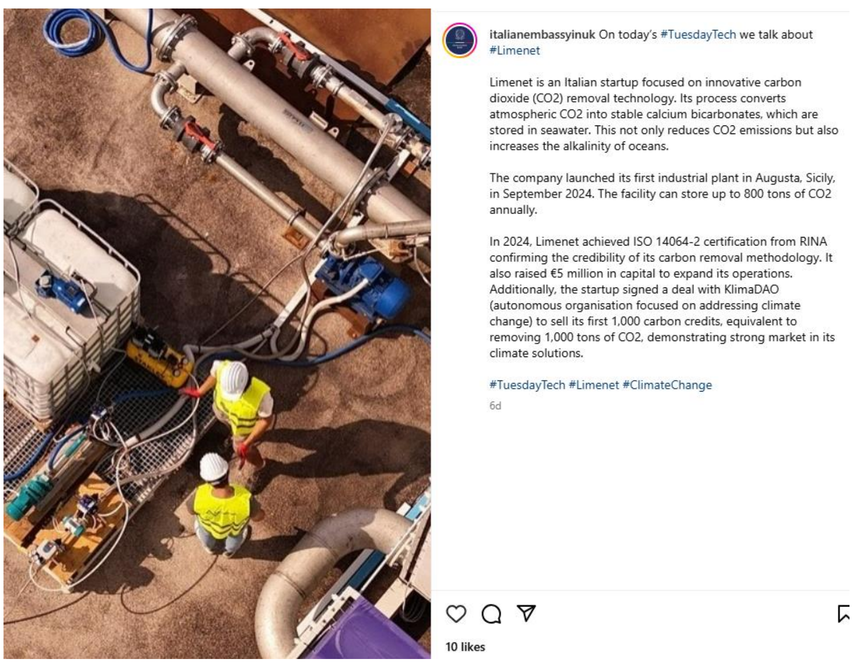
4.3.2/6. The Hungarian embassy in Peru announces a prize game for followers on Facebook, September 2019

The above detailed diplomatic content has changed in importance or emphasis within the body of diplomatic work, but these branches at least existed before Web 2.0. A type of activity that has not been seen in the world of diplomacy before, but with the horizontal quality of social networks it became part of diplomatic activities, is organizing interactive games and awarding prizes to participating civilians (iFIN, iMEX, iPER, iUN). The aim is usually country promotion, possibly connected to the previously mentioned branches, cultural or tourism diplomacy, or other knowledge about the country such as history or great achievements like sports victories or Nobel prizes. The organization is simple: the participants only need

[108] Meaning that tourism promotion is supposed to make people want to travel to the promoted country, therefore it is logically done abroad (at the embassies), not on home base (at the HQs).

to comment, share, or post certain required elements, with which they actively serve the promotion purposes, and if they are lucky, they can win something, which then usually also serves the promotion purposes, like a picture album, some folk art, or a bottle of famous wine from the given country. As for the genre, the game can be a trivia quiz, a photo contest, a challenge about cultural knowledge like language, arts, culinary traditions, etc., or can even take the form of a poll or a survey, asking about followers' opinions on given aspects about the country (iMEX, iGRE). Interactive games are so logically arising from the nature of Web 2.0 that even international organizations, which generally show less content change, use these platforms for playful direct interaction with followers, in the form of online competitions (iUN, iEEAS).

A further novelty of diplomatic activities is advertising on their social media platforms. At first sight, it seems counterintuitive that a public entity would be advertising products, places, or events, but it is among the tasks of embassies to assist home companies[109] in their endeavor to enter the host country's market, and it is among the tasks of embassies to promote their national culture. Therefore, it has become routine for foreign representations to extend courtesy and help if these priorities come into play (iGER, iJAP, iNZL, iFIN). If an outside actor (private or public) is organizing an event promoting a particular national culture, let's say the Sydney Latin Festival invites an Argentinian tango ensemble to perform in Australia, the concerned (Argentinian) embassy in Canberra will actively promote the event for the cultural reason, even if this actually helps a non-Argentinian private company with its ticket sales. If an outside actor is opening a venue that intends to promote a particular national cuisine, let's say an Uzbek national opens an Uzbek restaurant in Milan, Italy, the concerned (Uzbek) embassy in Rome will actively promote the venue for the cultural reason, even if this actually helps a private entrepreneur with its revenues.



4.3.2/7. The Italian embassy in the UK advertises Limenet, an Italian company in its Instagram post, January 2025

[109] Companies registered in the country of origin or owned by citizens of the country of origin

Advertising may happen even with specific products far away from the representation if it serves country promotion. When a national product achieves international fame for whatever reason, it serves the promotional goals of the embassy to share a post about it (iFIN, iARG). Even without a single piece of the product ever having been at the embassy, in the age of online shopping links, it takes only three clicks to offer followers the opportunity to immediately buy the given product on Amazon, AliExpress, Taobao, Lazada, or other similar platforms (iARG).

A new branch of diplomacy

Boosted areas of diplomacy are strong indicators of content change, but Web 2.0 has not only boosted existing areas of diplomatic activities, it has also caused diplomats and experts to create a completely new branch of diplomacy: cyber-diplomacy (iNZL, iJAP, iGER; Keleti, 2023).

As a new branch of diplomacy, it addresses different issues related to cyberspace and the general implications of online technology on human societies. As the exponential development of IT deeply affected the world regardless of national borders, the international community took note and has been trying to address cybercrime and cybersecurity, the responsible use of online space, digital inclusion, and other related issues (Deibert, 2013; Adesina, 2017; Maurer, 2018) within a multilateral framework that is the concept of cyber-diplomacy.

Web 2.0 tools have been fundamental in the existence and evolution of this new branch. They have created real-time, decentralized, interconnected global networks, which raised security concerns that required multilateral cooperation. They have expanded internet use exponentially, invoking a global attempt from the international community to achieve some kind of internet governance. Most issues that drove cyber-diplomacy (e.g. data privacy, misinformation, freedom of expression, etc.) were amplified by Web 2.0 beyond the point where global engagement became necessary (Deibert, 2013).

Web 2.0 created cyberspace as a new domain for public affairs, where cyberattacks have been conducted by both state-sponsored and independent perpetrators. In the online sphere, espionage, sabotage, and misinformation campaigns could not be dealt with without coordinated international action (iJAP; Keleti, 2023; Maurer, 2018). Such shared global challenges manifested in the multilateral cyber-diplomacy efforts leading to the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime[110], the Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace[111], or the UN norms of responsible state behavior in cyberspace[112].

[110] The Budapest Convention on Cybercrime is the first international treaty addressing Internet and computer crime harmonizing national laws, improving investigative techniques, and increasing cooperation among nations.

The Web 2.0-facilitated emergence of non-state actors (like private tech companies or NGOs) in public life also challenged traditional ways of international relations (Slaughter, 2004), and out of necessity, the main fora of cyber-diplomacy started including these entities around the negotiating table (Maurer, 2018). This way, not only a new branch of diplomacy was born, but a new, more inclusive understanding of stakeholders grew out of the new realities of Web 2.0.

OSINT in the Web 2.0 era

In this sub-Chapter focusing on content change all the elements so far were parts of the diplomatic output of different entities: embassies, MFA HQs, IOs, etc. There is, however, a crucial part of diplomatic work, which has been revolutionized by Web 2.0 tools, and does not concern the output, but the input side of activities. It is the data collection done by diplomats from open sources, or as the jargon borrowed from intelligence communities puts it: diplomatic OSINT. Diplomats in foreign service need to report to their HQ, and HQs need to report to their ministers and prime ministers or presidents, just like IO representations need to report to their HQs on a variety of topics[113]. To do that, they need information.

Open source intelligence has originally been an activity done by foreign intelligence and counter-espionage agencies "on the side". It used to complement the work they did in covert forms, adding openly available information to reports to make them comprehensive, structured, and ready for higher level leadership (iNZL; Keleti, 2023) Open source intelligence can be done by anyone when reading the newspaper or watching the evening news, therefore there is nothing extraordinary about it. However, as open methods were the only methods for diplomats – contrary to their clandestine colleagues – to collect data, MFAs began to refer to it simply as diplomatic OSINT.

It is not a surprise that of all the changes discussed in this dissertation, the change in OSINT received the clearest and most vocal unanimity from the interview participants. As for any current university student it is a mystery how people were able to write a thesis or even a home

[111] The Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace, launched on 12 November 2018 during the Paris Peace Forum, aims to drive initiatives on emerging and, as yet, insufficiently regulated issues, by working with a variety of actors including states, businesses, and professional associations and civil society organizations.

[112] The UN norms of responsible state behavior in cyberspace are a set of voluntary guidelines that outline what states should and should not do in cyberspace. The norms are intended to promote cooperation and security in cyberspace, while also respecting human rights and privacy.

[113] In the case of embassies it is usually the interior, exterior, economic policies of the host nation, bilaterally relevant issues, and other topics that may in any way affect policy-making at HQ. In the case of HQs it is usually comprehensive materials that serve as foundation for high-level decision-making. In the case of IO representations it is usually issues that belong to the thematic domain of the given organization, or other matters that can affect the cooperation with the host country.

assignment before the internet, diplomats also recall oldschool data collection with a grin, adding that the enhanced access to information also added new tasks to their everyday duties (iNZL, iCoE).

Before online tools, OSINT was a highly time-consuming process, which consisted of analog searching through print media, official reports, following regular radio or TV news, personally meeting and asking for information from peers and potentially other people who presumably had the required information, or consulting physical archives. With Web 1.0, the arrival of static first-generation homepages the process became somewhat more convenient, as some data became accessible online, but the manual nature of all these tasks not only took a long time, it also limited the depth and scope of the analysis (iGRE, iGER, iNZL, iBOL). “Diplomats used what they found, not what they actually needed for their tasks” (iGRE). Compared to that, the application of Web 2.0 tools has enabled everyone, including diplomats, to access a seemingly unlimited, interactive world of data, facilitating more efficient and more diverse information gathering. “Remembering the world before, it is hard even to grasp the amount of information that we have now” (iGRE).

Regular reporting like weekly reports on the host country or on diplomatically relevant events has become a lot less of a burden than before, as the time spent with searching for information is now close to zero (iGNQ, iFIN, iEEAS, iPER). One interview participant added (with the request of not referencing this) that they even used the comments on Facebook and Twitter to find analysis added to the raw data, because apart from the “noise” and the politically biased opinions, usually there will be some knowledgeable and well-presented analytical comments as well, which could be used in diplomatic reporting after some fine-tuning. (For the risks arising from potential misinformation, see Chapter 4.4.5.)

A further advantage of Web 2.0 OSINT is the real-time dissemination of information. Diplomats can follow up on hashtags, keywords, or targeted accounts and access information literally a few seconds after relevant happenings. This enhances the ability to respond to crises or any extraordinary situation[114]. As a specific example, when in June 2022 a tourist died and another was injured while illegally climbing Mexico’s actively erupting Popocatepetl volcano, western countries’ embassies were frantically searching social media accounts of the incident, as police and medical services could not and would not share information on the citizenship of those affected (iMEX). Eventually, it turned out that no foreign nationals were involved, but in the dawn after the May 2017 Manchester Arena bombing, the Polish embassy in London saw Facebook posts about Polish victims earlier than receiving official information from UK authorities (iCAN). An example on a much larger scale was the Arab Spring, when diplomats

[114] But this new quality is equally useful if a diplomatic leader simply wants to send reports to the HQ as fast as possible, not only in case of emergencies.

monitored protests, evaluated the political climate, and gained social context through social media in real time (and shared knowledge with their like-minded[115] colleagues through instant messaging groups). This level of immediate information gathering was quite simply not possible before the Web 2.0 age, with the delayed reporting of classical tools (iNZL, iGER).

One of the practical applications of Web 2.0 tools for diplomats is the ability to efficiently create detailed public and personal profile materials of new partners before formal contact. Embassies are nowadays often tasked with creating such profiles of host country political or business leaders, usually before planned high-level meetings (iCAN, iTUN, iGER, iIDN). Diplomats can now use LinkedIn for professional history, skills, achievements, then move on to the "big three", Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter/X for a human perspective, including opinions, hobbies, and further casual characteristics. If the given leader has an academic background, Google Scholar helps find their areas of expertise. In case they have past controversies or even scandals, social media will provide all angles of the issue(s) in question. This way a diplomat can finish the task within an hour or two, while before Web 2.0 this task would have taken days of out-of-office efforts to be deep, detailed, and comprehensive (iMEX, iGER).

An additional aspect of blooming diplomatic OSINT is that the information does not even require diplomats to try accessing it actively. In the pre-online, or even in the Web 1.0 era one had to consciously go for the information, read the papers, search a homepage, or call a partner. Now, if a diplomat once follows relevant partner entities' or news agencies' social media platforms (with one active action, a click on the "like" or the "follow" button), information will continuously reach them even when they are off duty, scrolling their Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, etc. feeds recreationally (iPER, iCAN, iLAO, iARG). If the casually learned data seems valuable enough, they can utilize it in future reporting or can build a separate report on it – if their time allows, or if their superior is open to prioritizing the issue (iARG).

On the other hand, there are vast depths of Web 2.0 OSINT, where diplomats seemingly never venture. No interview participant has heard of dedicated online OSINT tools like Meltwater, Tweetdeck, or Brandwatch[116], and has not heard of other colleagues using such tools either. Furthermore, while some have heard about the most easily accessible platform (if one has a Google profile), Google Trends, none have actually used it. This suggests that the whole phenomenon of enhanced diplomatic OSINT was not consciously sought for by the diplomatic

[115] A term used in the CD to refer to partner countries or embassies, which usually take similar positions in a variety of matters. For example, in human rights issues, EU embassies in third countries usually call upon their like-minded partners like the USA, the UK, Norway, Switzerland, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and South Korea to join them in publishing, or simply support an official communication.

[116] Social media monitoring tools that help track online conversations across various platforms, enabling diplomats (or anyone) to monitor mentions of keywords or public entities and gain insights to context – across social media and online news pages.

community, it merely happened, like it happened with other groups of society. Web 2.0 brought the ease of data collection, and although diplomats enjoy the benefits of it and utilize it in almost every minute of their work, they do not endeavor to assign their time or energy to maximize these benefits through tools that would require some of this time and energy to exploit.

4.3.3 Change in transparency

As stated in Chapter 2.4, in the context of this research, transparency refers to the level of openness and clarity in which a given diplomatic entity conducts its activities. A diplomatic entity can be considered more transparent if it shares more information about its operations and tasks, and/or if the public has better access to this information. About this aspect of changes, the interview participants had an interesting set of in-depth opinions, in which they all agreed that Web 2.0 tools have indeed increased the transparency of diplomatic activities, but they did have differing opinions about the extent and quality of this increase.

Tendencies of transparency growth

It was by default mentioned by a number of participants that it was not an extraordinary achievement to raise the level of transparency in the diplomatic realm, as in the past (up until the appearance of the examined new tools) this domain was practically non-transparent (iGRE, iCAN, iPER). While politics worked in the foreground, diplomacy operated in the background[117], and all the information concerning the many branches and layers of diplomatic activities was held by very few people within the elite (iARG, iJAP, iTUN; Wiseman, 2011a; Pamment, 2013; Görömbölyi, 2023). Diplomacy, being a "backroom, confidential activity of the states" (Bjola, Holmes, 2015) had a strictly restricted information flow, kept from public scrutiny.

Chapter 4.1 of this dissertation describes how Web 2.0 penetrated this closed world, and when it did, this lack of transparency was about to change (iGRE, iARG, iFIN, iUN, iEEAS, iCoE). The speed with which these changes overtook digital entities' communication flows, in the context of the millennia of diplomatic secrecy, was revolutionary[118] (iARG, iCoE; Görömbölyi, 2023). The key difference is not complex, it lies in the default attitude. The basic imperative became "to share, share, and share", instead of the previous approach of "why would we tell anyone"[119] (iARG, iGER, iCAN, iCoE, iEEAS, iBOL, iMEX, iSLE; Bátora, 2008).

