Public Diplomacy and Social Media Listening: Examining the practices of Australia and Italy

Luigi Di Martino
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STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICATION

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

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Abstract

Public diplomacy is understood as the public and interactive dimension of diplomacy. Listening has long been considered a core public diplomacy activity; however, the introduction of social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook have challenged and altered this activity.

This thesis investigates how public diplomacy actors are (re)articulating their practices with the introduction of social media. It further considers how social media can be used more effectively to advance listening and engagement (with both foreign and domestic publics) in public diplomacy. To develop the theoretical foundations for this study, I connect public diplomacy scholarship with a new wave of literature that has argued that listening is a critical and previously neglected component of dialogic engagement.

In the theoretical part of the thesis I develop the idea of a 'spectrum of listening', conceptualising listening as a set of diverse communicative choices and practices that are available to public diplomacy actors. Using this spectrum, this thesis endorses active listening and the embedded concept of dialogic engagement as a concrete yardstick by which to assess successful public diplomacy listening on social media.

To explore ways in which social media can extend and enrich listening practices in public diplomacy, I focus my empirical research on Twitter. I argue that quantitative Twitter analytics represent an opportunity to conduct large-scale listening to foreign and domestic publics. However, I argue that such analytics, while useful, do not provide comprehensive insights about the quality of listening and engagement. In order to address this, I propose an innovative mixed method approach that combines 'thick' (focused and contextualised) and 'thin' (large-scale) analysis.

To develop and test this methodological approach, the study investigates two international events as exploratory case studies: the 2014 G20 summit in Australia and Expo 2015 in Italy. These cases exemplify the involvement of domestic and foreign publics in discussing and debating important global issues on social media, and the ways in which public diplomacy actors do and do not listen.

In summary, I consider listening to be a representational force: a public and active response to publics who are increasingly demanding not only to participate, but also to be listened to. The findings demonstrate that thick and thin listening and, in particular, being seen to listen, are the condition sine qua non for conducting successful digitally mediated public diplomacy.

Introduction

Mobile and social media technology use has altered and complicated conceptual boundaries that once defined diplomacy. At the same time, the rise of public diplomacy in the last two decades has reinvigorated academic debate about the role of diplomats, while introducing new definitions and frameworks that make claims about the essential dimensions and features of diplomacy.

The status of public diplomacy as academic field in its own right is still contested. Ten years ago, Gregory (2008) recognised the "sunrise of an academic field" in public diplomacy. Similar remarks were made by Gilboa (2008). While the current academic interest in public diplomacy is demonstrated by the growing volume of research conducted in this area, discussions about its boundaries (Gregory 2015) and appropriate theoretical and methodological approaches are still unfolding. This is a reflection of the often patchy theoretical underpinnings of public diplomacy in the context of a practice that moves rapidly with rapidly changing technology. Some recognition has been granted to this emerging field in the last few years, an example of which is the acceptance of public diplomacy as an interest group by the International Communication Association. However, a theory or even a theoretical framework for public diplomacy that would bring under one roof most of the relevant disciplines, approaches, methodologies, models, and findings is yet to come.

Even the definition of public diplomacy is still contested. In this regard, Fitzpatrick (2010, 89) notes that there are more than 150 definitions of public diplomacy. Each of them encompasses and emphasises different perspectives and approaches. While these debates have been fruitful, there is now a lack of conceptual consensus about what constitutes public diplomacy.

In line with the centrality of dialogue and interactions in this recent academic literature, in this thesis I use the definition provided by the Center on Public Diplomacy at the University of Southern California, which refers to public diplomacy as:

> the public, interactive dimension of diplomacy which is not only global in nature, but also involves a multitude of actors and networks. It is a key mechanism through which nations foster mutual trust and productive relationships and has become crucial to building a secure global environment (n.d., para. 1).

I have chosen this definition because it highlights the digital significance of public diplomacy practice today, and also stresses my focus on social media and the emergence and involvement of new actors in international relations. At the same time, this definition also emphasises that public diplomacy is part of diplomatic practice and recognises the centrality of communication by creating "productive relationships".

The introduction of social media in public diplomacy has, indeed, fuelled a focus on the interactive dimension of communications, especially in academia. The early literature that addressed the introduction of social media in public diplomacy emphasised how these emerging technologies and practices empowered international publics. Indeed, publics can now directly interact with each other and with governments across borders. These discourses both in academia and in governmental policy have been labelled by Rolfe (2014) as a "rhetoric of renewal". Such rhetoric, according to Rolfe, has been shaped by the necessity to reaffirm the relevance of diplomacy as governmental practice within the emerging international non-governmental sphere, as well as within a perceived diminishing role played by national states in the current networked society (Castells 2008). In response to these kinds of critiques, my germinal research proposal, written four years ago, aimed to address such hype and move the debate away from the focus on the newness of digital communication in diplomacy and toward addressing the question: what can public diplomacy achieve on social media? However, while I was conducting this research, the academic debate itself had begun to critically assess the use of social media in public diplomacy, now considered as integral component of a set of tools available to diplomats (Hocking and Melissen 2015, Byrne and Johnston 2015, Sotiriu 2015, Riordan 2016, Tam and Kim 2017). This literature has provided an important turning point in the evolution of the study of digitally mediated public diplomacy.

While analysing my research data and conducting the literature review for this study, it became clear to me that much of the still unexamined potential of social media in public diplomacy relied on an activity that the academic literature and many diplomatic practitioners already considered crucial to public diplomacy communication activities: listening. As will be explored in the first chapter of this thesis, traditional diplomacy's information-gathering activities became significantly redundant with the advent of the 24-news cycle and the internet. At the same time, the literature on public diplomacy, especially after the Bush Administration's War on Terror, agreed on the necessity to conduct dialog-based public diplomacy, whereby listening to foreign publics, as opposed to mere advocacy, emerged as the defining characteristic (see Melissen 2005). Although the literature on public diplomacy now largely agrees on the central role of listening, a clear definition of this activity and clear parameters defining how listening should be conducted and evaluated has largely been missing.

Comor and Bean (2012) notice that "how people think about and process their interactions […] can be modified, not just by what is communicated but also *through the communication process itself*" (208, emphasis in original). Being seen to listen or showing signs of "paying attention" on social media are thus defining elements of the "interactive dimension of diplomacy" – as per definition provided above. My focus on listening is thus justified by the need to provide "complex understandings of listening and speaking, and of their interconnections", as suggested by O'Donnell, Lloyd, and Dreher (2009, 436). This is due to the interactive nature of public diplomacy, a feature that will be discussed in more detail in the first chapter. This research agenda does not neglect the importance of public diplomacy's advocacy activities on social media, but rather aims to incorporate both listening and 'speaking' in the analysis of public diplomacy on social media.

At the same time, social media analytics and big data analysis are becoming key methods for monitoring social media conversations and some public diplomacy branches have started to use these methods as part of their listening activities (e.g. U.S. Department of State 2014, Linzell 2015). The use of analytics has the potential to enhance social media monitoring and evaluation. Nonetheless, the quantitative analysis of users' reaction to public diplomacy content – by counting followers, likes, retweets and comments – risks constraining diplomats' understanding of social media engagement merely to issues of reach and gaining reactions to content, rather than the long-term and two-way communication aspects highlighted by earlier public diplomacy academic literature.

While this thesis finds that social media analytics has much to offer public diplomacy, a number of limitations emerged when I applied this research method to the analysis of two public diplomacy case studies. It is my hope that my own experience of acknowledging and addressing such limitations can contribute to the development of practical approaches for conducting digital listening in public diplomacy. To address these limitations, I recalibrated my enquiry accordingly and focused on how social media can represent an opportunity for diplomats to reclaim traditional diplomacy's information-gathering activities – now reinterpreted and reframed by the concept of listening in public diplomacy.

These considerations inspired the following research questions that have driven my study:

1. How are public diplomacy actors (re)articulating their strategies with the introduction of social media? How do public diplomacy actors listen to publics on social media?
2. What methods are most effective for analysing digitally mediated public diplomacy?
3. How can public diplomacy actors advance engagement practices (with their publics) via social media?

Relevance of the study

Much research has been done in the field of public diplomacy, though scholars have largely focused on the United States' and the Anglophone countries' experience. This focus is at least in part a consequence of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, when the debate was characterised by a strong emphasis on the relationships between governments and citizens in the West and in the Islamic countries (Melissen 2005). More recently, however, scholars have geographically extended their research, looking also at Asia (Melissen and Lee 2011, Melissen and Sohn 2016, d'Hooghe 2015, Wang 2013a, Melissen 2011, Hayden 2012, Hall 2012, Hall and Smith 2013, Lee 2012, Edney 2014), Europe (2013, Pamment 2016, Adler-Nissen 2013, Rodin and Topić 2012), and Latin America (Bustamante and Sweig 2008, Hayden 2012).

Social media, in particular, have introduced new possibilities for governments to engage and communicate with domestic and international audiences. Some scholars have highlighted the importance of new communication technologies in public diplomacy and considered how traditional international actors, for example foreign offices, are adapting their communication strategies to address and make use of these new technologies (Archetti 2012, Bjola and Holmes 2015, Manor 2016a, Hocking and Melissen 2015).

The lack of preparation in coping with this new international mass self-communication environment has been particularly emphasised after the so-called Arab Spring (Seib 2012). Scholars have also highlighted the role of new international actors, ranging from NGOs to terrorists, in using new technologies (Castells 2008). Heads of state, foreign offices, ministers and ambassadors have increased their use of social media in the last few years (Twiplomacy 2018). Yet, very little attention has been given to the analysis of how public diplomacy actors use social media within the context of the large array of non-governmental actors and citizens now participating in international and highly visible debates. As Zaharna (2015, para. 22, 40) puts it,

> the challenge for diplomacy is that digital media remained a medium, and policy itself remained the message [...]. [The] digital media is shattering the assumption of one-way influence, assumption in public diplomacy, that governments can seek to influence publics without being influenced as well [sic.]. In an interconnected sphere, one cannot influence the other without being influenced in return.

According to the academic literature in the field, public diplomacy listening is of primary importance for strategy implementation (Gregory 2011, Cull 2008, Yepsen 2012). However, the role of listening remains understudied in public diplomacy and much related scholarship that investigates public communication practices in organisational, governmental and political settings (Macnamara 2016, 2018).

In this thesis I argue that the "interconnected sphere" created by public internet communication requires both scholars and practitioners to move beyond questions of message, strategy and information gathering, and to also rethink the act of listening in a fundamental way. Listening is also a representational force, a public response to those non-governmental actors and citizens who are now increasingly requesting not only to participate, but also to be listened to. With changes to listening brought about by social media capacities and practices – since social media likes, follows, retweets and replies are all forms and indicators of listening – being seen to listen is now itself an act of public engagement (Comor and Bean 2012).

Moreover, in the "interconnected sphere" emerging from the current social media landscape, public diplomacy actors and their narratives are increasingly mediated by a large array of non-governmental actors and citizens. These emerging actors can act to legitimise or weaken foreign policy and are able to foster or destroy public diplomacy actors' credibility and authority. In this context, digital engagement in public diplomacy needs to be rethought as a dialogical process, with listening a factor of equal importance to the more conspicuous act of speaking.

Drawing on other academic fields that have investigated listening in public communication, in this thesis I unpack the concept of listening further. Building on theoretical and practitioner discussions I propose a method for digital listening that will be employed in the two case studies presented which will also be proposed as a feasible method that can be adopted by public diplomacy practitioners in foreign offices.

To conduct my analysis, I have chosen to focus on diplomatic use of the social media platform, Twitter. The reason for my focus on Twitter is because of its prominent use by public diplomacy actors. The Twiplomacy Study 2017 carried out by public relations firm Burson-Marsteller found that the vast majority (178) of the 193 United Nations member countries have a presence on Twitter (Twiplomacy 2018). Twitter remains the most popular social media platform among diplomats and world leaders – more so than Facebook (168 of the UN member states are on Facebook) (Twiplomacy 2017).

In my study, qualitative and quantitative Twitter analysis has been applied to two international events: the 2014 G20 summit in Australia (chapter 5) and Expo 2015 in Italy (chapter 6). These international events have been selected as part of two explorative case studies on Australian and Italian public diplomacy. These case studies offer a valuable platform from which to develop and test the integrity of the method and analytical framework employed. Analysis of these two international events provides insights about the actual articulation of listening and engagement within online conversations. During the 2014 G20 summit in Brisbane and Expo 2015 in Milan, as host nations, Australia and Italy respectively drew international attention. This attention provided each government with an opportunity to spread and cultivate particular narratives, and to build networks related to national and international strategic issues.

The methods I use to analyse these case studies develop an in-depth account of the issues and narratives Italian and Australian policy makers endeavoured to promote through online channels. The same methods consider how these narratives relate to the broader flows of information and engagement among online networks in relation to these events. Further policy analysis provides insights into Australian and Italian public diplomacy strategies, paying particular attention to digital listening and monitoring activities.

The novelty of this study stems in part from the fact that the two selected case studies – the Australian and Italian foreign offices and their public diplomacy and social media strategies and practices – have not been studied in depth, nor have they been compared and contrasted. Indeed, very little has been written about the public diplomacy practices of Australia and Italy. Notable exceptions include studies by Chitty (2008), Byrne (2009, 2016), Green (2013) of Australia's public diplomacy, and of Italy's, those by Hayward (2008), Deruda (2012), Albano (2013), Ardizzoni (2016). Moreover, Italy and Australia are both examples of so-called middle powers, whose diplomacy is usually focussed on specific foreign policies, as opposed to great powers, whose influence can cover a wider range of issues in international politics, or small states, who tend to seek mere international acknowledgment (Gilboa 2010). Consequently, listening is particularly important for these middle power states: their limited negotiation power means that they cannot speak without listening, as in the case of great powers, nor they are expected to simply listen, as in the case of small powers.

My research findings provide insights into the role social media currently has in public diplomacy, and the role it could play in the future. My investigation contributes to ongoing debates and definitions of listening in the context of digitally-mediated public diplomacy. By employing the idea of a 'spectrum of listening' in this study, the case studies analyse not only the impact of online public diplomacy, but also illuminate the extent to which public diplomacy actors listen on social media, and how their activities are perceived and mediated by non-governmental actors and citizens.

By comparing Italy and Australia's public diplomacy strategies and their social media practices I provide a comparative analysis of the diverse ways in which middle powers engage with both domestic and foreign publics. Finally, the results of this study offer an empirical account of the complex effects of technology on new forms of democratisation of international debates, which inevitably affect diplomatic practices and procedures.

Thesis overview

This thesis is organised in seven chapters.

In the first chapter, I explore the evolution of public diplomacy, from propaganda to the current dialog-based approaches, and justify my focus on listening by reviewing the academic literature in the field. As anticipated, there is little consensus or clarity in the literature on the type of listening required in public diplomacy. Consequently, the chapter draws from other disciplines – such as public relations, communication theory, democracy studies and political science – to explore the concept of listening, which will be defined as a range of methods available to diplomacy actors to listen to their publics.

Chapter 2 builds upon the theoretical discussion in chapter 1 and explores how the academic literature in public diplomacy addresses the introduction of social media. The considerations made in chapter 1 in regard to listening are translated into the medium of Twitter, a prominent site for the investigation of digitally mediated public diplomacy due to its widespread use and also the availability of samples of its data.

Chapter 3 presents my mixed methods approach for social media listening in public diplomacy. These methods draw on academic literature on the study of digital communication and are gathered into a coherent approach that is applied in the two case studies that follow. Beyond its value to these studies, I also propose that this approach can be employed by public diplomacy practitioners. The potential and limitations of this method are critically assessed *in situ*.

Chapter 4 introduces the Australian and Italian public diplomacy strategies. It describes the two countries' historical public diplomacy approaches and assesses their communication activities, with a particular focus on listening and monitoring activities on social media. It also contextualises the two international events which are the foci of the case studies in the two following chapters – the G20 meeting in Brisbane in 2014 and the Expo in Milan in 2015 – within the broader national public diplomacy strategies.

The two case studies are analysed in chapters 5 and 6. These exploratory case studies provide insights into the use of social media in public diplomacy and consider to what extent and how public diplomacy actors are listening on social media. In chapter 5, I focus on the G20 2014 meeting in Brisbane. This is an opportunity to examine the use of social media in public diplomacy during a large, prominent diplomatic forum and media event. During this forum pressing geopolitical issues were debated at the negotiating table and publicly discussed both on social media and in traditional media.

By contrast, the case study about Expo 2015 in Italy (chapter 6) analyses digitally mediated public diplomacy in a less competitive and 'low-politics' environment. Social media data also provide insights into visitors' experience at the Expo – insights that were previously investigated through surveys and focus groups (e.g. Wang 2013a).

The conclusions of this thesis, presented in chapter 7, address the research questions by discussing the main findings of the two case studies. I consider possibilities for practitioners to adopt the listening approach developed in chapter 3 and applied in chapters 5 and 6. I also address limitations of this study and make suggestions for future research.

Drawing on the empirical findings, I argue that listening and, in particular, *being seen to listen*, are critical factors for conducting successful digitally-mediated public diplomacy. With the introduction of social media in diplomacy, it is important to consider the role played by non-governmental actors and citizens in the presentation, legitimisation and implementation of foreign policy. The focus on listening in public diplomacy opens up research agenda that provides rich insights and opportunities for critically analysing public diplomacy, while offering the possibility for diplomats to (re)claim their role as “the natural foreign experts” (Herman 1998, 8) within broader governmental activities.

1 Public diplomacy and listening

This chapter sets the scene for this thesis by describing the evolution of public diplomacy practices, starting with propaganda and concluding with current relational and networked approaches. I will argue that communication has been a central component of diplomacy since its early stages, through the dissemination and gathering of information. With the rise of public diplomacy, along with developments in the mediatised environment, dialogic forms of communication that emphasise 'listening' activities have emerged in the literature to differentiate public diplomacy from propaganda and other governmental communication activities. In traditional modern diplomacy, information monitoring and gathering activities were considered as a mere means to inform foreign policy. With the rise of dialog-based and interaction-focused public diplomacy approaches, the term 'listening' is used in the academic literature to differentiate public diplomacy with early forms of states' international communication efforts such as propaganda.

The current scholarly approaches to public diplomacy acknowledge the fact that multiple actors now contribute to international affairs. This shift – described in this chapter – is based on new communicative capacities introduced by the internet, and concomitant new expectations from publics. As a consequence of the role played by citizens and non-governmental actors in the current networked digital media environment, listening to these voices is of primary importance for developing, legitimising and informing foreign policy. More importantly, I argue that listening represents an important communicative act. Indeed, the publics' perception of being listened to by public diplomacy actors enhances the legitimacy and credibility of their foreign policy. This is why I consider listening to be a central component of public diplomacy both as a communication enabler and as a strategic tool to implement and advance a state's foreign policy.

Despite the academic focus on the communicative act of listening, there is no agreed theory that establishes how listening contributes to public diplomacy or sets out how it can be used within frameworks for good practice. This has produced a gap in the academic literature on public diplomacy, and a corresponding lack of clarity in the terminology employed by both academics and practitioners in the field. Moreover, social media have increased the opportunities for diplomats to interact with foreign publics in innovative two-way, dialogic and networked forms of communication. The introduction of social media in public diplomacy requires us to find clear definitions and suggestions for best practice where listening constitutes a key component.

In this chapter, I argue that the problem of listening in public diplomacy is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the public diplomacy literature seems to disagree on the definition of listening, although it recognises the centrality of this activity. On a practical level, this literature does not clarify how 'good' listening should be conducted.

By drawing on the contributions of other academic disciplines that have investigated listening – such as public relations, communication theory, democracy studies and political science – this chapter provides an articulated discussion on the different understandings of listening activities. This discussion aims to enrich and support public diplomacy's academic study of listening. The considerations made in this chapter will be translated into social media communication in chapter two.

Before introducing the relational and networked shift in the academic literature in public diplomacy, the following section introduces the definition of propaganda, public diplomacy's predecessor, and the evolution of public diplomacy before the digital turn.

1.1 Public diplomacy as a foreign policy tool

1.1.1 From propaganda to public diplomacy

It is difficult to pinpoint when public diplomacy practices began, since scholars are still struggling to define the boundaries of this field. It can be argued, however, that propaganda can be considered public diplomacy's predecessor. Snow (2012, para. 2) defines propaganda as "source-based, cause-oriented, emotion-laden content that utilizes mass persuasion media to cultivate the mass mind in service to the source's goals". At its worst, propaganda "forces its messages on an audience, often by repetition and slogans; demonizes elements of the outside world and claims the nation it glorifies can do no wrong; simplifies complex issues, including history; misrepresents the truth or deliberately lies" (Brown 2008, para. 14). Although propaganda has apparently fallen out of favour in scholarly circles, some governments still conduct propaganda (for example, on social media as I will discuss in more details in the following chapter).

The need to control and/or manipulate information is not new in diplomacy and originates in the emergence of modern diplomacy (Lazzarini 2015, 73-75). These activities were generally focused on spreading favourable rumours or sabotaging enemies' sources of information. The intention behind the deployment of propaganda was not to persuade or convince foreign citizens – a feature of public diplomacy today – but to support the operations conducted by armed forces.

In the 20th century, as result of the introduction of mass media and the growing participation of the masses in political life, citizens became targeted by governments' propaganda, which sought to spread favourable information to support specific political purposes. Each new media technology has altered diplomatic communication practices. In particular, radio accelerated the speed of international politics, since it meant it was not exclusively discussed in closed forums by elites any longer (Rawnsley 1996, 6-7).

Radio was first used as a major tool of foreign policy by Soviet Russia in 1929. *Radio Moscow* was created to "explain" the Soviet revolution to international publics. The Soviet radio channel was already broadcasting in four different languages by 1933 (Rawnsley 1996). This was the time when 'propaganda', as a term, came into fashion. Initially used within the domestic political environment, propaganda was then deployed for targeting foreign citizens during WWII, such as the Nazi propaganda (Roberts 2006), American counterpropaganda in Latin America (Friedman 2003), state-funded Hollywood film propaganda in Europe (Fyne 1997), and Soviet State film propaganda (Taylor 1998).[1] Despite the fact that propaganda was predominately used against enemies in WWII, allies were also targeted. For example, Cull (1996) has investigated the British propaganda that opposed the U.S.'s neutrality, by targeting American public opinion to create consensus for the participation of the U.S. in the war. Since its origins, "propaganda and war have always been intrinsically connected" (Taylor 2003, 5), so that Taylor defines it as "mind munitions".

Along with its association with war, propaganda emerged particularly as result of the appearance of broadcasting technologies that allowed governments to reach wider publics. After the Second World War, "to influence the people of another country and to do this from an embassy" became acceptable, changing the nature of diplomacy *in toto* (Roberts 2006, 62). This was an important shift resulting from the introduction of broadcasting in diplomacy.

During the Cold War a new term, public diplomacy, made its appearance in the U.S. Although it is difficult to identify a turning point at which the term propaganda was replaced by a new one, Cull's historical reconstruction of the origins of the term public diplomacy provides a realistic narrative. In this account, Edmund Gullion, Dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, used the term 'public diplomacy' in its current sense for the first time in 1965. According to Cull, it was an attempt to substitute the word 'propaganda' with a new and revitalised concept. Indeed, propaganda had by this time acquired a negative connotation, related as it was to European totalitarianism and reminiscent of the Nazi minister of propaganda, Joseph Goebbels (Cull 2009b, 17, 2009a, 19-23). The new term was invented

[1] For example, the famous *Battleship Potemkin* by Sergei Eisenstein that highlighted the oppression of the masses.

because the United States Information Agency's (USIA) mission needed to be distanced from all the negative meanings associated with propaganda.

Propaganda is usually intended as a goal-oriented and strongly instrumental form of persuasive communication. Information can be deliberately manipulated to achieve a persuasive goal (Lasswell 1927, 627-31). Furthermore, as John Brown (2008) has argued, "both public diplomacy and propaganda, at their best or their worst, can achieve credibility with their audiences. However, the best public diplomacy achieves credibility through careful presentation of fact and thoughtful argumentation, while the worst propaganda achieves credibility by falsification and sensationalism" (para. 15).

