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## **The Use of Twitter As a Public Diplomacy Tool: A Case Study of The U.K. Embassy In Egypt (2014-2018)**

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**The American University in Cairo**



**School of Global Affairs and Public Policy**

**THE USE OF TWITTER AS A PUBLIC DIPLOMACY TOOL: A CASE  
STUDY OF THE U.K. EMBASSY IN EGYPT**

**(2014-2018)**

**A Thesis Submitted by**

**Alamir Othman**

**to the Public Policy and Administration Department**

**in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Public**

**Policy**

**Under the supervision of**

**Dr. Shahjahan Bhuiyan**

**Fall 2020**

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## **Acknowledgements**

This thesis is the jewel in the crown of my professional journey with the U.K. Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). It will, hopefully, boost my professional brand as an expert in the field of diplomatic communication.

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Cordially,

Elamir Osman

## **ABSTRACT**

There is a growing academic interest in understanding the role of social media platforms in performing public diplomacy. The purpose of this exploratory study is to investigate the phenomenon of the use of Twitter specifically to boost the public diplomacy of a country in another country with the application on the U.K. Embassy in Egypt (2014-2018). The choice of the case study was inspired by the scarcity of the literature on the U.K public diplomacy in Egypt and the active Twitter approach of the U.K. Ambassador during the period of the research. The study employed in-depth interviews with seven individuals involved in designing, performing, and evaluating the Embassy's public diplomacy including the Ambassador and his Communications Team. The primary data were analysed under Nye's framework of public diplomacy. The study confirmed the two hypotheses and confirmed that the context, within which the U.K. Embassy in Egypt performed its public diplomacy, supported the Ambassador's activism on Twitter. It also confirmed that the impact of the Embassy's active Twitter approach boosted the U.K.'s public diplomacy in Egypt. However, the U.K. policy on Muslim Brotherhood, in particular, is seen as illegitimate by Egyptian audience and undermines the Embassy's public diplomacy efforts. The study also concludes that Twitter diplomacy thrives when the institutional culture, and institutional structures at foreign ministries encourage diplomats to engage, and empower them based on the notion of presumed competence. The study also shows that diplomats need a mind-set shift from a message-centred approach to audience-centred communication styles. The study reveals that diplomats can build reach when they are creative, authentic, and locally attuned online. Finally, the study concluded that while the U.K. Embassy's Twitter approach offers a rich model for academics and practitioners in the field of diplomatic communications, the whole experience is a context- and person-specific game.

## **Keywords**

Public Diplomacy – Soft Power – Twitter Diplomacy - Digital diplomacy – Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) - Social media - U.K. Embassy in Egypt

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## **Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION:**

### **1.1 Traditional diplomacy: continuity and change?**

The classic practice of diplomacy has always focused on government-to-government communication where the diplomatic envoy must go through the official channels to convey the messages of his/her government. These channels include, but are not limited to, the local Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Presidency, Cabinet, ministries, local authorities, political parties, and civil society organisations. This classic aspect of doing diplomacy remains intact due to its direct link to the sovereignty of the host nation and the governing regimes of managing international diplomatic relations. Diplomats are expected also to knock the doors of officials when they need to raise issues of interest, cooperation and concern with the host nation. Before the emergence of social media platforms, diplomats were limited in how they can do diplomacy. They could only reach out to the state institutions, some civil society organisations and few prominent individuals.

The state efforts to influence foreign audience using soft power is not a new phenomenon (Ogunnubi and Amao, 2016). The soft power of a country comes from its wider forces within society such as culture, art, film industry, music, sport and academic scholarships to foreigners (Idowu, and Ogunnubi, 2018). As such, countries like the U.S. enjoys extensive soft power because of Hollywood and exporting its culture to other parts of the world such as the fast food culture, American music, and political values. Some other countries projecting soft power is a different way. China for example focuses the “Chinese Culture” which is a mixture of traditional Confucian values and ‘socialist core values’ (Jintao 2007; Huang 2013). Even small nations exercises soft power. For example, Norway is a good example of “actions speak louder than words” (Nye, 2008). Norway has a small population, without an international language or exportable culture, is not a central hub of organisations or major corporate brands. Yet, it has developed a presence and a voice out of proportion to its small size and resources

“through a ruthless prioritisation of its target audiences and its concentration on a single message—Norway as a force for peace in the world” (Leonard 2002, 53). The relevant activities include mediation in the conflicts in the Middle East, Columbia and Sri Lanka, in addition to a generous aid budget and its frequent involvement in peacekeeping missions.

## **1.2 The Development of Soft Power and Public Diplomacy**

The state attempts to influence foreign audience intensified during WWII. For example, in 1942, U.S. President Roosevelt created an Office of Wartime Information (OWI) to counter the Axis Powers’ propaganda (Nye, 2008). OWI cooperated with Hollywood and while before the Cold War, “American corporate and advertising executives, as well as the heads of Hollywood studios, were selling not only their products but also America’s culture and values, the secrets of its success, to the rest of the world” (Pells 1997, xiii). Modelling on BBC, the U.S. created what became known as Voice of America (VAO) which had, by 1943, 23 transmitters sending news in 27 languages (Nye, 2008).

During the Cold War, the Soviet threat to the Western bloc grew, so public diplomacy continued to grow (Nye, 2008). The U.S. targeted the foreign audience behind the Iron Curtain and created Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe. Nye concluded that public diplomacy was vital for the U.S. to win the Cold War (Nye, 2008).

After the end of the Cold War, the U.S. budget for public diplomacy, performed by United States Information Agency (USIA), decreased 10 percent between 1989 and 1999 in comparison with the Cold War era (Nye, 2008). However, 9/11 attacks made the Americans to “rediscover the importance of investing in the instruments of soft power” (Nye 2008, 99).

When social media platforms came into existence, new communications horizons became open to politicians and diplomats. Twitter, in particular, has transformed how diplomats communicate (Stein, 2011). In a few years, Twitter has established itself as the top

social media platform in the field of digital diplomacy with 131 foreign ministries and 107 foreign ministers maintaining active accounts ([Twiplomacy, 2018](#)).

### **1.3 Background on Egyptian-U.K. Relations:**

The United Kingdom (U.K.) and Egypt enjoyed long history of political, economic and social relationship. Egypt was ruled indirectly by the U.K. Monarchy from 1882 to 1922. The year (1922) when Egypt was granted deficient independence ([State Information Service, 2020](#)). The Anglo-Egyptian Treaty in 1936 paved the way for the U.K. troops to withdraw gradually from Egypt and introduced the reciprocation of diplomatic representation between Cairo and London at the ambassadorial level. But because of the outbreak of World War II, the U.K.'s military presence and influence in Egypt intensified. The 23<sup>rd</sup> July Revolution in 1952 led to the signing of the Evacuation Agreement which included the withdrawal of the last U.K. troops from the Suez Canal zone in 1956 ([State Information Service, 2020](#)). During the 1950s and 1960s, the UK-Egyptian relations was closer to conflict than cooperation because of the legacy of the Suez Crisis, the Egyptian anti-colonial narrative and the hostilities between Egypt some U.K. allies in the region (i.e. Israel and Gulf countries). The prospects became positive in the mid-1970s. Bilateral relations grew steadily since the early 1980s on the political, economic and social fronts with two of Egypt's first ladies, Gihan el Sadat and Suzan Mubarak being half British.

Moving to the present time, the UK-Egyptian relations are driven by shared political and security interests (U.K. Embassy in Cairo, 2020). Economically, the U.K. is one of the top foreign investors in Egypt with total investments of 47.4 billion US dollars through 1816 companies operating in Egypt (Egypt Today, 2019). U.K. investments cover wide range of sectors such as energy, retail, tourism, financial services, pharmaceutical products, and communication and information technology. The Egyptian-British Chamber of Commerce and

the Egyptian British Businessmen Council are key players in enhancing trade ties between the two countries (State Information Service, 2020)

A particularly positive aspect of the bilateral relations is cultural and educational ties. His Royal Highness Prince Charles Philip Arthur George, Prince of Wales, opened the British University in Egypt (BUE) in March 2006 (British University in Egypt, 2020). The British Council remains a cultural and educational hub in Egypt's two major cities, Cairo and Alexandria (British Council in Egypt, 2020).

#### **1.4 Significance and Objectives of the Study:**

As most of the literature on public diplomacy in Egypt focuses on the U.S. Embassy, the review of the literature highlights a scarcity in academic writings discussing the U.K. public diplomacy in Egypt. This study will contribute towards filling this academic gap.

Another significant contribution of this study is its exclusive focus on Twitter as a relatively new public diplomacy tool within the Egyptian context. The reason behind choosing Twitter as opposed to Facebook or Instagram is that the former U.K. Ambassador didn't establish personal presence on either platforms. He had only account one social media which was on Twitter.

The selection of the case study is also linked to the fact that although the U.K. Ambassador was not the first foreign ambassador to create a professional Twitter account in Egypt, he established himself as the most followed foreign diplomat in Egypt on Twitter towards the end of his posting in August 2018 with more than one million followers on Twitter. This makes the case study a powerful one to explain the phenomenon this research is attempting to tackle, which is "the use of Twitter to boost public diplomacy".

Accordingly, the key objective of the study is to explore how the U.K. Embassy used Twitter to boost its public diplomacy in Egypt, under the leadership of the former U.K. Ambassador (2014-2018), with special concentration on the advantages and disadvantages of the Embassy's Twitter approach. Accordingly, the research question will be:

How did the U.K. Ambassador's use of Twitter influenced the U.K's public diplomacy in Egypt? What were the advantages and disadvantages of the Ambassador's Twitter diplomacy approach?

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW:**

Many of the published studies on public diplomacy focus on the U.S., Western European countries, and some other rising international and regional powers such as China, India, Nigeria, Iran and Israel. There is an obvious academic gap in the Egyptian context. Most of the studies on public diplomacy in the literature fall under one of the below three categories:

- 1) Foundation studies
- 2) Region or country-specific experiences
- 3) The public diplomacy of political figures such as Trump.