As for the substance of this sharing, it includes elements from a wide spectrum. Diplomatic entities and leaders are sharing their policies on different issues. Before Web 2.0, only policies on important, high-impact subjects were shared through analog channels; now even less relevant or temporary topics get their share of publicity through such posts and comments. Diplomatic

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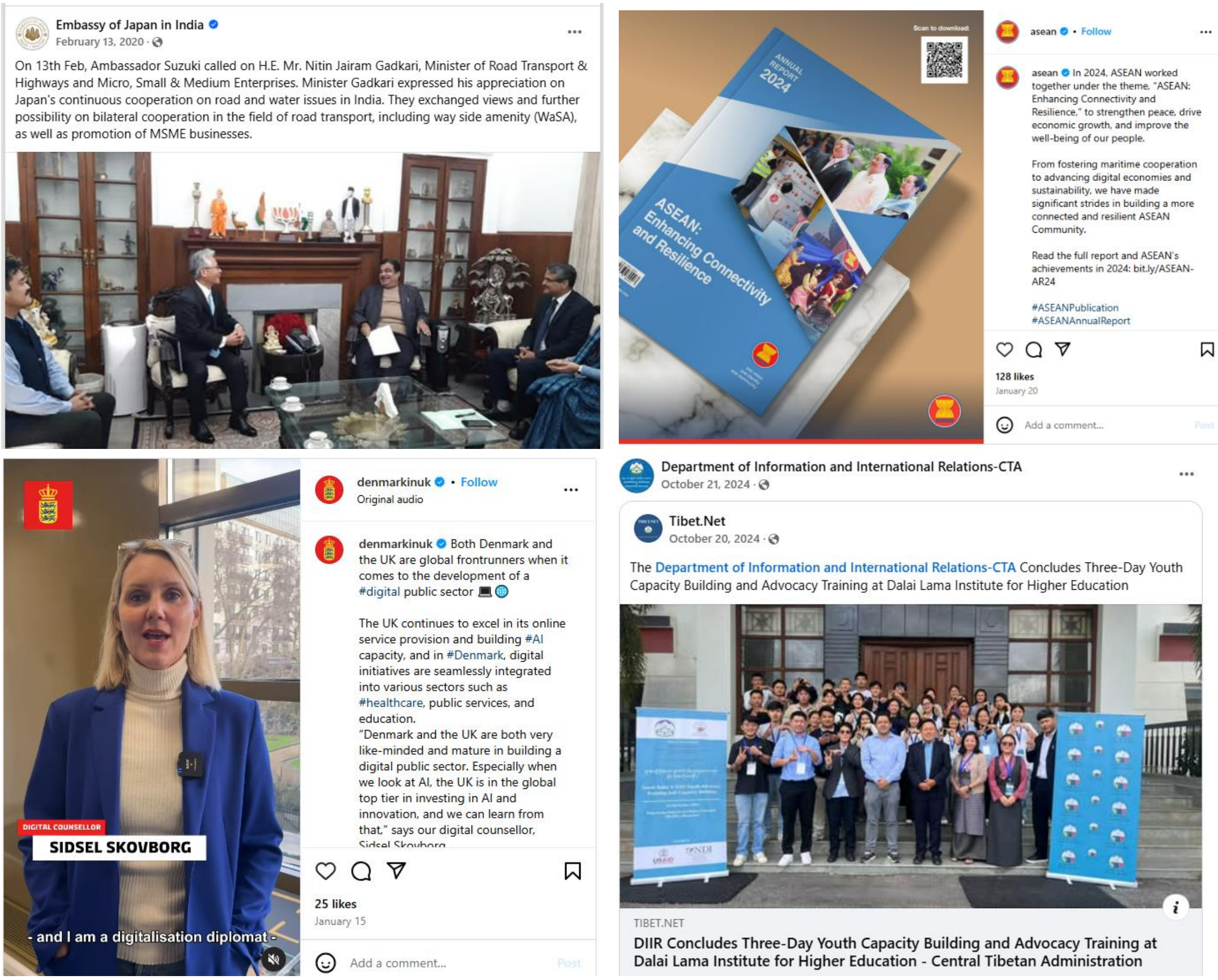
[117] As previously described in Chapter 4.1.
[118] Another reason why the Foreword of this dissertation compares the examined changes to milestones of diplomatic history like the Westphalian order or the Vienna Congress.
[119] First mentioned in this form by the Argentinian interview participant, later referenced in further interviews for the participants' confirmation or denial. No participants denied.

entities and leaders are sharing their everyday activities including meetings, event participations, topics addressed at such meetings and events, and sometimes even aligning or opposing opinions articulated on those topics. Before Web 2.0, very little information of this sort was openly accessible, practically nothing about lower-impact activities. Diplomatic entities and leaders are sharing procedural insights of discussions from the highest, multilateral heads-of-state congresses



4.3.3/1. Further examples of social media posts enhancing diplomatic transparency. The Japanese embassy in India shares details of an official high-level meeting, including discussed issues on Facebook in February 2020; the ASEAN headquarters shares the organization's full annual report with download links on Instagram in January 2025; the Danish embassy in the UK shares cooperation details with staff information and specific pledges on Instagram in January 2025; and the Department of International Relations of the Central Tibetan Administration (the de facto Foreign Ministry of the Tibetan government-in-exile) shares details on their training activities on Facebook in October 2024.

to the most basic working group meetings. Before Web 2.0 rarely did the public have the chance to look into the procedural matters of any diplomatic activity. Diplomatic entities and leaders are sharing thematic or comprehensive reports on their work. Before Web 2.0 such reports would have only reached their higher-level leaders or supervising authorities, and the public would have gained a very limited access only in cases of scandals or serious mismanagement. Diplomatic entities and leaders share pledges on current issues deriving from their policies, they share how the public can engage in particular activities, they share colorful background details of their everydays, they stream diplomatic events live, and apart from the above, they are sharing any additional aspects or nuances of their work that they see adequate at the given moment (iCAN, iGRE, iPER, iARG, iJAP, iSLE, iUN, iEEAS, iCoE, iGNQ, iMEX; Pamment, 2013; Manor, 2019).

The strive for public appreciation, or even vanity that many diplomatic leaders have exhibited has also helped boost this phenomenon (as discussed in Chapter 4.3.2). Seeing others' Web 2.0 profiles gathering momentum, becoming richer in substance and information by the month, has caused many to instruct their colleagues to share more details about a larger variety of elements of the work, not to fall behind others (Clifton, 2013). There is a sense of rush to be first, to be more comprehensive, there is a pressure to post regular and frequent updates (Kissinger, 2014), and these, in consequence, create a highly informative digital footprint, making diplomatic entities' activities exponentially more transparent than before the adoption of Web 2.0 tools (iARG; Bjola, 2016). As an example, one South American interview participant created a Facebook post after attending a meeting between their ambassador and the ambassador of Sweden in the host country. After their ambassador saw that the Swedish partner posted an information-rich recount of the meeting, he made the interview participant edit the post, adding extra information, "not to be in shame" in comparison with the partner's Facebook profile (iARG). In another example, a Ukrainian ambassador started fully supporting deeper information sharing on the embassy profiles after receiving feedback from the Ukrainian diaspora living in the host country, reassuring the ambassador that the level of trust of the people towards the embassy has grown significantly, since everyone can now see what the embassy does day by day, and what valuable activities the embassy takes part in or supports (Derkacz, 2023)

Furthermore, Web 2.0 hasn't only enhanced transparency through the amount of information shared, it also did it through the unprecedented multiplication of the reach. Fifteen years ago, such information – even if made public in some form – would have mostly been accessible by the intellectual elite only. Today, as Web 2.0 platforms are in everyone's pockets on their smartphones[120], a farmer in rural Indonesia or Tanzania, a taxi driver in Kazakhstan or Australia, or a factory worker in Colombia or Germany can easily, within a few seconds, access the information on what the Secretary-General of the UN did the previous day. With information shared on Web 2.0 platforms, any citizen of the world has the chance to look into different levels of diplomatic activities they consider interesting, or relevant to their lives.

[120] The development of Web 2.0 platforms and the development of adequate hardware like smartphones have mutually generated each other. The more interactive social networks became, the better smartphones were made. The better the smartphones got, the more sophisticated Web 2.0 platforms could develop (Keleti, 2023).

Also, while before Web 2.0 every instance of information access required an active element, now it is enough for anyone to follow any given profile once with a single click, further information shared by that given entity will automatically flow to the user without any further active effort[121].

The observations of Democratic theory (described in the context of Web 2.0 in governmental functioning in Chapter 3.2.1) can also be identified in diplomatic activities. The democratization of information and the decentralized nature of Web 2.0 platforms have, as detailed above, contributed to the transparency of the participating governmental entities (Wilhelm, 2002) in the realm of diplomacy as well, offering a more diverse and nuanced understanding of global affairs to all citizens concerned.

Limitations in transparency growth

Apart from the above, most interview participants emphasized that important limitations to the growth in transparency exist in multiple forms.

One such limitation is that although a transparent and inclusive public life is a prerequisite of democratic governance, a hundred percent transparency is by no means a goal in the diplomatic world (iNZL, iEEAS, iJAP, iPER). (It is worth noting that a theoretically or mathematically pure, hundred percent transparency is not even possible in human systems because of the lack of insight into the mental and psychological motives of the multitude of actors, but this observation states that such complete transparency is not even desirable.) Many international situations require background discussions and subtle negotiations away from public scrutiny (Kissinger, 2014) to bear fruit. This does not mean that the concerned actors would be malevolently hiding public information, a level of confidentiality is necessary and has always characterized international affairs (iJAP, iNZL, iCAN, iEEAS, iTUN, iGRE). As one interview participant put it, “We post about the meetings, the participants, even some expected outcomes, but we are not sharing how the sausage is made” (iEEAS).

When asked about this limitation, many interview participants pointed at the wide variety of diplomatic activities, the difference in their importance, impact, or if they are contested, meaning if the stakeholders have aligned or opposing interests in the given issue (for the explanation of high-impact and low-impact diplomatic activities, see Chapter 1.1). Herein lies one of the major observations of this research, putting diplomatic transparency into perspective: Web 2.0 tools have caused a significant increase in the transparency of diplomatic activities, which are low-impact, politically or diplomatically non-contested, everyday activities. However, they have not caused such an increase in the transparency of diplomatic activities, which are high-impact,

[121] The same way as explained in the OSINT section of Chapter 4.3.2.

politically or diplomatically contested, extraordinary activities (iEEAS, iPER, iCAN, iARG, iNZL, iCoE, iTUN, iIDN). As an example, Tunisian and Algerian diplomatic leaders will gladly post in-depth information about bilateral talks when the issue is Maghreb economic cooperation or support for the people of Palestine, but they will communicate superficial political panels, or choose not to communicate at all when their negotiations are about shared water resources, where traditionally opposing interests and political sensitivities exist (iTUN).

Low-impact, non-contested, everyday issues comprise the overwhelming majority of diplomatic activities, yet they do not attract significant public spotlight. High-impact, contested, extraordinary issues comprise only a small part of diplomatic activities, but the overwhelming majority of the public spotlight falls on them, therefore the superficial perception may be that the transparency of diplomatic activities in general has not increased significantly, while in reality, it has, just not necessarily concerning the matters most interesting or captivating in the eyes of the general public (iGRE, iARG, iIDN)

The boundary between these two groups of issues is certainly not sharp. As an issue gains high-level attention and induces opposing interests, diplomatic leaders are less keen to show their cards; therefore, the growth of observable transparency becomes less. When it reaches the most debated and prioritized level of a diplomatic entity's agenda[122], diplomatic transparency becomes negligible, and political commentary takes its place (iARG, iCoE; iGRE, iTUN, iEEAS; Bat-Oyu, 2024). The other way around, when a contested issue is resolved in a win-win solution and all actors are content with the outcome, or in other words when the contested nature dissolves, the stakeholders are usually open to sharing details, not only of the outcome but sometimes even retrospectively about the negotiation process (iEEAS, iCAN, iCoE). An example of the latter could be pointed out in the case of the EU multi-annual budget negotiations, where all member states are rivals, the resources are finite, and there is a great deal of political bias in the diplomatic communication leading up to the final negotiations. However, as soon as an agreement is reached, there is no contested nature in the issue anymore, so participants open up more about the results and the discussions alike (iEEAS).

Another such limitation, arising from the above phenomenon, is misinformation and political framing. At certain times, certain diplomatic leaders – for reasons of their own – make the decision not to share accurate or real information, but material that is either politically motivated or false/fake (iTUN, iFIN, iCAN, iJAP). What differentiates this limitation from the first one is that here the diplomatic actors, instead of refraining from communication, intend to create and promote their own narrative and actively frame, misinform, or disinform. (The definitional difference is that if they communicate factual data but present it in a politically biased way, it is

[122] Simply put, when something becomes a frontpage news headline.

called framing; if they communicate untrue data unwillingly, it is called misinformation, and if they willingly communicate untrue data, it is called disinformation (Galliford, 2024)). The political or socio-psychological analysis of these behaviours does not constitute part of this research, but they need to be mentioned here as elements hindering diplomatic transparency. An example of this can be captured in the social media posts of the Chinese MFA concerning the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), in particular, in the difference in what content the official platforms promote on the internally-targeted Baidou, WeChat, and Douyin profiles, versus their Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram profiles, which are intended for international partners and audiences (Görömbölyi, 2022c).

4.3.3/2. Examples of different angles of framing in the communication of the Chinese MFA. The first is a post from the MFA HQ's WeChat profile from February 2025, presenting China's BRI projects in Pakistan as a source of national pride, strengthening China's global standing. The second is a video post from the MFA spokesperson Mao Ning's Instagram profile from January 2025, presenting China's BRI projects in Africa as a grand scheme of win&win solutions through the advantages it brings to the host countries of different projects.

Another, more publicized example is how Israel and the Palestinian Authority present the same details of their ongoing armed conflict[123] with opposing narratives online (Bat-Oyu, 2024). Coincidentally, both Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi, and Israeli foreign minister Eli Cohen have announced in 2024 that their ministries have opened 100+ new social media accounts, to "bring diplomacy closer to the people"[124] and inform the public of the work of the foreign service.

[123] The 2023 Gaza War, the latest (at the time of this research) open conflict of the wider Israeli-Palestinian crisis.
[124] Posted on Weibo by Wang Yi when emphasizing the importance of social media in 2024.

Finally, a third kind of limitation is the result of the different capabilities of diplomatic actors. For the effect of the digital divide[125] on online diplomacy, see Chapter 4.3.5. What must be mentioned here is that not every MFA HQ, IO, INGO, and not every embassy in the world can afford to assign human and financial resources to online functioning in equal proportions (iGRE, iTUN, iBOL, iSLE). If a diplomatic entity has an abundance of these, it can develop its online activities at will, therefore the growth in transparency exhibited by the entity will be the result of an organic tendency. However, if a diplomatic entity is struggling to fit its basic tasks into the physically possible framework of a working day, and/or is struggling to provide modern IT equipment to its staff, the development of online activities, and consequentially, the growth in transparency will be significantly limited, even without such intention (iGRE).

Bearing in mind the above limitations, it remains a fact that no related literature (accessed by this research) and no interview participants have even entertained the possibility of Web 2.0 tools having an overall decreasing effect on diplomatic transparency anywhere. As some participants added, apart from the more than 150 countries and practically all IOs showing a significant increase, even in the case of some of the least transparent countries' diplomacies some small steps forward can be identified; because compared to the almost complete lack of information before the digital age, a little information is still more than nothing (iARG, iIDN).

[125] The digital divide is the unequal access to digital technology, including smartphones, tablets, laptops, and the internet. The digital divide worsens inequality around access to information and resources.

4.3.4 Change in accountability

As stated in Chapter 2.4, in the context of this research, accountability refers to the public's ability to hold a given diplomatic entity responsible for its activities or lack thereof. A diplomatic entity can be considered more accountable if there are more, or more efficient ways of scrutinizing its operations and undertaken tasks, or if a wider range of actors can engage in this scrutiny, or if the entity is more responsive to questions, feedback, requests, or concerns of the public. When some interview participants brought up this area of changes (iGER, iARG, iUN), and later, when it was discussed with further participants (all second and third round participants), they routinely connected the changes in transparency and accountability, referring to them as closely related. Therefore, this sub-Chapter follows the one on transparency change and builds on the details disclosed there.