Yet both propaganda and public diplomacy seem to depend upon communication technology targeting citizens of other countries and challenging the traditional one-to-one form of state diplomacy (Jönsson and Hall 2005, 90). Thus, while public diplomacy is a quite new term, "its constituent parts are, in contrast, old: essentially as old as statecraft" (Cull, 31). While seen as more expansive than propaganda, the definitional boundaries of public diplomacy are yet to be clarified: often it is hard to distinguish public diplomacy from the broader category of state diplomacy. Bruce Gregory rightly considers both the same practice, as public diplomacy has become so intrinsic in diplomacy that "it is not longer helpful to treat it as a sub-set of diplomatic practice" (Gregory 2011, 353).

During the Cold War, public diplomacy was a term used especially in the American context precisely to create a sanitised version of propaganda. Its existence was justified by the tensions between the two international power blocs, which also legitimised the funding allocated to the USIA. The main differentiations between propaganda and public diplomacy emerged especially after the end of the Cold War, when public diplomacy started to receive academic and governmental attention beyond the U.S. Public diplomacy was thus conceptualised as an ongoing governmental effort that aims to be separated from – or carefully combined with – the use of violence and coercion in international relations. In particular, the academic interest in public diplomacy has been fuelled by the concept of soft power – coming from the academic field of International Relations – which has been widely used in academic and practitioner jargon.

1.1.2 Soft power and attraction

The term 'soft power' was first coined by Joseph Nye in his book *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (1990). According to Nye, while hard power is about getting others to do what you want, soft power is about making others want what you want. Essentially, soft power is "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments" (Nye 2004, x).

This concept emerged from the debate about the futility of the use of so-called "hard power" in the 1990s, when there was an animated debate about how American power and foreign policy could be adapted and reshaped to the new international environment following the fall of the Berlin Wall (Nye 1990). The term was widely adopted in policy-making, international affairs and academia after the Cold War. It is now considered a justification for many international communication and representational initiatives beyond the United States. For example, China has established its Confucius Institutes in 2004, which aim to advance its "cultural soft power", promoting Chinese language and culture around the world, jointly with the growth of its "hard power" (Wang 2011, 8).

While soft power may be an accessible concept that suggests practical strategies for practitioners, there are still some analytical uncertainties. After all, philosophers and scholars are still struggling over definitions of power and its manifestations (e.g. Lukes 2005). These ambiguities are also reflected in the idea of soft power. Indeed, if the concept of soft power seems relatively straightforward at first glance, it gets more complicated when some sort of connection between resources, outcomes and impacts has to be made.

To analyse soft power in a strategic way, Nye rejects the Gramscian idea that coercion and co-optation are inseparable. According to Gramsci (1995), hegemony operates by submission and co-optation, which is to say that, as Zahran and Ramos (2010, 12-31) have pointed out, soft power's attractiveness masks a form of hegemony. However, Nye uses the notion of hegemony in an uncritical way, translating the Gramscian theory of hegemony into a relatively "value-neutral" concept for policymakers (Hayden 2012, 34). Indeed, when Nye explains how soft power works, he refers to two approaches: passive and active soft power. Soft power is passive when it is deployed from resources already established. By contrast, it is active when "an actor makes active efforts to create attraction" (Nye 2011, 131). Also, Nye makes a further distinction: soft power effects can be direct and indirect. In the former case states relate directly with international counterparts, while in the latter case multiple parties are involved (interest groups, non-governmental organisations, stakeholders or decision-makers) (Nye 2011, 94-100). The relation between resources and behaviours is crucial for Nye: favourable comportments are produced by "the skills of the agent in converting the resources into behavioural outcomes" (Nye 2008a, x). Thus, Nye underlines the importance of the agent's ability to understand the strategic situation in which (s)he operates, which is to say the actors' understanding of their own resources and the context.

There are some controversial aspects in Nye's theory of soft power. Its popularity has caused both underspecification or overspecification, leading Ying (2008) to refer wryly to it as "power of confusion". Indeed, soft power is a problematic concept for two reasons. Firstly, as Mattern (2005, 583) points out, it is not clear how soft power and attraction work, and how soft power resources are translated into policy outcomes. Secondly, soft power is problematic when we try to draw boundaries between soft power and hard power (Gilboa 2008, 61). Arguably confusing these distinctions further, Nye himself has coined the concept of "smart power" to bundle hard and soft strategies (Nye 2009, 160-3). Indeed, hard power resources, such as military capabilities, can be perceived as legitimate when military resources are used for humanitarian operations[2] (Noya 2006, 66). This actually problematises yet another of Nye's distinctions, between tangible and intangible resources (for example military capabilities and cultural assets), which seek to draw analytic boundaries between hard and soft power.

In relation to the soft power of attraction, Nye argues that attraction creates "alluring or positive magnetic effects". To explain this, Nye borrows from psychologists the elements of attractiveness, like benignity, competence and beauty (charisma), transposing them into international relations (Nye 2010, 92). Yet it is difficult to determine the occurrence of attraction because many contingent cultural and historical elements are involved. Even if Nye defines attraction as a rhetorical device, with such a broad definition, attraction risks being an empty signifier. To cope with this challenging concept, Mattern argues that soft power is a synonym of "representational force", "a form of power that operates through the structure of a speaker's narrative representation of reality". This paradoxically makes soft power "hard" because of its coercive potential (Mattern 2005, 609-12).

For Moussaoui (2014), if communication entails power effects, it can also be argued that communication-based power is not always coercive. On the one hand, soft power activities can be perceived as coercive, or even considered as new forms of ideological colonisation. On the other hand, public argument and exposition, which is to say the ability to make others want what you want (co-option), are not necessarily coercive, as many governmental and non-governmental public diplomacy initiatives have demonstrated (for example, a government's commitment to human rights).

Soft power is now a concept that has moved well beyond the study of American foreign policy, since it has become a widespread conceptual framework for the analysis of general national power strategies and resources. In terms of the study of national strategy, it has produced an important corpus of literature examining diverse case studies that span Asian areas such as China (e.g. Wang 2011), India (e.g. Kugiel 2017) and East Asia (e.g. Melissen and Lee 2011), BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) (e.g. Chatin and Gallarotti 2017), and European nations (e.g. 2013).

In terms of soft power resources, this concept has inspired the development of indicators, such as *The Soft Power Survey* published by the media company Monocle (2017b), *The Soft Power*

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[2] An example is Operation Astute, an Australian peacekeeping operation in East Timor to re-establish stability and provide support to the local police force after the crisis in 2006.

30 published since 2015 by the media company Portland (Portland and USC Center on Public Diplomacy 2017), and the *The Elcano Global Presence Report* by the Elcano Royal Institute for Strategic and International Studies (2017a). These indexes have employed a series of metrics to measure a country's soft power resources such as culture (e.g. number of tourists), diplomacy (e.g. number of embassies), education (e.g. number of international students), business/innovation (e.g. gross domestic product), nature of government (e.g. human freedom indexes) and digital engagement (e.g. number of social media followers) and international surveys to capture people's perception of a country.

These indexes provide comparative information about a country's soft power resources, but they do not explicate the mechanisms of attraction (Mattern 2005, 591-6). The concept of soft power interprets relations from a country-to-subject perspective, where certain resources produce attraction, but it fails to explain *how* attraction is formed. As Graham (2014) points out, this concept

> does not explain how resources of soft power are translated into durable relations of influence that shape how target publics conceive of themselves and their interests, since public diplomacy must be influential only as a reflection of material power. Such an approach thus does not offer a basis for explaining the constitution of relations that are durable and shape preferences. (6)

The concept of soft power has contributed to identifying the importance of attraction in the post-Cold War international environment. This has highlighted the importance of building long-term confidence and a focus on attraction, rather than coercion, as the currency of contemporary international relations. In this way, Nye has basically turned upside down Machiavelli's recommendation to the prince that it is safer to be feared than loved (Bauman 2012).

Nye himself warns that effective public diplomacy is a "two-way street that involves listening as well as talking" and suggests listening as a way to gain an "understanding of how [others] are hearing your messages and adapting them accordingly" (Nye 2008b, 103). However, even this replicates an agent-centric model within a linear model of communication. Indeed, this understanding of listening serves only as a way to adjust the agent's message and does not meaningfully consider the perspective of the interlocutor (see further section 1.2.3). As Cull (2009b) notices,

> The advantage of the term "soft power" is that it has moved the conversation around public diplomacy into the realm of national security and provided a language for arguing that attention be paid to public diplomacy. The disadvantage is that Nye has presented it a mechanism for "getting what one wants". The idea of a state entering into each international conversation purely to get what it wants makes excellent strategic sense but it is certainly not attractive, rather it is repulsive: negative soft power. *Listening and being open to being changed by an encounter is attractive.* Hence, paradoxically too much public focus on soft power can actually diminish an actor's soft power (15, emphasis added).

In short, Cull is arguing that soft power, despite Nye's attempt to define it as a neutral concept, can have negative reputational effects in practice, since it is publicly framed by the state's interests. By contrast, listening and being open to relations – is central component in the "new" public diplomacy explored in the following section – are considered far more "attractive".

The concept of soft power has contributed to highlighting the importance of "soft" resources in contrast to the use and threat of violence and war in international relations. As Slaughter (2017, 32) notes, Nye "wanted to show that 'military security' would not automatically be 'the dominant goal' in these states' political interactions and that 'military force' would not necessarily be the most effective instrument of state policy". In Nye's conceptualisation, states are the main actors and attraction is employed in order to achieve cooperative inter-state solutions. Following this line of reasoning, public diplomacy activities are framed as a soft power tool where the main goal is to influence state actors.

By contrast, I will argue that public diplomacy is a tool of diplomacy rather than of soft power. If, as stated in the introduction, public diplomacy is "the public, interactive dimension of diplomacy" (Center on Public Diplomacy n.d., para. 1), it cannot be evaluated only by looking at a public diplomacy actor's soft power resources. How these resources are perceived, communicated, mediated and challenged also needs to be explored. To understand how public diplomacy can be effective, I will suggest focusing on the relational aspects of communication.

I will propose in the following subsections that public diplomacy has to be analysed as a communication process that involves not only state actors, but an array of non-governmental actors that are now seeking to participate in the implementation of states' foreign policy. In other words, I recognise the conceptual contribution of soft power when it comes to the assessment of an agent's attractive resources. Nevertheless, my analysis starts from the idea that diplomacy is primarily a communication process, which involves not only the "attractiveness" of the agent, but also the participation, mediatisation, facilitation, and/or the opposition of a large array of actors, who are now part of the international relations landscape. If we consider public diplomacy as a communicative process, we are alerted to the frictions and tensions emanating from public diplomacy actors' attempts to communicate a positive and attractive image abroad, on the one hand, and people's reaction to and interaction with such attempts, on the other. The communication space resulting from this friction – I argue – is where engagement between citizens and diplomats takes place.

In the following sections I will suggest that an analytical focus on listening can progress the study of public diplomacy and go beyond the mere focus on an agent's resources, which is a significant limitation in the concept of soft power. Such conceptualisation of public diplomacy will be built upon recent developments in the academic literature in public diplomacy.

1.1.3 Public diplomacy before the digital turn

The emphasis on attraction against violence in international relations in the conceptualisation of power after the Cold War – in which public diplomacy was indented as a tool of soft power – has evolved in parallel with the academic focus on public diplomacy as an independent academic field. The first wave of academic attention has categorised public diplomacy practices according to their temporal dimensions and based on the emerging similarities in core practices.

In particular, Cull (2008) has based his taxonomy on the history of public diplomacy practices before the digital turn. He describes five elements of public diplomacy – listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy and international news broadcasting (table 1) – which "diverge in four important aspects: their conceptual frame, the direction of flow of information, the type of infrastructure required, and the source of their credibility" (Cull 2008, 34). According to Cull, all of the five elements share the general goal of influencing a foreign public.

Table 1 – Taxonomy of time/flow of information/infrastructure in public diplomacy (Cull 2008, 35)

TAXONOMY OF TIME/FLOW OF INFORMATION/INFRASTRUCTURE IN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Type of Public Diplomacy	Time Frame	Flow of Information	Typical Infrastructure
1. Listening	Short and long term	Inward to analysts and policy process	Monitoring technology and language-trained staff
2. Advocacy	Short term	Outward	Embassy press office, foreign ministry strategy office
3. Cultural diplomacy	Long term	Outward	Cultural center and/or library
4. Exchange diplomacy	Very long term	Inward and outward	Exchange administrator, educational office
5. International broadcasting	Medium term	Outward but from a news bureaucracy	News bureaus, production studios, editorial offices, and transmitter facilities

Listening is the first of the five elements. For Cull, effective listening in public diplomacy requires a two-part process. Firstly, it involves "collecting and collating data about publics and their opinions overseas". However, according to Cull, listening is rarely done and it is generally not used to redirect policies and public diplomacy approaches more appropriately (32). The second element is *advocacy*, which can be considered as part of traditional diplomacy: this includes embassy press releases and information provision. The third activity is *cultural diplomacy*, which consists of managing "the international environment through making [national] cultural resources and achievements known overseas and/or facilitating cultural transmission abroad" (32). Some examples of this are the work of the British Council or the Italian Institute of Culture. The fourth activity is *exchange diplomacy*, which has been used extensively in twentieth-century public diplomacy. It consists in sending citizens overseas and reciprocally accepting citizens from overseas for a period of study and/or acculturation.

It must be noted here that, before the digital turn and according to Cull, international exchange was the only means to conduct public diplomacy in a "very long term" time frame and with inward and outward flow of information (table 1). This will change with the introduction of digital media in diplomacy, as I argue later in this chapter.

Finally, according to Cull's taxonomy, the fifth activity is focused on the use of traditional media, especially through *international news broadcasting*. This is usually an "actor's attempt to manage the international environment by using the technology of radio, television, and the internet to engage with foreign publics" (Cull 2009b, 12). Cull argues here international broadcasting practices have to be "institutionally separate from other public diplomacy functions" (21) to be credible sources of information, like the world-renowned BBC World Service, which has greatly strengthened British public diplomacy efforts (34).

It is interesting to note here that Cull categorises the internet as part of international broadcasting activities, in line with the conceptualisation of public diplomacy that was still considering communication technologies as primarily broadcasting tools. This was before the academic study of public diplomacy began to consider digital media as many-to-many and networked technology, as part of the emergence of more interactive, open and dialogic forms of mass online engagement. The academic literature that started to reflect on the networking potential of digital technologies will be addressed in the following section.

1.2 Public diplomacy as communication

1.2.1 Emergence of the new public diplomacy and a focus on relations/networks

The initial conceptualisations of public diplomacy were based on actual practices, "between 'take-offs' and 'crash landings'" (Kelley 2009). After the 9/11 terrorist attack in the U.S, George W. Bush launched the War on Terror attacking Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2004. Much of the efforts of American public diplomacy were directed to the Islamic world's perception of the U.S. During that time, Zaharna (2003, para. 4) warned about the disjuncture between American public diplomacy and its foreign policy actions. Also, new public diplomacy practices were emerging from the rise of the so-called middle powers, such as Canada and Norway, and new non-Western powers, such India and China. Scholars needed to take into account the adoption of public diplomacy by these emerging powers, as well as address the problem of being credible actors on the international stage, which emerged during the Bush's administration.

As a response to these changes in the political context, Jan Melissen (2005) coined the term "new public diplomacy". He believed that the way public diplomacy was conducted during the War on Terror caused "the perceived need for updated public diplomacy practices" (Melissen 2011, 9). The new public diplomacy was "generally based on a more liberal view of international relations and a reaction to the United States' approach, which was dominated by security concerns and corporate practices" (9). In particular, Melissen criticised the fact that public diplomacy was mainly conceived by governments as a one-way communication approach to foreign publics, that could not work in the new networked international environment that saw growth of non-state actors, civil society movements and the rise of "new media", although still in their germinal stage in 2005 (Melissen 2005).

The response to this call by academics was an increasing interest in dialogue-based forms of communication "based on listening to 'the other'" (Melissen 2011, 10). The academic study of public diplomacy saw an evolution in its focus from traditional diplomacy to collaborative diplomacy, from promotion to relationship cultivation, from speaking to listening. Relational public diplomacy was born to mark the shift from monologue to dialogue (Metzl 2001, Cowan and Arsenault 2008) and from competition to collaboration (Hocking 2008).

What has been called the "new public diplomacy" can be characterised as "more than a form of propaganda conducted by diplomats" (Melissen 2005, 11); rather, it is a new phenomenon where "international actors accept more and more that they have to engage in dialogue with foreign audiences as a condition of success in foreign policy" (Melissen 2005, 14-15). The "new public diplomacy" theorised by Melissen (2005, 15) "aims at spanning bridges between different cultures" in two-way forms of exchange.

These transformations in the international environment are directly related to their consequences, which Manuel Castells (2008, 83) defines as "the decreased ability of nationally based political systems to manage the world's problems on a global scale", a process which "has induced the rise of a global civil society". The crisis of the ability of national states to manage global problems has brought "the emergence of de facto global governance without a global government" (Castells 2008, 87). Consequently, "the goal of public diplomacy, in contrast to government diplomacy, is not to assert power or to negotiate a rearrangement of power relationships. It is to induce a communication space in which a new, common language could emerge" (Castells 2008, 91).

Most importantly, the media environment changed with the global diffusion of the internet. As mentioned earlier, the evolving technological context pushed the academic literature to reflect on the emergence of networked publics and new non-governmental actors in international relations.

The collaborative approach resulting from this shift in the literature is focused on relationships and on the network structures created by these relationships (Zaharna 2010). According to Hocking (2008), thinking in terms of hierarchical, intergovernmental, competitive approaches is no longer reasonable in public diplomacy. A people-to-people-oriented approach is what advocates of the "new public diplomacy" argue to be the main characteristic of a renovated approach to communication in public diplomacy (e.g. Melissen 2005). This is because we now live in a multi-party, multi-stakeholder (Hocking 2008), wider-networked (Fisher 2013), hyper-connected and mass self-publishing environment.

In this context, "communication is a social process that regulates the relationships within a larger social context (…) trying to heal, protect, and preserve the relationship, thereby restoring social harmony" (Zaharna 2010, 147). This conceptualisation of communication emphases the agency of both states and publics, and the social power of the former (Van Ham 2013).

However, Fitzpatrick (2007, 201-2) warns that "the new public diplomacy is normative in the sense that it describes what are perceived to be 'ideal' approaches to modern public diplomacy rather than reflects how public diplomacy is widely practised". The term has actually moved away from the initial intention of its coiner, since – as Melissen (2011, 10) himself admitted – "in the literature, interests in innovations or the 'newness' in public diplomacy did not bring much conceptual clarity to the debate".

This debate remains open to new interpretations. Does the new public diplomacy constitute a real shift in the core practices of public diplomacy, or – as Riordan (2005, 180) provocatively puts it – is it "merely a fancy name for traditional propaganda activities"?

I believe that the new public diplomacy has fostered a collaborative and relational approach that, although it can be critiqued for its idealism, has created a valid network-based theoretical contribution to the analysis of public diplomacy, especially on social media (e.g. Fisher 2010). Although, as Zaharna and Uysal (2016, 212) have acknowledged, "the relational mindset may yet to be fully appreciated by nations", it brings to light the constant tension between "influencing" and "listening" and thus between the theorisation of ideal forms of communication and actual diplomatic practices.

1.2.2 Diplomacy as communication

Public diplomacy "is probably one of the most multidisciplinary areas in modern scholarship" (Gilboa 2008, 56). This poses a dilemma to scholars studying public diplomacy practices when it comes to finding common ground. This is also reflected in the fact that even the definition of public diplomacy is still contested, as mentioned in the introduction.

The contributions to public diplomacy in terms of theories and methodologies come from a wide range of disciplines, such as public relations, international relations (and its subfield of diplomacy studies), media studies, sociology and cultural studies (refer to Gilboa 2008). Rather than interpreting the interdisciplinary nature of public diplomacy as a problem to overcome, this thesis takes advantage of it. In particular, the study of public diplomacy listening on social media requires an additional – although sometimes challenging – combination of perspectives from digital methods, media studies, sociology, public relations and international relations. This is because, despite the academic emphasis on listening in public diplomacy, very little practical detail has been provided to clarify what constitutes listening in public diplomacy or how it can be analysed. There is therefore a need to adopt methods and theories from media and communication studies in order to define and test listening practices in the context of the current media environment. Such an approach informs and supports my underscoring of diplomacy as a communication process – an approach that is particularly pertinent for the study of public diplomacy within the context of social media. This focus on communication has been inspired by what I believe to be the leitmotif that connects different views in the literature in relation to what diplomacy is and what it should achieve. These contributions will be pointed out and justified throughout the thesis.

In this sense, this thesis agrees with the observations made by those scholars that see communication as a central aspect of diplomacy. For example, Bjola and Kornprobst (2013, 201-3) propose the study of diplomacy as communication, while Jönsson (2016, 79) remarks that "without communication, there is no diplomacy", and Tran (cited in Jönsson 2016, 79) highlights that a lack of communication results in violent conflicts or atrophy. Rather than focusing on the newness of digital technologies, which are both part of and contribute to endless transformations in the environment within which diplomacy operates, the focus should instead be on the process of communication itself.

In the spectrum of public diplomacy initiatives suggested by Zaharna (2009, 84-100), two core approaches to communication can be distinguished. The first approach is defined as a linear process of transferring information: this includes propaganda, national branding, media relations (such as press releases) and international broadcasting. The second approach is referred to as a relational or networked approach to communication, which aims to build long-term relationships and contribute to a more peaceful international environment. This includes cultural and educational exchange, leadership visits, cultural and language institutes and aid projects.

This echoes the two contrasting models of communication distinguished by (Carey 2009): the transmission and the ritual models. In the former, "messages are transmitted and distributed in space for the control of distance and people" (13). By contrast, in the ritual view of communication the message is directed "toward the maintenance of society in time" and "of an ordered, meaningful cultural world that can serve as a control and container for human action" (15).

Carey's distinction seems interestingly pertinent in the context of public diplomacy. The normative reading of public diplomacy above would seem to argue for the substitution of ritual for transmission views of communication. Propaganda and initial theorisations of public diplomacy were based on "transmissive" forms of communication, pertaining to "matters of government and trade" (27) – strictly related with the concerns of traditional diplomacy. By contrast, the relational shift in public diplomacy recalls the ritualistic communication model that aims to foster a "common culture" (27) where international dialogue can take place.

Social media platforms are now part of our communication environment and cannot be easily classified, since they can encompass both approaches. Traditional public diplomacy activities, such as international broadcasting, could be easily categorised under one or another communication approach, as Cull did in his taxonomy described in 1.1.3. By contrast, social media can encompass the full spectrum of public diplomacy initiatives, from propaganda to network-building activities. This has created tensions between the design of public diplomacy strategies and their actualisation.

Unlike common presumptions, it is not the medium that fosters a process of collaboration or long-term relationship building but rather the communication approach adopted. That is to say, the use of social media by diplomats does not necessarily imply dialogue between diplomats and foreign publics. It is how social media are used and conceived by public diplomacy actors that determines the categorisation of a certain public diplomacy activity on social media on the spectrum of communication approaches in public diplomacy, between the two extremes of linear/transmission and relational/ritual.

Cull (2008) comfortably classified media technologies of radio, television, and the internet – before web 2.0 developments – as international broadcasting with an outward flow of information (transmission model) (table 1). With the introduction of social media in public diplomacy, this classification is no longer straightforward. In mass media communication, the distinction between sender and public was well-defined, given its one-to-many technological affordance. Social media have created what boyd (2011) defines as "networked publics". Social media's communication potential ranges from one-to-one to many-to-many forms of communication, forming networked publics that "are simultaneously (1) the space constructed through networked technologies and (2) the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice" (boyd 2011, 41).

In the next chapter I will return to the technological affordances of social media platforms and expand on these considerations, focusing my enquiry on Twitter. For now, it is important to note that social media platforms support new configurations of international audiences as "networked publics" which challenge previous definitions of public diplomacy. This development requires a rearticulation of public diplomacy activities towards a major focus on relational communication approaches as a consequence of the evolution in the media environment.