### **2.1 Foundation Studies**

These category of studies focuses on the origins, development and conceptualisation of public diplomacy. In his study “Public Diplomacy and Soft Power”, Joseph Nye (2008) offered a comprehensive analysis to the development of the practice of public diplomacy to boost soft power and offered a theoretical framework to perform public diplomacy (Nye, 2008). Nye defined soft power as “the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment” (Nye, 2008, 94).

According to Nye (2008), the resources that generate soft power stems largely from the set of values a country demonstrates in its culture (Nye, 2008). Accordingly the U.S. enjoyed a powerful position because, as a former French foreign minister noted, “Americans are powerful because they can inspire the dreams and desires of others, thanks to the mastery of global images through film and television and because, for these same reasons, large numbers of students from other countries come to the United States to finish their studies” (Nye. 2008, 96). In the same study, Nye offered a historical background on the early soft power efforts of

the U.S. and other major European countries where he, also, highlighted how different countries and political groups utilised new inventions to attract foreign audience through the utilisation of then the new technology of the radio. The use of emerging communications platforms, such as Twitter, in public diplomacy is another relevant aspect to my research on the public diplomacy of the U.K. Embassy in Egypt.

The study identified three dimensions for public diplomacy, which are daily communications, strategic communications and building lasting relationships beyond the government sector (Nye, 2008). The researcher will employ framework in discussing the public diplomacy of the U.K. Embassy in Egypt.

Nye's study (2008) concluded that soft power and public diplomacy efforts can be undermined by policies that are perceived by foreign audience as "illegitimate" and gave the example of the invasion of Iraq (Nye, 2008). This another relevant aspect to this thesis as it will be utilised to explain how policy disagreements between Egypt and the U.K. on issues such as the U.K. policy on Muslim Brotherhood limited the success of the former U.K. Ambassador's public diplomacy in Egypt.

Like many other studies, Nye's research examined public diplomacy from American lenses. While Nye dedicated a section in his study to discuss public diplomacy in the information age, he did not anticipate the potential impact of social media platforms, that existed back then, on performing public diplomacy.

## **2.2.Region or Country-Specific Experiences:**

Some other studies discussed the soft power and public diplomacy of emerging Asian powers in South and East Asia, Africa and the MENA region. In their study "The Struggle for Soft Power in Asia: Public Diplomacy and Regional Competition", Hall & Frank (2013) highlighted the growing competition between major Asian countries to display soft power leveraging public diplomacy (Hall & Frank, 2013). The study argues that "there are

two arms races happening in Asia today: one for military capabilities and another for the weapons of “soft power.” (Hall & Frank, 2013, 2). The study offered a historical background about the public diplomacy in Asia during the Cold War then discussed the various public diplomacy approaches followed by major Asian powers. The study focused mostly on China as Asia’s top investor in soft power with 9 billion US dollars a year on public diplomacy and other activities to enhance its soft power (Hall & Frank, 2013). Hall and Frank identified five strands for China’s public diplomacy strategy which are:

- 1- Engaging ethnic Chinese living abroad,
- 2- TV channels in foreign languages,
- 3- The establishment of a dedicated Public Diplomacy Division in 2004 (renamed as the Public Diplomacy Office) as part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the creation of a Public Diplomacy Research Centre at the Beijing Foreign Service University and a scholarly journal, Public Diplomacy Quarterly
- 4- Sponsoring more than 320 Confucius Institutes in almost 100 countries modelling on the British Council and Goethe Institute.
- 5- Hosting big cultural, sports and business events such as the Beijing Olympics in 2008 and the Shanghai World Exhibition in 2010. (Hall & Frank, 2013, 3:4)

China’s major competitors reacted quickly capitalising on their comparative soft power assets. For example, Taiwan intensified its public diplomacy work utilising democracy as its “most valuable soft power asset” (Hall & Frank, 2013). India, Japan, and Malaysia followed suit and created public diplomacy divisions within their foreign ministries and invested in their foreign media management. For example, The Japan Public Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) began to broadcast news services in 18 languages and South Korea’s Airing World which was established to improve the image of Korea globally (Hall & Frank, 2013, 5). The main criticism



of Hall & Frank (2013) is that it did not cover social media efforts, let alone Twitter, as part of the wider public diplomacy efforts of emerging Asian powers.

Moving to Africa, a study by Idowu, A. and Ogunnubi, O. (2018) highlighted Nigeria's use of economic and human resources to serve its growing foreign policy activism in Africa (Idowu, and Ogunnubi, 2018). The study admits that the research in Africa on public diplomacy is in its "infancy" where the focus has been mostly on South Africa (Idowu, and Ogunnubi. 2018). The study made clear reference to Nigeria's soft power assets, including religious diversity, film industry, human capital, tourism sites and political diplomacy (Idowu, and Ogunnubi. 2018). Yet, it did not expand on any of these elements. The focus was mainly on Nigeria's economic development. The study argues that Nigeria's role as a 'force of good' in the African continent has not been utilised to best serve the interests of Nigerian citizens. It concluded that an economic diplomacy that is focused on improving the lives of Nigerian citizens will help improve the negative perception of Nigerians in Africa and globally which will eventually boost Nigeria's soft power (Idowu, and Ogunnubi. 2018). The study did not explain how Nigeria, if at all, is integrating social media to advance its public diplomacy in the African continent.

As far as the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is concerned, majority of studies in the literature focused on the U.S. public diplomacy towards Arab and Muslim audiences as part of the global war on terrorism after 9/11 terrorist attacks. Similarly, within the Egyptian context, most of the studies focused on the U.S, Embassy's public diplomacy. For example, Owen Henry (2012) conducted a detailed study where he compared between the official Twitter accounts of the US Embassies in Egypt and the UK. Mixing qualitative and quantitative methods, Henry highlighted the engagement trends and concluded that there can be better utilisation of Twitter diplomacy. Yet, he mentioned @USEmbassyCairo as one of the best examples (Henry & Sandberg, 2012). The study was conducted at the peak of the political

transition in Egypt after the 25<sup>th</sup> January Revolution. The situation has changed significantly since then.

One other study discussed the role of localised language in diplomatic communication in the MENA region. Muhammed (2016) mentioned the former U.K. Ambassador alongside other examples of Arabic speaking diplomats in the MENA region such as the former Arabic Spokesperson of the U.K. Government based in Dubai, Edwin Samuel. While Muhammed (2016) recognised the impact on using Arabic to communicate effectively to advance his messages, it did not offer insights about the structures in place to perform public diplomacy, the Embassy's communications model, and the quality of engagement. Additionally, the study did not obtain primary from neither the U.K. Ambassador himself nor his Communications Team.

### **2.3. Public Diplomacy of Prominent Political Figures such as Trump.**

The political use of Twitter by Trump increased the academic attention to the use of Twitter to boost public diplomacy and foreign policy. Farias (2020) offered an evaluation to the successes and failures of President Trump's use of Twitter to boost his personal public diplomacy and to set the agenda for foreign policy (Farias, 2020). The study argues that Trump utilised two strategies. "The first one is establishing a highly personal, face-to-face visibility in all his activities as president. Trump routinely appears on talk shows, gives live interviews and attends rallies across the country, portraying himself as the best, most popular president in US history, or as "your favourite President (me)" (Farias, 2020, 1). The second strategy was to maintain a "highly active, virtual presence on social media where Trump continuously reinforces the messages that he delivers in live events and sets the agenda for new topics of discussion." (Farias, 2020, 1). The study concluded that the two strategies were highly effective to defeat his political opponents and to strengthen his connections with his support base in the U.S.

The two strategies enabled him to set the foreign policy agenda where he put his opposing world leaders or countries in a reactive position (i.e. announcing economic sanctions against Turkey on Twitter) (Farias, 2020). Yet, Trump's use of Twitter in foreign policy has been "one of contradictions" and reinforced his "erratic, individualistic and self-glorifying attitude toward his responsibilities and powers as president and commander-in-chief" (Farias, 2020, 5). This study is particularly useful to explain how other political and diplomatic celebrities may follow Trump's Twitter strategies which will be part of the analysis of the use of Twitter by the former U.K. Ambassador in Egypt.

The literature review of Twitter diplomacy to boost public diplomacy in Egypt suggests clearly that the few studies mentioned the U.K and that the focus was, mostly, on the US Embassy in Egypt. It also suggests that there is a literature gap in this area particularly in relation to the public diplomacy of the U.K. Embassy in Egypt. The key objective of this study is to contribute towards filling this gap.

## **CHAPTER3: RESEARCH QUESTION, METHODOLOGY, AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **3.1 Research Question:**

The research question of the study is:

How did the U.K. Ambassador's use of Twitter influenced the U.K's public diplomacy in Egypt? What were the advantages and disadvantages of the Ambassador's Twitter diplomacy approach?

The key objective of the study is to explain how the U.K. Embassy used Twitter to boost its public diplomacy in Egypt with strong focus on the advantages and disadvantages utilising the conceptual framework of soft power and public diplomacy offered by Joseph Nye (2008).

The main hypotheses of the research are:

#### **Hypothesis one:**

The context within which the U.K. Embassy in Egypt performed its public diplomacy, supported the ambassador's active approach on Twitter

#### **Hypothesis two:**

The impact of the Embassy's active Twitter use boosted the U.K.'s public diplomacy in Egypt.

### **3.2. Methodology and Conceptual Framework:**

#### **Case Study:**

Robert Yin (1981) defined “case study” as a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident (Yin, 1981, 51). Gerring offered a similar definition where he described a case study method as “an in-depth study of a single unit” (Gerring, 2004, 341). A simpler definition was offered by Herreid (1997) where he said “cases are stories with a message” (Herreid, 1997, 92). Because of the exploratory nature of the thesis, a case study is deemed a suitable research strategy to examine a phenomenon within its context (Yin, 2008), (Ragin and Becker, 1992). Accordingly, the thesis will use the public diplomacy of the U.K. Embassy in Egypt to tackle the phenomenon of employing Twitter to boost public diplomacy.