Some, even before turning to specifics, have argued that with more horizontal elements in diplomatic activities like public participation and interactivity (Hocking, Melissen, 2015) with more deliberate sharing and inclusion, with more online responsibility and attention, it is naturally coded in the ongoing tendencies that the level of accountability grows proportionally as well (iEEAS, iNZL, iGRE, iIDN, iTUN; Adesina, 2017).

The activities, including the promises and pledges of diplomatic entities and leaders, play out in front of the eyes of "the whole world", therefore any interested individual – be them professional or "civilian" – has the opportunity to follow up and call for results or achievements (iARG, iJAP, iEEAS, iCoE; Bjola, 2015). Furthermore, the interactive nature of Web 2.0 makes it necessary for the actor to react when individuals of the general public address its promises and pledges on these interactive surfaces (iGER, iMEX, iCOE, iPER, iNZL).

The first of these qualities of Web 2.0 diplomacy, namely to be in front of the eyes of the world, has provided multiple examples of citizens' successful oversight. After the devastating 2020 Beirut explosion[126], the president of France, Emmanuel Macron visited Lebanon and promised financial aid and assistance to political reforms, widely promoted on social media. After months of no progress, French and Lebanese activists started commenting and sharing Macron's promises with the hashtag #MacronFollowThrough, which gained traction, filtrating up to the political levels, making the French MFA re-engage with their Lebanese counterparts, creating a detailed roadmap with specific elements of assistance.

[126] A major, internationally widely reported explosion of 2750 tonnes of ammonium-nitrate that happened in Beirut, Lebanon on 4 August 2020, and caused more than 200 fatalities, 7000 injuries, and 300,000 displaced people.

4.3.4/1. A citizen holding their government accountable online through a Twitter/X post, using the viral #DigitalDunkirk hashtag, calling for the fulfillment of the US government's promise not to abandon its former allies in Afghanistan. November, 2021.

In 2021, during the US military withdrawal from Afghanistan [127] multiple American leaders pledged to evacuate Afghan cooperating partners, as the new Taliban government considered many of them traitors to be punished by death. First, both military and civilian procedures failed to provide administrative and practical solutions for the evacuations, but a widespread public social media outrage followed (among others, the #DigitalDunkirk campaign), forcing the State Department to save thousands of cooperating Afghans from imprisonment or capital punishment.

In 2015, the German federal government pledged to provide asylum to a significant number of Syrian refugees [128], widely publicized and shared on official social media. However, soon bureaucratic obstacles and political "second thoughts" have slowed down the process. For the next two years, between 2015 and 2017, numerous social media campaigns have continuously pressured the government to deliver on its promise, resulting in the acceleration of approvals and expanded resettlement programs.

Such examples of practical accountability can be found at IOs just like at national diplomatic services. The EU, for instance, has committed on its online platforms to sharing COVID-19 vaccines with lower-income countries through COVAX in 2021. Significant delays and large-scale vaccine hoarding led to public backlash, amplified by social media activists and NGOs online. The growing pressure forced the EU to follow through with vaccine donations, delivering on its promises eventually in late 2021.

These cases show "proper, live-action accountability" (iARG), but examples aside, it is naturally consequential that if it is clear to see for everyone (from citizens through the media to national

[127] The US and the Taliban signed the withdrawal agreement of US forces from Afghanistan in 2020. The actual withdrawal happened in the following year, with many criticizing its management for its lack of planning and adequate transition procedures.

[128] As a plan to ease both the November 2015 European refugee crises, and the long-term demographic challenges of Germany.

political oppositions and international adversaries) what issues lay on the table of diplomatic leaders in any given moment, an organic need for follow-up arises and anyone concerned can exercise this new quality of substance-based accountability (iMEX, iFIN; Horváth, 2023). Before Web 2.0, some (definitely not all) of these issues would have been announced through a dry press release, maybe a press briefing, and then possibly could have gone forgotten, as the public had no way whatsoever to follow the functioning of the MFA (or IO, etc.). Today, as we can see from the above, if there is no follow-up, if the issue "fades away", the public has an easy task pointing out both the pledge and the lack of results. This change is not negligible. If a piece of information is false, it will be obvious earlier and more clearly; if a promise is empty, more will ask for results in more direct ways; and biased propaganda will be unveiled across the internet faster than before the Web 2.0 era.

The positive effects of this include that leaders' possible laziness is kept in check by the mere possibility of being widely scrutinized, therefore, there is a visible growth in willingness to follow through with projects and follow up online (iMEX). An organic example[129] of follow-up was the pledge by the Royal Thai MFA to support green initiatives in 2019, followed up by participation in the Earth Hour initiative, support for international climate action, and a coordinated project to clean up the Chao Praya River with a large number of MFA and guest embassy staff collecting trash from boats on the day of the event (Görömbölyi, 2021). This self-conscious form of keeping to a high standard is confirmed by public choice theory, which applies economic principles to bureaucratic decision-making, claiming that public institutions act in self-interest, driven by positive incentives and the fear of negative consequences (Shaw, 2008; Bull, 2014). Knowing that their reputation is more at stake because of higher levels of Web 2.0-induced transparency, fearing public pressure in case of negligence or the mismanagement of a previously publicized issue, diplomatic leaders "step up their game" (iMEX) and deliver more avidly than before these motives existed, before the Web 2.0 era (Bull, 2014).

Furthermore, being ever-adaptive to changing ways of communication, many media outlets nowadays have specific colleagues or even teams – depending on the size of their staff – monitoring the social media platforms of high-level diplomatic entities. This development has further strengthened the original tendency of growing accountability across all social media (iGRE, iTUN, iCoE). Apart from these usual ways of scrutiny, there are designated ways on Web 2.0 platforms to point out misinformation on different social media (X, 2022; Meta, 2024). If a diplomatic leader claims to deliver on a pledge through disinformation, these tools add to the range of possibilities of the public to hold them accountable (Allen et al, 2024) (for more on misinformation as a risk, see Chapter 4.4.5).

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[129] Also mentioned in Chapter 4.3.2 on content change.

The second above mentioned quality of Web 2.0 diplomacy, namely the interactive nature of the new tools, is a more difficult area in which to pinpoint changes, let alone prove them. Some participants of the first round of interviews pointed out that direct messaging and commenting serve as an efficient tool of this “new accountability” (iGER, iMEX), but later, only a handful of others (iPER, iNZL, iCOE) agreed; the majority of the participants did not consider this particular aspect significant.

To gain further clarity, I approached more than 20 different diplomatic entities through comments under their posts and direct messages through their profiles, addressing their recent activities as posted by them on the given platforms, asking a simple inquiry in all cases. The proportion of replies was very low. Since this probe was not scientifically designed, nor so executed, and only served as a rapid test of the topic raised by interview participants, it could not prove or disprove anything[130]. Had the target entities replied in abundance, I would have designed a scientific way further supporting this branch of the hypothesis, but this way all I could conclude is that while there are entities, that do indeed react and reply, their proportion is way smaller than so one could claim actual tendencies or changes showing in this respect.

The 2015 Warsaw Security Forum live streamed all of its proceedings and posted real-time briefs of its discussions. The public's questions and comments were presented to keynote speakers and panelists to ensure public scrutiny. Facebook, November 2015

The interactive nature, however, does have positive effects on accountability in other forms. A good example is the case of real-time unfolding events (iSLE, iFIN, iCAN). It can be an actual diplomatic event like a conference, a hearing, or a briefing streamed live on social media and freely commented on by the public, with the comments being lifted into the discussions of the event; or it can be a diplomatic proceeding’s crucial phase widely commented by both its participants and interested citizens.

For the first, a good example is the Warsaw Security Forum (WSF), where the events are being live streamed on Web 2.0 platforms, and selected questions from the public’s comments are read

[130] Therefore I shall not disclose specific details either, like number of enquiries, number and quality of replies, target entities, platforms, or specific questions.

to the participants by WSF moderators. For the second, a good example is the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA, widely referred to as the Iran Nuclear Deal). When negotiations and domestic debates for the nuclear deal were underway, both sides engaged in social media discussions. The two foreign ministers, Iranian minister Javad Zarif and US secretary of state John Kerry posted multiple times on Twitter/X, responding to the public's emerging concerns. This resulted in more attention to detail by the negotiators: more in-depth specification of verification measures and more accurate criteria for sanction relief in the text of the JCPOA.

Examining the growth of accountability, it is important to emphasize that the given diplomatic leader's behavior – taking or not taking political or professional responsibility – does not affect the validity of the related hypothesis (see Chapter 1.4). This hypothesis does not claim that diplomatic leaders today are more in support of accountability, that they are less corrupt, or that they are better human beings by any possible standards than diplomatic leaders were 15 years ago, before Web 2.0. A minister of foreign affairs, an IO secretary general, an INGO director, or any other diplomatic leader may disregard political or professional responsibility for a mistake, negligence, or a fault brought to the public spotlight through Web 2.0 platforms, just like they previously could. However, it does not change the fact that Web 2.0 platforms have indeed facilitated the aforementioned mistake, negligence, or fault to be brought to the public spotlight.

The hypothesis aims to point out that the level of accountability has – regardless of the given institution or leader – grown, courtesy of the changing circumstances, as the toolkit of Web 2.0 provides an accessible arsenal for the public to scrutinize them, to examine their achievements and statements, and to follow up on their promises. It aims to point out that because of these tools, today even those farmers, taxi drivers, or factory workers mentioned in Chapter 4.3.3, or any human being in the world, has access not only to the necessary information, but also has more access to necessary tools to make their voice heard and hold their diplomatic leaders accountable.

The level of growth is naturally different in every country, or even every institution or unit (iCoE, iEEAS, iBOL, iJAP), or in some extreme cases it is even possible that the level of growth is close to zero (iJAP), but the tendency is examined at the global level, with the overall average of the changes being significant (iCoE, iGNQ, iEEAS, iBOL, iTUN, iMEX, iJAP).

4.3.5 Further changes

At the end of every interview, participants were asked if they saw any further changes in diplomatic activities that they would fully or partially attribute to Web 2.0 tools. Most ideas coming up at these times fit into the codes and categories identified in other interviews, thus cross-validating each other's substance. Sometimes, however, some thoughts could not be fit into the categories discussed in the previous four sub-Chapters.

As one such example, the training of diplomats has changed. Web 2.0 tools have pushed diplomats to develop new skills and competencies like digital literacy, fast response communication, and the use of specific software and applications. In many MFAs and IOs nowadays, it is part of the training of new diplomats (iGER, iCoE, iTUN, iCAN), and sometimes even the older generations (iJAP; Steigerwald, 2023), to participate in sessions or seminars enhancing social media fluency and the use of online platforms in line with the institution's principles and guidelines.

Organization of travel activities has changed in many diplomatic entities as well. Before the existence of Web 2.0 ticket reservation, accommodation booking, and travel management platforms and applications, diplomatic institutions had well-staffed administrative departments dedicated to purchasing flight tickets and booking hotels for any diplomat traveling for any reason (posting or delegation). Likewise, at embassies or foreign representations, someone from the administrative staff had similar tasks. Nowadays, in most cases, diplomats take care of this (in minutes, instead of days) through Web 2.0 options like Skyscanner, Google Flights, Booking.com, Agoda.com, Trip.com, Amap, etc., and later include the receipt among other expenses (iBOL, iSLE, iPER).

Being part of the highly bureaucratized national level governmental systems of each country, diplomatic services have, since their beginnings, been very strict with handling documentation of their own activities. No diplomatic activity happened without written traces, and no written traces were discarded later; it can all be found in the archives of each national administrative system. The same can be said about IOs, which, likewise, since their foundation, have been preserving all material for possible member state oversight or internal scrutiny. With all the new genres and platforms in use since Web 2.0's arrival, as detailed in Chapter 4.3.1, for the first time in history, parts of diplomatic output are not being archived[131] (iJAP). While vast amounts of public

[131] This phenomenon triggered the creation of the concept "Digital Dark Age", which refers to the potential loss of information due to technological obsolescence and inadequate preservation efforts.

information are generated, much of it soon becomes inaccessible due to inadequate preservation practices (Jaillant, 2022). Social network activities are not only ephemeral in their quality, but also in their aftermath. They appear, they may or may not have consequences, and they go into oblivion. And it is true of the normal posts as well, not only the temporary visuals like Facebook Stories or Reels. Likewise, letters and diplomatic notes were always archived, emails of the Web 1.0 toolkit were archiveable, and most countries' diplomatic services have always archived emails of their staff's official accounts (iFIN, iNZL, iGER). Compared to that, professional conversations on instant messaging platforms can be casually deleted by the users, or simply be lost depending on the settings of one's smartphone, the settings of the application, or any potential change in the policies of the app operator. Although it is yet to be seen if this particular change has any substantial effect on the administration of diplomatic entities, the phenomenon itself goes against principles of public modus operandi, not even mentioning the potential of repeated mistakes or uninformed decisions in the absence of accurate archives (Shearer, 2019).

This brings the line of thought to the next novelty, namely, diplomatic activities being partially in the hands of private companies (iARG, iCoE; Bjola, Holmes, 2015; Pamment, 2015). It does not belong in the scope of this research how closely, in recent times, big tech companies have influenced high-level national and international politics[132]. Yet it is a fact that if outgoing public diplomatic communication and direct diplomatic communication run on private platforms, whose algorithms and policies influence visibility, reach, and even content moderation, then it does introduce a layer of necessary adaptation. It is a novelty that, in this context, it is not the private company that is adapting to the expectations of state institutions, but the other way round (iARG).

Job announcement on the Facebook profile of the Consulate-General of Thailand in Guangzhou, China, 22 May 2024.

At the start of this research, it was not considered as one of the potential changes that Web 2.0 tools in diplomacy may even – directly or indirectly – contribute to enhancing social equality. However, as I conducted an interview for a previous publication in the same research topic (Görömbölyi, 2021), it turned out that digitalization in diplomacy may indeed have such an effect, namely on social mobility. In earlier times – practically since the profession's beginnings – diplomatic positions and jobs were automatically

[132] Quite emblematically, at the time of writing this sentence, the owner of one of the main three social network platforms is in fact a member of the government in the most powerful country on the planet.

occupied by the privileged: the nobility and the economic elite, with any newcomer also being part of the upper classes. Nowadays, however, when the world of diplomacy has become more transparent, when smartphones show job openings regardless of social status, now anyone, even the sons – and daughters (!) – of the aforementioned farmers, taxi drivers, and factory workers can learn about the opportunity and make it in the system; based on their education and skillset, instead of their family background. As in that time H.E. Mr. Natapanu Nopakun, then deputy spokesman of the Royal Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs told me[133], since they have been advertising junior-level job openings on social media, HR has been receiving a completely new group of applicants, those from the universities and administrative municipalities of the countrside provinces. Before this, the MFA has routinely only recruited students from the most prestigious Bangkok universities, or those obtaining degrees abroad. With information reaching the outlying provinces through Web 2.0, numerous young talents have been incorporated into the ranks of the foreign service (Görömbölyi, 2021).

Naturally, this example does not imply that corruption or nepotism have ceased to affect such selection processes. It simply means that compared to the pre-Web 2.0 age, new, never-before-seen opportunities have opened up for the talented and professionally worthy candidates. Certainly, social tendencies are different in all communities of the world, and they are continuously shifting with or without Web 2.0. Therefore, one may not put this particular change solely in the column of the achievements of digitalization. It did, however, become a wider practice to spread job openings online (iBOL, iCAN, iGER), and this enhanced access to crucial information seems to have played a role in the changes in recruitment. Without deeper research into this aspect, this dissertation shall not draw definitive conclusions, but shall mention the phenomenon in this Chapter.