1.2.3 Listening as part of diplomacy

Along with the distinction between linear and relational models of communication, an important term has emerged in our journey from pre-digital to the current academic literature in public diplomacy: listening. This chapter has underlined that listening is a defining characteristic of contemporary public diplomacy, distinguishing it from propaganda and earlier forms of public diplomacy.

One of the central activities in modern diplomacy, since its earliest practices, has been the gathering of information. For example, in Northern Italy, where modern diplomacy was emerging at the beginning of the Renaissance, the importance of reporting reliable and first-hand information became of primary importance (Lazzarini 2015, 71-73). Information about the state of affairs, the political situation and the attitudes of publics toward the host state and the representative's state were considered central for informing and implementing foreign policy. With the growing number of emissaries, techniques for presenting and organising information were implemented (Lazzarini 2015, 81-84).

At the same time, with the definition of the professional role of diplomats, gathering information became a more sophisticated activity that led to the development of espionage as standard activity in diplomacy (Mattingly 1988, 211). After the industrial revolution, the military needed to collect first-hand information about enemies' strategic infrastructures. Gradually secret intelligence became an activity undertaken by defence departments, while diplomats used 'open' intelligence, such as journalistic and governmental sources.

Two important distinctions between military intelligence and diplomatic information-gathering activities emerged during this period. Firstly, "diplomatic sources and the methods used to develop them [might have been] confidential, but [were] not clandestine" (Jönsson and Hall 2005, 74). Diplomatic gathering of information has been legally framed by the 1961 Vienna Convention. Espionage, on the other hand, is currently tacitly practiced by military intelligence. Secondly, information-gathering activities have two different purposes. While for military intelligence information is related with military power, armed conflict and terrorism, for diplomacy information "are adjuncts to policy and action" (Herman 1998, 17). In this sense,

> Diplomats and foreign ministries – according to Herman (1998) – are the natural foreign experts, and in the daily decisions in foreign policy they make their own *interpretations* of all the information to hand; international affairs could not be conducted otherwise (8, emphasis added).

With the gradual growth of possibilities offered by press, radio, television and digital media to access information about governments and their citizens, the relevance of information-gathering activities has been challenged. For example, Jönsson and Hall (2003) noticed that, even before the advent of the internet, the 24-hour news cycle was making diplomats' reports redundant.

However, with the emergence of public diplomacy and its emphasis on foreign publics, scholars have reemphasised the importance of information-gathering activities (Jönsson and Hall 2003, Jacobson, Höne, and Kurbalija 2018). More precisely, public diplomacy scholars have gone beyond traditional diplomacy's definitions and practical boundaries of information-gathering activities. Even before the digital turn, as explored in 1.1.3 – the term listening has emerged as a central component of public diplomacy. With the growing focus on relations introduced in the post-War-on-Terror public diplomacy – described earlier in the chapter – listening became a defining element of dialogic forms of communication.

Yet it is difficult to find a definition of listening in the literature, nor has it been clarified how listening takes place and how it is articulated by governments in public diplomacy. This, I argue, reflects underspecification in the conceptual vocabulary of public diplomacy, both in academic studies and in actual public diplomacy strategies. In particular, listening can be narrowly interpreted as a way to implement and readjust a strategy, or it can be considered more broadly and ambitiously as an activity that aims to advance international understanding.

The first interpretation of listening views it as a synonym for monitoring, which fulfils an important planning function (Gregory 2011, 335). In this way, listening not only increases the capacity of governments to assess and/or readjust a given strategy, it can also advise leaders on policy formulation and implementation. Here, listening improves awareness about public debate among diplomatic actors. For example, a public diplomat who is aware of the opinions shared in an online conversation will be more likely to engage with users since (s)he can promptly respond to critics and suggestions on social media. This understanding of listening can also function as a way to tackle "points of resistance" (Bjola 2016, 7) on the part of those actors who hold different interests and opinions. However, in the digital environment, this interpretation of listening is limited because it tends to consider social media users as a target audience, not as active interlocutors. In a certain sense, this type of listening reintroduces the concept of information-gathering activities mentioned earlier.

The second perspective on listening comes from the collaborative approach, where listening is considered as "a *genuine* interest in the other's perspective" (Fisher and Bröckerhoff 2008, 23-24, emphasis added). This ethical approach to listening is based on sincere openness on the part of diplomatic actors. In this way, listening goes beyond mere monitoring and explicitly aims to create opportunities for collaboration in a peer-to-peer model. However, this approach risks being "normative" – as stated in 1.2.2 – when it suggests openness and genuine interest as an outcome that merely focuses on relation building rather than on the advancement of foreign policy goals.

These two positions suggest that the definition of listening is not straightforward. Although there is a general consensus on the need for listening in public diplomacy, it seems that there is very little of the type of listening that is required. While the tactical approach considers listening as a tool of public diplomacy designed for *monitoring publics* and *counteracting* criticism, "genuine" or "ethical" understanding considers listening as an *outcome in and of itself*.[3] These contrasting understandings of listening do not provide many analytical prospects for the examination of the communication process on social media, especially when they reflect dichotomies in the literature, such as listening or speaking, monologue or dialogue, competition or collaboration.

In my argument, there are various analytical opportunities – implicit in the literature – that go beyond this binary logic. Indeed, listening can be considered as *a methodology for the evaluation of users' social media engagement and public diplomacy activities*. In this regard, this research aims precisely to reconceptualise listening as *a spectrum of practices that reflect a range of methodological options* available to public diplomacy actors. It examines the possibilities and limitations of the different listening approaches and how they define the communication model and the type of engagement sought. This research interprets listening as an important component of public diplomacy actors' social media engagement and thus *a critical and defining element* of public diplomacy activities. In line with O'Donnell, Lloyd, and Dreher (2009), this focus on listening in the research

> is intended as a shift away from speaking but not a shift against, and a strategic emphasis on neglected questions of listening is seen as a means of developing complex understandings of listening and speaking, and of their interconnections (436).

The translation of this remark into the theoretical framework of public diplomacy means rethinking public diplomacy as the interactive dimension of diplomacy, as suggested by the definition by the Center of Public Diplomacy provided in the introduction chapter. In this sense, public diplomacy is a communication process that involves the interplay of listening and speaking. The evaluation of public diplomacy, intended as an interactive and relational communication process, cannot be limited to the measurement of the message's dissemination (voice); instead, it needs to explore how the combination of listening and speaking can support

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[3] This distinction will be further examined in the following section.

the advancement, the legitimisation and implementation of a state's foreign policy by "fostering mutual trust and productive relationships" (Center on Public Diplomacy n.d.). In the following chapter, I will propose a spectrum of public diplomacy listening on social media that will take into account the signs of listening embedded in social media acts including tweeting, retweeting, replying, liking and questioning. These aspects will be examined in more details in chapter 3, where I will propose a method that is able to evaluate both the signs of listening and speaking on social media. This method will be applied to and tested in the two case studies in chapter 5 and 6, and in the conclusions chapter is recommended as a feasible method for international listening that can be adopted by public diplomacy practitioners.

By connecting public diplomacy with other academic fields – such as public relations, communication theory, democracy studies and political science – that have investigated the theoretical underpinnings of listening, the following section will develop further the concept of listening, supporting the discussion in the following chapter, which will focus on digital listening and in particular on Twitter.

1.3 Active listening

As I have anticipated, other academic fields are increasingly recognising the need to go beyond the study of political participation indented as "voice" or "speaking" to focus on the importance of listening. Jim Macnamara (2016) – drawing on Nick Couldry (2009, 580) who sees voice as "the implicitly linked practices of speaking and listening" – points out that "communication and voice are predominantly associated with speaking and there is little attention paid in many fields of research or communication practice […] to listening" (Macnamara 2016, 29). Gemma Corradi Fiumara (1990) notices how the Greek term *logos* has been separated from the concept of listening in the history of Western thought.[4] This is part of the "tendency to constantly invoke dialogue in conjunction with [a] blind-spot on the issue of listening" (2). In this way, her "re-interpretation of *logos* […] is an attempt to retrieve the functions of listening which may allow truer forms of dialogue" (13).

Drawing on these philosophical considerations, scholars from the fields of public relations, communication theory, democracy studies and political science have recognised listening as a form of participation rather than only recognising voice or speaking up (Corradi Fiumara 1990, Bickford 1996, Burgess 2006, Dreher 2009, Thill 2009, Coleman 2013, Lacey 2013, Couldry 2010, Dobson 2014, Macnamara 2016, Bassel 2017). These scholars from different disciplines offer a theoretical background where a sophisticated understanding of listening can be built to

[4] Drawing on Heidegger, she points out that Western thought has separated the noun *logos* (reason, opinion or word) from its verb *legein* (to deliberate or consider).

advance the academic study of public diplomacy. Indeed, although Macnamara (2016, 108) in his book on *Organizational Listening* acknowledges that public diplomacy is one of the few disciplinary fields in public communication where "claims are made for listening", it is difficult to find a definition of listening in the literature on public diplomacy, as I have discussed in the previous section.

It is important to note that most of these authors focus their inquiries on the bottom-up agency of people, and ask the question of "who is heard?" rather than "who gets to speak?" (Burgess 2006, 203). This corpus of literature aims to challenge "conventions, institutions and privileges which shape who and what can be heard in the media" (Dreher 2009, 445), challenging "hierarchies of attention" (446). Within this focus on listening, Couldry (2010) recalls the ethical dimension of "mutual recognition and political action (…) in part aimed at correcting those social conditions that interfere with the possibility of recognition" (67). Similar remarks can be found in the work of Coleman (2013). He emphasises that the "struggle to give dignity and autonomy to human voice" in democracies is based on the fact that "most people can say what they think, but some are much more likely to be heard and responded to than others" (para. 1). These scholars echo what Fitzpatrick (2013, 30) has called "the ethical dimension of public diplomacy" that challenges the importance of exercising power towards "a more ethical alternative based on relationships".

To clarify why this can be problematic in the context of international politics, where public diplomacy operates, Bickford (1996, 2) points out that listening "tends immediately to evoke ideas of empathy and compassion". In contrast, drawing from Aristotle and Hannah Arendt, Bickford accepts the "conflictual" and "contentious" nature of politics, and thus she argues that listening "does not necessarily resolve or do away with the conflicts that arise from uncertainty, inequality, and identity" (2). In short, this means accepting the importance of interactions without underestimating the conflictual nature of politics in the creation of communication spaces that allow for dialogue and participation.[5]

This point provides the opportunity to clarify that here listening is not intended as a means for popular empowerment but as a communication enabler. Public diplomacy's ultimate goal is to advance, legitimise and inform foreign policy. Dialogic forms of communication enable more effective ways for public diplomacy actors to do so. They create spaces where relationships can be cultivated and enhanced. Indeed, if diplomacy is "a sophisticated method of change management" (Bjola 2015a, 1) that aims to conduct peaceful relations and prevent the use of hard power – as also argued in the previous sections – listening becomes "what keeps us from

[5] Note that this is part of a broader debate in democracy studies that counterposes Habermasian ideal forms of communication in the "public sphere" and the important role of antagonism in democracy highlighted by post-Marxists such as Laclau and Mouffe (1985).

being doomed to war, anarchy, or the relentless clash of unyielding wills" Bickford (1996, 2). Even attraction – particularly relevant within the concept of soft power – requires listening. It must also be noted that a public diplomacy actor can refuse to listen, since this in itself "is an effective kind of power" (3). Selective refusal to listen (as with boycotting) is sometimes itself an important diplomatic gesture. However, I am also arguing that this communication posture excludes any possibility for collaborative conflict negotiation,[6] and thus it has limited potential in relation-building public diplomacy.

These initial considerations in terms of listening indicate the complexity of this human activity and lead to further reflections to better define it. Indeed, I have already argued that a binary logic of listening and speaking does not provide many analytical prospects. Thus, it is useful to introduce some theoretical differentiations in the types of listening and then apply these demarcations in the context of social media in the following chapter.

The literature on public diplomacy makes only an initial distinction between the monologic and the dialogic in the first instance, with the latter as preferred outcome. Andrew Dobson (2014, 67) confirms this by arguing that monologic listening in democracies is a refusal to listen, while dialogic listening involves an interplay between speaking and listening.

Leonard Waks (2010, 2749) pushes the concept of listening further by distinguishing between *cataphatic* and *apophatic* listening. In the former the listener imposes his categories of interpretation while in the latter the listener makes a genuine effort to understand "feelings and personal connotations within or behind the words". Feelings, emotions and affect are a crucial aspect of social media communication that will be explored further in chapter 2. For now, it is enough to say that apophatic listening requires a genuine effort of complete openness, putting aside predetermined categories. The two types of listening represent the two extremes in a hypothetical spectrum of listening. Macnamara (2016, 71) reminds us of the theological origin of the two terms: apophasis is defined as a "negative" approach of listening to God which focuses on what "God is not", and thus requires openness to the possibility of what cannot be perceived. By contrast, a "positive approach", cataphasis, is limited to the description of what can be perceived. The theological origin of these terms links to the question formulated by Bickford (1996, 145) as to whether the extreme form of openness associated with apophasis or "hyperreceptivity is even possible (except in a mystical or meditative experience)".

Dobson (2014, 68) warns against the risks of cataphatic listening as it may reproduce "relations of power rather than have them challenged". It has also been argued earlier that public

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[6] The widespread use of social media by organisations as a unidirectional communication channel is an example of how this form of power is quite common.

diplomacy's ultimate goal is not to empower people but rather to peacefully advance a country's foreign policy through interactions and international dialog. Therefore, there must be more complexity between the two extremes of listening mentioned above, where listening openly can also work as an activity that facilitates and informs strategies and goals. Even so, this might risk being "instrumental listening" or mere "self-serving organisational listening", as Macnamara (2015, 10) warns. Public diplomacy listening needs to overcome this risk and conduct *active* listening. Good listening must be active (Dobson 2014, 10) to produce constant interaction in a real dialogic form of communication, and thus dialogic engagement, which "enables organizations and stakeholders to interact, fostering understanding, goodwill, and a shared view of reality" (Taylor and Kent 2014, 391).

Active listening means to promote and generate interaction, where "disorientation is definitely possible" (Bickford 1996, 146). This understanding of listening also recalls the relational mindset in public diplomacy described in 1.2.1, since it focuses on the agency of both diplomatic and non-diplomatic actors to listen or not listen. However, since public diplomacy actors carry interests and political goals, openness cannot be considered as uncritical acceptance of any opinion (apophatic listening), but rather as *active* listening "with one another with direction(s) and purpose(s)" (146). It is also important to note that active listening is directly connected to the concept of dialogic engagement mentioned earlier, based on interactive forms of engagement that go beyond mere 'reaction'. In active listening, listening and engagement are mutually embedded as if they were two sides of the same coin. In this regard, Comor and Bean (2012) notice that "how people think about and process their interactions […] can be modified, not just by what is communicated but also *through the communication process itself*" (208, emphasis in original). Therefore, active listening implies that public diplomacy actors "must be seen to listen" (Sorensen et al. Forthcoming) to create spaces where "people can interact with organisations in mutually beneficial ways" (Macnamara 2016, 246). Public diplomacy actors need to create spaces for listening if they want to undertake meaningful and fruitful listening. This means that an approach based on listening – one able to promote dialogic engagement – has to be reflected in public diplomacy organisational structure, what (Macnamara 2016, 246) calls the "architecture of listening". (The organisational aspects of listening will be addressed further in chapter 4).

The difference between active and passive listening also marks the crucial boundary between large-scale listening and mass surveillance on social media. A rhetoric of care, empathy and governmental protection can be used to justify forms of mass surveillance. Interaction and active participation are characteristics distinctive to *active listening*, as opposed to *listening in* (Crawford 2009, 531-2) – characterised by passivity (such as legitimate social media monitoring) or by illegal or unethical appropriation of information (such as illegitimate spying in on phone calls or emails) (Macnamara 2016, 44). These distinctions will be summarised in the spectrum of listening implemented in section 2.3.5.

Having established that the full potential of public diplomacy listening is achieved when listening is *active*, how can the different listening approaches can be classified?

Dobson (2014, 9) suggests an answer to this question by introducing an important distinction: listening can be analysed both as a *process* and as an *outcome*. He argues that it is understandable to evaluate listening in terms of outcomes, for example via policy changes in democracies. This is also true in public diplomacy, where listening activities have been evaluated especially in terms of a change in behaviour in diplomatic or non-diplomatic actors, or in terms of the achievement of forms of collaboration or influence. By contrast, listening as a process requires an analytical focus on the evaluation of those signs of paying attention that characterise dialogic forms of engagement. I will also argue in 2.3.2 that such signs are embedded in the different forms of Twitter engagement. For example, in personal communication there are different ways of knowing if someone is listening. “The signals” – explains Dobson (2014, 83) – “may be visual (is my interlocutor paying attention to me as I speak?) or dialogic (is s/he asking me questions that show s/he really wants to understand what I am saying?)”. Dialogue does not necessarily lead to collaboration, as if the listener should suspend judgment. Instead, the dialogic dimension lies in the process itself.

Dobson pushes his understanding of listening further by saying that a good process of listening helps going beyond “the inclination and temptation to hear what is said through pre-existing interpretive frames, and especially those which are the result of the exercise and reproduction of power” (Dobson 2014, 108), recalling the distinction between cataphatic and apophatic listening. While Dobson’s focus is on improving dialogue in democracies, this is not the main goal of public diplomacy. Developing a dialogic communication in public diplomacy – required by the new digital technologies and new actors in international communication – should encourage ‘diplomatic’ relations, as I will argue in 2.1.1. Following this argument, the inclusion of all voices in public diplomacy listening enhances diplomatic relations and, at the same time, contributes to the creation of a favourable communication environment in the long term (Macnamara 2016, 295-316), by avoiding communication breakdowns and including actors across cultures and borders (Macnamara 2015, 58-63), and by enhancing trust. In short, active and inclusive listening creates the conditions for credibility, a concept that will be unpacked further in section 2.3.4.

To conclude, scholars in democracy studies have advanced our understanding of listening and dialogic forms of communication. However, the noisy communication environment generated by social media often makes it difficult even for public diplomacy actors to be heard. As a consequence, public diplomacy communication on social media can become a struggle to be listened to, where attention is the real currency of the digital communication environment. Following on with this metaphor, listening is thus a strategic investment, represented by acts of paying attention – embedded in dialogic engagement – on the part of both diplomatic and non-diplomatic actors.

1.4 Typologies of Twitter accounts in the listening process

Before describing the consequences of the digital disruption in diplomacy in chapter 2, it is worth briefly introducing the actors who should conduct digital listening in public diplomacy. As anticipated in the introduction, Twitter has been chosen in this thesis as a prominent digital platform used in public diplomacy. More details on the medium Twitter and its use in diplomacy will follow in the second chapter, while chapter 3 will describe how digital listening can be conducted on Twitter. The methodology resulting from the discussion will be employed and tested in the two case studies in chapter 5 and 6.

This section provides a definition of diplomatic actors, mediators and domestic and foreign publics to define the terminology used in the case studies and the actors involved in public diplomacy communication practices on social media.

The distinctions made in this section are operational and do not aim to trace rigid or overarching boundaries and definition of actors. In particular, public diplomacy actors are usually governmental, but in the case of thematic social media accounts, they can also be temporary organisations or *ad hoc* initiatives that, despite their active role in the projection of the national image abroad, do not make explicit their connections with governmental agencies. The case study I present on Expo 2015 in Milan will provide several examples of this. At the same time, mediators can be domestic or foreign actors. They can collaborate in the national effort to project a positive image abroad or they can challenge it, but they are never directly connected to governments.

Mediators and national and foreign actors can perform different roles that can overlap in the communication process. Therefore, the following typology of actors should be considered an operational differentiation in the sense that it will support the description and interpretation of listening and engagement and does not aim to be applied as a universal typology of actors in international communication.

1.4.1 Public diplomacy actors

Thus far in this thesis, I have been referring to public diplomacy and diplomatic actors without clearly defining them. At this stage it is worth providing a definition. *Public diplomacy actors are those who contribute to the projection of a country's positive international image as a part of the national public diplomacy strategy*. These actors are not always strictly diplomats since they may not be explicitly part of the diplomatic organisation. This introduces a further differentiation between diplomatic Twitter accounts which are managed by diplomatic staff, and public diplomacy accounts which are usually accounts that support public diplomacy communication efforts as part of long- and short-term initiatives and international events.

The typology of diplomatic actors on Twitter can be defined according to the diplomatic organisation and the potential actors and topics they are most likely to engage with. Therefore, diplomatic actors on Twitter (and social media more generally) can be categorised as leaders, ministers and ministries of foreign affairs, thematic accounts, embassies and consulates (table 2).

Table 2 – Typologies of diplomatic Twitter accounts

Diplomatic social media accounts	Actors to engage with	Listening topics
Leaders	Predominately domestic, but also international	Political
Ministers of foreign affairs	Domestic and International	Political and foreign affairs
Ministries of foreign affairs	Domestic and International	Foreign affairs
Thematic/Initiative	Domestic and International	Specific
Embassies	Diaspora and foreigners	Consular services, bilateral relations, foreign affairs
Consulates	Diaspora and foreigners	Consular services and bilateral relations

Leaders' accounts are those belonging to heads of state/government, who can post as political leaders and representatives of the government. They are likely to post content about all kinds of political issues, but predominately about domestic political debates. These are usually personal accounts (for example @realDonaldTrump), as distinct from official position accounts (@POTUS) or organisational accounts (for example @WhiteHouse), which are intended to represent the views of the executive in a more institutional manner. Despite the fact that many studies in digital diplomacy have been focusing on leaders' accounts, the activity on those accounts, while quite significant in terms of the political projection of a country abroad, represents only a small segment of public diplomacy activities on Twitter. Moreover, leaders' accounts usually do not show direct signs of listening because of the large number of followers they attract, and if listening activities do take place, they are usually delegated.

Another type of public diplomacy actor is **ministers and ministries** of foreign affairs. The difference between the two is that while ministers probably engage more with the domestic political debate and with a more personal approach, ministries' accounts tend to focus more on international affairs and use a more cautious and institutional communicational approach.

Then, there are many **thematic accounts**, focusing on specific issues. This type of account is usually managed directly by diplomats or staff at departments of foreign affairs. An example of the former would be the Australian DFAT's (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) Twitter account @NewColomboPlan on its New Colombo Plan programme or @FarnesinaVerde on the Italian foreign ministry's environmental sustainability initiatives (further examples will be provided in chapter 4). In this case the content and audience are strictly confined to the theme of the account, which may target both domestic and foreign audiences. Sometimes these accounts are managed by external service providers, especially for national branding initiatives, as is for example @AusUnlimited. Temporary accounts can also be created as part of a one-off social media campaign and deleted or abandoned after they have fulfilled their purpose.

Finally, **embassies and consulates** mainly target a country's diaspora and the citizens of the host country, with the difference that embassies focus more in bilateral ties with the host country and listening to the citizens of the host country, while consulates concentrate more on listening to the diaspora community and on visa-services seekers.

There are also myriad accounts that can be part of a national public diplomacy strategy and that can fulfil a temporary purpose in relation to international events, such as an Expo or a national branding campaign. These accounts are not managed by diplomats nor are they directly related to foreign office activities, but they still play an important role in the projection of a positive national image abroad. They can be promoted and economically supported by other government departments and can focus on national branding, international trade and deals, culture, student exchange or aid programs and other international initiatives. Moreover, local governments and cities are increasingly active internationally, and they are becoming a central focus in place-branding studies (refer to Hanna and Rowley 2008).

The growing number of social media accounts that can fulfil public diplomacy activities complicates the coordination and consistent projection of the national image abroad. The creation of temporal thematic accounts is becoming a common practice in public diplomacy communication on social media. However, the fact that these types of accounts require so much effort to attract users and listen to them, while they may draw attention away from other accounts managed by ministries of foreign affairs and governmental agencies, begs questions about their effectiveness (refer to Cassidy and Manor 2016, 8).

This categorisation of public diplomacy social media actors suggests that each actor should adopt different listening strategies. Also, since these actors follow the internal organisation of diplomacy, it would be more likely to observe engagement in political discussions in the higher positions of the diplomatic hierarchy, and more practical and theme-focused engagement in the lower positions or in externally managed accounts. These observations will be supported by the analysis in chapter 4 of Australia's and Italy's broader digital communication strategies, and also the two case studies (chapters 5 and 6).