#### **In-depth interviews:**

This study uses primary data which have been generated via in-depth interviews with seven individuals involved in the process of designing and performing the public diplomacy of the U.K. Embassy in Egypt between 2014-2018. Those individuals are:

The Director of Government Communications at the U.K. Government,

The former U.K. Ambassador to Egypt

The former Deputy U.K. Ambassador to Egypt,

The former Head of Communications at the Embassy,

The three locally-employed staff members of the U.K. Embassy’s Communications team who worked directly with the Ambassador.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face in 2018 after obtaining the approval of the AUC’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). The shortest interview lasted for 17:19 minutes and the longest one lasted for 39:09 minutes. All interviews were conducted in Cairo except one

interview was conducted in Dubai. The questions were designed to get insights from the interviewees on the context, advantages and disadvantages of the Embassy's public diplomacy. The collected data from the interviews will be utilised to answer the research question via discussing the understanding, objectives, structure, strategy and delivery models, the advantages and disadvantages of the use of Twitter to boost the Embassy's public diplomacy in Egypt. The grounds of the discussion will be Nye's three dimensions of public diplomacy with the application on Twitter specifically. Those dimensions are:

- 1) "Daily communications which involves explaining the context of domestic and foreign policy decisions" (Nye, 2008: 101),
- 2) "Strategic communications which develops a set of simple themes much as a political or advertising campaign does" (Nye, 2008: 102),
- 3) "The development of lasting relationships with key individuals over many years through scholarships, exchanges, training seminars, conferences and access to media channels" (Nye, 2008: 103).

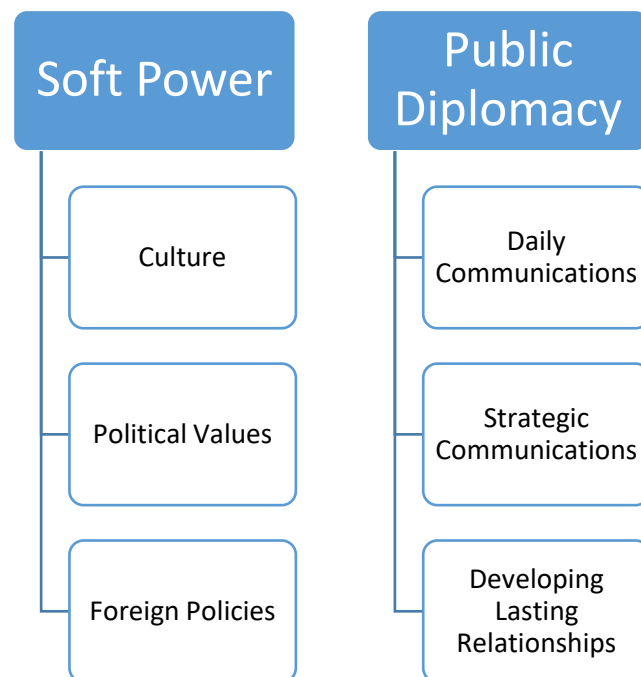


Figure 1. Nye's distinction between soft power and public diplomacy (Nye, 2008).  
Source: prepared by the researcher

As highlighted in the below figure, The insights offered by the interviewees will be discussed within the context of the wider institutional understanding of public diplomacy, the guidance from the mother institution, The Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO), the structure of the Communications Team at the Embassy and the communications model adopted to utilise Twitter as a public diplomacy tool. After that, the discussion will cover the main themes emerged in line with Nye's (2008) dimensions of public diplomacy including the advantages and disadvantages of the use of Twitter to inform the conclusions.

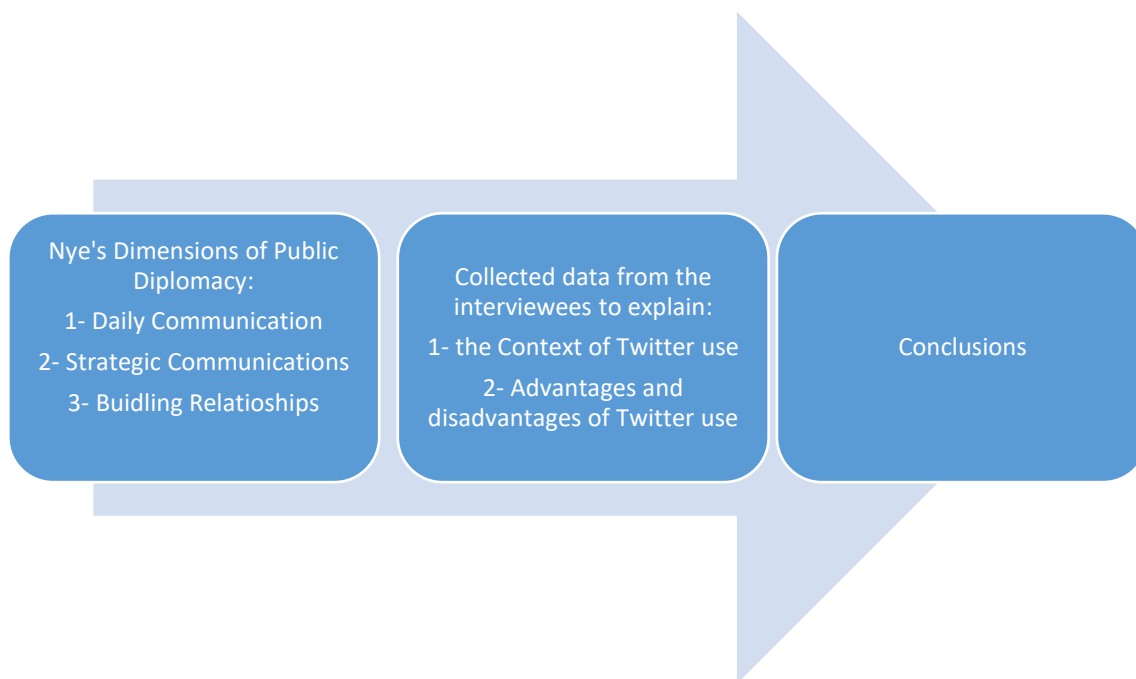


Figure 2: The process of data analysis

Source: prepared by the researcher

There are some concepts that are related to soft power and public diplomacy such as soft diplomacy, digital diplomacy and Twitter diplomacy. The below section offers a brief background on each concept and its relevance to the study.

## **Soft Power**

While the Cold War's global ideological struggle resulted in more creative communication approaches to influence foreign publics, the term "Soft Power" came to existence by the end of the Cold War. Joseph Nye coined the term and defined it as "the ability to affect others through the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes" (Nye 2004, 21). Nye (2008) identified three dimensions of any country's soft power, which are culture, political values and foreign policies (Nye, 2008). The study will adopt those dimensions in data analysis.

## **Public Diplomacy and New Public Diplomacy:**

Public diplomacy is a common term used by academics and practitioners in the field of diplomacy without "agreed-upon understanding of its definition and boundaries" (Cull, 2012). World War II was the starting point as to when foreign diplomats, politicians and leaders included foreign audience as part of their target audience. This process was known as public diplomacy (Siracusa, 2010). This one-way form of communication approach has changed to take the form of an interactive dialogue (Cowan & Arsenault, 2008). This second wave of public diplomacy has led to the emergence of the term "new public diplomacy" as a manifestation of both the activism of sub-state actors and their growing role abroad, and the flourishing of nation branding efforts and the spread of new technology (Cull, 2009). The main objective of public diplomacy is "not to convince but to communicate, not to declare but to listen" (Castells, 2008, 91).

New public diplomacy is targeting societies not governments (Castells, 2001). New public diplomacy is about listening not just telling which makes it different from propaganda (Melissen, 2005). Another comprehensive definition of new public diplomacy, which this study will adopt, is "an instrument used by states, associations of states, and some sub-state and non-state actors to understand cultures, attitudes and behaviour; to build manage relationships; and



to influence thoughts and mobilize actions to advance their interests and values." (As quoted in Cull 2012, 58).

### **Soft Diplomacy**

A third term that was closely associated with public diplomacy and soft power, which is "Soft Diplomacy". Burnay, Hivonnet, and Raube (2014) defined soft diplomacy as: "Fostering 'soft power' of a diplomatic actor; processing 'two-way-street' exchanges based on mutual agreements; implementing 'two-way-street' exchanges, learning and self-reflexive processes; including non-governmental actors; and being substantially linked to 'soft' issues" (Burnay, Hivonnet, & Raube, 2014, P. 40).

### **Digital Diplomacy:**

The term "Digital Diplomacy" is relatively new. In his book: Digital diplomacy: U.S. foreign policy in the information age, Dizard (2001) pioneered the use of the term "digital diplomacy". The book offered an analysis as to how modern technology is impacting diplomacy within the context of the US foreign policy (Dizard, 2001). Digital diplomacy can be defined as using digital tools to achieve diplomatic objectives (Bjola & Holmes, 2015). This suggests that key element to differentiate between traditional diplomacy and digital diplomacy is the use of social media which as the carrier of the message or the channel of the communication. It also suggests another fundamental difference, which is that the communication is taking place virtually in the online sphere not the actual face-to-face world. Digital diplomacy is doing old things in a new and more creative way.

### **Twitter Diplomacy (Twiplomacy):**

Twitter diplomacy is a more recent term that focuses exclusively on the use of Twitter as a public diplomacy tool. The term was coined in 2011 when a specialised website produced a study conducted to measure of use of Twitter by heads of states. Digital diplomacy can be

defined as the use of Twitter to achieve diplomatic objectives or the outcome of merging traditional diplomacy, digital diplomacy and Twitter (Chhabra, 2020).