There is another social aspect – this one in the international context – that is worth mentioning as one of the changes that was expected to take place, but it did not manifest in reality. The emergence of Web 2.0 has been widely expected to have an equalizing effect among countries with different levels of development or different levels of wealth (iGNQ, iMEX, Aleskhina, 2018). There are certain elements of diplomatic work that would suggest this is the case, like the outreach or geographical coverage of smaller countries' diplomacies. As smaller or less developed countries can generally not afford many embassies worldwide, they need to resort to accrediting their embassies to multiple other countries apart from the default host country. Communication and all bilateral cooperation with these countries is naturally more difficult without continuous personal presence, but Web 2.0 tools allowed such entities to effectively upgrade cooperation without considerable added cost (iGNQ). However, examining a wider

[133] As mentioned in Chapter 3.1, these earlier interviews have not been conducted in the same structure as the anonymous ones for this dissertation. Therefore, they are not referenced as interviews like (iTHA), but as publications like (Görömbölyi, 2021). Likewise, the name and position of the interview participant may be disclosed.

context, bigger and more developed countries' diplomatic services utilize the Web 2.0 toolkit more efficiently than their smaller and less developed counterparts (iCoE, iCAN, iGNQ). As mentioned in Chapter 4.2.1, this research has not found examples of MFAs of any of the LDCs having a robust and high-quality online presence, and accordingly, this research has not found examples of MFAs of any of the DCs demonstrating major lags and systemic drawbacks in their online presence. Whatever the background reason for this, lack of staff, lack of resources, lack of leaders' attention, lack of accessible equipment, etc., it seems that digitalization in itself does not provide a comprehensive solution to tackle global inequalities, not even in the highly cost-effective Web 2.0 realm. It only adds to these inequalities that the digital divide[134] is giving home audiences significantly different opportunities depending on the society they live in. Unequal access to the internet and digital tools (Aleshkina, 2018), and more importantly, the lack of a global digital literacy[135] education, limit the effectiveness of digital diplomacy for less developed regions and populations (West, 2015).

[134] The digital divide is the unequal access to digital technology, including smartphones, tablets, laptops, and the internet. The digital divide worsens inequality in access to information and resources.
[135] Digital literacy is the ability to access, manage, understand, integrate, communicate, evaluate and create information safely and appropriately through digital technologies.

4.4 Risks of Web 2.0 diplomacy

It is natural in any major human system that any change (let alone the highly complex one this research is examining) has its positive and negative consequences. Scientific research shall refrain from assessing or qualifying phenomena based on subjective notions like "good" or "bad", but listening to interview participants' opinions, it became clear that apart from all the changes they considered neutral or positive (see Chapters 4.3.1 – 4.3.5), the arrival of Web 2.0 into the realm of diplomacy brought about changes that they considered negative, and referred to as the risks of Web 2.0 diplomacy.

4.4.1 Faux Pas

It has been the unanimous opinion of interview participants that the widespread use of social media in diplomacy, especially the immediacy and decentralized nature of social networks, exposes diplomatic leaders to an enhanced risk of diplomatic faux pas[136] by posting in haste, or generally publishing uncontrolled material. Traditional diplomatic genres undergo a standard process of writing and approval by different actors, but tweets, Facebook posts, or Instagram updates can be published in real time, sometimes without prior consultation with anyone else (for more on HQs losing their control of embassies, see Chapter 4.3.1). This bypassing of checks increases the likelihood of posts that are misunderstandable, easy to misinterpret or misquote, or simply erroneous in a diplomatically embarrassing way (iIDN, iPER, iSLE, iBOL; Bjola, 2019). In the age of Web 2.0, when leaders want to be or need to be first to react (Manor, 2019; Görömbölyi, 2023), this constitutes a significant risk and may manifest in any unfortunate moment.

Furthermore, the informal style and short size of texts utilized on social media generally strip away the necessary context and the nuanced quality of diplomatic language (iNZL). Consequently, diplomatic leaders may raise tensions by using sarcastic or emotional language that becomes subject to scrutiny. In situations or issues of high importance (like conflict or sensitive negotiations), a single post can undermine previous diplomatic attempts, or be used as a propaganda spin by actors with opposing interests (iARG, iNZL).

[136] A diplomatic faux pas is a significant or embarrassing error or mistake made by a diplomat, that may cause dissonance in the diplomatic relations of the entity that the particular diplomat represents.

Adding to the damage, the viral potential of Web 2.0 amplifies the impact of such situations. A controversial post by a prominent diplomatic leader can quickly reach many users around the world, including journalists, activist groups, foreign partners, and other diplomatic entities. And it happens faster than any clarification or correction that the original host may make (iIDN, iARG; Bjola, 2019). Therefore, once such a faux pas takes place, the news of it (and the damage caused) can not be significantly restricted or limited, and the widespread reactions may, in certain cases, cause personal consequences like withdrawal, firing, withdrawing support or partnership, etc. (Horváth, 2023). Another aspect of this danger is the irretrievability of the posted content in the Web 2.0 sphere, so any imprecise wording, cultural insensitivity, or emotion-induced statement can become permanently embedded in the digital world.

As these cases usually draw significant attention, many examples remain in the collective diplomatic memory. In one such instance in 2015, the Canadian embassy in Jordan tweeted an image of a maple leaf (Canada's national emblem) on top of a mosque, which many interpreted as a Christian cross. This caused a backlash from muslim leaders and the Jordanian MFA alike, forcing the embassy to delete the post and publicly apologize (iCAN).

Another similar case was that of Pooja Tripathi, a mid-ranking Indian diplomat serving at the Indian High Commission in London, when in 2020, he referred to climate activist Greta Thunberg as "Greta Doomsday Thunberg" in his Twitter post. He made the mocking remark in response to Thunberg's criticism of the Indian government's environmental policies, but it was immediately deemed insensitive and disrespectful, resulting in the tweet being removed (iFIN).

Even liking or retweeting controversial content can and will be noticed nowadays and may harm the standing of the given diplomat, making the line between personal opinion and professional position practically non-existent (iGRE, iJAP). A well-publicized example of this was the case of H.E. Mark Regev, then ambassador of Israel to the UK, who was caught up in controversy in 2019 after he had liked posts from extremist commentators with Islamophobic and racist content on his Twitter/X profile. Even though the Israeli embassy in London responded, claiming the likes were made in error by a staff member, the issue tainted the ambassador's public credibility and caused widespread criticism from multiple UK and Middle Eastern political leaders (iGRE).

In another instance, in 2013, H.E. Keiichi Hayashi from the MFA of Japan retweeted a post that criticized Korean comfort women, an ever-sensitive issue in the bilateral relations of the two countries up to the present day. This action was considered highly insensitive, and the South Korean MFA demanded a public apology, leading to renewed diplomatic tensions between Tokyo and Seoul (iJAP).

It is important to point out at this point that not all scandalous diplomatic action can be considered a faux pas, as some was deliberately made to provoke or emphasize a controversial position, even at the expense of outrage, or rather, intentionally drawing the outrage to multiply the reach. There are times when it is clear that an honest mistake was made. A good example of this is when entities make a mistake with flags, carelessly confusing similar flags, such as Polish with Indonesian, Palestinian with Jordanian, Greek with Uruguayan, US with Liberian, or Hungarian with Tajikistani. This later happened in 2022, when the US embassy in Budapest posted on Facebook about a routine meeting, but accidentally used the flag of Tajikistan instead of the flag of Hungary. Some irony and mockery followed, but no one considered it an insult against Hungary or Hungarians. On the other hand, there are times when it is clear that the offensive content was intended, either as protest or provocation. For example, when in 2024 then Israeli foreign minister Israel Katz tweeted about Hamas terrorists being thankful to Spain for its support, it was not a faux pas, it was a direct diplomatic attack.

4.4.1/1 A post of the US embassy in Budapest, accidentally mistaking the flag of Tajikistan for the flag of Hungary, thus committing a minor faux pas. Facebook, September 2022.

But as the nature of faux pas goes, in most cases, one can not determine without a doubt if what happened was a mistake or an insult. This is why faux pas can be destructive to a diplomatic entity's relationships, and this is why diplomatic services include in their training of their staff to be mindful and observant of all sensitive matters in their official domain. However, with the instantaneous quality of social media, even with the utmost care, such situations arise. An efficient way to tackle this phenomenon is what the Spanish MFA introduced: A ministerial decree instructed all personnel of the MFA in HQ and at foreign representations that noone, not even ambassadors or state secretaries are allowed to post any content on official social media profiles without at least one more MFA personnel having seen it before (Szűcs, 2024). Diplomats' training in this aspect is far from uniform. While in some instances the HQ does not even touch upon such risks while preparing their diplomats for foreign postings (iLAO, iSLE, iBOL), others' attention is thoroughly drawn to these threats with bad examples mentioned in abundance to make sure the message is well received (iGER, iEEAS).

One final aspect, or one potential contributing factor to the risk of the faux pas is the given diplomat's age or generational culture. "While for younger ones, online awareness is as natural as breathing, the older ranks of MFAs sometimes approach Web 2.0 tools in a more clumsy way, not being aware of the full scale of potential consequences" (Steigerwald, 2023). Possibly, by the time Generation-Z[137] diplomats arrive at the mid-ranking levels of diplomatic services, this threat will significantly decrease and will be just a minor, everyday circumstance of diplomatic life.

4.4.2 Losing sight of original goals

"A like-based approach can easily harm the strategic and comprehensive work at the embassy" (iARG). Web 2.0 diplomacy does offer a wide range of new perspectives for diplomatic actors, as it is visible from previous chapters. But it also risks a quiet shift in focus from long-term strategic or conceptual objectives to short-term online success (iFIN, iIDN, iGRE, iSLE, iCAN; Kissinger, 2014; Horváth, 2023). The visibility and immediate nature of Web 2.0 platforms subconsciously incentivize diplomats to prioritize "easily digestible, cool, trendy, or hard-hitting" (iCAN) content over actual, real-life, policy-related achievements.

Diplomatic leaders at all levels may become preoccupied with their social media metrics, interpreting these as metrics of status among their peers[138], or actual professional success. This can lead to symbolic actions like public statements unrelated to their own tasks, unnecessary but advertiseable visits of solidarity, or just simple self-marketing, without substantial diplomatic effort that in the case of an embassy would further bilateral relations, or in the case of an MFA would contribute to executing the national foreign policy.

One interview participant asked to remain anonymous (even in the sense of reference to their country) when explaining that they have sat through a 3-hour long embassy staff meeting after the summer holidays, intended to set the priorities and goals of the coming autumn period, in which the ambassador enthusiastically identified dozens of tasks, all completely or partially social media-related, and when asked about the execution of the actual, existing bilateral concepts and policies, the ambassador waved it off with a simple "of course, we are doing those, too". This considerably decreased moral among the diplomatic staff, and contributed to the negative tendencies in workplace human interactions.

Furthermore, the real or percieved (real from the side of HQs expecting a high-level online presence, perceived from the angle of overperforming peers) pressure to maintain a constant digital presence often results in reactive rather than constructive communication (iGER).

[137] Generation Z (Gen Z), also known as zoomers, refers to the demographic cohort succeeding Millennials and preceding Generation Alpha, generally defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012. Members of Gen-Z are socialized online, and Web 2.0 functioning for them is as natural with all its pros and cons as offline, real-world functioning.

[138] It would certainly constitute an interesting topic for a brief psychologic research if this phenomenon originates from the same subconscious roots as teenagers measuring their own social standing through social media acceptance and online praise.

Diplomatic leaders may feel the need to issue statements quickly, sometimes without coordination with other stakeholders, or their superiors. This undermines coherence and depth, especially in more complex or sensitive diplomatic situations. If the given diplomatic leader fails to find "the golden middle path" or balance between Web 2.0 and real-life substance, it might result in jeopardizing the original strategy and organically built diplomatic modus operandi (Görömbölyi, 2023).

In crisis situations with high media awareness, digital diplomacy can also distort priorities. For example, a ministerial cabinet's efforts may be focused on managing online narratives rather than addressing the root causes of the crisis or engaging in direct diplomacy with other stakeholders (iNZL). This way, diplomacy becomes a spectacle, without real substance, and it may lead to superficial engagement with actual conflict resolution or building win & win solutions. This then blurs the distinction between diplomacy and political marketing, risking that diplomacy becomes a game of visibility and short-termism, instead of a provider of viability and solutions (Kissinger, 2014).

Diplomatic leaders with exaggerated social media interest also risk slipping into a cultivation of personal brands (iFIN, iIDN, iTUN), which then may create a dangerous confusion between individual expression and national positions, possibly leading to the loss of credibility (iTUN). It is not unheard of that ambassadors need to be warned by their HQ (the supervising territorial department or the HR department to manage both their personal and embassy accounts more responsibly, in a balanced way (iGRE).

In another context, "losing sight" may refer to questions related to the psychology of attention. Diplomats need to not only navigate but also understand a landscape overloaded with information and constant notifications, which can fragment attention (iFIN). The need to respond promptly to social media interactions and real-time news can divert focus from genuine diplomatic objectives, and the accelerated pace may limit opportunities for broader overviews or strategic thinking (Williams, 2018).

4.4.3 Malicious attacks, espionage, and unwanted leaks

It was the unanimous conviction of all interview participants that technological risks are all around every institution or individual that engages in Web 2.0 use. These technological threats may appear in different forms.

One of the most obvious ones, also unanimously pointed out by the participants, is the increased vulnerability to cybersecurity attacks (Pamment, 2015; Keleti, 2023), as no one, not even diplomatic entities, are immune from these, even they are not exempt from continuously developing their cyber defences. While traditional diplomatic communications were mostly routed through safe channels, Web 2.0 use relies on third-party platforms and open networks. These can easily be targeted by hostile actors for several reasons, from account hijacking to data interception, from malware inception to overload attacks (Keleti, 2023). High-profile diplomatic accounts, like those of foreign ministers or embassies, can be hacked, leading to the dissemination of false information. This can cause real damage in diplomatic relations.

Web 2.0 software installed on private or governmental equipment can open digital security gaps for intrusion, allowing infiltration into government servers. The "smartphone age" (iNZL), with the complete penetration of mobile devices in the social and professional domains, and decentralized digital activities within MFAs, add to this risk significantly, lowering traditional IT safeguards (iGER, iNZL). Apart from an uneven level of digital security discipline among the ranks of the global diplomatic community[139], it is also true that the battle between attacking hackers and defending IT developers is continuous and never-ending, therefore even the best-equipped organizations may suffer serious consequences as a result of a temporary oversight, a late update, or a delayed IT-related leadership approval (Keleti, 2023; Görömbölyi, 2023). An example of risk minimization and early planning is what the Spanish MFA has done, setting up a rapid communication channel with tech giants like Google, Yahoo, Meta, etc., through the National Cyber Defense Institute, enabling immediate action in case of an online attack or any related unforeseeable occurrence.

4.4.3/1. The Swedish MFA's Facebook profile after a coordinated Chinese spam campaign through bots and fake accounts in response to Swedish criticism of Chinese human rights deficiencies. Facebook, September 2018

It has been mentioned in Chapter 4.3.5 that Web 2.0 diplomatic activities are going through the hands of private companies[140]. This comes with a natural risk of the given company (Meta,

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[139] It does probably contribute to the uneven human behaviour in cyber-security matters that most of us don't actually understand the in-depth IT explanations behind these risks, therefore it is easy for the casual user to occasionally disregard due discipline.

[140] It does not constitute the research topic of this dissertation, but it can be mentioned that the situation may get even more serious if these companies' owners get actual government positions with foreign policy implications – as the example of Elon Musk becoming a member of the second Trump administration in 2025 showed.

Twitter/X, etc.) becoming biased or even hostile towards any country, IO, or any other diplomatic actor, and there is no public control over how the given private company can hinder the online activities – the diplomatic efforts – of the actor (iTUN, iEEAS, iMEX, iCAN). Banning, algorithmic downgrading, or content filtering, therefore, may undermine sovereign communication without any transparency or official appeal procedures (iTUN, iCAN). Although it is not within the scope of this research, diplomatic entities must take into consideration the recent tendencies endangering the political neutrality of Web 2.0 platforms. The most obvious example from 2025 is the owner of Twitter/X, Elon Musk, not only supporting the campaign of US president Donald Trump, not only accepting a role in his second administration, but directly meddling in foreign countries' internal politics[141].