1.4.1.1 Language and public diplomacy

The use of English as a *lingua franca* is not usually considered an important concern for diplomats from countries where English is the national language. Diplomatic actors can easily reach their counterparts, non-governmental organisations and users by simply tweeting in English.[7] However, Ang, Tambiah, and Mar (2015, 63) have suggested that English monolingualism (in countries such as Australia) is also problematic, since the evolution of English as lingua franca does not necessarily follow "the norms of 'standard' English (e.g. the U.S. or U.K. variety)". Familiarity with languages other than English facilitates international communication and the understanding of the different "varieties of English". At the same time, countries where English is not the national language need to make strategic choices about the language adopted in their communication on Twitter, according to whether the information is relevant for the domestic or the international public.[8]

Linguists have warned that the use of English in institutional online communication is becoming hegemonic even in contexts such as the European Union, where all the national languages have equal legal status (Koskinen 2013, 80). Besides these concerns about hegemony, the widespread use of English as the lingua franca is crucial to understanding the limitations of social media listening when it does not take into account languages other than English. Listening in public diplomacy requires the knowledge and acknowledgement of other languages if it aims to fully listen to international publics and to be seen to listen. This aspect will be particularly important in the case study about the G20 2014, where the Twitter conversation around the heads-of-state meeting also attracted non-English speakers (chapter 5). By contrast, the case study about Expo 2015 will explore the challenge of social media communication from the opposite point of view (chapter 6). Public diplomacy actors of non-English-speaking countries – like Italy – need to conduct their communication in English if they want to be listened to, especially at international events like the Expo. At the same time, they also need to address speakers of their own national language, since public diplomacy

[7] This despite the fact that the sole use of English means that many non-English speakers worldwide will not be reached.
[8] This is also true for traditional forms of public diplomacy activities such as international broadcasting. An example is Italian international broadcasting, examined in chapter 4.

actors need to address domestic publics too (e.g. Huijgh 2011, Tyler et al. 2012, Just 2015), as will be argued in the following subsection.

1.4.2 Mediators

In the two case studies included in this thesis, detailed in chapters 5 and 6, social media listening is shown to be a mediated process. Despite that public diplomacy listening should be *active*, often social media can constrain the possibilities for direct and dialogic engagement between public diplomacy actors and publics. Public diplomacy scholars have already recognised the role of "third-party mediators" – non-governmental actors, including global media and international social media influencers – as part of what has been termed "mediated public diplomacy" (e.g. Entman 2004, Fahmy, Wanta, and Nisbet 2012, Sheafer and Shenhav 2009, Sheafer and Gabay 2009). However, very little has been said about the role played by these mediators on social media.

Relations among diplomatic actors have largely been studied as part of the so-called Twiplomacy, a term coined by the public relations firm Burson-Marsteller for its annual "Twiplomacy Study" (Twiplomacy 2018). This study has already shown how leaders interact on social media according to the most accessible metrics and has already proved the importance for leaders of a Twitter presence.

By contrast, mediators are non-governmental actors that intercede between diplomats and individuals on Twitter. Social media enhance the possibility for direct engagement between diplomatic actors and individuals. Nevertheless, the mainstream news media, NGOs, and organised social movements and their affiliates play an important role in mediating diplomatic issues. This type of actor can mediate and thus serve to orient the focal points of listening for both diplomatic actors and 'ordinary' social media users by representing important information hubs (Himelboim et al. 2014, 361). In communication studies and public relations these actors have been considered as gatekeepers or stakeholders (Shoemaker and Vos 2009) that regulate the flow of information. By contrast, I will consider mediators from a listening point of view, since they can direct the focus of attention onto social media. In a networked logic, mediating actors can channel attention onto specific actors or issues, and/or create expectations and emotional attitudes.

1.4.3 Domestic and foreign publics

While I will follow the public diplomacy literature in its employment of terms such as 'public' and 'audience', I will not use these concepts with the passive connotations typical of 'traditional' forms of communication. Indeed, the importance of listening highlighted by the literature implicitly recognises the agency of the different international actors, since social media users can also create, reinforce, critique and challenge online conversations. 'Public' and 'audience' will thus refer to all those actors that public diplomacy entities aim to reach and listen to on social media, while recognising social media users' agency within the communication dynamics. Public and audience are to be indented here as an operational reference to networked publics mentioned earlier, which is complicated by social media's technological affordance and use.

Moreover, social media also tends to blur another traditional distinction between domestic and foreign publics. Information travels across national borders, and public diplomacy actors are aware that their Twitter communications can reach both domestic and foreign publics.

Public diplomacy scholars have pointed out the importance of engaging with domestic audiences in an interconnected world. Civil society, corporate leaders, academics, celebrities and other influential national entities are becoming increasingly relevant to public diplomacy in two ways (Szondi 2008, 6). Domestic publics can be considered an asset for public diplomacy when they participate in the promotion of a positive image of a country abroad (Tyler et al. 2012, 4). At the same time, governments and diplomats need to justify and clarify their foreign policies and diplomatic strategies to the domestic public to confer legitimacy to their activities (Putnam 1988, 459-60, Melissen 2005, 13).

The constant intersection between domestic and international publics and how they relate to each other will emerge in the two case studies I present in this thesis.

1.5 Conclusion

In this section I have provided a definition of public diplomacy, exploring the academic evolution of this field as well and the development of practices from propaganda to relational public diplomacy. My focus on listening builds upon recent scholarships that argues public diplomacy must be thought of as two-way process that requires listening. Despite the centrality of listening in the academic literature, I have pointed out that there is no general agreement on the type of listening required. The discussion in section two, that has been built upon academic fields such as public relations, communication theory, democracy studies and political science, has delivered the definition of *active* listening. I have argued that listening should be *active* in the sense that public diplomacy actors must be seen to listen, through dialogic engagement, while the analysis of listening should consider listening as a process rather than an outcome. The understanding of listening as a process will be crucial in the implementation of the methodology in chapter 3.

This chapter has also proposed a typology of actors involved in diplomatic-related discussions on Twitter. This has served to identify the digital entities that should conduct listening – public diplomacy actors on Twitter – and the actors that should be listened to (foreign and domestic publics), while also illustrating the range of mediating actors that frame and/or drive diplomatic-related discussions on Twitter.

In the following chapter, I will transfer my arguments and claims about listening to social media contexts, and particularly to communication using the platform Twitter.

2 Public diplomacy listening on social media

Mobile phones, digital communication technologies like the internet, and social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook have brought adjustments to the core activities of public diplomacy. This chapter considers the impact of these technologies on the study and practice of international relations and diplomacy. As a reaction to the initial diffidence towards social media in diplomatic circles, the academic study of public diplomacy responded by focusing on the possibilities and innovations provided by many-to-many online communication platforms. The aim was to encourage more risk-taking approaches to social media in public diplomacy practices. With the growing adoption of social media in public diplomacy practices, the most recent academic literature now tends to consider social media as part of a set of tools available to diplomats. It is generally agreed that social media platforms have brought new possibilities to engage with foreign publics, but they also need to be effectively employed and integrated into everyday diplomatic practices.

In addressing the academic debate about the introduction of social media in public diplomacy practices, I also briefly explore the technical characteristics of Twitter as medium. In particular, I describe the affordances of Twitter – which is to say what the platform allows users to do (Bucher and Helmond 2017) – and the evolution in the use of the platform.

The third section of this chapter presents a typology for the signs of engagement on Twitter. It applies the theoretical assertions made in chapter one to social media and, by proposing a spectrum of listening, clarifies the different methodological options for conducting public diplomacy listening on Twitter.

2.1 The digital disruption in international relations

Developments in the public uses of digital communication technologies, like the internet, mobile phones, and social media have introduced both optimism and scepticism about new forms of democracy, participation and transparency. These digital technologies have greatly impacted upon international affairs for at least three important reasons: they are popular, widely accessible, and they allow for vertical (e.g. diplomats and their public) and many-to-many communication. This section briefly describes the impact of digital technologies in international relations and in diplomatic practice.

The 2000s initiated a dramatic rise in the development and use of social media and user-generated content including the launch of an open-source encyclopaedia (Wikipedia in 2001), as well as several popular social media sites (Facebook in 2004 and Twitter in 2006), photo-sharing sites like Flickr (in 2004) and Instagram (in 2010), and video-sharing services like YouTube (in 2005). User numbers have significantly and rapidly grown since these platforms were launched.[9] For example, Facebook, the most popular internet platform worldwide, had around 2 billion monthly active users in 2017, up from 100 million in 2008 (Statista 2017a), while for Twitter, also among the most popular, the figure was 330 million, up from 30 million in 2010 (Statista 2017b).

Diplomacy, along with several other governmental activities, has been altered by the internet in two key ways. First, the internet has changed what diplomats do to engage with publics; second it has changed the actors who influence or are engaged with diplomacy. Just as the telegraph's introduction in the late 19th century was a not-entirely-welcomed transformation in the communication infrastructure among diplomats (Fong 2010), 21st century social media platforms have similarly created anxiety in diplomatic circles. For example, when these platforms were introduced in the U.S. State Department several questions and problems emerged: "Can diplomats blog? Twitter? Should comments be allowed? Should they be filtered? Who can engage? Where? For what purpose?" (Graffy cited in Richter 2016, 105).

With the introduction of the internet in public diplomacy – and in particular of social media – the literature has begun to consider these digital technologies as a factor that has empowered new actors in the international stage, resulting in calls for a dialogic model of public diplomacy. In his call for a "real-time diplomacy" after the "Arab Spring" or the "Arab Awakening", Philip Seib (2012, 1) argued that "individual citizens (have) become intellectually and politically empowered" and that "they use social media tools to form communities of interest that enhance political activism"[10].

In 2010 the U.S. State Department under Secretary of State Hillary Clinton decided to bring "diplomacy into the digital age" (Lichtenstein 2010, para. 5) with a policy statement titled "21st Century Statecraft" (U.S. Department of State n.d.). According to Jared Cohen and Alec Ross, who at that time were working for the State Department, this plan "represents a shift in form and in strategy – a way to amplify traditional diplomatic efforts, develop tech-based policy solutions and encourage cyberactivism" (Lichtenstein 2010, para. 5). American influence had thus to be exercised "on a more multilateral basis, and doing so under the frame of global citizenship, less than quote 'America's Values'" (Forenstein 2011). According to Clinton (2010), the technological tools should be made as widely available as possible, since "the internet is a network that magnifies the power and potential of all others. And that is why

[9] Although there are examples of platforms that have seen a decline after an initial growth, as the notorious case of MySapce, launched in 2003.
[10] See also Seib (2016, 26-30) on "The Empowered Public".

we believe it is critical that its users are assured certain basic freedoms. Freedom of expression is first among them" (para. 14).

This plan was criticised for promoting the continued close association between the State Department and Silicon Valley, such "that repressive regimes now see Google, Facebook and Twitter as tentacles of American foreign policy's research, putting all users of those internet tools under suspicion" (Morozov, cited in Barton 2012, para. 9). In addition, the policy became linked to emerging widespread concerns about surveillance and digital forms of control over freedom of expression, highlighted in the seminal book *The Net Delusion* by Evgeny Morozov (2011). A Belarusian writer and researcher, Morozov is one of the most well-known and prolific critics of cyber-utopianism, and in particular has critiqued claims that citizens' will be empowered by the kinds of digital technologies featured in the American "21st Century Statecraft" policy. In *The Net Delusion* Morozov (2011) highlights the contradictions in the idea of internet freedom espoused in the Clinton policy. While the internet was fuelling the democratising aspirations of Western governments and mainstream news media during the Iranian protests around the presidential elections in 2009, the Iranian government was effectively using the internet as a surveillance tool to monitor and suppress any opposition. This political repression was conducted using the same so-called liberation technologies, since the Iranian government identified and tracked down activists by inspecting photos and videos of the protests that were posted by protestors to social media.

Following on from debates that surrounded Clinton's policy announcement regarding the paradox of freedom on the internet, in 2013 *The Guardian* published a series of classified documents leaked by a system analyst employed by the U.S National Security Agency, Edward Snowden. The leak provided evidence that the U.S. National Security Agency was indiscriminately intercepting internet and phone conversations of citizens around the world, a fact that ran counter to the U.S.'s officially declared support for internet freedom and undermined the validity of its policies to advance this globally (Greenwald 2013). Following subsequent revelations that internet 'dragnet' surveillance was also being carried out by the Five Eyes[11], this leak increased global concerns about mass surveillance on social media, especially that conducted by the American government (Landau 2014).

These concerns have fostered the debate about the public sphere and democratic role of the internet and social media. The promotion of social media as a tool for freedom and liberation by the U.S. State Department has been directly countered and contradicted by evidence of the use of social media as a repressive surveillance tool by states including the U.S. The

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[11] An intelligence alliance constituted by the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, New Zealand.

governmental use of the internet for surveillance and their use of misleading information have challenged the idea of social media as an intrinsically empowering dialogic tool (Barash et al. 2018).

Meanwhile, new questions about the quality, accuracy and accessibility of news in social media emerged. Pariser (2011) warned how algorithms and internet engines create a "unique universe of information" – he called this a "filter bubble" – by selectively guessing what information a user would like to see based on data collected from the user (e.g. location, past clicks, search history). The U.S. presidential elections in 2016 and the election of the new President of the United States, Donald Trump, has generated further public and academic debate about misinformation on social media. Filter bubbles, along with the spreading of 'fake news' (a journalistic term used to describe proliferation of misinformation on social media) assisted, according to some (e.g. Solon 2016), to Trump's election.

In the previous chapter, I have warned that social media cannot be easily categorised under the linear or relational communication approach. This element is also confirmed by the fact that large number of online messages can now be sent at once even with limited resources, in contrast with the expensive and centralised technologies of mass media (Tufekci 2018). Social bots – created to produce automatically generated messages on social media – "are considered to be capable of massively distributing propaganda in social and online media, and their application is even suspected to be partly responsible for recent election results" (Grimme et al. 2017, 279). The 'old' term propaganda, which was thought to be exclusively relaying upon mass media technologies, is now regaining attention from scholars. For example, the Oxford Internet Institute's has launched *The computational propaganda project* in 2016 that aims to address the rise of new forms of propaganda on digital media (see also Howard and Bradshaw 2017).

This debate about the potential of and the bias within digital technologies is critical to understanding the environment where diplomatic activities take place and has important implications for the study of digital communication in public diplomacy.

The debate about people's empowerment versus more critical views on the role played by digital technology is also coming to light in the literature on public diplomacy. Words such as 'participation', 'new actors', 'listening' and 'collaboration' in public diplomacy risk becoming empty buzzwords if not carefully defined and meaningfully considered. If the core practices of public diplomacy have already been articulated, more problematic is the question of what the goals are of such practices. There is a division in the literature on public diplomacy between those who might best be described as idealists and those who are more pragmatic realists, especially when it comes to making claims about the role of public diplomacy in the new communication environment. Indeed, Brown (2013) poses an important foundational question: is public diplomacy an instrument of diplomacy and foreign policy or an opportunity for changing international relations and therefore the *status quo*?

The first chapter has sought to clarify why this question cannot easily be posed in binary terms. My research interest in public diplomacy is precisely due to the equivocation between instrumental and transformative understandings of public diplomacy activities. The focus on listening is a direct consequence of the substantial shift in the way power works in the current international stage, as has been highlighted by the justifications provided by those scholars in their call for a more 'relational' public diplomacy. In such a complex and networked communication environment, working for changing the *status quo* by creating opportunities for international dialogue represents an opportunity to enhance credibility and legitimacy. To put it differently, public diplomacy can effectively serve foreign policy and strategic interests only if its 'transformative' dimension is understood as a *condition sine qua non* for the advancement and legitimisation of a state's foreign policy.[12]

The following subsection outlines the literature in public diplomacy that addresses the role played by digital media in public diplomacy.

2.1.1 Social media as a tool of public diplomacy

Across academia and governments, it is generally recognised that digital tools – and social media in particular – are now part of everyday diplomatic activities. In academia, the earlier academic focus on what diplomacy should or ought to be with the introduction of digital technologies and the creation of new networked publics (Grant 2004, Westcott 2008, Heine and Turcotte 2012, Graffy 2009, Seib 2012), has since moved to emphasise digital media as integral component of the set of tools that diplomats can deploy (Trent 2016, Hocking and Melissen 2015, Sotiriu 2015, Riordan 2016). Most recently, the literature is moving toward the investigation of what public diplomacy can achieve on digital media.

The number of heads of state, ministers, ambassadors and embassies using social media accounts is ever increasing, creating new and still unpredictable transformations in diplomacy. The necessity to create a "permanent cadre of digital professionals who can drive digital diplomacy" is now a priority for many leading governments in the development of soft power strategies, such as the U.K. (Fletcher 2016, 10).

To mark these changes in diplomacy practices, several new terms have been coined, with varying degrees of success: "virtual diplomacy" (Smith 2010, Brown 2001), "cyber-diplomacy" (Potter 2002), "media diplomacy" (Gilboa 1998), "democratisation of diplomacy" (Grant 2004), "digital diplomacy" (Dizard 2001, Sandre 2015, Bjola and Holmes 2015), and

[12] Similar remarks are made by Ang, Isar, and Mar (2015) in relation to cultural diplomacy.

"public diplomacy 2.0" (Glassman 2008, Cull 2011). Across all of these terms there is general agreement about the transformations that the new digital communication technologies have brought to diplomatic practices and especially to public diplomacy.

While the term "new public diplomacy" – explored in chapter one – appears to have quickly fallen out of fashion, digital diplomacy is emerging in the literature as the term that aims to embrace such technological changes in diplomacy, despite the fact that a general consensus on defining its activities is still missing. In particular, digital diplomacy has been focusing on the use of social media in diplomacy. Manor (2016a, 28-34) has identified the digital diplomacy studies published in the last decade, summing up the main findings. The studies have focused on different countries, mainly evaluating the social media accounts of ministers of foreign affairs. The drivers of the study of digital diplomacy have been the need for new strategies to react to terrorists' use of social media (Al-Qaida in particular), the new forms of citizen participation online and the new communication environment shaped by digital technologies (6-7).

The evaluation of collaboration, dialogue, two-way forms of communication and engagement has been a central focus in many of these studies. Many of them have concluded that public diplomacy on social media rarely fosters real dialogue with foreign publics. This has meant that the focus of the scholarship is now moving toward critique and assessing the agency of both diplomatic actors and publics (Hocking and Melissen 2015, Riordan 2016, Bjola 2015a).

Indeed, while the literature has predominantly focused on whether and how public diplomacy actors generate conversation opportunities, Manor (2016a, 46, 91) has reported the frustration of public diplomacy practitioners in regard to the few engagement opportunities offered by social media users themselves. Some practitioners have lamented that ministries of foreign affairs' social media accounts usually receive few questions and many people usually criticise the political aspects of diplomats' job (46). Others have reported that official diplomatic accounts are often targeted by spamming (90).

This, once again, confirms the disjunction between scholarly ideals and practical failings. Both diplomatic actors and social media users should – in theory – reciprocally engage, and it is precisely in this dialogic space where those communication mechanisms take place. However, practitioners are frequently constrained by circumstances that are often underestimated by the proponents of some ideal communicative situation.

According to other scholars, diplomacy has always dealt with changes and technological transformations as part of the endless evolution in international relations. Aeroplanes, radio and the telegraph, as well as social media today, have all brought about temporal acceleration and changes in diplomatic practices. Kurbalija (2013), for example, has described some parallels between the introduction of the telegraph and the internet in diplomacy. In both cases debates have emerged regarding the strategic importance of communication infrastructures and their supposed neutrality. The initial diplomats' inexperience at using new technological tools has also produced "techno-suspicion" and anxieties, "confusion and misunderstandings" – both with the introduction of the telegraph and the internet in diplomatic practices.

According to some scholars (Bjola 2015a, Sharp 2009), the inevitable changes in the mediated and political environment need to be interpreted by recognising the prominence of diplomatic core activities. Such activities include conducting peaceful relations among states and dealing with new international actors. New actors and technologies in international relations do not require that diplomacy be revolutionised. After all, diplomacy has always dealt with an ever-changing international environment, and it has constantly articulated its activities to create "a sophisticated method of change management" (Bjola 2015a, 1) rather than a mere adjustment to changes. "When something difficult needs to be accomplished" – Sharp (2009, 1) observes – "or when a settlement or general improvement in international relations is in prospect, more and better diplomacy is often called for". New and traditional actors interact under a new logic – networked, participative, multi-party and hyper-connected – but "the success or failure of these relations is largely contingent upon diplomats' ability to properly recognize evolving power dynamics (…), judiciously interpret one's aspirations in light of contextual circumstances (…), carefully assess the limits of one's capacity to adjust to change (…) and to actively enlist the support of others in promoting or resisting change (…) " (Bjola 2015a, 1-2).

In this sense, scholarship on the new public diplomacy, which has recognised the technological transformations and the participation of new actors – argues Bjola (2015a, 2) – provides important advice on "how diplomats can better orient and adapt themselves to the constitutive rules of the international society". However, there is also a need to embrace the changes in international society beyond mere "adaptation". Diplomats need to respond to the call of those new voices that now aim to be heard, while tools of international dialog and negotiation should be reinvented for the new international environment.

Following this logic, Sharp (2009, 289) claims that the challenge for diplomacy is not "value promotion through public diplomacy" but "the maintenance of peaceful relations". Diplomacy is not about the best way to reach people more effectively or empower people to be more effective international actors. "Rather, its focus is and ought to be upon getting the people and peoples who now seek to participate in international life to think and act diplomatically themselves" (289). In summarising his own perspective, Sharp asserts that "the focus in public diplomacy should be more upon the diplomacy and not, as it has been up to now, upon the public" (289).

Hocking et al. (2012, 5) propose the concept of "integrative diplomacy" based on the need to integrate change and continuity in diplomacy. They add "public diplomacy has now been 'mainstreamed' into diplomatic practice" and the creation of separate categories risks missing the complexity in the evolution of diplomacy (Hocking and Melissen 2015, 21).

This debate on the consequences of the digital disruption in diplomacy demonstrates that the initial enthusiasm for digital technology has now been replaced by prudence, if not also scepticism, even in diplomatic circles. In 2013, the former U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry, admitted that "everybody sees change now", suggesting that new and separate categories will not change the main goal of advancing foreign policy objectives (Kerry cited in Hocking and Melissen 2015, 21). Indeed, if the internet was at first considered an empowering tool per se, it is now interpreted as an integral component of the set of tools that diplomats can deploy, involving both opportunity and risk (Trent 2016).

As Hocking and Melissen (2015, 15) argue, "those seeking to manage international policy need to appreciate how and why the digital communications revolution is significant and how and why human agency remains of prime importance". Digital communication platforms generate a communicative space that supports the communication practices of both diplomatic actors and social media users, and their interactions to be investigated and analysed.

This is an important shift in the academic literature – also in line with this thesis approach – that has moved its focus from what public diplomacy *should* or *ought to be* (as a reaction to the War on Terror mentioned in the previous chapter) toward what public diplomacy *can and does* achieve as governmental communication activity in the current geopolitical and media environment.

To conclude, this section has described the evolution from normative claims about collaborative networked public diplomacy, to a more cautious approach that acknowledges the current global environment is "characterised by relationships between states and non-state entities, producing complex webs of diplomacy – sometimes competitive, sometimes collaborative" (Hocking and Melissen 2015, 10).

I have already indicated in the first chapter why Twitter is relevant for the study of public diplomacy. Building upon the considerations made in chapter one, the following section introduces the medium Twitter, its evolution in the use and in the technological affordances.

2.2 Twitter as an object of study and a source of data

Twitter is one of the most used social media platforms in public diplomacy. Indeed, much of the research into the use of social media in public diplomacy has focused on Twitter, both for its popularity among diplomats and governments and for the accessibility of its data.

Twitter is a platform that allows users to post messages up to 140 characters in length.[13] These messages, called tweets, can contain text, URLs, photos, animated GIFs, or videos. As of December 2017 Twitter has 330 million active monthly users, 80% of which use the platform from a mobile phone (Statista 2017b). Despite the constant growth since its launch, in the last year the platform has seen only a minor increase in the number of monthly active users.