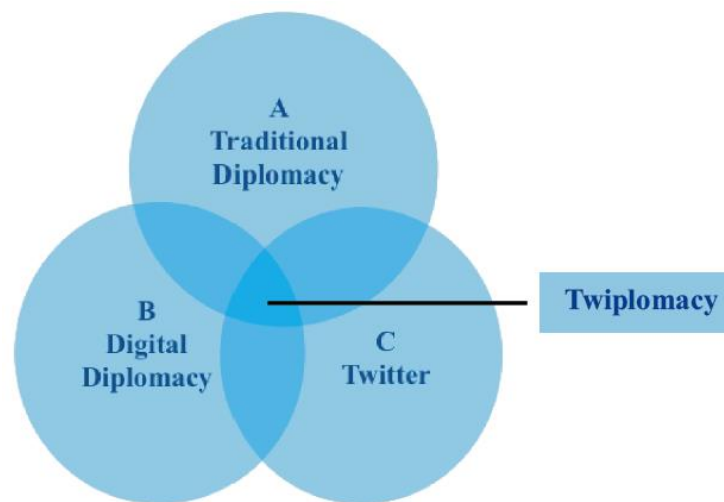


Figure 3. Distinction between traditional diplomacy, digital diplomacy and Twitter diplomacy. Circle A represents the sphere of traditional diplomacy and circle B represents digital diplomacy. Circle C represents Twitter, which is part of digital diplomacy, making it even a smaller part of traditional diplomacy as a whole.

Source: (Chhabra, 2020. P.2.).

### 3.3 Limitations of the study:

The main limitation of this study the study was the fact that the researcher was a member in the Communications team of the U.K. Embassy in Egypt in the period between October 2012 and February 2017. Yet, one may argue that the study will gain stronger grounds due to the direct engagement of the researcher in the Ambassador's public diplomacy.

### 3.4 Ethical considerations:

The informants signed the consent form which was approved, before conducting the interviews, by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The author guaranteed the confidentiality of the interviewees' names. The participants were reassured that the study is for pure academic purposes and should not be used otherwise. They signed the consent form in hand-writing.

## **Chapter 4: CONTEXT**

### **4.1 Institutional context**

As part of the analysis of a case study, it is key to understand the context of the phenomenon (Ragin and Becker, 1992). Applying this on the study, the following sections will discuss the institutional context of the use of social media, including Twitter, within which, the U.K. Embassy performed its public diplomacy in Egypt. The context includes the understanding, structures in place, guidance, strategies and delivery tactics (Cull, 2012). The analysis of the context is designed to test the first hypothesis of this thesis, which is that the context within which the U.K. Embassy in Egypt performed its public diplomacy, supported the Ambassador's active approach on Twitter.

#### **4.1.1 Institutional Understanding of Public Diplomacy**

The use of Twitter has become a key requirement for senior diplomats to be able to do their jobs. Most foreign ministries including the FCO encourages diplomats serving overseas to engage online with the local users in host nations ([Twiplomacy, 2018](#)). When asked about the understanding of public diplomacy, the interviewees demonstrated shared understanding of the importance and relevance of public diplomacy but without clear distinction between public diplomacy, new public diplomacy and soft power. The Director of Government Communications at the U.K. Government described public diplomacy as “explaining your (the diplomat's) country's ambition” to connect with “the host country's aspirations” which leads to an “improved mutual understanding”. This definition goes in line with Nye (2008) definition of soft power and touches on the first and second dimensions of Nye's definition of public diplomacy, which are daily communications and strategic communications (Nye, 2008). The Director of Government Communications at the U.K. Government also described public diplomacy is a “force for good” by which the diplomat explains who he/she is and what he/she

is trying to achieve. It is a “direct” form of communication with the public. He also described social media platforms as a “great opportunity” and a “powerful tool” to tell “your, and your and country’s story through words, pictures and videos”. Yet, there was a clear reference to the potential risks of the use of social media platforms, including Twitter, as a public diplomacy tool. It can be used to “sow confusion and misinformation”, he added. However, the general understanding of the role of Twitter as a public diplomacy tool was positive.

The former U.K. Ambassador indicated that public diplomacy is an integral part of modern diplomacy where the diplomat can influence the wider social context within which the process of social change happens and the local political decisions are made. This understanding goes in line with Castells’s definition of public diplomacy as a way “not to convince but to communicate, not to declare but to listen” (Castells, 2008, 91). It also reflects Castells’s definition of new public diplomacy which “aimed at societies, and not just at governments” (Castells, 2001, 160). The former U.K. Ambassador went as far as to say “you (the diplomat) can’t achieve anything important by (just) talking to all government officials only”. This view covers Nye’s third dimension of public diplomacy which is about building lasting relationships beyond the government sector (Nye, 2008). Other interviewees used the word “listening” as a primary goal of public diplomacy which goes in line with Melissen’s description of new public diplomacy as being about listening not just telling (Melissen, 2005).

Endorsing the positive view of public diplomacy and Twitter, the Ambassador compared between Twitter and the traditional press release. He described sending out a press release to a lot of newspapers as a “laborious process” as someone else writes the story on behalf of the Embassy that may or may not reflect what the Embassy or the former Ambassador want to say, and people may or may not read the story. This is a clear demonstration of the impact of modern technology on the modern practices of public diplomacy (Dizard, 2001). Nye (2008) touched also on the role of new technology in boosting soft power where he highlighted

how the invention of radio in the 1920s allowed many governments into the arena of broadcasting in foreign languages. In the 1930s, fascists and communists were in a competition to project “favourable images to foreign publics” and Nazi Germany, utilised foreign-language propaganda films and radio broadcasting (Nye, 2008, 97).

The Embassy’s public diplomacy approach was based on active engagement with Egyptian audience. The former Ambassador indicated that his account was an effective tool to get a “much better feel of the general climate” of opinions in Egypt. The use of Twitter leads, ultimately, to an informed diplomacy, The Director of Government Communications indicated. Stressing on this point, the former Ambassador said that the diplomat does not have to assume because he/she “can see exactly how they (audience) interact with you (him)”.

Reflecting on the positives of Twitter as a public diplomacy tool, one locally-engaged member of the Communications Team highlighted the significance of Twitter during crisis time to reach out to “people in need”. Another significant demonstration of the value of social media for the Embassy was improved daily and strategic communication on the services delivered by the Embassy such as consular services based on the feedback from customers online.

Decentralisation and empowerment emerged as key themes in the interviewees. Locally-engaged staff members stated that they feel empowered to make local judgment as to what to publish, when to publish, how to publish and where to publish. This fits nicely with the central guidance from the FCO which says “we do not expect our staff to all use social media in the same way, but we do expect social media to be a core part of the toolkit of a modern diplomat” ([FCO, 2015,2](#)). It also stated that staff should feel empowered to use social media. A key driver behind such an empowering approach by the ministry in London is “presumed competence”. The former Ambassador said “The Foreign Office (FCO) employ people who you (the FCO) think are good diplomats and then you (the FCO) let them make the judgments”.

The responses received from all the interviewees, including the most senior two, suggest positive sentiment towards the use of social media to boost public diplomacy because it benefits the Embassy in managing its daily and strategic communications in addition to building relations beyond the government sector. The later dimension will receive further analysis under the “advantages” section in the next chapter.

#### **4.1.2 Central Guidance:**

The FCO issued an updated guidance in 2015 for the institutional use of social media. The guidance “encourages all staff to make full use of the opportunities provided by social media to help deliver FCO objectives.” ([FCO, 2020, 1](#)). The four-page document stated that social media “allows diplomats to monitor events, harvest information and identify key influencers, provides real time channels to deliver our (the FCO) messages directly and influence beyond traditional audiences, can assist in the consultation process and the formulation of policy by helping us crowd source ideas, improves the delivery of our services through closer engagement with our customers and allows us to better manage a crisis, and makes us more accountable and transparent through open dialogue” ([FCO, 2015,1](#)).

While the Twitter account of the UK’s Foreign Secretary is less formal and more personal, the FCO’s Twitter account [@ForeignOffice](#) is used fundamentally to cover news and press releases, speeches and statements by the Foreign Secretary and Foreign Office Ministers, photos, retweets of notable announcements by U.K. government departments and organisations, and live event coverage ([FCO, 2020](#)). A locally-engaged staff member indicated that this model is adopted by the institutional Twitter account of the U.K. Embassy in Egypt [@UKinEgypt](#) but with Egyptian-focused and embassy-driven content. Following the U.K.

Foreign Secretary's model, the Ambassador's account is meant to be more personal, flexible, conversational and less formal.

The central FCO guidance offered a framework to inform local judgements on what to post and what not to post online. As highlighted in the below table, the guidance identified three colour codes based on which, a local decision by the Embassy can be made.

- Green Category:

The concerned communicator does not need to seek clearance before posting materials related to established policies and agreed press lines within the area of his/her knowledge and expertise. An example would be a factual Tweet about one of the Embassy's local services.

- Amber Category:

The concerned communicator should seek guidance from the centre in London, namely a Head of Policy Team, Media Office or the Digital Transformation Unit. Examples under this category includes, breaking news of unforeseen events such as terrorist attacks or big political announcements. It also includes the ministerial movements for obvious security reasons especially during overseas visits.

- Red Category:

The concerned communicator must not publish online any classified data or on issues that are not part of his/her knowledge and responsibility. Examples include diplomatic telegrams and major policy documents (FCO, 2015).

Go ahead	Established policy and press lines within your area of expertise.
Seek guidance from head of team and/or Media Office & Digital Transformation Unit.	Breaking news where there is no press line.  The interpretation of a change of policy where the line is being agreed.  Ministerial movements.  Rebuttal.
Don't do it	Subjects not in your area of expertise or direct responsibility.  Any classified data.

Table 1. Framework on when to seek clearance before publishing content on official channels

As far as public diplomacy activities are concerned, the members of the Communications Team indicated that the sweeping majority of the Embassy's Twitter posts fall under the Green Category because they focus on issues that are not "controversial" in nature such as promoting the U.K. excellence in education, business ties, trade deals between Egypt and the U.K., and light topics like football and food.

It can be concluded that the central guidance was in favour of more online activism for the Embassy on social media including Twitter.

#### **4.2 The Structure of the Communications Team at the Embassy**

Understanding the public diplomacy of an actor requires attention to the structures in place to perform it (Cull, 2012). According to the former Deputy British Ambassador, the Communications Team is part of the wider political team. It is headed by a U.K. diplomat, usually a Second Secretary, who is responsible for the bigger picture and acts as a focal point between the Communications Directorate at the FCO in London and the Embassy in Cairo. He/she is also the manager of two locally-appointed communications experts. The two officers



are usually Egyptians. One officer leads on traditional media engagements, such as TV, Press and Radio whereas the other officer leads on digital communications. The two officers' work overlaps due to the inter-dependency between conventional and digital media. The Embassy appoints an intern to assist the digital lead in visual content production (i.e. videos, graphics and online posters).