Unwanted leaks

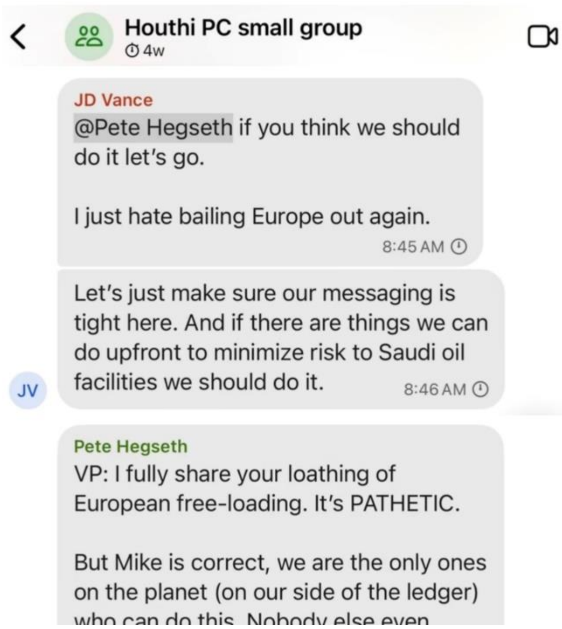
Although usually resulting from human error, unintended[142] information leaks must be mentioned here, as they often occur through technological mishaps. The variety of Web 2.0 tools used in public and private communication significantly enhances the chance of such leaks (iTUN, iJAP; Bjola, Holmes, 2015), which sometimes serve a healthy level of transparency (iCoE), sometimes constitute a deeper breach of information security, but in all cases, it manifests as a failure from the aspect of the diplomatic actor in question (iCoE, iTUN).

An example of the first type of leak, resulting in desirable transparency, happened when the Council of Europe was discussing details of the planned Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence. Despite institutional transparency requirements, the CoE leadership decided to keep all information behind closed doors. However, Luca Bertuzzi, a tech journalist privy to many stakeholders participating in the discussions, leaked an unofficial draft version in March 2024, generating public discussions. This forced the hand of the CoE, so they communicated necessary elements of the ongoing procedures, claiming their commitment to transparency, but the staff managing the preparations of the convention knew well that it was the leak that triggered this "sudden honesty" (iCoE).

An example of the second type of leak, resulting in a serious breach of security well beyond any possible limits of desirable transparency, happened in the form of the most widely publicized mishap of the first months of the second Trump administration in the US in March 2025. In a foreign and defense policy-related instant messaging group discussion on the Signal platform, titled "Houthi PC small group"[143], with the participation of senior cabinet members like secretary

[141] Among many other examples, the most obvious being his visit to Germany before the German federal elections, and openly supporting one particular party's campaign.
[142] Intended information leaks, which serve to formulate public narrative, are not discussed here.
[143] Referring to the ongoing Yemen civil war's implications on US foreign and military policy.

of state Marco Rubio and secretary of defense Pete Hegseth; national security advisor Mike Waltz mistakenly added a senior political journalist, Jeffrey Goldberg to the group.



4.4.3/2. A published screenshot of the "Signalgate" messages, resulting in serious leaks of sensitive military and diplomatic information. Signal, 2025.

During the presence of the journalist, who clearly should not have received such information, multiple ministerial-level participants expressed contempt for their European allies, and Hegseth disclosed detailed military information on an upcoming US military operation. The backlash and the public outrage were significant, and the level of trans-Atlantic trust between the US and its European allies deteriorated further.

As a final thought on technological risks, it must be mentioned that aside from all the potential damage arising from their presence, these risks did indeed incentivize international stakeholders (governments, IOs, INGOs, private companies, etc.) to join forces and address cybersecurity issues with a multilateral mindset[144] (Keleti, 2023).

4.4.4 Personnel risks

The most immediate and structural risk from the aspect of personnel matters is the unmanaged expansion of diplomats' roles (iARG, iCAN, iFIN, iBOL). Fifteen years ago, diplomats focused on representation, negotiation, reporting, etc, but in the Web 2.0 era, they are expected to create and manage social media content, respond to questions or requests from the public, and monitor online discourse in real-time. These new tasks are, without proper thought of the consequences, simply added to the existing duties without proportionate increases in human resources, leading to an increased workload.

This informal multitasking effect (informal in the sense that it is rarely in any diplomat's job description, it is usually the ambassador or the department director who allocates the tasks based on their own momentary ideas of time management) results in the blurring of roles and responsibilities (iGER, iIDN). When guidelines are unclear, and in many diplomatic institutions they are yet unregulated (iMEX, iARG, iGRE, iTUN, iIDN), diplomats slip into situations where

[144] For further thoughts on cybersecurity, see Chapter 4.3.2 discussing content change in diplomatic activities.

they need to make real-time content decisions that naturally carry risks of dissonance with their superiors. In Web 2.0 communications, questions of approval, deadlines, and content requirements are less clear than in classical diplomatic genres, and the uncertainty decreases clarity and efficiency (iBOL, iARG, iGER, iCAN, iEEAS).

Since diplomacy became a 24/7 profession (for details, see Chapter 4.3.1), and since Web 2.0 platforms are also active 24/7, the expectation shifted – unofficially, but completely – for diplomats to be available for immediate action around the clock (iGER, iJAP, iNZL, iFIN, iIDN, iGRE, iCAN, iTUN, iMEX, iPER, iSLE, iGNQ). None of the interview participants were ever paid for such off-hours extra work, with directors and ambassadors casually claiming "this is the nature of diplomatic life" (iJAP, iBOL). This immediacy and volatility result in significant psychological burdens, which in a good case manifests only in continuous anxiety, in worse cases in chronic stress, or burnout (iJAP, iNZL, iFIN, iIDN, iGRE, iCAN, iMEX, iSLE). "When in the cinema we can only buy end-of-the-row tickets, or on the beach, one member of the family must always stay ashore because the phone can chime at any time and there would be serious repercussions if we didn't answer, it takes a toll on one's nerves" (iARG). It only adds to the situation that the periods in question are not short-term arrangements, but ongoing for year upon year; and additionally, when immediate work hits, the pressure is high and there is virtually no scope for error allowed (iGER, iBOL, iTUN, iGNQ, iTUN). In such an emotionally taxing work environment with no blueprint for easing, diplomats are likely not able to achieve their maximum capabilities in their everyday output.

It is a crucial task for HQs of MFAs and IOs to adapt their training to the requirements of the Web 2.0 age, and the differences between countries and institutions in this aspect are significant. As mentioned in Chapter 4.3.5, positive examples exist where diplomats receive detailed group trainings and internal handbooks on how to deal with online tasks and circumstances (iGER, CoE, iTUN, iCAN, iJAP; Szűcs, 2024), but such guidelines and any substantial training are missing in many places, like Mexico, Laos, Sierra Leone, or Ukraine (iMEX, iLAO, iSLE; Derkacz, 2023), while HQs are routinely expecting their diplomatic staff to perform at high levels (iMEX). Closely connected to this is the possibility of unfair evaluation arising from such criteria changing more slowly than reality. Therefore, evaluation systems often fail to account for work in the digital realm. While a report written to HQ from an embassy will be accounted for in the given diplomat's portfolio, several tweets and Facebook posts about the same issue may be disregarded in their colleague's (iMEX, iGER). Such a lack of balanced recognition can create resentment and may undermine motivation for those engaging in important and efficient, but administratively unappreciated tasks.

Experience has traditionally been valued in diplomacy as an important asset, since the primary inter-human and intercultural skills in the diplomatic profession can only be cultivated and accumulated throughout longer periods, traditionally throughout an entire career. Web 2.0 use, however, being a result of new technological advancements, puts a previously not experienced stress on some members of the senior generation of diplomats, who are sometimes simply not well-versed in the latest communication platforms, and sometimes straight out averse to them (Steigerwald, 2023). Senior diplomats may hesitate to engage publicly on social media, they may be upset about the requirements of 24/7 online communications, and they may routinely misunderstand the norms of digital discourse (iEEAS, iLAO, iGNQ, iTUN, iPER). Some senior interview participants confirmed many of their fellow senior diplomats' dislike connected to the change of diplomatic style and the inclusion of the new online genres in diplomatic activities (iGRE, iNZL), while some junior and mid-ranking interview participants expressed it as a problem and a conflict source that some senior colleagues lack digital literacy, therefore require patient tutoring from someone of a lower rank in the diplomatic hierarchy (iSLE, iLAO, iJAP, iTUN).

No interview participant has heard about dismissal of older diplomats on the grounds on not being able to fulfill online duties, but many have experienced that the strong and agile Web 2.0 performance of certain younger diplomats contributed to their faster promotion, leapfrogging their senior competitors for a higher position (iFIN, iCoE, iIDN, iTUN).

A final element of personnel-related risks is one that is only sporadically present in diplomatic entities, depending on the leadership style and internal culture of the given institution. It is the issue of "non-obligatory, but highly recommended" (iCAN) online actions, meaning when the given diplomatic leader expects members of their team to share the official profile's contents on their private social media profiles. In this situation, everyone involved knows that based on regulations or simple human decency, there should be no such obligation, yet they follow the wish of their leader, out of fear of repercussions, or in hope of a peaceful coexistence with the leader (iMEX, iLAO, iIDN, iTUN, iCAN). In some cases this results only in brief negative sentiments of "this should not be like this" (iMEX), but when the given individual's personal or professional convictions differ from those of the institution they represent, a much deeper dilemma and anxiety may arise, psychologically struggling between the values of loyalty and honesty (iMEX, iCAN; Practical Diplomacy, 2022b).

It is worth mentioning a further common personnel risk that has emerged in other sectors of life, but seems to be completely missing in diplomacy. Digitalization has long been considered dangerous to jobs, as modern online tools can easily substitute certain activities. In the case of diplomacy, this has never been a concern, given the highly human quality of diplomatic activities. The presumption has been further confirmed by the interview process of this research, as no interview participant has reported any occurrence of digitalization-related layoffs in diplomatic entities. There are, however, moderate examples of the opposite – some new recruitment for handling Web 2.0 tools, as mentioned in Chapter 4.1.

4.4.5 Misinformation

One of the primary challenges of online diplomacy is the risk of information overload and the spread of misinformation. All interview participants shared the view that the enormous amount of information available online can make it difficult for diplomats to discern accurate and relevant data. With Web 2.0 platforms nowadays multiplying unscrutinized information 24/7, the proliferation of fake news and disinformation campaigns now poses significant threats to diplomatic efforts (Howard et al., 2017; Bjola, 2019). This concerns diplomatic OSINT (see Chapter 4.3.2) and comes with the real risk of inaccurate information filtering into official diplomatic reporting and, consequently, making its way into high-level decision-making.

A (later) well-publicized example of this occurred when, in 2018, after the chemical attack on Douma[145], Russian-backed media, Telegram channels, and influencers on all platforms launched a counter-narrative to the emerging visual reports. This disinformation campaign claimed that the whole issue is just Western propaganda against Assad, and that the attack was staged. This narrative spread rapidly through Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook, fueled by scores of Russian web brigades and automated bots. Their hashtags like #SyriaHoax and #FalseFlag started trending, and at the same time, the UN ambassador of Russia cited these materials in official UN Security Council meetings. The line between debated on-field information and misinformation slowly blurred, and even some Western commentators and media started incorporating the false communications as source material in their reporting. This eventually led to the diplomatic community using a mixture of these narratives instead of legitimate scrutiny, hindering fact-based decision-making and a clear understanding of the happenings.

Another angle of this is to take a look at any given diplomatic entity's own Web 2.0 profiles. When the public sharing of diplomatic data is not done with the intention to provide the public with information, but serves the shaping of a certain narrative in the interest of the given entity, framing, misinformation, or disinformation may occur (for differentiation, see Chapter 4.3.3). There are instances when diplomatic Web 2.0 profiles are the committing tools of spreading misinformation, and there are instances when they are the targets of such online behavior (iBOL, iFIN, iCAN; Manor, 2023; Horváth, 2023; Bat-Oyu, 2024). A good example of the active spread of misinformation on diplomatic entities' profiles could be found during the 2019 Bolivian

[145] In one of the many attrocities of the Syrian civil war, on April 7, 2018, the Assad regime carried out a chemical weapons attack on the city of Douma, killing dozens of civilians and many members of the Free Syrian Army.

election crisis. Long-time US adversary, Evo Morales, won with a decisive margin, but the Organization of American States (OAS)[146] has immediately accused the government of election fraud, and US diplomatic entities echoed these allegations, sparking widespread protests in La Paz, forcing Morales into temporary exile. In the following months, multiple independent (including US academic) institutions have confirmed that there was no statistical sign of fraud, and there has never been any tangible evidence of fraud-related activities in front of the Election Courts in Bolivia. In summary, although it will always remain unknown if the US action was premeditated in order to oust their political opponent in another sovereign country, it is a fact that the immediate US online diplomatic communication was misleading and contributed to what many observers later labeled as a coup against the rightfully elected Morales[147] (iARG, iCAN)[148].

There are multiple forms of how a diplomatic entity's Web 2.0 platforms may fall prey to misinformation. Although it belongs to the realm of technological risks, profiles may be hacked, in which case, it is easy to create real diplomatic damage through fake statements or comments (iEEAS, iGRE; Keleti, 2023). Even if the actual account has not been hacked, adversaries may easily create edited (fake) screenshots of MFA or embassy profiles and claim scandalous content (iMEX, iGRE). Sometimes, even less is enough for controversy, if a real post on a real profile is not carefully worded, and gives opportunity for malicious actors to intentionally misinterpret (spin) the issue, causing diplomatic disturbance (iIDN). All these cases, albeit different in depth and effect, are especially harmful because in the virtual sphere, a sober, factual clarification can never have such reach or viral quality as the original, scandalous material had (iEEAS). As one example, in February 2022, the Twitter/X account of Pakistan's embassy in Buenos Aires was hacked. Pro-India messages appeared, praising the traditional adversary's leadership and supporting its positions. Even though the content was only up for a few hours, even though the Pakistani MFA issued a clear report of the hacking and denial of the fake posts, the initial "sensation" was more viral online; therefore, even after the clarifications, protesters showed up in front of the MFA in Islamabad, condemning their own foreign service for their "pro-India mishap".

As discussed in Chapter 4.1, it is ill-advised for a diplomatic entity to create a social media profile if it is unable to manage it regularly, as an abandoned profile mirrors low quality, lack of attention, or even negligence. However, not creating a profile on the major platforms also comes with a risk, namely that malicious actors can fill that vacuum, creating a fake profile of the given

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[146] Widely considered to be a US-funded front in the shape of an International Organization to further Washington's interests regionally. Its critics consider it a CIA satellite, but even moderate commentators admit that the OAS has historically always aligned with US positions with its activities.

[147] After a bitter legal and political struggle, Morales' party returned to power in 2020 with the presidency of Luis Arce, but Morales himself has never claimed the presidency again.

[148] In the examination of this particular case, because of the obvious possibility of political bias, the remarks of the Bolivian interview participant were not considered.

entity and spreading misinformation (iGER, iEEAS, iCoE, iPER). After being discovered, it is still not easy to get rid of such intrusion, as it is usually a time-consuming administrative process, with a private company (for related risks, see Chapter 4.4.3) having the final say in potentially deleting the fake account and allowing for the legitimate entity to claim its rightful identity on the platform (iCoE; Keleti, 2023).

4.5 The impact of emergencies

Recent years have proven that in the case of unplanned or unpredictable situations that jeopardize human movement or interaction, online platforms play an important role in how societies overcome these hindrances.

4.5.1 The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The realities of our current age (these words are being put on paper in early 2025) demand that any study about digital development address the influence of the COVID-19 global pandemic of 2020-2022[149]. As coronavirus temporarily uprooted the entirety of global human society, causing a significant growth in all forms of online activities, naturally, it left its mark on diplomatic activities as well (Beltrán, 2021; Practical Diplomacy, 2022a; Manor, Pamment, 2022; Kela, 2024; Görömbölyi, 2021). All interview participants agreed that the pandemic radically reshaped the basic landscape of diplomacy. Traditional face-to-face diplomatic activities like bilateral or multilateral meetings, conferences, and negotiations became impossible as borders closed and physical gatherings were restricted.

"If not for Web 2.0 platforms and communication options, when the pandemic hit, diplomacy would have ceased to function" (iMEX). The move from hybrid to purely online was complete, and this saved the continuity of diplomatic life (Szűcs, 2024). Web 2.0 tools shifted to being existential and became the primary infrastructure of diplomatic discourse and engagement. Thus, the pandemic accelerated both the scope and the depth of Web 2.0 diplomacy (iGRE, iPER, iCoE).