In 2010, Twitter, Inc. donated to the Library of Congress its entire collection of public tweets since its foundation in 2006, thus officially settling the platform into a data set (Library of Congress and Twitter 2010). Although at the time of writing the Library of Congress is still attempting to make these tweets publicly available for consultation (Zimmer 2015), while addressing the ever-increasing size of the dataset and a range of privacy concerns,[14] the donation has certified the academic importance of the platform as both object of study – as a particular communication platform – and a source of data. Yet, we should ask: what exactly is the object of study? And why is Twitter data relevant for the study of public diplomacy?

Rogers (2014, ix-xxiii) identifies three evolutionary stages of the platform: Twitter I, Twitter II, and Twitter III. The study of "Twitter I", he claims, was focused on its banality, summarised by the "pointless babble" of the "I'm eating a sandwich" type of information, the so-called "food tweets". Early adopters introduced the @ symbol and then the # symbol during the San Diego fires in 2007. The interplay of the two symbols produces relationships that are not necessarily "personal" and introduced a mix of broadcasting or narrowcasting activities, which will be explored in detail later in this chapter. Marwick and boyd (2011, 115) describe the interplay of personal and public on Twitter as a process that involves imagination and the construction of the self "in order to present themselves appropriately, based on technological affordances and immediate social context". Twitter users not only imagine their audience, they also navigate multiple audiences and, "by necessity (…) maintain impressions by balancing personal/public information, avoiding certain topics, and maintaining authenticity" (122-124).

The latter leads to the second use of Twitter (Rogers 2014, xvi), characterised by the new question "What's happening?" in the tweet box, which replaced "What are you doing?". Twitter II extended the use of the platform as a backchannel for conferences, TV programmes, events, elections, protests and disasters (Sutton, Palen, and Shlovski 2008). This second stage of the use of Twitter is particularly related to the data collected for this research, as will be discussed in chapter 3.

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[13] In November 2017 Twitter announced an increase to 280 characters for all its users.
[14] The Library of Congress has ceased archiving all tweets (Osterberg 2017) because a dramatic increase in the volume of tweets and in the use of visual content (pictures and videos), as well as the impossibility to make available this ever-increasing database to researchers.

Finally, Rogers's definition of Twitter III is not in relation to the evolutions in the use of the platform but to the current study of the platform as a dataset – archived by the Library of Congress – that allows for different types of analysis that can also provide anticipation and predictions. As Meier (2013) remarks, "The analysis of tweets predicts the flu better than the crunching of traditional data used by public health institutions, for example". However, there are still serious doubts about the use of social media data to predict human behaviour, as for example in the case of election results (see Tumasjan et al. 2011, Bermingham and Smeaton 2011).

Moreover, Twitter data analysis faces a methodological dilemma when it comes to the definition of the object of study. Indeed, it has been questioned whether social media is a resource for social research or an empirical object on its own (Rogers 2014), or an historical record of communication when it is archived by the Library of Congress. Others have even doubted whether social media can provide insights about the "social" (Couldry and van Dijck 2015). As Marres (2017) puts it,

> Online research (…) confronts us with a basic methodological choice: do we wish to study digital practices and processes, or is it our ambition to deploy digital devices instrumentally, in order to gain insight into social phenomena that extend beyond online settings? (104)

In this thesis I argue that it is possible to consider Twitter both as a medium, which shapes conversations in a certain way, and an object of study, when it can provide the means for international listening. This means accepting the hybridity of the object of study, since online controversies "invite us to investigate both the substantive issues at stake in the controversy as well as the formative role played by mediating technologies in the enactment of these controversies" (Marres and Moats 2015, 1).

A recent debate is questioning whether Twitter is in decline (Meyer 2015) and therefore whether data collected from the platform are still meaningful. In this way, its ongoing relevance is in question. Lafrance and Meyer (2014) warned that "people are still using Twitter, but they're not hanging out there"; while Meyer (2015) pointed out that the growth of the number of Twitter users has slowed down precisely because Twitter has become a dataset and people have started to become aware of this. A more pointed critique of the medium comes from Haque (2015):

> Twitter's a cemetery. Populated by ghosts. I call them the "ists". Journalists retweeting journalists…activists retweeting activists…economists retweeting economists…once in a while a great war breaks out between this group of "ists" and that…but the thing is: *no one's listening*…because everyone *else* seems to have left in a hurry.

Despite these claims, preliminary findings based on a dataset containing almost 1 billion tweets posted in Australia between 2006 and 2015 analysed by the Social Media Research Group at the QUT Digital Media Research Centre demonstrates that the daily number of tweets coming from Australian accounts has been increasing, contradicting theories of the decline of Twitter. However, a closer look at the types of tweets demonstrates the number of plain tweets, mentions, replies, and modified retweets – which represent a more conversational dimension of the platform – is decreasing, while the overall number of retweets is increasing (Burgess 2015). Therefore, it can be argued that while Twitter is changing and becoming less conversational, not that it is necessarily in decline. The platform is thus entering a fourth stage which is less about mundane topics and more about political discussions, news and strategic communication.

In this sense, it is interesting to mention the story shared by the former U.K. ambassador to Ethiopia, Greg Dorey, who at first was sceptical about opening a personal Twitter account due to the very low Twitter penetration in Ethiopia (only 5% of the population). Nevertheless, when he eventually did so, he realised that citizens of the host country are not necessarily the main target of diplomatic listening on social media. Indeed, at the end of his mandate in Ethiopia, he wrote this post about his Twitter experience:

> Direct feedback shows (as with my blog) that [readers] include a number of key opinion formers and decision makers, among them some Ministers – not just in Ethiopia (and Hungary), but in other African countries. Addis covers Djibouti and the African Union too – and many of my colleagues, but not normally me, worked on Somaliland issues too – plus relevant diasporas (if that's the plural), who often have far better access to IT (Dorey 2016).

Here Dorey makes a practical and important point: Twitter is about listening not only to people or citizens but also to counterparts and stakeholders, a listening activity that was ascribed especially to traditional diplomacy.

Part of this evolution in the use of Twitter is also the recent controversial "Trump phenomenon": the aggressive use of Twitter by the president of the U.S. as a way of challenging and bypassing mainstream news media's framing of political issues. In this regard, Couldry (2017) has defined Trump as the "putative Twitter King" with his courtiers the mainstream news media outlets, which "regularly report Trump's tweets as if they were policy". Besides these considerations within the U.S. domestic context, Trump's use of Twitter also has consequences for international diplomacy. For example, Trump's tweet[15] complaining

[15] @realDonaldTrump, 2 February 2017: "Do you believe it? The Obama Administration agreed to take thousands of illegal immigrants from Australia. Why? I will study this dumb deal!"

about the refugee deal between Australia and the U.S. made by the Obama administration sparked a brief diplomatic crisis between the two countries. From a public diplomacy point of view, this impulsive and unpredictable use of Twitter by a head of state might undermining long-term strategic goals by compromising American international reputation and diplomatic ties. This – aside from its controversial aspects, which will most likely be addressed in future studies – confirms once again the ongoing relevance and ever-changing use of the platform.

The evolution of Twitter is meaningful because it illustrates the different kinds of engagement and listening activities that can potentially take place on Twitter and the fluidity of this use. This section has demonstrated that the evolution of the platform is a dynamic that revolves around the interplay between the platform's affordances, the implicit rules that frame the everyday use of Twitter, and the recent use of Twitter as a newsgathering platform. This implies that the medium is evolving alongside the information it hosts or renders, with the associated methodological challenges that go along with changes in the use of the platform and in its technological affordance.

These considerations, although coming from the academic study of Twitter, are relevant for public diplomacy practitioners as well. Public diplomacy listening on social media needs also to carefully consider the evolving use of the platform to adapt accordingly its strategy. As Melissen and de Keulenaar (2017b, 3) proposes, the use of digital platforms by diplomats should be critical, in the sense that "neither practitioners nor pundits debating 'digital diplomacy' can afford to ignore the underlying infrastructures of digital technologies".

2.3 Listening on Twitter

2.3.1 Dialogic engagement on social media

This section will build upon the considerations about active listening and dialogic engagement made in the first chapter. It has been argued that the historical evolution of the field of public diplomacy – which needed to be divorced from all the negative connotations of propaganda – has led to the consideration of listening as one of its constitutive characteristics. It is generally agreed that good public diplomacy – with long-term strategies and goals – implies dialogic forms of communication and thus listening or understanding.

However, the considerations made in the first chapter have been limited to an anecdotal description of the signs of listening in personal communication, which now need to be translated into the medium Twitter within its use and technological affordances.

Arsenault and Hayden (2014), in a U.S. government report entitled *Data Driven Public Diplomacy*, suggest going beyond a focus on audience reach and instead advocate the pursuit of "engagement", which has been massively employed in U.S. public diplomacy strategies. Indeed, while the diffusion of the message can be easily investigated through a quantitative approach (number of likes, shares, followers, retweets), it is more complex to evaluate and interpret the 'quality' of online engagement. It can be argued that the interpretation of engagement on social media is framed by the actor's communication approach, within the spectrum of communication activities ranging from advocacy (message diffusion) to collaboration (that contributes to foreign policy development) (Cowan and Arsenault 2008).

My focus on listening builds upon recent scholarship that argues public diplomacy engagement must be thought of as two-way process. This type of engagement "places a premium on dialogue, reasoned argument, openness to the opinions of others, learning through questions" (Gregory 2011, 357). Since the primary characteristic of two-way forms of communication is listening, engagement is intrinsically linked to listening, since it requires that both the diplomatic actors and the public pay attention to each other. This understanding of engagement is also defined as "dialogic engagement" when it "enables organizations and stakeholders to interact, fostering understanding, goodwill, and a shared view of reality" (Taylor and Kent 2014, 391).

The listening approach indirectly defines the type of engagement sought and valued by public diplomacy actors. Indeed, adopting a dialogic communication model implies a listening approach that is able to recognise dialogic forms of engagement and go beyond evaluation of the audience's message reaction. In short, listening in dialogic communication should be able to intercept the dialogic elements (e.g. questioning) embedded in a message and go beyond quantifiable signs of engagement, such as counting the number of followers and likes.

The analysis of social media engagement will be methodologically framed by employing the related concepts of thin and thick description (Geertz 1973). Thin description requires the concept of the network as an interpretive tool that supports analysis of the complexity of large-scale listening. Indeed, the relations that result from the signs of engagement can be pictured as networks where the communication flows can be reciprocal or unidirectional. Thick description focuses on contextualising engagement by interpreting context and tone. Thick description, a concept borrowed from ethnography, aims to explicitly address the limitations of quantitative social media analytical approaches. These approaches originate predominantly from marketing – but also computational sociology, business and organisational studies, and discourse analysis – based on likes, retweets, followers and replies, and thus focuses on mapping communication flows and message diffusion. The combination of the two levels of analysis provides a more complex analysis of engagement, beyond message diffusion and the dichotomy of positive/negative reactions. In particular, in this context, I use thick description to focus on the meaning of the single tweet within its social, cultural and political context. Thus, I argue, the modalities of engagement – such as tweeting, tagging and retweeting – must be not only counted but also *interpreted* to understand their meanings. The combination of thin and thick description will be addressed in chapter 3, when I will describe how the two different stages of the analysis will be mediated. The proposed method for social media listening will be applied to the case studies. It also constitutes an example of listening – that can be adopted by practitioners – beyond mere analysis of message diffusion/reach or unsystematic information gathering on social media, a practice reported by Manor (2016a, 63-4) in his interviews with diplomats.

In relation to this latter point, the following sections address the affective and emotional aspects behind the formation of social media publics and attitudes, and consider how credibility and listening are interconnected on Twitter. The observations made about listening and engagement in this and in the first chapter are summarised in a form of a spectrum, which illustrates the range of methodological options available to public diplomacy actors for conducting listening on Twitter. *Active* listening and the embedded concept of dialogic engagement represents the concrete yardstick by which to assess public diplomacy listening on social media.

2.3.2 Twitter engagement and embedded signs of listening

The idea of listening as a process explored in the previous chapter is a powerful means of analysing public diplomacy social media communication. Indeed, listening "invokes the more dynamic process of online attention, and suggests that it is an embedded part of networked engagement – a necessary corollary to having a 'voice'" (Crawford 2009, 527).

The process of public diplomacy listening frames the way engagement and public diplomacy activities can be interpreted. What then are the signs of engagement on social media, and how can we evaluate their communicative potential in terms of reciprocal forms of paying attention and/or interactivity? Twitter affords different engagement practices with potentially unlimited actors. Drawing on Bruns and Hallvard (2014, 15-28), Twitter has four different layers of communication, each of which encompasses a different type of engagement. These layers, summarised in table 3, are characterised by hashtags, following, replays and retweets/likes. These layers are not completely separate from one another but rather intersect and overlap constantly.

Table 3 – Layers of communication on Twitter

Listening Layer	Public	Evaluating engagement
Hashtag	Often rapidly forming and dissolving publics associated through common interests/affects in an issue/story.	Volume and distance of the relations, issues mapping and network structures, tone of the messages.
Follower-followee	Direct publics: gradually accumulated.	Reciprocity and tone.
Replies	Interpersonal communication.	Reciprocity.
Retweets/likes	Platform-specific.	Lamination.

The *hashtagged* layer of communication on Twitter is characterised by the creation of online conversations through the use of hashtags, which are keywords preceded by the symbol '#' (Halavais 2014, 36-37). Such keywords usually gather together tweets about a particular issue. The conversations created by hashtags are often volatile, but sometimes hashtags remain popular for years, as for example Bruns and Sauter (2015, 2013) explored in the case of #auspol. Consequently, hashtags assemble tweets of ad-hoc publics, often fulfilling the backchannel function mentioned earlier (see Bruns and Burgess 2011). The use of a hashtag in a tweet is a form of engagement that suggests that the user is aware of the discussion and the stories behind it and thus conveys a sign of paying attention, while also indicating participation. However, this is not always the case, since hashtagged discussions can serve different purposes. This is why engagement must be evaluated according to the dynamics, topic and size of the discussion. For example, Huang, Thornton, and Efthimiadis (2010, 175) distinguish between *conversational* and *organisational* tagging practices on Twitter. In the first case, users use hashtags to answer the question "What's happening?" by questioning "back and forth among themselves". In this case the hashtag has a genuine conversational and dialogic use. By contrast, in the case of organisational hashtags, an organisation tags its resources and content to make them available at a later date. In this case tagging aims to create a sort of database rather than a conversation, and it does not indicate engagement with an issue or discussion.

Hashtags can also be used to hijack or mock a conversation. In this case the use of the hashtag represents signs of negative engagement, but it also acts as an acknowledgement of the discussion.

The volume and distance of the relations, the network structures (information flows among users, relations among nodes and shared interests) and the tone of the messages will support the assessment of the degrees of interactivity of a social media network. This will be unpacked further in the following chapter about method.

The second layer of communication on Twitter is the *follower-followee*. The relationship created by clicking the 'Following' button is not necessarily reciprocated. As mentioned in the previous section, this is a distinctive characteristic of Twitter that is now extending to other social media, since users are now allowed to follow others even on Facebook. Tweets posted from an account appear in the 'stream' of all its followers, and if the account is public (as is often the case) the tweets are also accessible to anyone using Twitter, through the search functions or by accessing the sender's profile. This is part of the so-called personal public (Schmidt 2014, 4-7), which refers to the personal dimension of the medium. However, again it is difficult to state that this layer is always "personal". For example, boyd and Marwick (2011, 155-6) investigated how celebrities use this semblance of personal communication, which in fact implies "the power differentials intrinsic to the relationship" between celebrities and their followers. This can also be said for leaders, politicians, diplomats and organisational accounts, where the risk of adopting a broadcast-only mode – as opposed to dialogic engagement – is very high (Crawford, 530). Even signs of reciprocal listening do not guarantee that those behind these accounts – which usually have numerous followers – are really listening, especially when they outsource their online activities to their staff, a form of listening that Crawford (2009, 531) defines as "delegated".

Twitter also allows the inclusion of *@mentions* of other users, who will be then notified of the action (Bruns and Hallvard 2014, 19-20). A user who receives a mention can then @reply. The conversation can also involve more than two users. Again, despite the fact that mentions are usually addressed to the participants of the conversation, the users who may read the 'thread' are potentially unlimited, especially if hashtags are included. Indeed, the three layers of communication can interplay, making it difficult to achieve a real understanding of who actually sees and reads the content. This is a characteristic of social media, where the degree of publicness of information can encompass the private and the public, and smaller and bigger groups, going beyond the traditional media separation between public broadcasting and private communications.

Other forms of listening on social media are *likes* and *retweets*. The like button on Twitter is represented by a small heart. A like conveys appreciation for a tweet, but it is also a sign of listening, since it notifies to the sender that their content has been read. This type of engagement is limited in terms of conversational potential: indeed, likes usually do not lead to dialogue. As, for example, applause constitutes appreciation in ordinary forms of dialogue, 'likes' perform an equivalent dialogical function in social media, although limited in their dialogic potential.

By contrast, the interpretation of retweeting as signs of engagement is not straightforward. The incorporation of the retweet emerged from the practice of users copying and pasting content posted by other users, adding 'RT' and then reposting it themselves. This practice became so widespread that Twitter formalised it by incorporating a retweet button into the platform interface (Halavais 2014, 35-36). boyd, Golder, and Lotan (2010, 5-6) showed that a retweet can indicate attribution, amplification and curation. It can also publicly express agreement or disagreement with someone. Bjola (2015b, para. 2) sees the retweet as an act of real engagement on social media that "recommends it as an appealing metric for assessing the impact of digital diplomacy", but "tells us little about the quality of the engagement, e.g., how 'deep' the engagement is with a particular diplomatic message".

Retweets certainly represent signs of engagement on Twitter, but it does not necessarily follow that the engagement is positive. Indeed, the retweet provides new listeners for a tweet and can also transform the original tweet through quoting and commenting, a process that Bjola (2015b) calls "lamination" (I will address the importance of the context for the interpretation of this lamination process further below). A higher degree of lamination can represent endorsement or hijacking, while a lower degree can represent apathy or signal a Twitterbot action. The latter kind of retweet takes place when a software system automatically retweets, likes, follows or replies to a tweet that includes a certain word or phrase. The role played by Twitterbots will be particularly clear in the case study about Expo 2015 (see chapter 6), which will highlight how Twitterbots can create 'noise' in the process of listening on Twitter.

Passive forms of listening are far from the ideal active listening or dialogic engagement described earlier in this chapter. This point highlights that, despite the fact the large amount of information made available by online media increases opportunities for reciprocal listening, "they also reveal the human limits of attention" (Crawford 2009, 532) and the limits imposed by the use and technological affordance of the platform, described earlier in this chapter. Such limits suggest that gaining attention or signs of listening from audiences remains a challenge for public diplomacy actors, despite the possibility of direct forms of communication brought about by social media. This may suggest that the evaluation of public diplomacy activities on social media needs to be pondered in terms of the different contextual elements that this chapter has mentioned.

The complexity in the interpretation of social media engagement also points out the methodological challenge of analysing public diplomacy listening. The interpretation of engagement and the evaluation of public diplomacy activities in not straightforward: it needs to be contextualised and interpreted. This is a consequence of a complex landscape that calls for the mix of thin and thick descriptions introduced at the start of this chapter. Indeed, how can we differentiate whether the use of a hashtag is positive engagement or mocking? Does the use of a hashtag suggest listening? What kind of listening? To answer this type of question we need what Geertz (1973, 6) calls “thick description”. To explain this, Geertz provides the famous example of one boy winking at another and the different ways this act can be interpreted without proper knowledge of the context, which clarifies the need for a contextualised interpretation of engagement. The boy’s wink could be a conspiratorial sign to a friend, an involuntary twitch or something else entirely. A thick analysis of the signs of listening on social media can provide a deeper understanding of the cultural meaning of these acts. In this way, “culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviours, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly – that is, thickly – described” (Geertz 1973, 14). This point also relates to the emotional aspects of social media communication, explored in the following section. The methodological strategies for the thick level of social media analysis will be discussed further in the next chapter.

If thick description contextualises the analysis of the signs of listening at the micro level, a different problem is how to deal with the large number of these signs that Twitter users constantly produce. This introduces the thin level of the analysis, which will be explored next.

2.3.3 Listening within social media networks

Social media are exponentially increasing the number of voices but “the chances of them being heard by the people they hope to address are slim” (Coleman 2013, para. 8). Similar concerns are expressed by Hindman (2008, 16-19) when he invites us to consider who “speaks and who gets heard as two separate questions”. If a thick description of the signs of listening addresses the problem of the interpretation of the meaning of signs, this does not address the problem of analysing large-scale listening that the enormous amount of information produced by Twitter users requires. How then can public diplomacy actors make sense of the multivocal complexity of large, diplomacy-related social media conversations?

An answer to this question comes from the study of social media as networked relations. The modalities of engagement – likes, retweets, replies, hashtags – can be analysed in terms of the networks they generate. This can support an analysis of listening activities on social media by addressing the nodes (representing actors, and objects such as hashtags) and their edges (representing connections and information flow between actors). This thin level of analysis precedes the thick descriptions mentioned above.

Calls for “network diplomacy” have been predominately driven by tech-enthusiasm for the new means of communication brought by the internet. For example, in 2001, Jamie Metzl, former Senior Advisor to the Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs at the U.S. Department of State, suggested that “dynamic networks have democratised access to power”, and thus “enhanced transnational civil society and issue networks (…) can serve as invaluable tools for sharing information, developing mutual understanding, and solving problems" (Metzl 2001). Although access to digital technologies has provided new tools for free expression and produced a pluralisation of actors in the international arena, I have already argued that it does not necessarily imply that these voices are heard.

In particular, the collaborative and networked approach to public diplomacy seems to argue a kind of political or even ethical dimension, which is able to bring "social conscience" to international relations (Fitzpatrick 2013, 36). Similar arguments are proposed by Fisher (2013, 6) when he claims that the importance of different roles within a network and "the contribution each actor can make to the realization of collective goals" should be considered. In short, it would seem that in collaborative public diplomacy, networks are formed according to "collective goals toward which a network of actors can contribute" (7), echoing Habermas' (1984) notion of the "ideal speech situation". Indeed, Habermas presents in his theory of communicative action an idealised situation that concrete situations must be measured against. In an ideal speech situation, participants can interact free of any kind of coercion with the mere desire to collaboratively create a rational consensus. This form of idealised communication is intentionally counterfactual – something that can be approximated but never fully realised. In this sense, the difficulties faced by practitioners in getting users' engagement on social media, mentioned earlier in the chapter, are a concrete example of such failed realisation.

The conceptualisation of ideal forms of communication or listening – as in the case of apophatic listening, mentioned earlier in chapter 1 – is a fascinating theorisation of hypothetical forms of international communication that public diplomacy actors could aim for. This ideal form could allow for the implementation of an evaluation framework based on the comparison of concrete situations with idealised forms of communication and listening. Moreover, this line of reasoning in public diplomacy focused on ideal forms of communication contributes significantly to the study of the networked dimension of public diplomacy, with a particular focus on the long-term perspective and dialogic forms of communication. Indeed, it has also highlighted the mutual agency of public diplomacy actors and audiences, focusing on the collaborative and social aspects of relations building.

However, setting a rigid association between collaboration and networks is highly demanding and can limit the analysis of public diplomacy communication activities, since the complex context in which public diplomacy communication takes place does not necessarily produce the conditions for "ideal speech" or apophatic listening. Even Fisher (2013, 8) recognises that "connections in a network have not only the potential to empower an actor but also the potential to constrain". Moreover, a Habermasian interpretation is likely to see the Twittersphere as quite far removed from any conceptualisation of ideal speech. Therefore, why should the analysis be limited to what can facilitate empowerment and collaboration within different actors in a network when it can be extended to both collaborative and competitive dynamics? The latter allows for a broader snapshot of the complexity of international communication networks.

To understand such networks, I refer to the work of Latour (2005, 1) and his ambitious project to "redefine the notion of the social", where he points out the need to go back to "associations between heterogeneous elements" (5). According to the French sociologist, "network is a concept, not a thing out there. It is a tool to help describe something, not what is being described" (131).