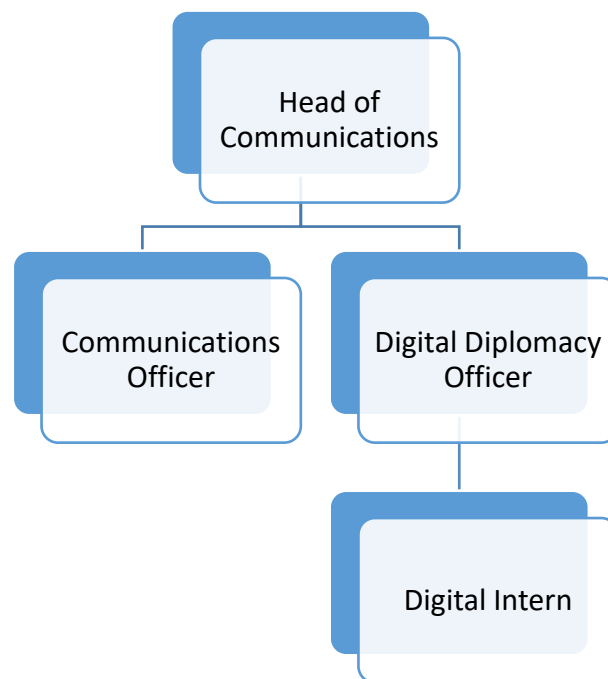


Figure 4. The structure of the Communications Team at the U.K. Embassy in Egypt.

Source: Prepared by the researcher.

The structure of the Communications Team goes in line with the positive understanding of the role of social media in boosting public diplomacy. The former Head of the Communications Team indicated that social media is a key driver for the Embassy's TV and Press work saying "I think a real mark of success is when those messages make it from our social media to conventional media. So, doing a video on gender equality on our Facebook that ends up on breakfast TV (show), or the ambassador tweeting about something and that tweet

getting picked up by conventional news websites, shows that our message is hitting a mark and reaching a wide audience and getting other people to spread our message for us is good”. The appointment of a social media, not a conventional media, intern is a reflection of an understanding of the growing role of social media compared to TV and Press.

It can be concluded that the existing structure within the Embassy is encouraging expansion of the use of social media, including Twitter, to boost the Embassy’s public diplomacy.

#### **4.3 The Embassy’s Communication Model**

Nye (2008) stated that policies which are seen by target audience as “illegitimate” undermine the country’s soft power. He gave the example of the impact of the invasion of Iraq on the U.S. soft power amongst Muslims and Arabs (Nye, 2008). When asked about the objectives and the communications model of the Embassy, the former U.K. Ambassador highlighted that the one of the objectives of the Embassy’s active public diplomacy is to address the “trust deficit” between the U.K. and Egyptians. The Ambassador and his Communications Team members identified three policy issues that caused this deficit in trust.

- The U.K. support to the Muslim Brotherhood:

Against the interest of the Egyptian Government, the U.K. Government announced in 2015 that London would not ban the Muslim Brotherhood ([BBC, 2015](#)) which resulted in a general perception amongst the Egyptian elites and the Egyptian public opinion that the U.K. is a supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood. The perception of the U.K. support to Muslim Brotherhood received academic attention in recent years. Lorenzo (2015) endorsed this view in a study, under GW Program on Extremism, where he argued that the U.K. is a global hub for the Muslim Brotherhood (Lorenzo, 2015). The main categories of Muslim Brotherhood

members are “1)Pure brothers: These are members of various branches of the Muslim Brotherhood throughout the Middle East (Egypt, Iraq, Libya...) who over the last fifty years have established a presence in the UK, 2)Brotherhood affiliates: Those are organisations established by individuals with strong personal ties to the Brotherhood but operate completely independently from any Brotherhood structure, and 3)Organisations Influenced by the Brotherhood” (Lorenzo, 2015, 3:4). Lorenzo (2015) identified three goals for the Muslim Brotherhood in London which are

“1- To spread their religious and political views to British Muslim communities

2- To become official or de facto representatives of British Muslim communities

3- To support domestic and international Islamist causes. The Brothers aim at using their positions of influence to advocate for various Islamist causes both with local Muslim communities and British policy-makers and public.” (Lorenzo, 2015, 15).

- Suspension of flights between the U.K. and Sharm el-Sheikh:

In late October 2015, a Russian passenger plane crashed in Egypt’s Sinai, killing all 224 people on board. Few days later, the U.K. government decided to halt all flights directly between the UK and Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt ([BBC, 2015](#)). This decision had a negative impact on the tourism sector in Egypt which experienced a total loss of 4 billion US dollars in the following two years ([EgyptIndependent, 2017](#)). It is worth noting though that the situation changed in 2019 when the U.K. decided to resume flights to Sharm el-Sheikh (The Independent, 2019). The interviews were conducted before the resumption of flights.

- Visa services:

The data collected from the interviewees suggest that the Embassy’s visa services were unpopular amongst wide range of Egyptians. According to a locally-engaged staff member, the

Ambassador used his Twitter account to collect feedback, communicate improvements in the visa service and address concerns of customers. Yet, the locally-engaged members highlighted that there is little these Tweets can achieve unless the actual visa policy changes.

The above-mentioned policy context offered a strong case for a more active utilisation of public diplomacy on Twitter to build trust with Egyptian audience. In response, The Communications Team members mentioned that the Embassy followed a methodical framework offered by the UK's Government Communication Service (GCS). The model is called OASIS ([Government Communication Service, 2020](#)). 'O' Stands for objective, 'A' is for Audience, 'S' is for Strategy, 'I' is for Implementation, and 'S' is for Scoring. The Embassy uses this strategic framework to perform its Twitter diplomacy. In the below section, we review how the model was applied by the Embassy.



Figure 5. The strategic communication model of the U.K. Government (OASIS)

Source: ([Government Communication Service, 2020](#)).

**Communication objectives:**

The former U.K. Ambassador, identified four goals behind the Embassy's public diplomacy; 1) building trust with Egyptian audience, 2) controlling the message of the Embassy and the branding of the Ambassador, 3) finding and developing partnerships beyond the government sector, and 4) modelling a positive way of interacting with the Egyptian people. These objectives reflect and cover Nye's (2008) identified dimensions of public diplomacy.

The Ambassador stated that he made a conscious decision to use Twitter to control his messages and brand capitalising on disintermediation, or removing the middleman, as a key advantage of Twitter. One locally-engaged team member highlighted that controlling the messages mitigated the risk of misquoting Ambassador and helped in containing the spread of misinformation about U.K. in Egypt by responding quickly to any inaccurate information about the Embassy or the Ambassador.

Direct communication with Egyptians on Twitter enabled the Embassy to achieve its objective to be part of the wider change process in Egypt via spotting and engaging with some unheard voices of positive change makers in Egypt (i.e. Inspire Egypt initiative) which is a reflection of Nye's (2008) third dimension of public diplomacy (i.e. building lasting friendships beyond the government sector).

**Audience:**

When asked about the audience, the interviewees agree that the Ambassador was keen to reach out to as many Egyptians as possible but with special focus on young people and those who are interested in the issues that U.K. care about. Elaborating on this point, The

Ambassador said "... Egyptians are interested in where the country's going, where are the jobs coming from, how do we reinforce positive versions of faith against extremism. All these issues that are our bread and butter. We're focused particularly on pushing a positive

reform agenda in terms of enterprise, equality, and education. Any Egyptian is interested in that, we try and reach them”. This is a clear reflection of the Embassy’s approach to join the online crowd where they are as opposed to the classic approach of sending out messages and expecting the audience to engage. It, also, fits nicely with Nye’s (2008) third dimension of public diplomacy.

The data collected from the interviews suggest the Embassy follows a professional approach to analyse the landscape of online audience. The Embassy’s audience analysis was inspired by well-established practices in the field of project management in categorising stakeholders to determine the best ways to deal with each category. The Embassy tailored the common technique of “the power-interest grid”, which was popularised by Eden and Ackermann (2011) in their book “Making Strategy” (Ackermann & Eden, 2011).

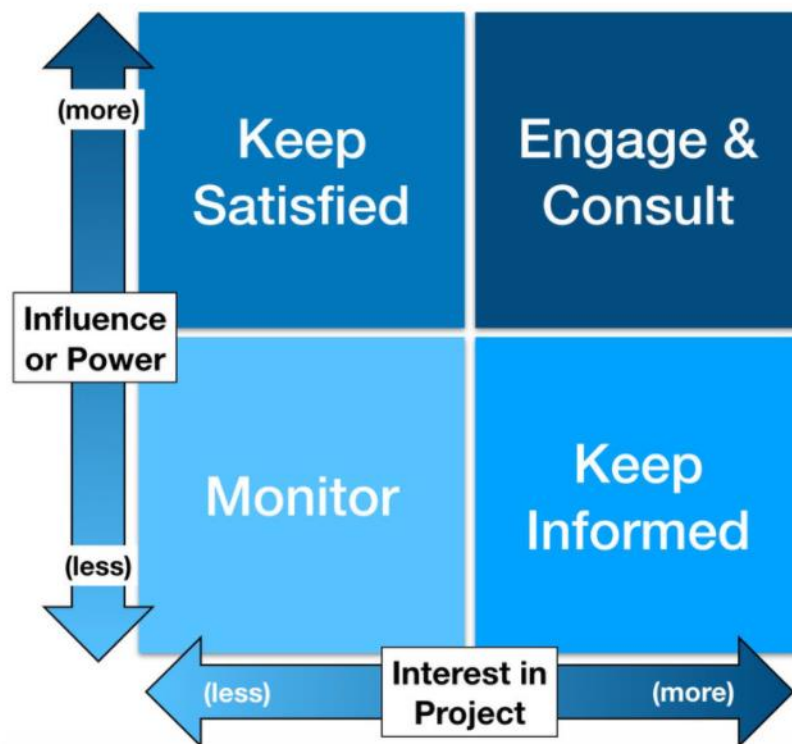


Figure 6. Stakeholders' power and influence grid

Source: [The project management blueprint, 2019](#)

Reflecting on the application of the Stakeholders' Power and Influence Grid, a member in the Communications Team indicated that the Communications Team makes conscious decisions on audience engagement. For example, less influential people who are not massively engaged and use their occasional interactions with the Embassy to attack the U.K. are often monitored but without responses. One locally-engaged member said "if you push out a message and get attacked for something that happened ten years ago, well I can't change the past."