It has been discussed in detail in earlier Chapters that the arrival of Web 2.0 tools in diplomacy was a slow and uneven process. Depending on the given diplomatic entity like MFA, IO or others, some adapted enthusiastically, some in a half-hearted way. Some provided human and financial resources, some kept things at a minimum. Some used all available platforms, some barely touched Facebook or Twitter/X. Most importantly: in the eyes of some, Web 2.0 tools achieved a status equal to that of classic diplomatic tools, while in the eyes of others, Web 2.0 tools remained a tolerated, but second-class set of options. This situation ended with the arrival of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Almost overnight, virtual diplomacy ceased to be an auxiliary

[149] Although in September 2022 WHO only signaled the soon-to-come end of the global pandemic, the everyday dynamics of the world have returned to their normal routines in most communities (China being a relevant exception), and this is true considering the unobstructed flow of diplomatic activities as well.

approach, and became the "savior" (iBOL) of diplomats worldwide (iGRE, iIDN, iTUN, iGER, iARG, iCoE, iFIN). The ultimate normalization of virtual platforms saw Zoom and Teams become the standard venues for diplomatic engagement, practically all events and meetings moved to the online realm, and much of the output of HQs and embassies also migrated to Web 2.0 platforms (iFIN, iJAP, iCoE; Beltrán, 2021).

In the highly ceremonial and traditional world of diplomacy, it was truly revolutionary when, for the first time in the millennia-old history of the profession, at the time of the global quarantine, bilateral international agreements and multilateral treaties were born through videoconferences (iEEAS, iIDN; Bjola, 2022; Görömbölyi, 2023; Szűcs, 2024). An example of global magnitude

4.5.1/1. "Signature Ceremony" of the RCEP, November 2020, online videoconference

was one of the outstanding diplomatic results of the year 2020, the signature of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which was established between 15 countries[150] of the Asia-Pacific region and ASEAN, linking together more than 30 percent[151] of the world population and world trade. The treaty was "signed" by heads of state and prime ministers, without personal presence at the 15 November 2020 "Vietnam Summit", through videoconference. In international relations, where so much revolves around prestige and due procedure, where leaders would never miss ceremonial signature opportunities, where organizers

[150] Australia, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam.
[151] By 2019 data of the WTO

take pride in hosting grand events and serving as the birthplace of treaties, this could have never happened before the maximalization of Web 2.0 potential by the necessities of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thinking about this magnitude of change, the reference in the Foreword of this study, claiming that changes resulting from Web 2.0 use can measure up to those caused by the Westphalian new world order or the Vienna Congress, may not seem so far-fetched anymore.

Naturally, in early 2020, the usual workplace setting changed significantly. Practical and hi-tech videoconference rooms took over the place of classic meeting rooms organized by protocol (iEEAS, iGNQ, iTUN, iCAN, iBOL), and even in diplomats' everyday lives, protocol requirements, especially dress codes, have decreased significantly, due to all communication shifting to Web 2.0 channels (iGNQ, iTUN).

The lockdowns also made societies more dependent on online information, especially crisis communication and official news on counter-pandemic action. Diplomats engaged in both extensively, with embassies pouring repatriation-related information on their citizens "trapped" in host countries, and MFAs updating the public on international cooperation under the aegis of the WHO, and on vaccine-related news (iEEAS, iPER, iTUN, iGER, iARG).

Not forgetting the tragic consequences of the pandemic, with sympathy for the many millions who passed away or were affected otherwise, but observing and analyzing reality, one can only realize that COVID-19 had a remarkably enhancing and maximizing effect on the Web 2.0 development of diplomatic activities.

As the pandemic slowly withdrew, as restrictions eased and disappeared, and in-person meetings resumed, "diplomacy did not simply continue where it left off" (iGRE) in 2020. With the Web 2.0 toolkit having received complete recognition as a serious means of official diplomatic work by this time, different actors could draw their own conclusions in unbiased ways about best practices and come up with a balanced modus operandi that integrates online and offline activities in ideal configurations to best serve their entities' respective needs and goals (iIDN, iFIN, iJAP, iCoE, iGRE; Vasas, 2023).

As common examples, high-level summits and negotiations mostly returned to in-person formats for depth and importance, while routine and technical meetings, preparatory or follow-up actions mostly remained in the virtual realm for efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Many reforms moving consular services to online platforms were kept in place to uphold consumer friendliness and speed (iNZL). Whenever the human character of an issue is in the forefront, real-life, offline solutions serve this added "human touch" well, likewise, when networking or the general deepening of interactions matter, human presence is essential. But when ease of operations and general effectiveness are decisive, like in the case of wide-reaching campaigns, training, etc., online tools continue to be of great service across the spectrum of diplomatic activities (iARG, iNZL, iIDN, iJAP).

4.5.2 The impact of other contingencies

War

Situations of armed conflict also reshape the online diplomatic landscape (Derkacz, 2023). In wartime, traditional open diplomacy may give way to secret, backchannel negotiations on the one hand, and public, high-speed information battles on the other (iFIN, iCAN). Involved actors, usually states, rush to shape the international narrative before their adversaries do so, by justifying their own actions and mobilizing support throughout social media.

Web 2.0 platforms, as if mirroring offline realities, become “digital battlefields” (iARG), where MFAs and embassies maximize the real-time nature of online diplomacy, instantaneously posting official positions and their own narrative of the happenings, bypassing traditional channels and classical media (iTUN, iFIN; Derkacz, 2023). The tone changes from cooperative and cautious to more assertive and emotionally charged, and the content becomes highly visual and direct (iARG, iNZL).

In war, the risk of misinformation skyrockets, as any side will naturally frame reality to their advantage (Bat-Oyu, 2024) by default, and disregarding a balanced truth becomes the norm (iGRE). In general, war accelerates the dynamic of Web 2.0 diplomacy, which comes with higher viewership because of the higher stakes (iARG, iSLE).

In the 2023 Gaza War, the latest (at the time of this research) open conflict of the wider Israeli-Palestinian crisis[152], both sides have flooded all important social media platforms with their narratives, real-time updates, and visual content. Israel’s digital diplomacy used graphic imagery about the attack by Hamas on Jewish settlements and the situation of the hostages to gather international sympathy, while Palestinian voices (including NGOs, activists, and official profiles) used their online communication to document the destruction of Gaza, appealing to global audiences through an emotional and personal perspective (Bat-Oyu, 2024).

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Ukrainian MFA ran a highly coordinated digital campaign on all important platforms, which combined resilience, calls for sanctions, and even humour (iGRE; Derkacz, 2023). Already before the war, the MFA determined that in the 2021-25

[152] This armed conflict is still ongoing at the time of writing these thoughts, in mid-2025.

period, digital diplomacy would be one of seven areas of priority. Once the invasion took place, they were prepared, among other things, with HQ-created material[153] that all representations could share, multiplying the reach (Derkacz, 2023). The importance of Web 2.0 tools in Ukraine's diplomatic arsenal was made all the more obvious by the publication of the book "War for Reality: How to Win in the World of Fakes, Truths, and Communities" by minister of foreign affairs Dmytro Kuleba in 2023. Meanwhile, Russia used its well-known web brigades or troll farms to push counter-narratives, which first seemed in vain, facing innumerable content removals, bans, and a growing isolation, but with time, some Russian propaganda started to take root in the international discourse, in some instances even infiltrating into some Western decision-makers' communications (iEEAS, iGER, iJAP, iCAN).

Civil unrest

Internal uncertainties in a given country may give rise to unexpected or unregulated occurrences, which filter into the interaction with the international community. In such instances, due to Web 2.0 tools, even "nameless" individuals can become actors in diplomatic activities, serving as a channel between the streets and diplomatic officials or international media.

4.5.2/1. A citizen's real-time video about Myanmar's military crackdown, intended to raise awareness in the international community. YouTube, 2007.

A good example of this was the 2007 Myanmar military crackdown (Görömbölyi, 2022a), which sparked an information campaign by the protestors' supporters – mainly driven by university students – to ensure that the world learned about what was taking place in Myanmar (Nelson, 2007), despite its controlled media and closed society.

Having no access to classical media, the Burmese began using Web 2.0 tools to publish and inform. Together with news from foreign journalists in Myanmar, information about the events was rapidly shared (Deejay, 2021). Mainstream foreign media and concerned individuals and groups disseminated this outgoing information, ensuring that the international community and global leaders were up-to-date on the atrocities.

[153] Like #RussiaInvadedUkraine, #StopFake, #LetMyPeopleGo, #CrimeaIsUkraine, etc.

The internet in 2007 was a different domain compared to the 2020s, with many of today's tools missing, but there were enough Web 2.0 platforms for the protesters to get the information and their messages through. They primarily used blogs, MySpace, and MSN Messenger. Wikipedia allowed readers to update in real-time, as information came in, while Flickr and YouTube offered social bookmarking, video and image tagging, and other utilities (Görömbölyi, 2022a). Online options grew by the day, thus Burmese and international efforts had an exponential effect on each other while keeping the online information flowing, and continuing to rally support. No wonder the military junta turned its focus time and again towards online platforms with specific bans and general network blockades, with little long-term effect (Pérez, 2021).

A few years later, at the time of the Arab Spring, the international community was more prepared, and the Web 2.0 toolkit was already better embedded in diplomatic everydays. As the protests erupted, diplomatic actors immediately began to use Facebook and Twitter/X to monitor developments and issue public statements, focusing on speed and efficiency (iTUN, iFIN, iGRE). The US embassy in Tunis, for example, tweeted in both Arabic and English to communicate safety warnings, US positions, and counter disinformation[154] about American involvement. The Arab Spring indirectly called for a more participatory and horizontal understanding of diplomacy online. Civil society, activists, and anonymous users claimed their place around the table, and the volatile nature of these social changes allowed for a looser and more protocol-free approach from the international community.

Climate change

As one of the most urgent and era-defining issues of our times, the environmental crisis has had its shaping effect on diplomatic behavior, pushing all stakeholders (state and non-state actors alike) to engage more publicly and in a more participatory and horizontal way. These types of shifts are easily accommodated by Web 2.0 platforms (iFIN, iCAN, iJAP). Chapter 4.2.4.2 has already presented the way Greta Thunberg, an individual, achieved recognition as an actor of climate diplomacy with the fundamental help of social media, but her case is only one of the many in the highly multilateral, cooperative, open, and non-hierarchical world of climate diplomacy. For the multitude of states, IOs, INGOs, individuals, interested companies, and media outlets, the virtual sphere has been the default space to express and interact, when outside the major multilateral occasions like the yearly UN COP meeting, or other relevant climate-related gatherings (iWWF, iUN). This participatory shift is enhanced by the necessity of legitimacy, as the stakes are truly civilizational, and the traditional actors of the international community have failed to deliver solutions so far (iFIN, iUN).

[154] Disinformation about American involvement – at least it was labeled disinformation according to the US narrative, the international community was indeed divided concerning US clandestine operations potentially taking place in at least Libya and Egypt.

At least occasionally, diplomatic leaders are pressured to pledge to climate action or publicly clarify their related stances. It is simple and easy to do online, and by doing so, these actors may feel that they have actually done something substantial[155].

Certain countries or regions, especially vulnerable nations, increasingly frame themselves as climate leaders, through well-built online narratives (iWWF, iUN). For example, Pacific Island nations have used all the main Web 2.0 platforms to communicate their climate threats. These online campaigns often include emotionally stimulating stories, visual images, or cultural elements that would not appear in pre-Web 2.0 diplomatic communications.

4.5.2/2. Video speech of Simon Kofe, foreign minister of Tuvalu, to the Glasgow COP-26 climate summit. YouTube, 2021.

Simon Kofe, Tuvalu's foreign minister, participated in the 2021 COP-26 UN climate conference in Glasgow through a video stream, himself at home in Tuvalu, standing knee-high in the Pacific Ocean, thus raising awareness of fellow world leaders to the immediate dangers of the environmental crisis. Incidentally, in this case, his online diplomatic speech was not the only connecting element between climate change, Web 2.0, and diplomacy. Tuvalu, a sovereign UN member state, is fast disappearing from existence due to rising sea levels, therefore, during his speech, Kofe announced that his country is planning to create a digital version of itself online, including a digital foreign service and digital citizenship, preserving nationhood and cultural identity for generations to come, even when the country will have

[155] It is a good example of the "thoughts and prayers"-phenomenon in the online sphere, when there is an issue (like a disaster affecting many), in which real help would be needed, but many just post theatrically sympathising social media messages (like "sending my thoughts and prayers"), posing as if they have actually done something helpful.

physically submerged, and its citizens will have all moved to Australia under the aegis of the Falepili Union[156].

It can also be said that the importance and urgency of climate issues have brought Web 2.0 communication opportunities more to the forefront (iGER, iWWF, iIDN). When an environmental disaster strikes, consular communication is fastest online, and when diplomatic leaders look for popular topics, the ever-important and trendy issue of environment protection is always there to boost likes and shares (for content change in diplomatic activities, see Chapter 4.3.2).

[156] The treaty of the Falepili Union, signed in August 2023, establishes a special migration pathway for Tuvaluan citizens to relocate to Australia while retaining their Tuvaluan citizenship, and recognizes Tuvalu's continuing statehood even in the case of loss of its physical territory.

5. Conclusions, limitations, future applications

5.1 Conclusions

After the detailed presentation of the findings of the research, it is time to look back in a structured way to summarize and synthesize the most important results of the research, providing answers to the main research question and examining the proposed hypotheses; reflecting on the grounded method, which allowed a genuinely bottom-up examination of changes in diplomacy across the globe.

5.1.1 Overview

In the ever-evolving landscape of modern international relations, Web 2.0 tools have emerged as both a technological opportunity and an operational challenge. Following the principles of grounded theory and building on geographically representative global interview data and real-time platform analysis, this dissertation has systematically examined the transformative effects of Web 2.0 on diplomatic activities. It has done so by following the knowledge shared by diplomats of the world, exploring shifts in the form and content of diplomacy, assessing the evolution of transparency and accountability, and mapping out the risks that these digital tools impose on stakeholders in foreign relations.

The grounded theory approach proved particularly well suited to this research subject. It allowed me to begin without fixed preconceptions[157] and instead construct the hypotheses inductively. The openness and flexibility of this methodology enabled the identification of nuances that would likely remain hidden under a more rigid, top-down research framework. As such, the final hypotheses emerged organically from the iterative coding of incoming data, reflecting diplomatic realities rather than abstract concepts. This adds novelty to the research, not only in terms of its conclusions, but in its very construction.

The findings point to nothing less than a paradigmatic shift in diplomatic practice. No longer can diplomacy be solely described as the domain of elite negotiations conducted behind closed doors; instead, it increasingly takes place in the open, among the fragmented, evolving, and user-ruled environment of online platforms, with a greater number of horizontal stakeholders than ever before. While traditional structures and procedures have not vanished at all, they now coexist with digital formats that have the potential to challenge hierarchies, introduce new genres of communication, and amplify both reach and impact.

[157] Both without theoretical preconceptionsn and without the categories of my own diplomatic experience.

This transformation does not unfold uniformly. The capacities, leadership styles, and strategic choices of individual diplomatic actors determine the degree and direction of these changes. However, across the board, the digitalization of diplomacy is irreversible and deepening. The form of diplomatic communication has expanded beyond recognition, its content has become more multidimensional and interactive, and institutions face heightened demands for transparency and responsiveness. At the same time, the profession also faces different vulnerabilities – from reputational faux pas to personnel overload, from manipulated narratives to ultimate distraction.

These conclusions aim to offer more than a snapshot of a moment in diplomatic evolution. It shows a new phase in which digital platforms are not only optional extensions of practice anymore, but fundamental, determining tools of the diplomatic reality.

5.1.2 Answering the research question, examining the hypotheses

The main research question, from the first until the last moment of this research, was: "In what ways and depths have Web 2.0 online tools transformed diplomatic activities?"

The question was approached through the iterative formation and refinement of hypotheses, in line with grounded theory methodology, so the research allowed empirical reality to shape the analytical structure. This process resulted in three final hypotheses, which were tested and examined throughout the assigned chapters in the findings.

Changes in form and content

The first hypothesis states that Web 2.0 tools have reshaped both the form and content of diplomatic activity in paradigmatic depths. It can be confidently stated that this was confirmed.