This interpretation of networks that comes from actor–network theory fits with the understanding of listening argued in the previous sections, especially when Latour suggests a "neutral" understanding of networks, since – as I have argued – networks can be either competitive or collaborative, inclusive or exclusive. Indeed, Latour (2005, 25) argues that the researcher should listen to the actors and follow them through the networks they inhabit, avoiding pre-categorisations that aprioristically suggest which actors should be followed. In this way listening activities can provide multiple and unexpected opportunities to analyse listening on social media networks.

More importantly, this approach can go beyond academic research and also be employed in public diplomacy social media listening. In pragmatically looking at networks, as proposed by Latour, a public diplomacy actor needs to listen to others to understand their own position within the network and to become credible and authoritative enough to manage crises and conflicts and inform their own strategies.

However, it is important to note that the need for 'thick descriptions' described earlier explicitly aims to address a common objection against Latour regarding the "dismissal of the social" (Couldry and van Dijck 2015, 1). This devaluation of the social means that "the very space where sociality appears is being rebuilt (recalibrated) to produce a particular measurable kind of 'social'" (Couldry and van Dijck 2015, 5).[16] This "measurable kind of social" or – to use Latour's (2005, 15) own words this "*flat* social world", a metaphor borrowed from cartography, is my own approach to the analysis of Twitter networks, as I will explore further in chapter 3. This is a necessary level (thin) of analysis in my own method to make sense of large-scale Twitter discussions. At the same time, the conceptualisation of public diplomacy itself encompasses a '"normative" dimension[17] to make possible the assessment of its activities – some kind of Habermasian "ideal speech" or an ideal communicational yardstick. This communicational yardstick differs from the one suggested by the collaborative understating

[16] Refer also to debate about big data in chapter 3.
[17] I have referred to this when describing relational public diplomacy and the theoretical move needed to differentiate public diplomacy from propaganda in chapter one.

of networks in public diplomacy. Indeed, this research is not evaluating to what extent public diplomacy actors enhance collaboration on social media (collaboration as an outcome). By contrast, I will analyse the signs of listening allowed by what Marres (2017, 48) calls "the grammar of action" made available on Twitter as a social media platform. Such "grammar of action" has been explored in the previous subsection.

The result is that certain aspects of both arguments, Latour's 'idealised research' (that is, approaching networks neutrally and pragmatically) and Habermas' 'idealised speech' (connected with 'idealised' apophatic forms of listening and with the understanding of networks as necessarily collaborative), need to be recalibrated, especially in the context of Twitter communication.

This is why the implementation of methodology in chapter 3 will employ Latour's 'neutral' understanding of networks, while also considering *active* listening as a yardstick to establish whether and how public diplomacy actors listen on social media.

In more practical terms, networks on Twitter remain framed within the demographic and social characteristics of its users and the platform's technological affordances – which refer to "the grammar of action" mentioned above. These considerations challenge the supposed networks' neutrality argued by Latour, since the platform mediates how and which social dynamics are represented. Moreover, Twitter data are always "metadata",[18] and thus "the focus of social enquiry shifts from the actors or content itself to consider more formal features of networked activities (uptake, location, and so on)" (Marres 2017, 78). This also implies the difficulties of "idealised speech" on Twitter (e.g. apophatic listening), since I have argued that the communication space on Twitter is limited by technical characteristics, partial inclusion, power dynamics, human limits of attention and, in extreme cases, forms of censorship.[19]

Despite these tensions and limitations, Twitter provides the opportunity to conduct *active* listening within the conceptual and methodological constraints that I have exposed in this section. Moreover, looking at the dynamics of Twitter networks also allows for listening to those voices that have been labelled as 'peripheral participants' in social media communication and overcoming the difficulties of large-scale listening, especially in terms of the inclusion of those 'voices' that are less likely to be heard. Indeed, it will emerge in the two case studies that the majority of Twitter users do not significantly advance the conversation under study, even though they still show signs of engagement by tweeting, retweeting and

[18] Twitter as a generator of metadata will be further discussed in chapter 3.
[19] For an extensive discussion on Habermas' public sphere in reference to social media refer to Iosifidis (2011).

liking. A methodological approach that combines thin and thick description of the data can intercept these actors too.

2.3.4 The benefit of listening to collective emotions

The study of engagement, facilitated and constrained by the technical characteristics of the platform, also needs to address the affective and emotional aspects that play an important role in the formation and dissolution of Twitter conversations, especially in the hashtagged layer of communication. Real-time access to social media networks and the new ways of sharing content, particularly visual content, that often use humour, especially in online political debate, lead to an increasing importance in the role played by affect in the formation of online publics. Social media, according to Papacharissi (2015a, 32), facilitate feelings of engagement within affective publics, where the technology brings users into the network, but only storytelling creates "soft structures of feeling" that connect distant publics and "sustain [their] feeling of being there".

In digital communication, Papacharissi (2015a, 7) refers to the role played by affect, which, "as the sum of – often discordant – feelings about affairs, public and private, is […] the energy that drives, neutralizes, or entraps networked publics". and thus often "non-conscious". Other scholars have described "the digital realm as an emotional space" (Serrano-Puche 2015, 9), where "much of that communication is emotional, reflecting immediate feelings, sometimes as they occur" (Benski and Fisher 2014, 6).

The terms feelings, emotion and affect have been often used interchangeably in the literature. In this regard, (Shouse 2005) can help to clarify the semantic boundaries.

> A feeling is a sensation that has been checked against previous experiences and labelled. It is personal and biographical because every person has a distinct set of previous sensations from which to draw when interpreting and labelling their feelings. […]. An emotion is the projection/display of a feeling. Unlike feelings, the display of emotion can be either genuine or feigned. […] An affect is a non-conscious experience of intensity; it is a moment of unformed and unstructured potential. [The term] affect is the most abstract because affect cannot be fully realised in language, and because affect is always prior to and/or outside of consciousness (para. 3-5).

Emotion was also a central concern for the scholars who studied propaganda. In particular, Lasswell (1927, 628) distinguished between the "deliberative" and "dispositional" logics of communication. The former refers to those forms of communication that produce "the search for the solution of a besetting problem with no desire to prejudice a particular solution in advance", while a dispositional logic generates "valuational dispositions or attitudes". Based on this distinction, most scholars pointed out that propaganda is more dispositional (Brown 2008, Snow 2012, Graham 2014), which is especially a problem in democratic contexts.

However, dispositions are not necessarily negative forces, since they can unintentionally contribute to the creation of social movements. For example, Castells (2015, 13-14) studied how emotions drive networked movements. The two emotions that are most likely to produce social movements, according to the Spanish sociologist, are fear and enthusiasm. The first is paralysing, but it can become action when it is converted into anger; the second is connected to hope, and thus action.

Similar considerations are made in the study of the emotional aspects of international relations in the work of Crawford (2014, 536), who distinguishes between the emotions of fear and empathy, and calls for the institutionalisation of empathy.

> Empathy can be promoted and institutionalized, or alternatively, fear and a lack of identification with another may diminish empathy. To the extent that anarchy is understood as a self-help system, where trust cannot be expected, and groups exist in a relation of fear toward each other, it will be difficult to develop empathy between the leaders and peoples of states. Conversely, politicians may certainly believe, and publics may be told, that it is in their 'interest' to lower barriers to trade and travel, or that it is no longer necessary to increase military spending directed at their neighbors. The perception and creation of interests is an emotional process as well as one rooted in a material reality or drive for power. (Crawford 2014, 550)

Since "ingroup and outgroup empathy are potentially distinct", Crawford concludes that "empathic feelings and interpretations must be checked through the act of listening to the other (diplomacy)" (543). To translate this remark into more practical terms, it can be said that when a public diplomacy actor is seen to listen, it will likely create the conditions for a trustworthy environment, or a space for listening, as argued in 1.2.4. Public diplomats' investment in listening will enhance their credibility, and people will perceive this 'emphatic force'. A more trusting environment will be more likely to produce a space for mutual positive engagement than it will to produce conflict. Thus, active listening is advantageous because it enhances trust when actors are seen to be listening. In this way, active listening can encourage positive attitudes and expectations from publics because they perceive that they are being heard. It can nourish a circular process that, by generating positive affect, can enhance credibility and thus generate trust.

As (Rolfe 2014, 79) confirms, "no matter how rational (*logos*) or emotional (*pathos*) a speech is, an audience will not listen if it lacks trust in the rhetorician". Trust is principally generated by the positive reputation, which is to say credibility, of public diplomacy actors. Since credibility is about perception, it does not "reside in a source" (public diplomacy actors) but rather "is bestowed on a source by an audience" (Gass and Seiter 2009, 156). Therefore, listening can create credibility because it supports the interpretation of the "situation-specific" and "culture-bound" elements that foster an audience's trust (Gass and Seiter 2009, 157). Without listening, which shows goodwill and supports intercultural understanding, credibility and trust cannot be established.[20] The focus on listening to be credible does not mean the neglect of other characteristics – such as competence, composure and dynamism – that the literature in public diplomacy has highlighted as important for building trust (Gass and Seiter 2009, 158-61). I am focusing on the concept of trust and credibility because these are strictly bounded with listening. The audience's perception of being listened to can develop positive affect, then translated in positive emotions and attitudes in social media communication. The case studies presented in later chapters will provide empirical evidences about the importance of *active* listening to build trust and credibility.

These 'forces' in communication may further complicate our understanding of listening on Twitter, but the capacity to intercept them can enhance the analytical potential of listening methodologies. Crawford (2014, 553) also recognises that while "it may not be possible to directly observe emotions at work", we can observe their traces in online discussion. Therefore, listening on social media also needs to interpret these traces. Indeed, the analysis of the two case studies will be supported by looking at the role played by affect in the formation of diplomacy-related discussions on Twitter through mundane forms of communication such as selfies, memes and GIFs. These new forms of identity expression in the political arena require that diplomats "expand their attention from technology and information to the emotional dynamics" (Zaharna 2017, 3, 5). For example, humour is an important component of social media communication and can take different forms – parody accounts (Highfield 2015), memes (Shifman 2014, 119-150, Graeff 2013, Foster 2016) and hashtags – that can be used for political irreverence when users contaminate serious hashtagged discussions with jokes, or when users create new hashtags that mock the original ones (see Highfield 2016, 53-57).

Methodologically, this begs the question of how to listen to these emotional forces in Twitter communication. Once again, thick description can support understanding these forces when it comes to the analysis of *tone,* and the *cultural* and *situational* context of the message. As Papacharissi (2015a, 120) puts it,

> Affective mechanisms increase awareness of an issue and in so doing amplify the intensity of that awareness. They do not inherently enhance understanding of a problem, deepen one's level of knowledge on a particular issue, or lead to thick forms of civic engagement with public affairs. These things may indeed occur, but they present outcomes of other cognitive and behavioral processes that are connected to – but are also distinct from – affect mechanisms. This is why context is key in interpreting the meaning of affective mechanisms and the potential impact affective publics may generate.

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[20] There is also an extensive corpus of literature in management and leadership research that highlights the importance of listening to enhance trust (e.g. Helms and Haynes 1992, Flynn, Valikoski, and Grau 2008, Brunner 2008).

Recalling Papacharissi's soft structures of feeling mentioned above, listening implies also a contextualisation of Twitter storytelling to interpret and connect with social media affective publics.[21]

2.3.5 The spectrum of listening

I have argued in the first chapter that the literature on public diplomacy has not provided an articulated understanding of listening despite largely recognising its importance, especially in the new digital environment. In this chapter I have addressed engagement on Twitter, and it has emerged that definitions and methodologies of listening are complicated by the new digital environment. I have also explored the Twitter-specific signs of engagement, defining how the platform enables different levels of 'paying attention'. This journey has enriched the theoretical understanding of listening, going beyond the binary logic of listening vs. refusal to listen. Finally, I have provided insights on how listening to emotions online can enhance trust and credibility.

Table 4 shows the different types of listening drawing on relations between level of trust, types of engagement, communication goals and social media listening strategies. This table capitalises on the theoretical discussion conducted so far and will support the analysis and evaluation of public diplomacy communication approaches in the two case studies. The table summarises five types of listening, ranging from an ideal type of listening to unethical listening activities: *apophatic*, *active*, *tactical* listening, *listening in* and *surreptitious* listening.

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[21] Drawing on the anthropologist Arnold van Gennep, Papacharissi (2015b, 124) defines this process as "liminality", which is "a middle point in a dialogue about what is news in a society. It is a transitional but essential stage in finding one's own place in the story and doing so from a position that allows autonomy and potential for agency".

Table 4 – Spectrum of listening

	Type of listening	Engagement	Goal	Listening approach on social media
High level of trust	*Apophatic* listening	Hypersensitivity and self-negation.	Listen to God. Meditative or mystical experience.	N/A
	Active listening	Dialogic and relation-building engagement. Creates spaces for listening.	Long-term strategy implementation and adjustment. Promotes trust and understanding.	Thick and thin description.
	Tactical Listening	Instrumental and reactive engagement.	Correct misconceptions and pursue short-term sub-goals.	Monitoring to identify issues and actors of concern.
	Listening *in*	Unidirectional engagement.	Assessment of message reach.	Social media metrics based on impact.
	Background/casual listening	Casual engagement.	Information gathering.	Scrolling, unsystematic and/or accidental encounter of content.
Low level of trust	*Surreptitious* listening	No signs of engagement.	Spying/ Surveillance.	Unethical/illegal acquisition of private data.

It has been argued that *apophatic* listening, the 'ideal' form of listening, is unlikely to be applied to public diplomacy listening activities, which entail political direction and purpose. Since its theological origin, this type of listening encompasses a meditative or mystical experience as a form of 'listening to God' without preconceptions and implies self-negation. Nevertheless, *apophatic* listening is not always counterfactual, as for example listening to quasi-religious political leaders may induce forms of 'self-negation' (e.g. Brown 2015, Hackley and Hackley 2016). Although this type of listening might be unlikely to be applied in from a public diplomacy prospective – which is usually implies to act under the umbrella of more or less political and strategic goals – it is still helpful to mention it anyway since it represents an 'ideal' yardstick by which to compare the different listening strategies in public diplomacy.

The desirable and feasible type of listening that I have implicitly endorsed in this chapter is *active* listening, precisely because it requires the active participation of both diplomatic and non-diplomatic actors. In this case, the goal is to advance foreign policies by creating the conditions for international dialogue. Dialogic forms of communication do not imply self-negation but rather a constant negotiation of different attitudes to avoid conflicts and enhance trust, but "with direction(s) and purpose(s)" (Bickford 1996, 146). In short, listening in this case is a communication enabler. It creates a favourable environment where public diplomacy actors are seen to listen and therefore are considered credible interlocutors, and it enhances trust and enables the cultivation of long-term goals. The dialogue resulting from this type of listening is also more likely to produce meaningful conversations to be listened to by creating spaces for listening. Active listening is mindful to the extent that it is situation-specific and culture-bound. Since active listening aims to fully understand the types of engagement within the cultural context and to hear all voices, it requires a combination of thick and thin description to deploy it. Such a combination also allows the inclusion of so-called 'peripheral voices' that often represent 'ordinary' citizens and Twitter users. This type of listening will be implemented as a research method in chapter 3, as well as it will be proposed as a practical example for practitioners to conduct listening and evaluate public diplomacy engagement on Twitter.

Tactical listening aims to implement and readjust public diplomacy messages and correct misconceptions. It facilitates the identification of issues and actors of concern to provide a picture of the environment in which tactical goals operate. Forms of engagement are sometimes interactive, but with the clear goal of facilitating the accomplishment of a particular communication sub-goal (e.g. correcting misconceptions). In this case, the creation of a trusting communication environment and the credibility of public diplomacy actors are not the main concerns. Indeed, when active listening creates forms of dialogue, these are limited to the accomplishment of specific short-term goals. According to the literature on public diplomacy, tactical listening is performed in "two-way asymmetrical public diplomacy [which] means that although communication might be both sent and received […], the effects of the communication are limited to the foreign audience" (Yepsen 2012, 10). Tactical listening is concerned only with actors that are perceived as influential or instrumental for the achievement of a specific goal; thus it does not aim to listen to all voices.

Listening in is similar to tactical listening, but unlike the latter it does not contemplate signs of listening by public diplomacy actors. Listening in is equivalent to passive monitoring or traditional diplomatic information-gathering activities focused on measuring a public diplomacy actor's message reach and impact through social media analytics, such as number of views, followers, retweets and likes. In contrast with *surreptitious* listening, *listening in* gathers legitimate data with no invasion of privacy.

Background/casual listening is perhaps the most common approach adopted by social media users. To describe this type of listening, Crawford (2009) uses the analogy of tuning in and out while listening to the radio, with a constant but unsystematic – or casual – variation of the listener's levels of attention. "A Twitter user follows a range of people, some of whom will post updates that offer useful advice, amusing anecdotes, or interesting links. But many messages will simply be scanned quickly, not focused on, something closer to being tuned out rather than tuned in" (528). In relation to public diplomacy practices, Manor (2016a) has reported that in some cases ministries of foreign affairs encourage diplomats to gather information from social media on specific issues. Manor revels that this type of unsystematic but recurring form of listening is usually used as a source of information for diplomatic reporting. Moreover, background listening can potentially lead to forms of casual engagement that can result in 'appearance of listening' by, for example, occasional retweeting or strategical following.[22]

Surreptitious listening is a kind of listening that implies spying of a specific international actor or forms of mass surveillance. It has historically been used, and continues to be used, by governmental intelligence for espionage, sometimes justified for security and/or anti-terrorism reasons, sometimes for strategic military and geopolitical reasons. Despite the fact it is unethical and often illegal, governments seem to employ this type of listening in the context of what has been called cyberwar or cyberespionage, which can be offensive when governments actively seek to sabotage enemies' digital infrastructures. As this is clearly a digital form of hard power, this type of listening goes beyond the theoretical and practical boundaries of public diplomacy and implies a very low level of trust among international actors.

To conclude, this research will suggest that social media platforms are a powerful tool for listening to international publics, implement and adjust communication strategies, and generating engagement. However, despite claims for listening and engagement being made in many public diplomacy strategies,[23] these do not clarify their listening approaches and the kind of engagement that is sought and evaluated. Indeed, the chapter has argued that the type of listening frames the whole communication approach, since it defines the type of engagement that a public diplomacy actor seeks and is capable of. Listening frames the evaluation of public diplomacy communication activities on social media, and thus it is defined by the methodological approach embraced.

This chapter has defined the spectrum of listening approaches available to public diplomacy practitioners. This model supports the implementation of public diplomacy evaluation strategies by shifting the focus from speaking (advocacy and persuasion) to listening. The type of listening a public diplomacy actor adopts explicitly defines its own understanding of engagement, communication goals and evaluation criteria.

More detail about the methodological considerations will be provided in chapter 3, which will also highlight the limitations in the use of Twitter data in terms of geographical distribution of

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[22] The existence of this practice has also been confirmed by informal conversations with diplomats. For example, lurking expatriates' Facebook groups can offer insights into their experiences, needs and feedback that might be used to readjust consular services.
[23] For example, in the Australian DFAT's Digital Media Strategy (2016) addressed in Chapter 4.

the platform, sampling, analysis and interpretation and ethical concerns, already anticipated in this chapter.

2.4 Conclusion

The reflections made in this chapter aim to capture a complex landscape in digital mediated public diplomacy. Public diplomacy itself has already implicitly complicated conventional diplomacy, implying a multitude of non-diplomatic actors. The emergence of social media has disrupted the field of public diplomacy further, creating in some sense an interminable communicative chain of ‘actors’ and ‘networks’. What we are witnessing, then, is the transition to a digitally mediated public diplomacy, which inevitably creates opportunities and challenges.

This research aims to capture this complexity, aware of the impossibility of epistemological completeness for insecure, accidental, subjective but heavily layered accounts of engagement and its interpretations through *active* listening, which necessitates a mix of thin and thick descriptions.

The first two chapters have built upon the literature in public diplomacy and the multidisciplinary literature on listening in public communication. I have proposed a move from the focus on the transformations brought by the introduction of digital media in public diplomacy to the critical analysis of public diplomats’ communication approaches and activities. As it emerged with older anxieties about the 24-hour news cycle and information overload described in chapter one, the lack of finitude of a ‘digitally mediated public diplomacy’ impact upon what are seen as diplomacy’s traditional functions. The evolution from information-gathering activities in traditional diplomacy to the current listening activities in public diplomacy can provide an important opportunity for diplomats to claim back their role of “natural foreign experts” in governmental activities (Herman 1998, 8). Complexities in the international stage and public diplomacy’s focus on listening to foreign publics can reinvigorate and renovate traditional functions of diplomacy.

The first chapter has clarified how listening can be interpreted and evaluated in different manners. This chapter has applied these theoretical considerations into the medium Twitter. Twitter’s evolving technological affordance and use define the ways digital engagement is conveyed and publics formed. In this sense, being aware of both the evolution in the technological affordance and in the use of Twitter is pivotal for conduction ‘good’ listening on social media.

This chapter has also implemented a spectrum of digital listening drawing from the literature review in chapter 1. Within the spectrum of listening, it has proposed *active* listening as a feasible yardstick for the assessment of public diplomacy communication activities and strategies, as well as a framework for conducting meaningful listening on social media. The mixed method approach that I will propose in the next chapter will build upon academic methods used for the study of digital media and the distinction of thin and thick description introduced in this chapter. I argue that the mixed methods approach I use to study and analyse my case studies (chapters 5 and 6) also provides a feasible and effective way or public diplomacy practitioners to conduct listening on Twitter.

3 Research method

3.1 Methods for studying public diplomacy on social media

Since public diplomacy is an emerging academic field of study, it borrows conceptual frameworks, methodologies and methods from different fields, including social and political science, communication studies and journalism, and international relations. In the book *Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*, Singh (2015, 192-96) lists some examples of methods for public diplomacy listening. These include ethnography and elite interviews with diplomats and negotiators (e.g. Sandre 2015, Archetti 2012); focus groups and in-depth interviews with audiences to solicit their reactions to content (e.g. Khakimova Storie 2015); histories of diplomats (e.g. Kovach 2008); and the most prevalent method, case studies (e.g. Cull 2009b, Fisher and Montez 2011).

While this research employs the case study method, it also adopts a specific approach to analysing social media and I describe that approach in some detail in this chapter. More specifically, I provide an explanation for the selection of the two explorative case studies and the rational for applying a mixed method for the analysis of Twitter data. The considerations made in the previous chapter about thick and thin description will be translated into a mixed method approach that involves the following stages: data extraction, data processing and cleaning, quantitative data analysis and visualisation, and qualitative data analysis of tweets and non-Twitter sources.

The question of method is itself integral to the field of public diplomacy. Governmental departments, such as public diplomacy branches, need a certain degree of accountability to demonstrate to what extent their activities have generated value for money. Quantitative methods that measure increases in the number of followers, reactions and visualisations, provide fast and cost-effective ways to demonstrate that investments in online activities have been value for money. By contrast, qualitative academic research and methods – often directed toward systemic or structural conditions of possibility rather than practical and empirically-verifiable improvement – are not always welcomed by practitioners.

To answer the question of method in public diplomacy, some have argued for a balance of qualitative and quantitative approaches. For example, in the report *The Soft Power 30* Brown (2017) has called for political leadership "to encourage risk-taking and an open, non-defensive way of analysing" public diplomacy activities, arguing precisely against the type of quantitative evaluation approach, based on return on investment (ROI), which is common in digital marketing. This call reflects the perceived need to build "real quantitative and qualitative research skills [among practitioners] to help determine frameworks to assess which strategies and tactics work in complex environments to build trust and understanding" (121).

The introduction of social media in the workings of relations between countries and non-state actors has offered the opportunity to closely listen to public opinion. Despite the wealth of attention in recent years to digital methods, there has not been an exhaustive debate about the methodological toolkit available to public diplomacy scholars, and particularly about what scholars can provide to practitioners in terms of methodological instruments to support investigative strategies and monitoring activities. In proposing my own methodological approach in this chapter, I also ask whether the availability of public conversations on Twitter and newly developed digital methods can contribute to the practice and evaluation of digital diplomacy. Can these new technological tools provide opportunities for combining meaningful social media listening with the assessment of public diplomacy social media activities?