Another member in the Communications Team highlighted the significance of online engagement with influential celebrities who show interest and develop strong connections with the U.K. A notable example is two famous Egyptian footballers, Mohammed Salah and Ramadan Sobhi, who signed in the past for teams in the English Premier League (EPL). The Ambassador was keen to keep the two players engaged by direct responses to their tweets and mentions.



Figure 7. A screenshot of a Twitter thread between the former U.K. Ambassador and the two Egyptian footballers, Ramadan Sobhi and Mohammed Salah.

Former U.K Ambassador handed footballer Ramadan Sobhi his passport with the U.K visa, Ramadan Sobhi and wished him a good luck in the EPL. The Tweet reads “It’s official. Ramadan Sobh in the EPL .. I gave him his passport with the visa. You have your passport and the visa. Go and bring the (EPL) title”. After posting the Tweet, another Egyptian iconic player, Mohammed Salah replied to the Tweet where he expressed his admiration of the Ambassador’s communication style in Arabic via asking “Seriously, is this the real U.K. Ambassador”. The former U.K. Ambassador kept the momentum of the conversation and replied saying “Yes, I



am the ambassador but you are the original (ambassador) Salah” with a poster of the Egyptian football star, Mohammed Salah. The poster featuring the player as a role model for young Egyptians.

Source: (Casson, 2016)

### **Messages:**

In line with the identified objectives, the Ambassador identified four categories of messaging; trust-building messages, explaining the U.K. positions on issues of mutual interest, partnership-building messages, and messages that aim at offering a positive style of diplomatic communications with Egyptians. The members of the Communications Team placed a significant focus on trust-building messages as a prerequisite to succeed in getting other messages through.

The former Ambassador and two members of his Communications Team stated that the Embassy opted for audience-centred messaging rather than message-centred communications. This approach goes in line with Cull’s focus on the importance of the audience as the key driver of effective communication (Cull 2009). It is also a practical manifestation of Cull (2009) observations regarding the new shifts in public diplomacy practices which are copying the corporate world replacing old-fashion language of diplomatic “prestige” and aura (Cull, 2009).

### **Strategy, Implementation, and Data gathering and Analysis (Scoring):**

The UK’s Government Communications Service, defined strategy as the effective use of the insight and research done about the audience to decide on the delivery methods ([Government Communication Service, 2020](#)). The interviews suggest that the Communications Team at the Embassy had a clear idea on how to decide on their Twitter products based on the reactions to previous similar Tweets and based on the demographics of their audience which they learn about via Twitter analytical tools.

Once the delivery tactic is decided upon, the implementation process begins ([Government Communication Service, 2020](#)). In the interviews, the Embassy's Communications Team explained the "Tweeting cycle". The process begins with spotting an opportunity to craft a tweet that will, potentially, serve one of the Embassy's identified objectives. Then, the Communications Team suggest a draft to the relevant policy expert on the issue in the Embassy to get facts right. After that, a draft goes to the Ambassador who asks some questions to better understand the situation and add his input to make it more personal and authentic. The team would agree the visual product that will work well with the tweet. Once the tweet is out, the team begins the monitoring process making sure the Ambassador is aware of how people are reacting. The Embassy would then utilise the stakeholders' power and influence grid to decide on its engagement tactics and formulate responses to some of the comments made by the audience. This reflects a methodical approach to audience management.

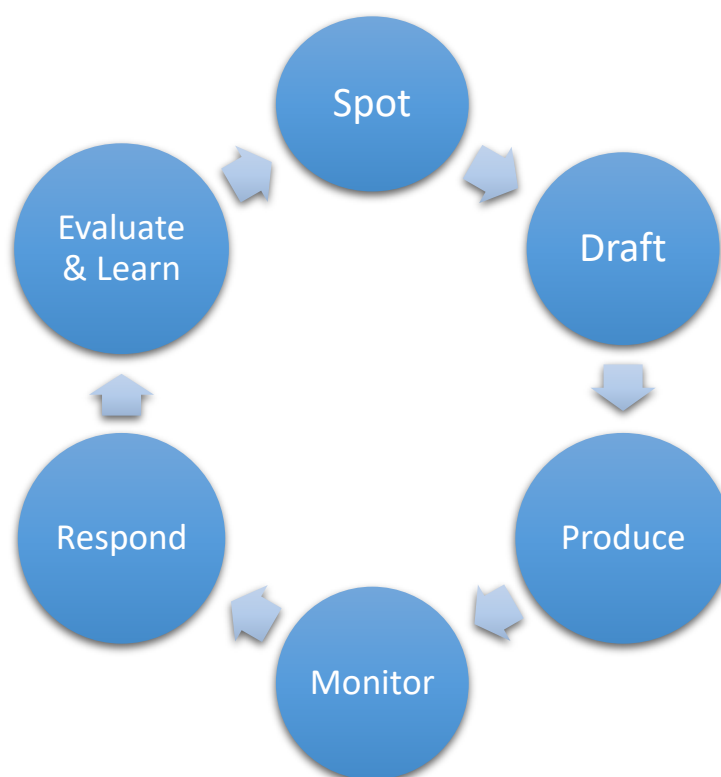


Figure 8. The standard journey of a Tweet by the former U.K. Ambassador

Source: Prepared by the researcher

A member in the Communications team highlighted that they collect data to evaluate how the tweets landed with the audience via close monitoring of reactions to respond according to the framework of the power-influence grid. The Team will then discuss the lessons learned to improve the quality of the coming tweets.

We can draw two main conclusions from the discussion in this chapter:

- 1) The context within which the Embassy performed its public diplomacy, using Twitter, was supportive of such an active approach. The institutional understanding, empowerment and flexibility, clear guidance and the existing structures have positively influenced the Embassy's use of Twitter as an effective public diplomacy tool which confirms the study's first hypothesis.
- 2) While performing its public diplomacy utilising Twitter, the U.K. Embassy adopted, in practice, Nye's (2008) three dimensions of public diplomacy.

## **Chapter 5: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES**

In the below part of the discussion, we will explain the interviewees' understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of the use of Twitter to boost the Embassy's public diplomacy in Egypt to test hypothesis two in the research journey to answer to the research question. The hypothesis is that the impact of the Embassy's active Twitter use boosted the UK's public diplomacy in Egypt.

### **5.1 Advantages:**

The former U.K. Ambassador and his Communications Team developed a clear and shared vision behind the use of Twitter as an effective public diplomacy tool. The interviewees made a strong case for the use of Twitter as the prime platform for Ambassador's public communications as opposed to Facebook, Instagram and the Embassy's website. The former U.K. Ambassador identified five key benefits of Twitter as a public diplomacy tool and his Communications Team endorsed this understanding. Those advantages are 1) disintermediation or removing the middleman, 2) immediacy, 3) multiplying effect, 4) trust-building, and 5) building new partnerships.

#### **Removing the Middleman:**

The Ambassador identified disintermediation, or removing the middleman, and owning the message as a key benefit of using Twitter to boost the Embassy's daily and strategic communications with its audience. He made reference to Trump's Twitter approach linking disintermediation to building trust. "There's an intermediary, which is what Trump calls the mainstream media [MSM] or the fake news media [FNM] or the failing media, and he's disintermediating— jumping over it by talking to the people he wants to influence and to convince them not to listen to these guys. And we're doing something similar. And it's powerful for trust building because people have immediate access to me that they wouldn't get

if they were just seeing me reported on the newspapers in the old way”, the Ambassador explained. This utilisation of Twitter goes in-line with the two strategies used by Trump to defeat conventional media, a.k.a. TV and Press, which have been identified by Farias (2020) as “establishing a highly personal, face-to-face visibility in all his activities as president. Trump routinely appears on talk shows, gives live interviews and attends rallies across the country, portraying himself as the best, most popular president in US history and highly active, virtual presence on social media where Trump continuously reinforces the messages that he delivers in live events and sets the agenda for new topics of discussion” (Farias, 2020, 1). The former U.K. Ambassador used similar approaches to establish his brand as a “celebrity diplomat” on Twitter. This confirms that social media platforms, including Twitter, enabled citizens to go around the establishment via gathering around prominent individuals who became ‘the champions of the people’ ([Stanzel, 2018](#)).

However, this understanding clearly underestimates the danger that removing the middleman and that the excessive use of Twitter can quickly make the Ambassador unpopular. One may argue that this is perhaps the case for President Trump. Some online articles suggested that Twitter will make Trump a one-term president ([The Hill, 2020](#)). More analysis to this specific point will follow under the “disadvantages” section.

### **Immediacy:**

All of the interviewees agree that Twitter offers “immediate accesses” to public debates, so diplomats can better understand the topics of interest for the public and participate where possible. Twitter is a two-way flow of information, so diplomats get immediate feedback which allows to “calibrate and improve your diplomacy”. To highlight the importance of immediacy as a key advantage of Twitter, The Director of Government Communications at the U.K. Government said “one of the wonders of Twitter and other social media (platforms) is that I can tell you immediately about which tweets got which levels of engagement and interest, and

which just bombed. So that's important. And then you could scale-up as desired, and you can obviously run live videos and all sorts of tools on it". The former U.K Ambassador argued that Twitter created an independent voice for the U.K. in Egypt where the Embassy can engage quickly with the topic or the topics of the day in Egypt. He concluded that, social media keeps us relevant to Egypt's public debates.