Formally, diplomacy has acquired a diverse and expanding repertoire of online genres, profoundly altering its stylistic and procedural identity. Where once diplomatic communication was defined by rigidity, formal tone, and a top-down structure, today's reality includes tweets crafted with intentional ambiguity, Instagram stories for soft power projection, video clips from fieldwork or ceremonies, and even emojis used to nuance tone and draw attention. MFAs and embassies now operate across platforms, responding to the need for immediacy and accessibility. By now, even the most conservative institutions have embraced these tools from social media to instant messaging and videoconferences, as they proved indispensable for networking and multiplying the reach with digital audiences and shaping perceptions in a noisy information environment. In this communicative shift, Web 2.0 no longer plays a peripheral, promotional role: it has become both a central medium of diplomatic output and a central set of internal and external direct communication platforms.

Driven by social media customs, a new, more casual style of diplomacy evolved as well, one that is emotionally receptive, culturally layered, sometimes even humorous. Furthermore, the new diplomatic language used on Web 2.0 platforms has filtered back to the offline domain, making settings that for centuries have been deeply protocol-heavy, friendlier, more casual, and more human.

In parallel, a new rhythm of diplomacy emerged as one of the most defining changes of the Web 2.0 era. The tempo of decision-making, internal coordination, and public messaging has accelerated significantly. Traditional workflows, once organized around emails, cables, and internal memos, have been supplemented or even replaced by real-time instant messaging apps like WhatsApp, Messenger, Signal, or Telegram and video conferencing tools such as Zoom or Teams. These formats enable cross-border diplomatic communication to happen continuously, not episodically. Virtual bilateral meetings, previously considered a compromise solution, became normalized during the COVID-19 pandemic, which served as a global culmination "moment" for digital adoption. During the crisis, digital channels were no longer auxiliary, they became the backbone of a multitude of activities.

Diplomatic teams now routinely plan outreach concepts with online visibility in mind. HQs and embassies frequently manage multiple parallel formats for the same message: a formal press release, a Facebook post, a more informal Instagram visual, or even a short video reel. Each format with different target audiences, different tones, and levels of depth. Diplomatic communication is no longer a follow-up "job"; it is a dynamic and layered practice, full of stakeholder engagement and immediate decision-making, shaped by both traditional diplomatic logic and real-time interaction.

As for content, diplomatic agendas have expanded well beyond their traditional domain. The research uncovered that online platforms have not only modified how diplomacy is communicated, but also what may now constitute diplomatic work. As diplomatic leaders became sensitive to online success, their decisions, determining what issues to address, what areas of work to emphasize, reflect this audience-centric recalibration of priorities.

New content areas such as digital humanitarian advocacy, diaspora engagement, and disinformation response have emerged as integral parts of daily operations. Digital tools have enabled HQs and embassies to directly participate in crisis response, blurring the lines between diplomacy, public service, and emergency management. While cultural diplomacy flourished the most since Web 2.0 presence became the norm, other examples are also transparent, underlining the changes – like the deeper incorporation of charity projects or tourism diplomacy into the digital repertoire of several representations. A complex set of consular activities found its way to embassies' online platforms, and there is an increase in online posts that promote national brands, solidarity events, or joint campaigns with civil society. These activities reflect a substantive expansion of mandate, and a functional diversification of content, enabled by the flexibility of Web 2.0 formats and driven by a more networked understanding of diplomacy.

Perhaps the most obvious shift is the way diplomatic OSINT transformed from a difficult, tedious, and slow process to a high-speed, comprehensive, and comparatively easy task. Diplomats and foreign ministries now increasingly monitor public digital content—social media posts, local news, satellite imagery, and online sentiment, primarily for reporting, to help informed decision-making, anticipate crises, and assess foreign narratives in time. This operationalization of OSINT reflects how Web 2.0 has expanded the informational reach of diplomacy, turning public data into an everyday strategic asset.

Changes in Transparency and Accountability

The second hypothesis addresses the potential rise of transparency and accountability through digital means. There is evidence strongly supporting such tendencies, but with important limitations in occurrence, scope, and institutional follow-through.

Transparency has evolved into both a cultural norm and a structural expectation within modern diplomacy, which is one of the clearest shifts brought on by the adoption of Web 2.0 tools. The research, supported by related literature, revealed that diplomatic entities now maintain a systematic online presence, often spanning multiple platforms, with content that includes everything from policy updates and public itineraries to real-time statements on unfolding events. MFA HQs, IOs, INGOs, embassies, and even individual diplomats now engage in regular self-disclosure of their activities, announcing bilateral meetings, publishing goals and achievements from multilateral summits, summarizing roundtable contributions, or even revealing day-to-day procedural matters such as ambassadorial schedules and meetings or national day receptions. While such disclosures were once confined to internal reports or press releases, and the general public had practically no idea what their countries' diplomacies did, they are now accessible, in near real-time, fulfilling, and at the same time also reshaping public expectations about diplomatic openness.

There is a growing internal pressure within institutions to remain visible and to "keep up" with the perceived transparency of peer institutions. A competitive dynamic exists in which diplomatic entities monitor each other's digital output to avoid appearing passive or absent in the digital public sphere. Regular sharing is increasingly equated with relevance, and inactivity with irrelevance.

However, the research also revealed a crucial limitation in this new diplomatic transparency: it is highly selective. While there is now an abundance of shared information on uncontested, routine, everyday, or generally low-impact activities, the same openness does not extend to contested, sensitive, high-impact issues. Such contentious matters are often only framed in vague, curated terms. This creates an asymmetric transparency, where the overwhelming majority of activities are indeed transparent, but the most critical issues remain invisible. This finding nuances over-enthusiastic narratives around digital openness and points to a complex reality, in which transparency, enhanced as it may be, is filtered through political caution and institutional self-protection.

Accountability, which in this case proved to be closely linked to transparency, has also undergone a significant reconfiguration in the digital era, reshaped by the participatory logic of Web 2.0 platforms. The research demonstrated that diplomatic actors today are subject to a broad spectrum of horizontal accountability mechanisms, originating not from parliaments or oversight bodies but from ordinary users, civil society groups, activists, expert communities, and journalists – engaging critically with online diplomatic content.

Importantly, this transformation reflects a move from accountability as a formalized top-down process to one that is bottom-up and informal. Campaigns or hashtag trends related to issues with major public interest have forced HQs and embassies to explain their actions or inaction, or clarify official positions, even when such topics would previously have been considered too politically delicate or bureaucratic. This accountability pressure is amplified during crises like natural disasters, political upheavals, controversial elections, where delays or silence on social media can rapidly trigger reputational backlash. In such cases, diplomatic actors find themselves compelled to publicly justify or modify their choices, not because a formal hearing demands it, but because the networked public sphere has claimed that right. This represents a broadening of the understanding of accountability, where institutional responses are not limited to answering superiors but extend outward to the stakeholders of the online realm.

Interestingly, some qualities of Web 2.0 platforms that logically could have enhanced accountability did not prove so: this research found no evidence that the social media feedback architecture of comments or direct messages would alter the behavior of diplomatic entities, or even sufficiently pressure institutions to respond.

The dissertation makes an important conceptual distinction here: accountability does not require that someone takes responsibility; it only requires that someone can be held responsible. In other words, even when no institutional consequences follow (i.e., no resignations or sanctions occur), the process of public scrutiny and challenge still constitutes a real accountability effect. Being called out, criticized, or pushed to clarify positions changes diplomatic behavior. Such public actions have led to apologies, changes in statements, or a shift in communication tone. The findings suggest that while formal accountability mechanisms remain unchanged in many diplomatic structures, the functional reality has shifted: Web 2.0 platforms have introduced new publics, new tools, and new approaches of scrutiny that are shaping how diplomats behave, even in the absence of formal sanctions.

Emerging Risks

The third hypothesis suggests that the intensifying use of Web 2.0 increases risks, and it has been verified in a diverse set of areas.

Perhaps the most visible and reputationally destructive risk of Web 2.0 diplomacy is the heightened likelihood of diplomatic faux pas. The immediacy and decentralized nature of social media allow for posts to be made without institutional vetting, bypassing the standard protocols of drafting, editing, and approval that traditionally governed diplomatic communications. A single tweet – whether careless, culturally insensitive, emotionally charged, or simply mistimed – can trigger significant backlash, with consequences ranging from public apology and strained bilateral relations to internal disciplinary measures. Even ”likes” or retweets of controversial material were reported to have drawn scrutiny, blurring the boundary between private opinion and public responsibility. These moments are amplified by the irretrievability and virality of Web 2.0: mistakes cannot be contained, and clarifications, however sober or accurate, do not spread as effectively as the original offense.

A more subtle yet organizationally dangerous risk is the gradual loss of diplomatic focus. The research revealed that in some entities, strategic planning meetings are increasingly dominated by discussions around social media visibility and follower engagement, rather than policy implementation or bilateral coordination. This drift occurs because the metrics of digital success – likes, shares, reach – are tangible and immediate, offering a form of validation to leaders susceptible to vanity that classical diplomacy rarely provides. As a result, such leaders may subconsciously prioritize “marketable” content over long-term strategic efforts that do not yield online traction. This phenomenon risks turning diplomacy into a spectacle rather than a solution-oriented practice. Moreover, as content creation demands increase, staff attention is diverted, reducing capacity for on-field work and strategic reporting. In crisis situations, this distortion is especially dangerous, with representations or even HQs focusing on narrative management while substantive responses are delayed.

Diplomatic institutions now operate in a hostile digital environment where cybersecurity risks are ever-present. Web 2.0 tools rely on third-party platforms and open networks, which are inherently more vulnerable than the secured, closed-loop systems of traditional diplomatic communication. The dissertation highlights examples of account hijacking, data breaches, and orchestrated spam campaigns as illustrations of how adversaries exploit digital spaces. Even more alarming are unintentional leaks, leading to the public exposure of sensitive diplomatic information. Web 2.0 platforms installed on personal devices or accessed outside secure systems increase these risks. Although some states have begun to develop contingency protocols, many diplomatic services lack adequate defenses. Additionally, the private ownership of these platforms introduces a meta-risk[158]: the algorithmic or political bias of platform owners may impact diplomatic reach, creating a form of extrajudicial censorship with no mechanisms for appeal. The research stresses that the security of digital diplomacy cannot be managed solely within the MFA; it must become a multilateral effort with horizontal cooperation, involving governments, tech providers, and civil society watchdogs.

Web 2.0 has not only changed what diplomacy entails but has also enhanced the workload and emotional burden of those who practice it. Diplomats are now expected to create content, monitor online discourse, manage engagement, and react swiftly to both offline and digital developments – on top of their traditional responsibilities. This workload expansion is often informal and unregulated, leaving staff to navigate their roles in ambiguity. Interviewees reported that the 24/7 nature of Web 2.0 creates a persistent sense of being "on call," even during weekends, holidays, or family time. The psychological toll of this constant connectivity includes chronic stress, burnout, and work-life imbalance, especially among junior and mid-ranking diplomats. Further complications arise from blurred personal-professional boundaries: some leaders expect staff to amplify official content on their private accounts, creating unspoken pressures that challenge autonomy and identity. These expectations, though unofficial, generate internal conflict, especially when individuals disagree with the tone or content of the institution's message. Interestingly, while digitalization in other fields has triggered concerns over job redundancy, there is no sign of online tools making diplomats' work obsolete. Rather, the opposite trend shows: additional roles being layered onto the same individuals without adequate staffing, training, or support. While digital diplomacy has redefined so much in the profession, leaders routinely fail to realize that their most important resources – their colleagues – take most of the burden of it, usually without adapted institutional safeguards.

Finally, one of the most emblematic risks is the proliferation of misinformation and its effect on diplomatic analysis and action. Web 2.0 platforms continuously circulate unverified, emotionally charged, and politically motivated content. This information noise makes it difficult for diplomats

[158] Both literally and metaphorically "meta" risk.

to distinguish credible data from propaganda, especially in highly contested issues or during crises. Misinformation can be external, targeting diplomatic audiences, or internal, when flawed online data is unintentionally incorporated into diplomatic reporting. The research also identifies active misinformation by diplomatic actors, resulting in institutions' loss of credibility. Misinformation devalues truth and erodes the factual consensus that diplomacy depends on. While counter-narratives and fact-checking mechanisms are being developed, they never achieve the virality of the original falsehood. This asymmetry makes misinformation one of the most pressing vulnerabilities in contemporary diplomacy.

Further changes

If one goes into the details, as this research has done, one naturally finds a long list of further changes that do not belong to the above categories. The fact that many other types of changes occurred – from the modernized training of diplomats to the private organization of official travels, from enhanced social mobility courtesy of highly visible job announcements on social media to diplomatic activities being in the hands of private companies running the platforms, from the digital divide deepening inequalities between MFAs to the huge gaps in archiving online diplomatic activities – only highlights how diverse and deep the transformation of diplomatic activities has been since the arrival of the Web 2.0 age.

Summary

The research confirms that Web 2.0 has fundamentally transformed diplomatic activities – not just in superficial terms, but in the very architecture of practice. Courtesy of grounded theory, this work could capture the depth and nuance of these changes by listening to practitioners, cross-referencing their perception of reality with literature and Web 2.0 profiles themselves, and allowing the hypotheses to evolve in parallel with empirical data flowing in.

This dissertation concludes that diplomacy in the Web 2.0 age is not an old system with some minor additions. It is a paradigmatically modified profession, which carries much of the old, but has incorporated a lot of the new – resulting in exciting new forms and substance, with enhanced transparency and accountability, and a new set of vulnerabilities.

5.2 Limitations of the research

While I believe that this research yields important insights into and conclusions about the evolving landscape of diplomacy in the digital age, like any research, this study is also subject to a number of limitations. These do not take away from the importance or relevance of the findings, but they do point to areas where future research – done by others or myself – could refine or enrich the conclusions.

The rapid pace of change in the technological landscape remains a challenge for research focused on digital tools and their effects. A certain kind of Web 1.0 online reality existed before Web 2.0 emerged, and another kind is on the rise with the arrival of Web 3.0 (see Chapter 5.2.2). Even Web 2.0 platforms constantly evolve, with features being added or removed, policies being revised, or even brand-new platforms appearing. This dynamic nature means that any findings related to specific tools may become outdated quickly. For instance, while this research may have highlighted Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram as key tools for public engagement in diplomacy, emerging platforms might shift the digital landscape in the near future. As a result, the findings are based on the contemporary realities of diplomatic engagement with technology, which could – and will – quickly change as new tools or trends take over.

Another limitation lies quite simply in the sample size of the interview participants. While geographical representativeness has been strictly upheld throughout the research, and qualitative interviews provided rich insights and empirical data, eventually reaching theoretical saturation, where further interviews did not bring further new codes and categories to the research; the altogether 21 conducted interviews certainly leave a theoretical possibility that a future research may find even more to add to the findings.

As the research question focuses on general and specific changes in a particular profession's activities, it is natural that the focus of interview participants shifted toward the areas most affected by these changes. Although the participants were specifically requested to avoid any confirmation bias, it is possible that incoming primary data highlights the changes more than their actual significance, and avoids discussing diplomatic activities, where the examined changes have remained superficial, or even non-existent. This particular limitation does not discredit the data collected on the changes that took place, but does make it difficult to draw conclusions on their proportions and their importance in the bigger picture of diplomatic life.

Likewise, the dilemma concerning objective–subjective–intersubjective context discussed in Chapter 2.1.1 naturally translates to a limitation of any social science studies. Although much was done to cross-reference and triangulate incoming data to move closer to objectivity, in some cases, there is no tangible material with which to cross-reference, therefore, the related finding remains in the realm of the intersubjective.

The interviews in this research have been conducted in 3 languages (English, Spanish, Polish), social media platforms and literature have been examined in 6 languages (English, Spanish, Polish, Chinese, Italian, Hungarian). These numbers are dwarfed by the large number of languages that are used online by the world's diplomatic actors on a daily basis. Since languages mirror cultural identities and ways of thinking, a linguistically more diverse approach may shed light on even more nuanced conclusions in future research.

The diplomats, who were interview participants in this research, do not exist in isolated realities. They are all parts of organizations with complex data protection and confidentiality systems, or at times even surveillance of their own diplomats; the detailed knowledge of which far exceeds the capacities of a single researcher. Therefore, although never openly signaled, one can not exclude that some interview participants have been hesitant while sharing strategic or specific information or even misrepresented reality in their answers. While the research provides plenty of control mechanisms through its continuous cross-referencing of incoming data, such occurrences may constitute a limitation of pure data collection.