I have argued in chapter 2 that what I have defined as social media *active* listening requires a combination of thin and thick description. The theoretical remarks made in the previous chapter now need to be translated into a methodological approach for the analysis of public diplomacy on Twitter. To do so, in this chapter I argue that the combination of quantitative and qualitative Twitter analysis can contribute both to the academic study and to practitioners' evaluation of public diplomacy social media activities, and to support meaningful social media listening.

In this thesis I aim to integrate and systematise academic social research methodological approaches to the practice of public diplomacy. Previous studies in academia have focused on specific social media accounts by providing a critique of their online activities and presence (posts, interactions, shares and likes) (e.g. Bjola and Jiang 2015, Strauß et al. 2015), while others have examined the networked relationships produced by international debates on social media. Such abstract relationality can be made concrete through the study of online diplomatic networks, such as the national and transnational networks of foreign offices, embassies and consulates (e.g. Manor 2015a), or the study of networks involving a wider range of international actors, where public diplomacy social media accounts can be part – or not – of debates and controversies occurring on Twitter. Principally, Fisher (2010), in his paper *Mapping the Great Beyond: Identifying Meaningful Networks in Public Diplomacy*, proposed a method for visualising and studying meaningful networks on social media, and applied the method during Barack Obama's visit to Brazil in March 2011 (Fisher and Montez 2011). In addition, practitioners are also starting to capture and quantitatively analyse social media data, such as the U.K. Foreign and Commonwealth Office who have used RipJar,[24] a social media monitoring tool (Linzell 2015) to conduct social media analysis to assess the effectiveness of their campaigns (Heatherly 2016). However, these approaches are focused on the analysis of message reach rather than evaluating how effectively social media has been used to listen.

The different approaches deployed in academia provide very valuable insights into the different aspects of social media use in public diplomacy. Some explore organisational aspects, such as the production of online content in public diplomacy branches (e.g. Manor 2016a, Archetti 2012), while others investigate communicational activities (e.g. Clarke 2015, Kampf, Manor, and Segev 2015). However, an approach that aims to listen to all voices and study public diplomacy actors within their networks and relational activities on social media cannot be limited to an analysis of the social media accounts of diplomatic actors, as argued in the previous chapters. Accordingly, my research will take into account the strategies and communication activities of both state and non-state actors, including NGOs, private sector and individual citizens. To sum up, my contribution can be summarised into three related but distinct points:

1. I translate the academic work on listening and methods into public diplomacy practice;
2. I combine qualitative and quantitative methods;
3. I add non-state actors into the analysis.

After describing my methodological approach, I will then analyse policy makers' discourses in chapter 4, in order to better comprehend Australian and Italian foreign offices' goals and strategies. Subsequent chapters will present the results of my Twitter analysis (both qualitative and quantitative) to map and evaluate public diplomacy activities on Twitter within a complex combination of governmental and non-governmental actors (in chapters 5 and 6). Such an approach takes into account both diplomatic actors' strategies and narratives, and their embeddedness within online networked relations that also include a large array of international actors.

3.2 Big data and public diplomacy: listening on social media

The introduction of social media platforms in public diplomacy, the digitalisation of data and the constant growth of computational capacity are providing novel opportunities for public diplomacy listening in the digital environment.

[24] https://ripjar.com

The term big data has been used to define different types of data where size is clearly the defining characteristic. Enterprises, public services providers, social media, and search engines companies collect large datasets. My focus in this section is on social media big data.

Social media big data makes it possible for information about international populations to be easily accessed for use in a wide range of areas, including public diplomacy. Such information would otherwise be difficult to gather due to the high investment in time and budget required to gain such insights through traditional research instruments such as questionnaires and census data (Manovich 2012). In particular, social media analytics provide the possibility of tracking the evolution of political engagement and discussion over time, as opposed to a single "snapshot" produced using a survey, for example (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan 2013). A deep analysis of social media data can provide valuable insights upon which communication strategies can be developed and readjusted. Therefore, social media big data promises new opportunities for governments to listen to their publics, both at home and abroad. Some public diplomacy scholars have argued that social media big data "can serve to provide new insights, challenge biases, and corroborate information", as well as "the ability to understand patterns and trends in discourse, to tailor messages, and to measure the effectiveness of a communication campaign" (Jacobson, Höne, and Kurbalija 2018, 5). More problematically, others have suggested that, "in some ways, if they learn to operate in this new environment, governments have the potential to move from reactive to proactive, to pre-emptive, to even predictive" (Reagan 2015, 261).

However, there are several challenges posed by the use of social media big data in public diplomacy listening. The analysis of huge amounts of information begs methodological questions as to how listening can be ethically and practically accomplished in the digital environment. In this sense, the implementation of listening methodologies needs to address the ethical boundaries between monitoring, genuine listening and surveillance. At the same time, listening needs to be meaningful to avoid the risk to limit our understanding of social media big data in public diplomacy as a mere "technological fetishism", as Bean and Comor (2018) have recently warned.

Big data is a phenomenon produced by the increasing readability and traceability of activities carried out in the digital environment, where "the stunning innovation is that every click […] may be gathered in a data bank and submitted to a second-degree data-mining operation" (Latour 2007, 2). This, along with growing computational capabilities, allows the searching, aggregation, and cross-referencing of large data sets. Drawing from boyd and Crawford (2012, 663), big data is a cultural, technological, and scholarly phenomenon that rests on the interplay of:

(1) *Technology*: maximising computation power and algorithmic accuracy to gather, analyse, link, and compare large data sets.

(2) *Analysis*: drawing on large data sets to identify patterns in order to make economic, social, technical, and legal claims.

(3) *Mythology*: the widespread belief that large data sets offer a higher form of intelligence and knowledge that can generate insights that were previously impossible, with the aura of truth, objectivity, and accuracy.

The second point in this definition refers to the possibility of using big data as a source of knowledge, principally by investigating reality – in our case, listening to foreign publics – in an innovative way. Indeed, big data analysis has been made possible because we are digitally collecting and storing information in a quantity never seen before. However, Crawford (2013) warns against corporations and experts fostering a mythology that big data analysis is superior to other forms of knowing. Indeed, the fact that big data now exists inevitably raises questions regarding how governments and public diplomacy scholars should make use of it. [25]

Before the advent of big data, as Manovich (2012, 461-62) pointed out, the study of the social and cultural world relied on two types of data: "surface data" about many people and "deep data" about few people. The first type has been used in disciplines that adopt quantitative methods, such as economics, political science, communication studies and marketing. The second approach has been used primarily in the humanities, for example the qualitative schools in psychology, sociology, anthropology and ethnography. To put it simply, these two types produce "the schism between those who dealt with numbers and those who dealt with qualities" which "has never been bridged" (Latour 2010, 147). According to Latour (2010), since big data can be both surface and deep, enabling the researcher to work simultaneously with both numbers and qualities, this traditional separation seems to be challenged.

However, there is both utopian and dystopian rhetoric about big data, which relates to the mythological aspects of this new phenomenon (boyd and Crawford 2012, 663). The debate within academia on the epistemological implications of big data can also inform how new methodologies of listening can arise from the digital enviroment. The current debate about big data is characterised by two perspectives. The first one enables data to speak for themselves free of theory (a sort of 'new empiricism' or 'data-driven' approach), while the second one incorporates existing methods with new inquiries that wouldn't be possible without computation (an approach endorsed by the so-called computational social sciences) (Kitchin 2014, 3, 8).

[25] This mythology can now be considered tempered with real concerns about the exploitative and discriminatory uses of big data by companies and governments, as discussed in Chapter 2.

The first approach provocatively declares the end of theory. In a well-cited piece, technology entrepreneur Chris Anderson claims that big data "allows us to say: 'Correlation is enough'. […] We can analyze the data without hypotheses about what it might show" (Anderson 2008). But behind this kind of argument is not just provocation: this is what marketing, retail and some public services are actually doing, trying to improve their services through computational prediction rather than explanation or interpretation. Thus, following this approach, anyone who can decode a statistic is able to interpret reality (Kitchin 2014, 4).

These assumptions are problematic for three reasons. Firstly, big data is attractive because it appears to be exhaustive and objective, yet it is not, since it is shaped by the modalities by which the data is captured and the tools employed (Crawford 2013). Secondly, despite the claim that we can abandon theory, algorithms employed by software and platforms are designed by humans to ask specific questions automatically. Such questions are never value-free, since they always entail prior categorisation (Marres 2017, 16). Thirdly, to assert that big data can be interpreted without context and substantive knowledge risks reductionism, ignoring "the effects of culture, politics, policy, governance and capital" (Kitchin 2014, 5). Nevertheless, this approach has gained popularity in business circles, providing as it does a cost-effective and rapid way of conducting large-scale marketing research.

More critical approaches come from "computational social science", which includes different fields such as digital methods (Rogers 2013, 21), digital humanities (Gold 2012) and digital sociology (Marres 2017). Besides the differences in their definitions, objects of study and tools employed – which are not relevant here – a critical debate is currently taking place about the methodological and epistemological implications of the analysis of digital traces (see Marres 2017, 14-18). The major concerns that arise from this debate focus on social media data. Within this debate, particularly relevant for listening are the issues of representativeness and interactivity in social media platforms. Indeed, social media data do not represent the whole population, but rather a group of users with characteristics that vary from one platform to another. Moreover, the data formats (hashtags, likes, etc.) limit the range of possible enquiries such that the researcher does not have the full control of the data structure. Therefore, the characteristics of the platforms shape the forms and modalities of interaction (the latter point has been discussed in 2.2).

Within the context of public diplomacy, with this thesis I aim to provide my own contribution to this methodological debate. In the presentation of the research methodology in this chapter, I will attempt to make transparent the process of data collection, analysis, categorisation and query. This will allow for a critical and reflective approach to social media analysis and open the door to exploring the range of methodological options for social media listening. This is also in response to the call made by (Melissen and de Keulenaar 2017a, 295), discussed further in section 3.2, for developing “a critical knowledge and use [in digital diplomacy practices] of software and other technical, but no less political, elements constituting digital technologies”.

Another problem that arises from social media listening is related to the contextualisation of social media and the role played by the social in the digital sphere. Indeed, there is a risk of vulnerability of our interpretative skills if the ‘what is happening’ comes at the cost of understanding the ‘why it is happening’ (Zwitter 2014, 3). Such whys often lie in the social, political, cultural and economic context. Considering context remains one of the challenges of big data (boyd and Crawford 2012, 671). However, as I will argue in the following sections, social media data can be analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Zooming in on the dataset allows another level of analysis: the researcher can look at specific units (a tweet or a Facebook comment, for example) for a qualitative reading, in order to understand context and analyse intended meaning. In this process the researcher, through specific software, can zoom in and zoom out of the dataset. This aspect suggests again the significance of the term ‘spectrum’ of methodological approached made in the previous chapter. Shifting between quantitative and qualitative modes of interpretation addresses limitations of using just one or the other.

To conclude, social media big data and digital analytics software represent an opportunity to conduct listening in a noisy communication environment. Nevertheless, the use of social media big data in public diplomacy needs to be clearly framed within the theoretical pillars and strategic goals of public diplomacy, to avoid forms of “surreptitious listening, or mass surveillance” (Singh 2015, 192). The public reaction after the revelations of Edward Snowden – mentioned in the previous chapter – and the legitimate concerns of citizens around the world about new forms of mass surveillance have already demonstrated how big data can foster new forms of control over internet users rather than promote genuine listening.

The big data society (Manovich 2012) has brought several challenges, but also new modes of enquiry. Despite the claim that a large amount of data is now available to researchers and practitioners, these new possibilities should be critically evaluated. This task will be undertaken in the following section.

3.3 The case studies: G20 (Australia) and Expo2015 (Italy)

Qualitative and quantitative Twitter analysis will be applied to two international events: the 2014 G20 summit in Australia (chapter 5) and Expo 2015 in Italy (chapter 6). These international events have been selected as part of two case studies on Australian and Italian public diplomacy.

The selection of two case studies strengthens the reliability, while permitting in-depth analysis that allows the exploratory research (Yin 2017) of public diplomacy listening strategies and practices on social media. The national focus of the analysis provides insights about the two countries' articulation of public diplomacy strategies, in particular in the digital environment. The selected international events provide an opportunity to experiment with the proposed method and examine how and to what extent diplomatic actors listen on social media. Elements of comparison are present in the analysis of the Italian and the Australian public diplomacy approaches in chapter 4, in particular in relation to the differences in the use of language in public diplomacy, as described in Chapter 1.

An analysis of current practices and the respective understanding of public diplomacy activities can advance what we know about how social media can support listening and advance diplomatic initiatives, particularly in cases where traditional media appear to be failing to disseminate Australian and Italian culture internationally (e.g. international television broadcasting). Australia's and Italy's soft power resources – represented by positive foreign perceptions of the two countries' cultural and natural assets – are crucial for the positive projection of their national image abroad, but only if they are ably promoted through effective communication strategies.

The two countries have been chosen for theoretical and practical reasons. Theoretically, Australia and Italy are two examples of so-called middle-powers (Thakur 1991, Jordaan 2003, Gilboa 2010, Cooper 2011). In their search for a meaningful place in the international stage and as result of their limited negotiating power, middle powers represent an example of nations supporting specific foreign policies, the so called "niche diplomacy" (Potter 1997). Middle powers' focus on specific issues facilitates in-depth analysis of the two case studies, as opposed to great powers that try to cover a wider range of issues in international politics or small states that usually seek mere international acknowledgment (Gilboa 2010). In particular, in the case of Australia, the centrality of the "middle power" concept has underlined its foreign policy since the Cold War, with "a focus on pursuing political outcomes that benefited the international community as a whole" (Ungerer 2007, 550). In this sense, listening is especially relevant for middle powers. Since their "*method* is coalition building with 'like-minded' countries" (Evans 2011, para. 30), they need to listen in order to create the conditions for collaboration before acting. This is in contrast with great powers, that can act unilaterally without listening, or small powers, that are usually expected to simply listen.

Retrospectively, two serendipitous connections have emerged from the case studies: the focus on the economy and the role of Russia in the current geopolitical environment. While the first connection has been unsurprising due to the common international need to collectively tackle the global financial crisis of 2007-08, the second is less so. Indeed, several of the dominant political preoccupations of this decade have emerged in the two relatively disconnected public diplomacy campaigns relating to the G20 2014 in Brisbane and Expo 2015 in Milan. In particular, reverberations from the wider geopolitical situation have been recorded in the two case studies in relation to the controversial and active role played by Russia on social media communication (Manor 2015b) and, more generally, on the international stage.

The contribution of soft power to the perception of a country is significant as the results of the London-based Institute for Government and *Monocle* magazine's *Soft Power Survey* of 2017 has shown.[26] This annual report, which ranks the 25 most appealing countries in terms of culture, sport, cuisine, design, diplomacy and more, has highlighted the growth of soft power capabilities for the two selected countries, currently placed in the top 10. However, even if Australia and Italy possess credible and solid soft power capabilities, less is known about how these countries' public diplomacy strategies are contributing to these capabilities. In fact, I argue in this thesis that, on the basis of my case studies, both countries are struggling to develop coherent, consistent and successful public communication approaches.

Nevertheless, Australia and Italy have been actively engaged in social media public diplomacy campaigns and associated planning. Australia recently published its *Digital Media Strategy 2016–18* (DFAT 2016), which follows its *Public Diplomacy Strategy 2014–16* and has incorporated digital media as part of the Australian public diplomacy activities. This move has been further encouraged by foreign affairs minister Julie Bishop – considered the inventor of what has been called emoji diplomacy[27] (Twiplomacy 2016) – who is now leading Australian diplomacy from the prudent approach of the 2014-16 strategy to more consistent digital planning.

Despite the lack of a clear digital strategy, Italy is also advancing its online communication, as the several social media accounts managed by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs demonstrate. In recent years, Italian diplomacy's social media presence was limited to Twitter. At the time of writing, it was expanding to Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Flickr and Telegram, as part of the social media campaign *#Italian*, which aims to promote the activities of the Italian diplomatic network around the world (MAECI 2016b).

Further, I have selected these two case studies for practical reasons. As far as Italy is concerned, my network of professional relationships developed during my previous work experiences supported information gathering and the research process. Moreover, the analysis of the strategies and online conversations in the Italian case study was able to be conducted without translation costs, since Italian is my native language. As far as the Australian case

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[26] Cf. also *The Soft Power 30* (Portland and USC Center on Public Diplomacy 2017), an international survey which provides a ranking of soft power. It ranks Australia in eight place and Italy in thirteenth.
[27] This refers to the use of emojis by diplomats in social media communication.

study is concerned, the main practical reason was that I was already based in Australia for my PhD, thus minimising travel expenses. Also, the data, documents and contents examined were in English, again avoiding translation costs.

The two planned international events selected as the focus of the case studies provide insights about the actual articulation of listening within online conversations. During the 2014 G20 summit in Brisbane and Expo 2015 in Milan, as host nations Australia and Italy, respectively, drew international attention. This attention provided each government with an opportunity to spread and cultivate particular narratives, as well as the possibility to build networks related to national and international strategic issues.

Referring to the categorisation and definition of time and space of events established by Getz (2007), both case studies were "planned" and "cyclical" events. They were also situated in a particular city and they have worked to "temporally transform spaces (or venues)" (3, 20). In term of their "size of significance", these selected events can be considered national "mega events" (25). Nation-based events often produce tensions between the transmission of "'official' ideologies to 'the masses'" and the creation of opportunities for "'resistant' responses by members of the public" (Roche 2002, 9). The interactivity of social media platforms has created a space where this tension can be explored because they allow us to analyse the unfolding of online discussions and controversies. Therefore, mega-events provide a space for public discussion that makes possible the analysis of both governmental and 'ordinary' citizens' social media engagement, as well as listening practices and strategies.

More controversial is the categorisation of the two case studies as "media events" – initially defined as those events that reached a global audience, interrupting ordinary and regular media production (Dayan and Katz 1994, 14). With the introduction of the internet, the literature is now indicating the need for a new definition of media event. In particular, Couldry and Hepp (2017, 3) define media events "as certain situated, thickened, centring performances of mediated communication that are focused on a specific thematic core". Media events are "central" because they "are widely communicated cross-media and in a digital environment" (3). This definition of a media event introduces the difference between the selected case studies: while the G20 is largely a mediated event, world expos are predominately events that require 'physical' participation. However, as I will argue in Chapter 6, expos can now be included within the definition of 'media event' since they are becoming 'widely communicated', particularly in the digital environment. In particular, Expo 2015 was the first world exposition that saw heavy social media coverage, a tendency that will most probably be followed in future editions. Further discussion about the characteristics and histories of the two events will follow in the case study analyses in Chapter 5 and 6.

The findings will be presented according the theoretical framework suggested in Chapter 2 and the methodology which will be described in detail in following sections. The case study design fits well with the proposed in-depth analysis of social media conversations and also provides a great opportunity for experimenting with methods of listening on social media. Moreover, my knowledge of the two political and cultural contexts has supported an analysis of the social media data that has been framed within the domestic and geopolitical contexts.

Interview requests were repeatedly rejected by the Australian DFAT (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade), and only one off-the-record conversation was able to be conducted with a member of staff at the Italian MAECI's (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation) press office. Interviews were meant to provide insights relating to the communication and monitoring strategies of foreign offices and the composition of actors involved in the production of online content and communication. My inability to conduct such interviews indicate the unwillingness of these institutions to engage with scholarship in this area and the insularity of emerging digital diplomacy practice.

3.4 Twitter as a Research Tool

Large-scale discussions and events on Twitter involving not only official public diplomacy social media accounts but also those of a number of other international actors can be monitored using social media analytics and big data software. The analysis of Twitter applied to the two case studies will provide insights about the use of this social media platform in public diplomacy while providing an opportunity to test, critique and adapt both emerging and established techniques derived from digital methods. Findings from computational analysis will then be complemented with and enriched by in-depth qualitative analysis.

Therefore, the selected case studies allow the study of public diplomacy on Twitter from two angles:

1. by critiquing and assessing the countries' social media use in the two case studies. This aims to evaluate the selected countries' public diplomacy activities by applying the spectrum of listening framework described in chapter two.
2. by developing and experimenting with approaches to listening on Twitter. This exploration produces insights about the methods employed.

These two analytical aims will be achieved by exploring actors' narratives and political goals before the events, mapping the issues and controversies that came out in the discussion and analysing public diplomacy actors' digital listening according to the spectrum of listening.

I will explore the Australian and Italian Twitter communication in relation to the two events, their message flow within and across networks, and how such messages are mediated, transformed, reinterpreted and/or challenged by non-diplomatic actors on Twitter. The analysis will be conducted through the interplay of thin and thick description, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Thin description, as I define it here, consists of two key components: social media metrics, and issues and network mapping. Social media metrics, previously defined as a 'listening in' approach, is focused on the message reach of public diplomacy organisations' content (mentions, links, tweets, etc.) and how far the message travels (retweets, cross-posting, shared content). Issues and network mapping assesses the position of public diplomacy actors within networks of actors and shared interests. This refers to 'self-serving' or 'tactical' listening and aims to facilitate the identification of issues and actors of concern to provide a clear picture of the communication environment in which public diplomacy actors operate. The thin description will employ strategies drawn from digital methods, using Rogers' (2009, 1) working definition of digital methods as methods "that are 'born' in the new medium, as opposed to those that have 'migrated' to it", and that allow us "to move beyond the study of online culture only". Digital methods employ digital platforms to gain insights for social and cultural enquiries. In line with this definition, this thesis will employ computational Twitter analysis and network visualisation to analyse and assess public diplomacy-related Twitter conversations. This refers to the first level of the Twitter analysis, which deals with the largeness of the datasets by mapping key actors and their interactions, URLs and hashtags.

The second level of analysis incorporates thick description, which aims to intercept users' context-specific dialogic engagement. It assesses message tone for both diplomatic and non-diplomatic actors, assessing the signs of paying attention in a qualitative manner. It focuses on evaluating whether there are dialogic forms of engagement (such as questioning, acknowledgement, interaction and/or formation of discussion), and thus whether signs of 'active' listening among participants in the conversation are present.

For the thick level of analysis, I manually access the profiles of the key actors, the webpages connected to URLs and the units of information or tweets to select significant samples of the online discussion, especially those relevant to public diplomacy social media accounts, to discover message tone and content. While thin description focuses on 'digital traces' (likes, tweets, hashtags, geolocation, etc.), thick description focuses the interpretation of these traces, incorporating both tweets and non-Twitter sources according to the definition provided in the previous chapter.

3.4.1 Thick description on social media

The use of thick description for the qualitative analysis of digital data is not a new endeavour. In digital ethnography, it has been suggested to readapt the ethnographic approach to the digital research environment, where ethnographic "listening" might also involve reading digital texts (Horst et al. 2016). The researcher can now "observe" events and conversations or "lurk" while they are happening online (Varis 2016, 12). It has also been suggested we need to read and interpret social media datasets as texts, and thus adapt hermeneutic analysis to social media (Gerbaudo 2016).

Nevertheless, concerns might still arise in relation to how far the thick component of my own method can go in terms of the researcher's participation and immersion, which define traditional forms of thick description in anthropology (Geertz 1973). To be more explicit, I refer to what Varis (2016) calls that "issue of the screen". By understanding thick description as a qualitative analysis of tweets, the main limitation is that we "only see what is on the screen"; and yet "what is observable on the screen can be misleading, or at least only provide a partial image" (Varis 2016, 13).

It should be considered, however, that my own research focus on *digital* listening requires that I adapt the concept of thick description to social media data. The need of thick description aims precisely complement social media big data approaches for public diplomacy digital listening described in the previous section. The terminology introduced in the previous chapter when I referenced Geertz (1973) serves as a argumentative move towards analysing social media as both datasets and texts. As Gerbaudo (2016, 99) suggests,

> The shortcomings of data analytics should be seen by qualitative researchers as evidence for the continuing relevance of interpretive methods. Social media data is not inherently hostile to a qualitative research agenda, and potentially offers a treasure trove for qualitative research (99).