The U.K. Ambassador drew links between immediacy and accountability saying "it (Twitter) makes me want to make sure that before saying that my visa service is good or I'm doing everything I can on tourism, I have to make sure I know its's true". However, the argument that Twitter promotes accountability seems weak as the Ambassador is, ultimately, accountable to his bosses back in London not his Twitter audience in Egypt. It would have been a stronger argument had he linked immediacy to accuracy. This particular link between immediacy and accuracy was identified as a key requirement for dealing with Twitter by one member of the Communications Team where she said "Twitter can be a good source for information if you need it fast. But you have to later make sure that this information is correct. So basically, you can't use this information directly. And this is one of the disadvantages. That it can be a source of information but you have to make sure that they are correct. So here you have to make more effort to verify the information".

### **Multiplying Effect:**

As of early 2020, Twitter population in Egypt was 3.63 million users (DataReportal, 2020). Twitter demographics in Egypt suggest that 33.5% are reportedly females and 66.5% are reportedly males ([Statista, 2020](#)).

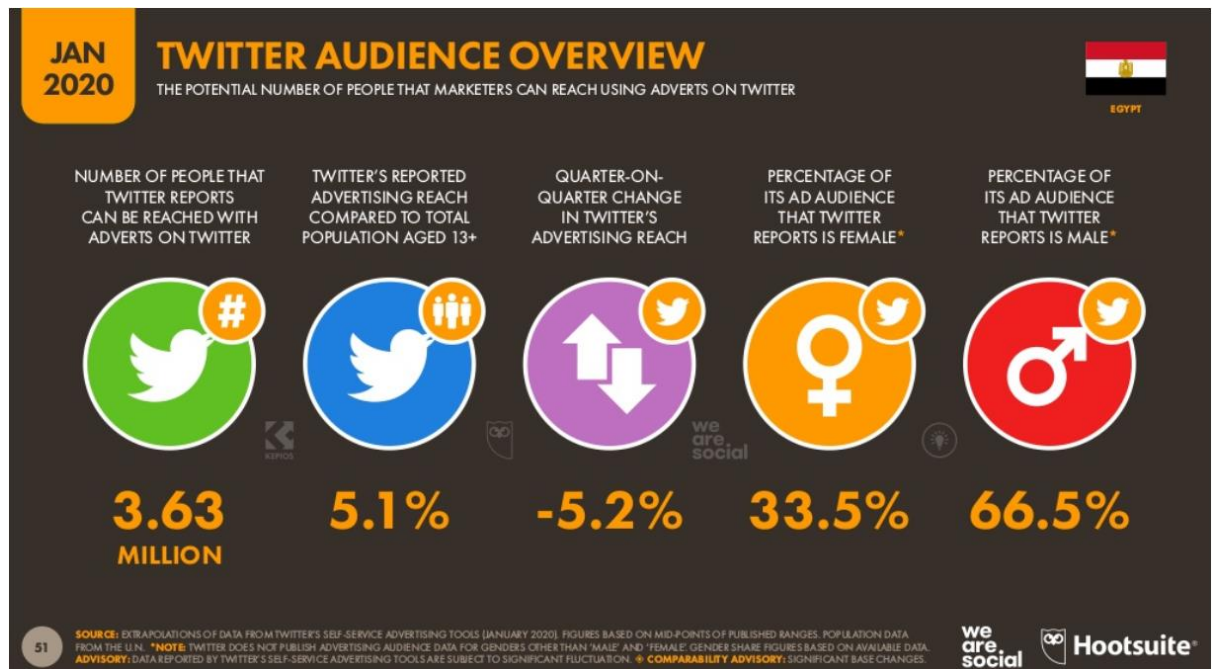


Figure 9. Twitter audience overview in Egypt

Source: [DataReportal](https://datareportal.com/), 2020

While Twitter is a “minority” platform in Egypt compared to Facebook which has 42 million Egyptian accounts ([Statista](https://www.statista.com/), 2020), Tweets of prominent individuals gets multiplied on other social and conventional media channels. Highlighting this advantage of Twitter, the U.K. Ambassador said, “If you do a good tweet, you will be picked up on Facebook, you will be picked up on TV, so it is literally million times more times more powerful than sending a press release”. Recent research studies endorses this smart approach. Egyptians spend more time online increasingly. The average time spent online weekly in Egypt went up from 18 hours in 2013, and 23 hours in 2015, to 26 hours in 2017 (Allam, 2018). This reflects the Embassy’s effective response and quick adaptation with the changing shifts in media consumption habits in Egypt.

### Trust-Building:

Building trust emerged as a dominant theme throughout the interviews. Interviewees terminologies like “trust-building material” and “trust-building messaging” which reflects the

centrality of “trust-building” in the Embassy’s Twitter work. Six of the seven interviewees referred to deficit in trust because of the three policy disagreements identified in the previous chapter; banning flights to Sharm el-Sheikh, U.K. support to Muslim Brotherhood and the dissatisfactory Visa Services. In response, the Embassy used Twitter to boost its public diplomacy and to explain the U.K. position on the noted issues. According to Nye (2008), what the audience perceive as illegitimate policies undermines the country’s soft power (Nye, 2008). This was exactly the case for the U.K. Embassy in Egypt particularly on the Muslim Brotherhood policy. The former U.K. Ambassador explained that it was “convenient” for some media outlets to paint U.K. as the ‘bad guy’ and to blame us (the U.K.) on things that go wrong” because of these policy disagreements. He argued that one of the key advantages of Twitter activism was to make it difficult for those media outlets to do that by building trust directly with Egyptian audience.

The Ambassador also indicated that he used his active public diplomacy to introduce himself to his online audience and the influential segments of the Egyptian elite as part of the “solution” not the “problem”. The members of the Communications Team indicated that the Ambassador’s vision was to build trust with Egyptians. To elaborate on his approach, the Ambassador said “I’m listening to Egyptians, I like Egyptians, I want Egyptians to succeed, I’m participating in the things they care about, and I’m celebrating Egyptian success. And by being authentic, I hope that builds trust. So that when something bad happens they say well we know the U.K. Ambassador, you know I have had very senior people at the top of the Ministry of Defence say to me you know we wish that U.K. policy was at some other place on some issues but we know you are very actively trying to help us and so it helps inoculate me as ambassador for complaints about wider U.K. policy, so it builds trust in me as an individual, it allows me to do my job, keeps people talking to me and seeing me as the solution, coming to me as the solution not as the problem.”. The Embassy tried to get its audience to pay more



attention to the issues of mutual interest between Egypt and the U.K, such as trade, education, and cultural ties, than to focus on the three areas of policy disagreements.

### **Building New Partnerships**

Applying Nye's third dimension of public diplomacy, the Ambassador used Twitter to enable the Embassy to build "new partnerships" beyond the government agencies. The Ambassador highlighted that Twitter gave the Embassy access to new partnerships which the Embassy "wouldn't otherwise have had" because it enabled the Embassy to spot "positive change makers" online especially outside the major cities. A significant example is "Inspire Egypt" which is an initiative launched by the U.K. Embassy in Egypt in 2016 to spot, reach out to, work with, and celebrate "positive change makers" from all walks of Egyptian life, bringing them together to invest in their enthusiasm to make a difference in Egypt. ([FCO, 2016](#)). The "Inspire Egypt" initiative seems to be inspired by "A Thousand Points of Light" which is a phrase used by the former U.S. President George H.W. Bush in his 1989 inaugural address ([Points of Light, 2020](#)). Few years later, the phrase developed to an initiative to support the culture of volunteerism and positive change. Now it is one of the largest foundation in the world dedicated to volunteer service (Points of Light, 2020).

### **5.2 Disadvantages:**

The data collected from interviewees suggest the active use of Twitter as to boost the Embassy's public diplomacy involved some risks and comes with some limitations. Three main disadvantages were identified; 1) online vulnerability in the form of strong criticism and inappropriate language against the Ambassador, 2) insufficient resources, and 3) misinformation.

## Online Vulnerability

Five interviewees stated that the Ambassador had the appetite to take risks and post controversial stuff sometimes. The former Ambassador himself said: “It (activism on twitter) will mean being controversial if you want to be relevant”. This goes in-line with Trump’s Twitter approach to set the news agenda for public debates as Farias (2020) stated “Trump has also used Twitter for setting the agenda. Numerous times, Trump was able to change the main topics of the national debate and drive focus either towards or away from himself simply by writing a short, but controversial, tweet” (Farias, 2020, 2).

The use Twitter as a public diplomacy tool invited, on occasions, some aggressive and inappropriate comments. In an extreme scenario, it might also lead diplomatic escalation. The interviewees made reference to some incidents where Ambassador received strong online criticism. The prime example was in May 2015 when he posted a Tweet that was described by local audience and Egyptian authorities as “unacceptable” and “interference” in Egypt’s internal affairs ([AhramOnline, 2015](#)). The Ambassador retweeted a job vacancy at the Embassy welcoming the “son of the garbage collector” reacting indirectly to a classist comment made by Egypt’s former Minister of Justice who said “A judge should come from a social class suited to the job, with all due respect to garbage collectors,” ([AhramOnline, 2015](#)).



Figure 10. A screenshot of a tweet in Arabic posted by the former U.K. Ambassador in May 2015. It reads “Do you want to work for the U.K. Embassy? We welcome all including the son of garbage collector”.

Source: AhramOnline, 2015

The Tweet has led to a strong wave of online criticism and an Arabic hashtag was created calling upon authorities to “expel him (the Ambassador)” from Cairo ([BBC, 2015](#)). While the Tweet reflected a lack of cultural sensitivity and poor judgement, the U.K. Ambassador received support from London when the FCO Spokesperson told BBC "the specific comment was a show of support for the idea that an individual's family background should not prevent them from applying for any job. We have a very talented group of local staff in Cairo and we hope this generates even more interest amongst local communities to join us in building strong ties between the UK and Egypt" ([BBC, 2015](#)). This incident is a clear demonstration that Twitter is a double-edged weapon. It can quickly make a “celebrity diplomat” unpopular.