The limitations outlined above highlight the challenges I faced when researching the effects of Web 2.0 tools on diplomatic activities. The findings, as detailed in the previous Chapters, seem comprehensive within the given scope, but these factors are important to consider when interpreting the results. Future research that addresses these limitations may possibly provide a more nuanced and updated understanding of the evolving role and effect of digital tools in diplomacy.

5.3 Applicability and future considerations

5.3.1 Direct benefits

As mentioned at the beginning of this dissertation, it is one of its desired goals to have an applicable quality; to be of service with its findings to both practitioners of diplomacy and academic research. For diplomats, primarily foreign service officials and HQ communication teams, this paper provides empirically grounded insights into the whole spectrum of online diplomacy and its wide-ranging consequences. By presenting how various actors – from small-country embassies to major IOs may employ Web 2.0 tools for communication and visibility building, the study hopes to offer information for one to evaluate their diplomatic entity's performance. More importantly, the structured examination of the consequences or potential consequences of Web 2.0 use provides a package of blueprints, to which one can reference their situation and decide upon steps to fine-tune online activities.

Although their own profession, therefore their best-known domain, diplomats may potentially better understand audience expectations, risks of missteps, administrative consequences, HQ-embassy dynamics, and any further related issues in a deeper context within diplomacy. The research tries to highlight institutional challenges, ranging from generational gaps in technology use to bureaucratic hesitance or workload intensification, that the diplomatic corps must address to optimize the use of digital tools. Although the study does not use complex case studies, the many examples and the detailed description of the changes in diplomatic activities may result in personal conclusions by practitioner readers, which can then be used as decision-making support information[159] – in the everydays, and in more conceptual planning alike.

It has admittedly not been the intention of this research to revolutionize related academic theory, still, it may offer solid empirical grounds for future theoretical examination and possibly some already applicable novelties. The study, being at the intersection of international relations, communication studies, and digital governance, may provide interesting material for scholars in each of these areas. The presented findings and the multi-scalar approach[160] possibly offer a good starting point for comparative analysis of case studies. As an ex-diplomat university lecturer, consciously striving to serve as a connecting element between practitioners and scholars, between

[159] The very first publication based on my research was a case study of the development of Thailand's online diplomacy. After having sent my then interview subject Thai MFA Director the published article, my Thai colleagues have signaled to me that the findings of that paper generated valuable discussions among the related Departments at the HQ in Bangkok. If this dissertation manages to ignite similar brainstormings among diplomats in different parts of the world, this multi-year research will have been definitely worth it.
[160] Examining the experience and output of both individuals, institutional units, and institutions alike.

diplomacy and academia, I do hope that theoretical researchers will welcome the body of reality-based empirical data presented in this research and use it in their quest to further develop IR theory.

As for university teaching materials, the current research and its findings have been used extensively as the contents of my lectures, both as full courses at my resident university[161] and as singular lectures at three different universities[162]. Any interested university professor is welcome to incorporate the results of this study into their teaching.

5.3.2 The show must go on

In the Foreword of this dissertation, I mention my students taking online functioning for granted. In their careers, the coordinate system of any comparison will be different from that of this research. Where this study ends, their endeavors begin, and one can only guess where the world of diplomacy may evolve in their lifetime.

It is a truth echoed in many cultures[163] that the only constant is change itself. As the world keeps changing, digitalization will provide tools yet unimaginable. Then, just like society as a whole, diplomacy will – sooner or later – also start utilizing these tools, which in return may affect and transform its own different qualities. Therefore, any analytic approach (like this study) may only result in a temporary overview of these tendencies.

While this study has intended to thoroughly investigate the effects of Web 2.0 tools on diplomatic activities, it also hopes to lay the foundations for a range of future research directions.

The first such path for further research arises from emerging digital novelties: with the transition from Web 2.0 to Web 3.0, the diplomatic community will soon be forced to navigate entirely new terrain. Similarly, the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) – including generative AI tools for content creation, sentiment analysis, and automated crisis monitoring – will redefine diplomatic workflows. Future research should explore what changes these tools will bring to the diplomatic domain. Such work may address ethical considerations arising from AI use, or whether such technologies can democratize diplomatic discourse, or instead enhance asymmetries between well-resourced and under-resourced diplomatic actors, etc.

[161] The Budapest University of Economics and Business
[162] The National Chengchi University in Taipei, the Chu Hai College in Hong Kong, and the Budapest University of Economics and Business
[163] The most famous ones claiming this, ranging from Heracleitus, through Gautama Siddhartha and Plato, up to Nietzsche.

Regardless of what the future brings, several important issues were beyond the scope of this study, which may attract scholars' attention in the present. These include the political influence or algorithmic bias in Web 2.0 platform governance, case studies with cross-cultural comparisons, a scrutiny of political communication vs. diplomatic communication, and the examination of the online behavior of heads of state and government, addressing diplomatic content from the aspect of highest-level leadership. I also only very briefly[164] examined the experience of the general public concerning diplomatic entities' online platforms, and that aspect does not constitute part of this dissertation, therefore, a further area to research can be the angle of user experience.

Another valuable angle would be to conduct longitudinal research, tracking how a single embassy's digital strategy evolves over a decade, or how generational shifts within diplomatic services affect platform use and content style. Comparative studies across regions, like the Global North vs. the Global South, or democratic vs. authoritarian regimes, would also enhance the comprehensive nature of future knowledge.

In summary, as the world continues to digitalize and societies become increasingly shaped by untangible algorithms, the need to continuously update our analyses is imperative. This thesis serves not as some final word, but as a stepping stone. The show, indeed, must go on, and the diplomatic community, along with scholars, must be prepared to perform not only on traditional but also on ever-evolving online stages.

[164] At the time of writing an earlier publication on "The Online Boom of Tibetan Diplomacy", I discussed with the Tibetan diaspora of multiple countries about their "user experience", but those results are certainly not representative to be included in such a comprehensive study as this one.

Closing remarks

When I started my research, I asked myself, “Are these changes in diplomacy, caused by the megatrend of digitalization, beneficial to human civilization?”

Naturally, such a deeply subjective question, given the obvious unscientific nature of it, can not make it into the body of a doctoral dissertation in social science. Still, I do hope that I collected, examined, coded, cross-referenced, structured, and finally, on these pages, presented enough material on the topic that you, dear reader, will be able to make your own subjective assessment with a well-rounded body of knowledge.

The reason why I refer to the “greater good” in these closing remarks is that I passionately believe, and have been teaching to my students for years, that the principles of a Diplomat (here, with a capital ‘D’) must be centered around promoting peaceful solutions versus conflict, promoting cooperation versus competition, and promoting win-win solutions.

I also do believe that higher and deeper levels of communication, new channels of dialogue, better understanding between cultures, countries, and individuals, and greater openness towards each other all serve these fundamental principles. Digital tools, when used in good faith, can help bridge geographical and cultural gaps and can reinforce connections, enabling more inclusive and diverse engagements across the vertical and horizontal spectrum.

Embracing new opportunities brought by technological advancement in communication correlates to what a Diplomat shall do. Build bridges, open doors, facilitate mutual understanding and kind exchanges on all levels from multilateral to bilateral, from global to local – for a more cooperative and peaceful world.

It is in this spirit that I close my doctoral dissertation, and it is in this spirit that I continue to pursue future academic endeavors.

Sources

Interviews

First round of interviews

Interview with a mid-ranking German diplomat with foreign postings in Asia and Europe (12 November 2023). Referenced in the text as (iGER).

Interview with a mid-ranking Argentinian diplomat with foreign postings in Africa, Asia and Aus/Oceania (17 November 2023). Referenced in the text as (iARG).

Interview with a senior Japanese diplomat with foreign postings in Europe and Asia (19 November 2023). Referenced in the text as (iJAP).

Interview with a mid-ranking Mexican diplomat with foreign postings in Asia and North America (24 November 2023) Referenced in the text as (iMEX).

Interview with a junior Equatorial Guinean diplomat with a foreign posting in Africa (5 December 2023). Referenced in the text as (iGNQ).

Interview with a mid-ranking United Nations diplomat with placements at the Geneva and New York HQ, and multiple foreign postings in Africa (20 December 2023). Referenced in the text as (iUN).

Second round of interviews

Interview with a mid-ranking diplomat of the European External Action Service, who earlier served as a junior diplomat of Finland with foreign postings in Asia and Europe (2 April 2024). Referenced in the text as (iEEAS) or (iFIN), depending on the context of the particular piece of information shared/referred to.

Interview with a senior New Zealand diplomat with foreign postings in Europe, North America, and Asia (20 April 2024). Referenced in the text as (iNZL).

Interview with a senior Bolivian ex-diplomat with foreign postings in South America and Europe (5 May 2024). Referenced in the text as (iBOL).

Interview with a mid-ranking official of the World Wildlife Fund with placements in Asia and Europe (23 May 2024). Referenced in the text as (iWWF).

Interview with a mid-ranking Sierra Leone diplomat with foreign postings in North America and Africa (1 June 2024). Referenced in the text as (iSLE).

Interview with a mid-ranking Laotian diplomat with foreign postings in Asia and North America (14 September 2024). Referenced in the text as (iLAO)

Third round of interviews

Interview with a junior Indonesian diplomat (female, 30-40 age group) with a foreign posting in Europe (27 September 2024). Referenced in the text as (iIDN).

Interview with a mid-ranking Peruvian diplomat (male, 40-50 age group with foreign postings in Europe and South America (5 January 2025). Referenced in the text as (iPER).

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Interview with a mid-ranking Canadian diplomat (female, 40-50 age group) with foreign postings in South America, Europe, and NATO. Referenced in the text as (iCAN).

Interview with a mid-ranking Peruvian diplomat (male, 30-40 age group) with foreign postings in Europe and North America. Referenced in the text as (iPER).

Interview with a mid-ranking diplomat of the Council of Europe (female, 30-40 age group) working at HQ in Strasbourg. Referenced in the text as (iCoE).

Interview with a mid-ranking Tunisian diplomat (female, 30-40 age group) with postings in North America, Asia, and UNESCO. Referenced in the text as (iTUN).

Further interviews on sub-topics or research methodology

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Interview on cyber-security aspects of the research with Arthur Keleti, “futurologist”, cyber-security expert (8 December 2023). Referenced in the text as (Keleti, 2023).

Interview on generational aspects of Web 2.0 with Krisztián Stiegerwald, generations expert and researcher (11 December 2023) Referenced in the text as (Stiegerwald, 2023).

Illustrations

4.2.2/1. US Secretary of State John Kerry's first official tweet in office

https://x.com/JohnKerry? (2014)

https://www.instagram.com/asean/4.2.2/2. The Twitter/X post of the Polish MFA about the official visit of minister Radosław Sikorski to Holland, and one of the minister's multiple tweets about the same event

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4.2.3/1. The Facebook profile of the Embassy of Malaysia in Cairo, with important basic information

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4.2.3/2. The Instagram profile of the Philippine Embassy in Beijing, the Facebook profile of the Finnish Embassy in Tehran, and the Twitter/X profile of the Ethiopian Embassy in Islamabad

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4.2.4/1. Twitter profile of Hua Chunying, spokesperson of the Chinese MFA

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4.2.4/2. A Twitter/X post from Miles Armitage, ambassador of Australia in Ankara, promoting the screening of an Australian film in Turkey

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4.2.4/4. The Twitter/X account of the MFA of the Republic of China

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4.2.4/5. Environmental NGO WWF promotes climate action on Instagram

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4.2.4/6. Greta Thunberg's post on international climate action on her Twitter/X profile

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4.2.4/7. The Malala Fund campaigning on Facebook for better funding for education

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4.3.1/4. The results of a short emoji-search on the Instagram profile of three distinct actors: the MFAT of Ireland, Mao Ning, spokesperson of the Chinese MFA, and the WWF

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4.3.1/6. An EU ambassador announcing the monthly Heads of Mission meeting through WhatsApp, instead of the previously usual note verbal form

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4.3.2/1. The Facebook post of the ambassador of Ireland in the Netherlands, on the charity event he participated in

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4.3.2/2. The Facebook post of the Spanish Consulate-General in Sao Paulo, promoting an event on equality, organized by the Cervantes Institute

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4.3.2/3. The chatbot on the homepage of the Greek embassy in London

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4.3.2/4. Emergency information provided on Facebook by the UK embassy in Ankara after the 2023 earthquake in southern Turkey

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4.3.2/5. The Norwegian embassy in Estonia promoting the concert of a Norwegian Black Metal band

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4.3.2/6. The Hungarian embassy in Peru announces a prize game for followers on Facebook

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4.3.2/7. The Italian embassy in the UK advertises Limenet, an Italian company in its Instagram post

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ANNEX I.

Interview guides

1. Round One

In your view/experience, in what ways did Web 2.0 activities change diplomatic activities?
In your view/experience, did the form of diplomacy change?
In your view/experience, did the contents of diplomacy change?
In your view/experience, did the level of transparency of diplomacy change?
In your view/experience, did the level of accountability of diplomacy change?
In case your answer is yes, then in what ways, and what depths?

2. Round Two and Three

In your view, how did Web 2.0 online tools change the form of diplomatic activities?

> Sub-topics for follow-up based on first round: What platforms are used by you or your organization? Is it an overtake of tools or a new parallel toolkit? Do you experience a necessary immediacy of action, a 24/7 diplomacy? How did personal networking and cooperation change? What tendencies in style and language do you see? Has it induced a faster generation change among diplomats? Is the multiplicator effect playing a role?

In your view, how did Web 2.0 online tools change the content of diplomatic activities?

> Sub-topics for follow-up based on first round: Cyberdiplomacy as completely new content? Is there a shift in decision-making factors? How have cultural diplomacy, charity projects, consular tasks, diaspora satisfaction management, and OSINT changed?

In your view, how did Web 2.0 online tools change the transparency and accountability of diplomatic organizations and entities?

> Sub-topics for follow-up based on first round: 1.) Transparency – Is there more public access to information? Is there a concrete or subconcious "obligation" to share? Do leaders compete to share more? Do citizens' passive access to information through one click help this process? Is there a difference between everyday diplomatic issues and politically contested issues? Are there differences by leadership? 2.) Accountability – Do we see a cause-effect connection here? Are there differences by leadership or culture? Does interactivity play a role? Does the need for follow-up play a role? Do we see a separation between accountability and actual consequences?

In your view, what risks do Web 2.0 online tools pose in the context of diplomatic activities?

> Sub-topics for follow-up based on first round: Are there personnel risks? Are there technological risks? Are there faux pas-related risks? Is there a risk of substance-less diplomacy?

In what ways did Web 2.0 online tools help your or your colleagues' work? In what ways did they complicate or hinder your or your colleagues' work?

> Sub-topics for follow-up based on first round: Is it a help in information access? Is it a help in speed? Is it a help in multiplication? Is it a help in contacts and networking? Is it a help in cost-effectiveness? Is it a complication for 24/7 duty? Is it a complication because of workload? Is it a complication for the lack of training? Is it a complication because of unfair evaluation? Is it a complication because of fake news or disinformation?

ANNEX II.

Interview Consent Form

Research project title: **The Effects of Web 2.0 online tools on diplomatic activities**

Researcher's name: David Görömbölyi, Corvinus University, Budapest
Researcher's contacts: gorombolyi.david@uni-bge.hu, +36205216463
Research Participant's name:

I voluntarily undertake this interview, having been informed of the following:

- The interview constitutes part of a research in the field of international studies, conducted by the researcher at the Doctoral School of Corvinus University.
- The opinions and information I share as part of this interview will be used as primary research data in the doctoral dissertation of the researcher.
- I undertake the interview in an anonymous way, being aware that a general description of my professional affiliation and circumstances (nationality, organization, basic diplomatic experience) will be mentioned in the list of sources of the dissertation. My name shall not appear in any form, nor will my identity be identifiable based on the description provided.
- The interview will not be recorded in any form. The researcher will take notes during the interview, to be used in his research findings.
- The researcher may use the data from the interview in further academic papers, publications, and presentations based on his doctoral dissertation without renewed consent being requested, with the same conditions of anonymity as in the case of his doctoral dissertation.

……………………………………
Research participant's signature

2025