### **Insufficient Resources:**

The four members of the Communications Team identified insufficient resources as a major limitation especially after the audience of the Embassy grew in numbers. The former Head of the Communications Team described the staffing as “thin” with only one digital expert

and an intern leading on content generation visual production. Other members of the Communications Team think that time, lack of professional equipment, and the low budget are not enabling them to be fully responsive to their audience. A member in the Team said “once you’ve got 1.5 million followers across social media, it needs quite a big team to keep up with that. So, the danger is we’re beginning to look more like an old-fashioned one-way broadcasting type of communication”. This suggests that the Embassy can be the victim of its own success.

### **Misinformation:**

There are growing concerns that social media platforms offer an environment where misinformation can spread and damage democracies and societies (Flynn et al., 2017). The data collected from the interviewees suggest a level of understanding of the danger of misinformation. The Director of Government Communications at the U.K. Government flagged the importance of mitigating the risk of the use of Twitter as a tool to promote misinformation and fake news. Twitter in particular became the battleground for competing narratives rather than telling the truth (USC Centre on Public Diplomacy, 2017).

The U.K. Embassy in Egypt made a conscious choice to engage on Twitter. The Ambassador indicated that there will be reasons for some Egyptians to attack the Embassy and the U.K. policy on Muslim Brotherhood, Sharm el-Sheikh, or Visas, so it is in the Embassy’s interest not leave a vacuum where these attacks go “unanswered”. The Ambassador thinks that the Embassy has been able to contain such attacks and to challenge misinformation via engagement rather than it would have done if the decision was just to leave it spread. He also stated that decision-makers or normal citizens of Egypt would be more reluctant to engage with the Embassy if all what they hear about U.K is negative news and fake news. This strategic

approach to public diplomacy and mindfulness of the risks of misinformation reflects Nye's second dimension of public diplomacy which is using strategic communications to boost the country's soft power particularly when some of its policies are seen by the audience as illegitimate.

In this chapter we explained the advantages, and disadvantages of the use of Twitter to boost public diplomacy. We can draw some conclusions:

- 1- The Embassy utilised the advantages of Twitter while performing the three dimensions of public diplomacy, in five ways; 1) removing the middleman in its communications with Egyptian audience, 2) getting immediate access to audience and public debates, 3) multiplying the effect of its messages, 4) building trust with Egyptian audience, and 5) building new partnerships beyond the Government sector. The Embassy was also mindful of the disadvantages of Twitter activism including online vulnerability, insufficient resources to cope with the growth in Twitter demand, and the threat of misinformation.
- 2- The Ambassador's Twitter approach was largely inspired by Trump's Twitter strategies to set the agenda and to brand himself as a celebrity diplomat via maintaining an active, and sometimes controversial, presence on Twitter to achieve his objectives.
- 3- Public diplomacy can certainly boost the soft power of a country amongst foreign audience. Yet, if the policies of this country are perceived as illegitimate, the use of public diplomacy, including Twitter, won't be enough unless a real change in the policy happens.
- 4- On the balance, the active use of Twitter boosted the Embassy's public diplomacy in Egypt which confirms the second hypothesis of this study.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion:**

As highlighted in the Literature Review, there are three main groups of studies in the field of public diplomacy; 1) foundation studies, 2) region or country-specific experiences, and 3) the public diplomacy of political figures such as Trump. While the research was based on Nye's foundation study in 2008, the study itself is a mix between the second and the third types as it aims at exploring the use of Twitter to boost the public diplomacy of the U.K. Embassy in Egypt (2014-2018). The study attempted to answer the below research question:

How did the U.K. Ambassador's use of Twitter influenced the U.K's public diplomacy in Egypt? What were the advantages and disadvantages of the Ambassador's Twitter diplomacy approach?

To answer the research question, the study developed two hypotheses suggesting that the 1) context within which the U.K. Embassy in Egypt performed its public diplomacy, supported the Ambassador's active approach on Twitter and 2) that the Embassy's active use of Twitter boosted the U.K.'s public diplomacy in Egypt. The research confirmed the two hypotheses by discussing the data generated by seven individuals involved directly in the process of the designing, implementing and evaluating the Embassy's public diplomacy.

The key conclusions of the study are as follows:

The context within which the Embassy performed its public diplomacy, using Twitter, was supportive of such an active approach. The institutional understanding, empowerment and flexibility, clear guidance and the existing structures have positively influenced the Embassy's use of Twitter as an effective public diplomacy tool.

The Embassy utilised the advantages of Twitter while performing the three dimensions of public diplomacy, in five ways; 1) removing the middleman in its communications with Egyptian audience, 2) getting immediate access to audience and public debates, 3) multiplying the effect of its messages, 4) building trust with Egyptian audience, and 5) building new partnerships beyond the Government sector. Yet, the Embassy also experienced the disadvantages of Twitter such as online vulnerability and misinformation. It also struggled with the insufficient resources to maintain the growth in Twitter demand, and the threat of misinformation.

The general influence of Twitter on boosting the Embassy's public diplomacy was, on the balance, positive. However, a country's soft power can be undermined by what is seen by the target audience as illegitimate policies. Public diplomacy can help repair some of the damage and create celebrity diplomats but sustainable trust-building with the audience requires fundamental changes in these illegitimate policies.

Like many previous studies, this research concluded that the definition of diplomacy has expanded to cover social media, including Twitter, as an increasingly important tool to perform modern diplomacy. Social media platforms increased the depth, width and intensity of embassies' communication with foreign audience at the host country. Twitter, in particular, has become the main public-facing platform for U.K. in Egypt.

Twitter diplomacy thrives when the institutional culture, and institutional structures at foreign ministries encourage diplomats to engage, and to empower them based on the notion of presumed competence. Active diplomats on Twitter may need support, and sometimes cover, from their foreign ministries back home when they come under pressure from host nation because of what can be seen as unacceptable interference or culturally insensitive messaging.

While the U.K. Embassy's Twitter approach offers a rich model for academics and practitioners in the field of diplomatic communications, the whole experience is a context- and person-specific game. The study reveals that diplomats can build reach when they are creative, authentic, and locally attuned online.

The study also shows that Twitter diplomacy is integral to the ecosystem of influence within the Egyptian context. Using social media to boost public diplomacy must be done methodically. It has to be done regularly, personally, with high production quality, interaction with the audience, deep understanding of each rapidly-evolving channel. Using local dialect has proven essential for diplomats to communicate effectively with the public opinion and the digital community of the host nation.

Passion, cultural curiosity, authenticity, and genuine interest in the affairs of the host nation and its population are fundamental requirements for diplomats to get online engagement and to generate positive sentiment towards the mother nation of the diplomat.

The study also shows that diplomats need a mind-set shift from a message-centred approach to audience-centred communication styles. A shift from crafting the perfect diplomatic lines while sitting on desks, to engaging with human beings where they are.

To conclude, this study's main contribution was to offer an analysis to primary data generated by the performers of the Embassy's public diplomacy including the former U.K. Ambassador himself and his Communications Team. It also filled an academic gap on the public diplomacy of the U.K. Embassy in Egypt as majority of previous studies, related to public diplomacy in Egypt, focused on the U.S. Embassy.



Future researchers are encouraged to examine the direction of the new U.K. Ambassador to Egypt to offer answers to the following questions: is the new U.K. Ambassador following the same approach? Why?

In the near future, interested scholars are also encouraged to examine other examples of Twitter diplomacy in Egypt. A comparative study between the U.K. diplomatic missions in the region will be of significant value and interest. Another suggestion would be a comparison between the approach of the public diplomacy of the U.K. Embassy in Egypt and the public diplomacy of the Egyptian Embassy in the U.K. since the two embassies are operating under the umbrella of Egyptian-U.K. relations.

Local experts in foreign embassies and diplomats are encouraged to take the initiative and write academic papers on diplomatic issues to spread the knowledge. Yet, they need to commit to the do-no-harm rule as a fundamental principle for the members of the academic community.

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#### Appendix A: List of Questions for the In-depth Interviews:

1. How do you define public diplomacy?
2. How do you see social media in general and Twitter in particular within the context of public diplomacy?
3. What are the guidelines from London regarding the use of Twitter as a public diplomacy tool?
4. What are the structures in place at the embassy to use twitter as a tool in public diplomacy?
5. What are the available resources to generate content on Twitter?
6. What are the key objectives of the embassy's twitter engagement?
7. What are the main targeted groups?
8. What are the key pillars and messages of the embassy's Twiplomacy?
9. Based on your role and experience at the embassy, what are the advantages and disadvantages of using twitter as a tool in public diplomacy?
10. What are your recommendation to improve the embassy's Twiplomacy? What should continue? What should be done differently?
11. How do you evaluate the twitter activities of the U.K. ambassador in Cairo?





To: Alamir Othman  
Cc: Mennattallah Abdel Hamid  
From: Atta Gebril, Chair of the IRB  
Date: April 21, 2018  
Re: Approval of study

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This is to inform you that I reviewed your revised research proposal entitled "The Use of Twitter as a Tool for Public Diplomacy: A Study on the British Embassy in Egypt (July 2014 to March 2018)" and determined that it required consultation with the IRB under the "expedited" category. As you are aware, the members of the IRB suggested certain revisions to the original proposal, but your new version addresses these concerns successfully. The revised proposal used appropriate procedures to minimize risks to human subjects and that adequate provision was made for confidentiality and data anonymity of participants in any published record. I believe you will also make adequate provision for obtaining informed consent of the participants.

This approval letter was issued under the assumption that you have not started data collection for your research project. Any data collected before receiving this letter could not be used since this is a violation of the IRB policy.

Please note that IRB approval does not automatically ensure approval by CAPMAS, an Egyptian government agency responsible for approving some types of off-campus research. CAPMAS issues are handled at AUC by the office of the University Counsellor, Dr. Ashraf Hatem. The IRB is not in a position to offer any opinion on CAPMAS issues, and takes no responsibility for obtaining CAPMAS approval.

This approval is valid for only one year. In case you have not finished data collection within a year, you need to apply for an extension.

Thank you and good luck.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Atta Gebril'.

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