In the context of my research, I believe that the challenges posed by using the concept of thick description limited to digital sources have been addressed by:

1. covering two rather than one case study;
2. devoting considerable time onto 'zooming in' the dataset, careful selection of the content[28] and in-depth interpretation of the text and visuals by conducting content analysis on selected tweets;
3. drawing upon extra-Twitter sources, such as media reports and news articles, that contextualise the discussion within broader public debates and media ecology;
4. in-depth analysis of the two selected countries' public diplomacy strategies and foreign policies promoted during the events.

The method proposed here, built upon the theoretical discussion conducted in the previous chapters, aims to take advantage of the paradox of social media data, that can be both big and

[28] The sampling techniques will be specified later in the chapter.

‘small’ and can allow for thin and thick level of analysis. As Lewis, Zamith, and Hermida (2013) put it,

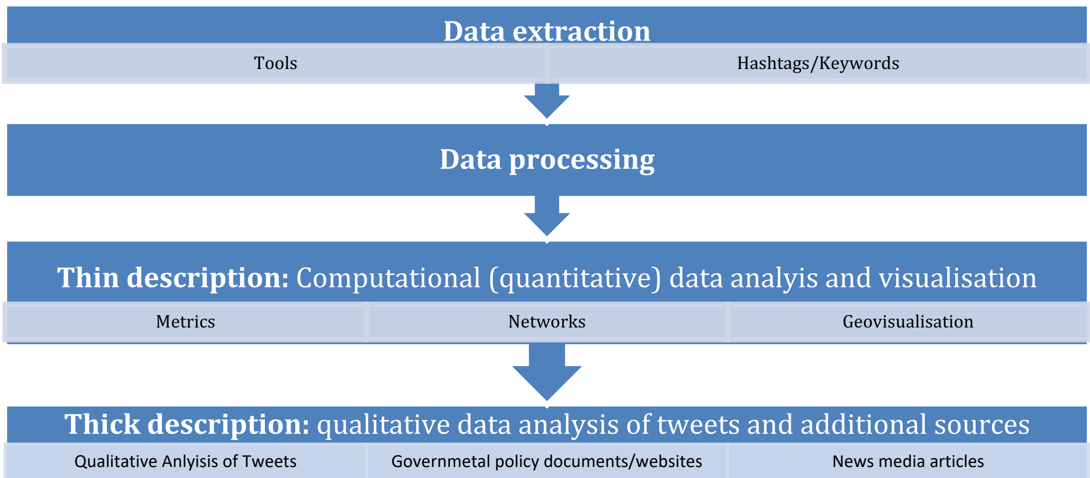
> careful combinations of computational and manual techniques can preserve the strengths of traditional content analysis, with its systematic rigor and contextual sensitivity, while also maximizing the large-scale capacity of Big Data and the algorithmic accuracy of computational methods (34).

As this quote suggests, the two levels of analysis complement each other. Thick description interrogates, supports and enriches the correlations that emerges from the quantitative analysis, while thin description intervenes in the partiality and bias involved in selective sampling of individual tweets. Thus, in my approach, thick and thin methods are both necessary and reciprocally bonded, since they complement each other.

3.5 Research method

In this section I describe both the thin and thick levels of the analysis, as well as the practical stages involved, such as data extraction, processing and sampling. The Twitter analysis approach employed in this research is constituted of four main stages: data extraction (hashtags or keywords), data processing and cleaning, data analysis and visualisation, and qualitative data analysis (table 5).

Table 5 – Twitter Analysis Research Sequence



The first stage of the method involves “freezing the flow” of the endless stream of social media data (Karlsson and Strömbäck 2010, 8-13), and producing a bounded data set that becomes unalterable once it has been extracted. Indeed, the extraction defines our dataset, and all the data that remains excluded cannot be captured subsequently due to the limitations imposed by the Twitter API (application programming interface), which does not allow for the recovery of tweets older than approximately two weeks (this temporal limit is even more stringent when mapping a hashtag that contains large amount of tweets).

Therefore, the researcher needs to make some important choices and predict the most suitable way to capture the data according the research questions before starting the data collection. Most importantly, the researcher has to select one or more hashtags or keywords. An aspect of this choice, and one that is rarely mentioned as a limitation of Twitter analysis, is that the selection of a hashtag also has consequences in terms of the range of languages included in the dataset, which leads to another form of demarcation of the boundaries of the sample. In other words, the choice of the keyword(s) will define the issues and actors listened.

Hence, there are "*a priori* philosophical assumptions intrinsic to any sample design and the subsequent validity of the sample criteria themselves" (Uprichard 2013, 2). These assumptions can only be justified by the exploratory skills of the researcher before starting the capturing process. As Gerlitz and Rieder (2013, para. 5) point out,

> Building collections by gathering tweets containing specific hashtags, for example, assumes that a) the conversation is held together by hashtags and b) the chosen hashtags are indeed the most relevant ones. Such assumptions go beyond the statistical question of *sampling bias* and concern the fundamental problem of how to go fishing in a pond that is big, opaque, and full of quickly evolving populations of fish. The classic information retrieval concepts of *recall* (How many of the relevant fish did I get?) and *precision* (How many fish caught are relevant?) fully apply in this context.

The two case studies included in this thesis research carry similar challenges (Table 6). For the Expo 2015 case study, I choose the official hashtag #Expo2015 because I was interested in the users' engagement with the official conversation promoted by the Expo social media team. My interest here was deliberately focused on a specific hashtag rather than on capturing the whole and more general conversation about the Expo, which could have been done by selecting the keyword 'expo'.

By contrast, for the Brisbane G20 case study, I choose a more comprehensive keyword, without the use of the '#', because I wanted to gather as many tweets as possible regarding the heads-of-state meeting within a limited span of time: the pre-G20 conversation which took place 1–14 November, 2014, and the debate during the actual meeting in Brisbane, 15–16 November 2014. Moreover, for the latter case study, the choice was also driven by a practical reason: the Digital Methods Initiative at the University of Amsterdam was already tracking the keyword 'g20', and this provided a unique opportunity to track the conversations by using the Digital Methods Initiative Twitter Capture and Analysis Toolset (DMI-TCAT).[29]

The main difference between tracking a hashtag and a keyword is that with the hashtag users are explicitly engaging with a specific Twitter discussion by tagging their tweets – as described in section 2.3.2 – while a keyword is not chosen by the person tweeting but rather by the

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[29] Information on this toolset is available at https://wiki.digitalmethods.net/Dmi/ToolDmiTcat.

researcher who has decided to search the Twitter database for that word, and therefore does not represent an explicit signalling on the part of the user.

Table 6 – Dataset figures

Keyword	Collection tool	N. of Tweets	Length of time
g20	DMI-TCAT	890,631	1–16 November 2014
#expo2015	Tweet Archivist	1,108,395	1 May–31 Oct 2015

3.5.1 Data extraction

After selecting the keywords or hashtags, I decided on the tools for the data extraction.[30] Despite the fact that several tools are available, not all of them are accessible for technical reasons, as was the case for the DMI-TACAT. One of the options for scraping tweets is through the use of purpose-built software or more general using programming languages such as R (with the package twitteR) or Python (using packages like PTT or Tweepy). However, these software need a server to run the query, in turn requiring a significant level of technical support.

Nevertheless, I was keen to experiment with different options to explore the challenges posed for the social scientist by a computational Twitter analysis. These challenges are probably no different from those faced by many consulates and embassies that do not have the resources to employ a specialised data analyst. The selection of the tools was driven by the need for user friendliness, and by an analysis of their pros and cons in relation to their capacity to analyse large datasets. As the analysis of social media matures, such tools – along with their affordances and limitations – will play an important role in assessing both audience reach and depth of engagement. However, it is important to note that the approach proposed in this research, more than the selection of tools, is what can contribute to practitioners' analysis and interpretation of social media conversations. Limited technical skills and resources can, I argue, be augmented by qualitative and contextualised interpretation of international debates on social media, part of the set of qualities long recognised as critical for diplomats who, as I have argued in chapter 1, can be seen as the "natural foreign experts" (Herman 1998, 8).

Hence, I decided to use two different data extraction tools for each of the case studies. For the G20 case study, I employed DMI-TACAT since it is an established open-source tool in the social media research community. For the Expo 2015 case study, I used Tweet Archivist because it is an example of closed-source – often referred to as 'off-the-shelf' – commercial

[30] For a comprehensive list of social media data collection tools, see http://socialmediadata.wikidot.com.

or proprietary software, employed in some studies published in academic journals, but also in marketing research. Since I was also interested in a comparison between different tools, I deliberately selected two tools that use different Twitter APIs, provide different sampling and export options, and adopt contrasting approaches in the distribution of the software.

The three ways of extracting data from Twitter are via their REST, search and streaming Application Programming Interfaces (APIs). The REST (representational state transfer) API is a rate-limited resource, used to gather data for a group of users (for example followers and recent tweets). The search API replicates the functionality of the Twitter search function, but does not guarantee the completeness of the information. This limitation will be explained further below, since this is the API employed by Tweet Archivist. Finally, the streaming API offers two different modalities for accessing the data: sample (1% random tweets) and filter (by keyword) (Gaffney and Puchmann 2014, 56-62). Without going into any greater technical detail, it must be noted that scholars and researchers cannot confirm how the API facilitates a data request through the code, which constantly changes, with or without notice (Elmer 2015, 112). This means that the political economy of Twitter data access shapes research designs and possibilities both explicitly and implicitly (Burgess and Bruns 2015, 93). Therefore, the extraction tools communicate with the Twitter API, which already restrains the way enquiries can be operated.

3.5.1.1 DMI-TCAT

This is also the case of the DMI-TCAT, which "relies on Twitter's APIs and is therefore bound to their possibilities and limitations" (Borra and Rieder 2014, 267). Since it uses the streaming and REST APIs, the DMI-TCAT allows three different sampling techniques: a 1% random sample of all tweets passing through Twitter, all tweets containing specific keywords (not to be confused with hashtags), and tweets from a specified set of up to 5,000 users. I employed the second technique, which is the most popular in research due to the fact that it allows for tracking all the tweets related to specific conversations or issues by tracking one or more keywords, except in the unlikely event that the keyword tracked contains more than the 1% of all the tweets posted on the system (Borra and Rieder 2014, 267-68).

Once the tool has run the query for the length of time decided by the researcher, it can be downloaded, among other options, as a 'fullExport' CSV (Comma Separated Values) file, which contains the same information that can be seen in the Twitter interface but in a raw and machine-processable format. The downloaded file allocates the information in the form of a spreadsheet with the following columns:

- id: tweet ID;
- time: tweet timestamp (UNIX time);
- created_at: tweet date (human-readable);

- from_user_name: sender's account name;
- from_user_lang: sender's language setting;
- text: tweet text;
- source: posting tool used;
- location: sender's location;
- lat: sender's GPS latitude;
- lng: sender's GPS longitude;
- from_user_followercount: sender's number of followers;
- from_user_friendcount: sender's number of followees;
- from_user_realname: sender's stated real name;
- to_user_name: account @mentioned in tweet (not always reliable);
- in_reply_to_status_id: ID of tweet being responded to;
- from_user_listed: number of lists in which sender is included;
- infrom_user_utcoffset: sender's timezone as UTC offset;
- from_user_timezone: sender's timezone (human-readable);
- from_user_description: sender's profile description;
- from_user_url: sender's profile URL;
- from_user_verified: sender's profile verification status (true/false);
- filter_level: sender's sensitivity rating (usually low).[31]

This list will be helpful when I describe the visualisation process. Additionally, the tool offers tweet statistics and activity metrics, network analysis (also providing Gephi files to support data visualisation), and content analysis that provides preliminary but powerful insights into the dataset.

Additional data such as mentions, hashtags or retweets can be extracted from the text using Open Refine.[32] Indeed, the tool does not provide the option of directly downloading a file with a column listing the hashtags or one containing only retweets or mentions. I will return to this point further when I focus on the data processing.

3.5.1.2 Tweet Archivist

The other data-capturing tool used for the Expo case study is Tweet Archivist,[33] an online analytic software program that allows capturing and downloading tweets into PDF format (not

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[31] From Axel Bruns's workshop "Advanced Twitter Analytics: Using TCAT and Tableau", Queensland University of Technology CCI (Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation) Digital Methods Summer School, February 2016.
[32] http://openrefine.org
[33] https://www.tweetarchivist.com

very useful in my case) or as a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Queries can be run for a single specified hashtag or keyword, creating a database of tweets, updated on an hourly basis for the duration of the subscription, at a cost of US$15/month to track three hashtags or tags. The description of the tool on the website promises “not to miss a tweet”,[34] although this assurance might be challenged by large conversations like #Expo2015. Indeed, the tool automatically queries hourly the search API, which does not assure the capture of all the tweets posted (Gaffney and Puchmann 2014, 61), while the algorithm makes sure that tweets are not duplicated in the dataset. The meagre information on the website does not provide a full description of the technical characteristics of the tool either, making this online software something of a black box. Therefore the use of this tool has limitations when it comes to large datasets, despite the fact that it has been used in different studies, such as those published recently by Billings, Burch, and Zimmerman (2015) and Blodgett and Salter (2013). Another constraint is that the tool provides a Microsoft Excel file of up 55,000 rows, which means that the dataset will need further adjustment at the processing stage as the data all needs to be incorporated into a single file for analysis. For example, in the data collection conducted for my case study about Expo 2015 in chapter six, every 3-5 days 55,000 rows were filled and a new spreadsheet needed to be started.

Despite these drawbacks, some of the advantages of Tweet Archivist are in the way the algorithm organises the data in the spreadsheet, providing a column containing the hashtags, which simplifies the data processing stage. Besides hashtags, the spreadsheet contains the following columns:

- ID: tweet ID;
- User Name: sender’s account nickname @;
- Universal Time Stamp: tweet time;
- Local Time Stamp: user’s time;
- Text: tweet text;
- Language: tweet language;
- Profile Image: URL to the profile image;
- Source: platform used (e.g. mobile phone);
- Location: user’s location as stated in the profile;
- Time Zone: user’s time zone;
- Geo: geolocation coordinates;
- Hashtags: hashtags in the tweet;
- Urls: URLs in the tweet;

[34] http://www.tweetarchivist.com/about

- User Mentions: users mentioned in the tweet;
- Media: URL of picture attached;
- Follower Count: sender's follower count;
- Name: name of the user.

As can be easily understood from this description of the two tools, the TCAT provides a better interface and better data organisation than does Tweet Archivist. Moreover, the TCAT enables some preliminary analytics with high flexibility on creating subsamples, by zooming in on a specific time period or on tweets matching certain criteria, a task that can be very difficult to accomplish once the data are downloaded onto the researcher's machine. The main difficulties in the use of the TCAT are related to the fact that it needs be installed on a server.[35]

TCAT and Tweet Archivist facilitate the first step of data extraction. Nonetheless, data cleaning and analysis still require some advanced spreadsheet skills, as well as the ability to work across multiple software tools, as I will further explore in the following sections.

3.5.1.3 Concluding notes on data extraction

To sum up, what has to be kept in mind from this section to understand the subsequent stages is that

1. the boundaries and the arrangement of our datasets are constrained by the researcher's choices, Twitter API and capturing tools;
2. in both case studies, notwithstanding the different data formats offered by the two capturing tools, the visualisations will predominantly combine six key data points: users, time, hashtags, URLs, location and text.

Sometimes the format of the export file needs to be readjusted to make such data points 'readable' for the visualisation software. This operation is performed at the data cleaning stage, discussed in the next section.

3.5.2 Data cleaning and processing

Since this research uses two different data extraction tools, the data cleaning requirements are distinct, though similar, for the two datasets.

As already stated, the main problem with the TCAT is that the user needs to extract hashtags, mentions and retweets from the 'text' field and create two new CSV files. In the case of mentions, a new file with three columns containing the ID, the user mentioned and the type of the tweet (mention/retweet) has to be created, while in the case of hashtags the new file will

[35] https://github.com/digitalmethodsinitiative/dmi-tcat/wiki/Install-Guide#manual-installation

contain two columns, one for the ID and the other for the hashtag included in the tweet, as shown in Figures 1 and 2.

Generating these files manually would require a great deal of labour that would take months: hence another software program is required to make the information readable to the visualisation software. To achieve this, I used Open Refine, which automatically selects the words that are preceded by '#', '@' and 'RT', creating a different column for these values. The software then creates a new data table.

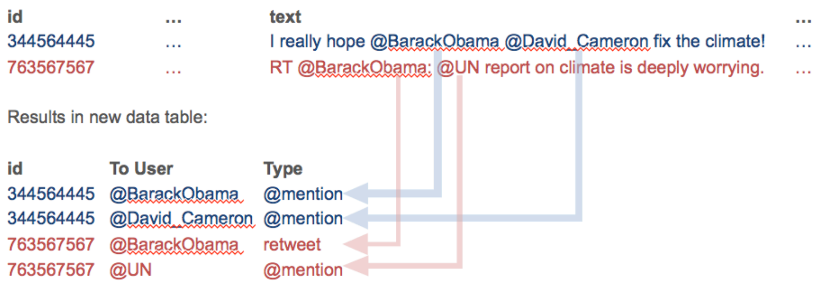

Figure 1 – TCAT: Extracting mentions and retweets from 'fullExport'[36]

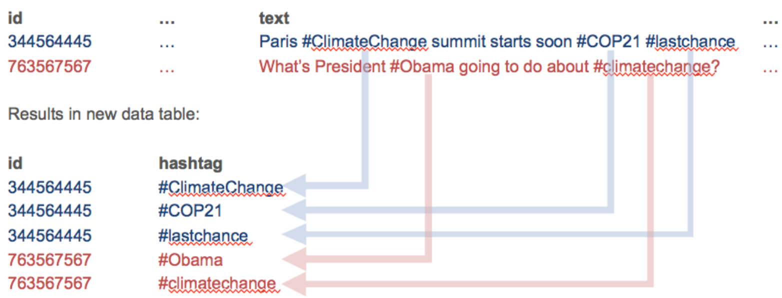

Figure 2 – TCAT: Extracting hashtags from 'fullExport'[37]

A similar process has to be carried out for the datasets downloaded through Tweet Archivist, though in this case we already have a column containing hashtags and mentions. Therefore, the 'hashtags' column has to be split into different rows and, at the same time, the 'Expo2015' hashtag deleted, since we already know that it is included in all the tweets (Figure 3).

[36] From Axel Bruns's workshop "Advanced Twitter Analytics: Using TCAT and Tableau", CCI Digital Methods Summer School, February 2016.
[37] Ibidem.

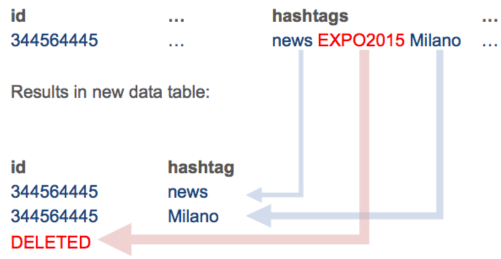

Figure 3 – Tweet Archivist: extracting hashtags from the Excel file

A similar process has to be conducted for mentions and retweets, but in this case the new data table is extracted from the 'text' column, as shown in figure 4.

Figure 4 – Tweet Archivist: extracting mentions and retweets from the Excel file

Another manipulation of the files obtained through Tweet Archivist is to assemble the several Microsoft Excel files obtained from the query, creating a single CSV file for analysing the data as a whole dataset.

Finally, the datasets – as often happens with popular hashtags – will contain 'spam' that can compromise results and therefore must be deleted. This process is not necessarily executed at this stage, as the spam will easily appear and be removed in the analysis of the data. However, it is worthwhile at this stage making explicit my criteria for defining spam in this research, since the literature has already pointed out the "challenges in disambiguating spammers from legitimate users" (Yardi et al. 2010). I consider spam all those tweets posted several times addressing topics completely unrelated to the hashtag tracked, such as commercial products or pornographic content. However, I will leave in the dataset those tweets that contain any kind of political content, even if unrelated with the hashtags, as well as those posted by Twitterbots (auto retweets), although in the latter case this will be mentioned in the description of the data. The rationale for this choice is that Twitterbots can play an important role on social media and I believe their use should be investigated – this is exemplified in the case of Expo 2015.

3.5.3 Twitter Analysis

Once the data has been cleaned it is finally ready for analysis. Nonetheless, a large amount of information is still left, and computational support is needed to determine what is meaningful and what is not.

In this section I will describe all the techniques and tools I used, but it is important to point out that such an analysis does not necessarily lead to meaningful conclusions. Despite everything, at this stage the researcher does not yet know what lies in the datasets. This is why the thin level of analysis can be considered as both an exploratory and analytical process.

Moreover, I have defined my approach as mixed or hybrid because it combines the power of computation, which allows for the management and categorisation of a large amount of data, and qualitative analysis. Both are needed for careful consideration of the cultural contexts (Lewis, Zamith, and Hermida 2013, 39), an important aspect of what has been defined as *active* listening in chapter 2. Indeed, a computer-assisted method is pivotal for coding and analysing a large volume of manifest content, flow of information and actors, "while human labour is still considered superior for the coding of latent content" (Sjøvaag and Stavelin 2012, 219), message context and tone.

In this regard, the first level of the analysis (thin description) can be defined as an exploratory process, which deals with the largeness of the datasets by mapping key actors and their interactions, URLs and hashtags. Then the researcher manually accesses the profiles of the key actors, the webpages connected to the URLs, and the units of information or tweets to select significant samples of the online discussion, especially those related with public diplomacy social media accounts, to discover message tone and content (thick description).

Therefore, the analysis can be summarised as comprising three main steps:

1. Quantitative analysis of the Twitter discussion by calculating and visualising metrics of Twitter communication. For this stage I will use the software Tableau.
2. Mapping the issue networks, identifying key actors and geographic focused visualisations (geovisualisation). I will use Gephi and CartoDB to map networks of users and their relations in terms of mentions, retweets, hashtags and URLs.
3. In-depth manual analysis of the main actors' profiles and information shared. I will manually inspect the most popular retweeted content, the key users' profiles and the most shared URLs. Particular attention will be given to explicit public diplomacy accounts.

These three steps have been employed to analyse both the case studies, but given the exploratory nature of this approach, the outcome may have proved more useful to answer the research questions for one or the other of them.

To sum up, this method considers tweets gathered as units of information related to each other and visualised in the form of networks. Once the key actors are identified and relations among the different nodes visualised, I will manually access the information shared. In this way, the dataset is visualised as whole and then analysed by creating specific subsets and selecting particular interesting units, which will contain clues to understanding content and context.

3.5.3.1 Thin description

3.5.3.1.1 Twitter metrics and Tableau

For the thin level of analysis of the datasets I will refer to some of the metrics suggested by Bruns and Stieglitz (2014, 2012). Such metrics can be considered as those created through the combination of key data points obtained by data extraction (listed above) and further manipulation in the data processing stage. All these metrics can be analysed one by one (most active user, most used language, most used hashtags, etc.) or intersected (users and hashtags, users and URLs, etc). Another important metric is the identification of volume, hashtags, users, and so on over time, the so-called temporal metrics. These allow visualising the emergence and dropping off of various issues or content over the time, or the relation between the number of active users and the total volume of the tweets. The combination of temporal metrics with hashtags can be also considered as a preliminary but effective kind of sentiment analysis, especially if hashtags with very positive or negative connotations are found in the dataset. For example, in the case study about Expo 2015, hashtags like ‘noexpo’ and ‘expottimisti’ (‘Expo optimists’) suggest two opposite feelings about the event. However, I will further complicate this distinction in the case study about Expo 2015 in chapter 5. Metrics can also focus on users, by connecting users and hashtags, or users and tweets/retweets, or users and URLs.

To conduct this first step of the analysis I used Tableau Desktop, a user-friendly and all-purpose data analytics tool. This software is closed-source and quite costly (US$1000 for personal use and US$2000 for the professional edition), but a free version is offered for students and instructors. It is compatible with most data formats and provides a wide range of analytics and visualisation and export options. More interestingly, it allows for the manual analysis and exporting of specific subsets, which is what makes it possible to narrow down the dataset and create subsets to then be manually analysed. For example, when hashtag use is visualised over time, specific hashtags can be selected, viewed and exported for further computational or manual analysis of all the tweets that constitute a peak in the graph.

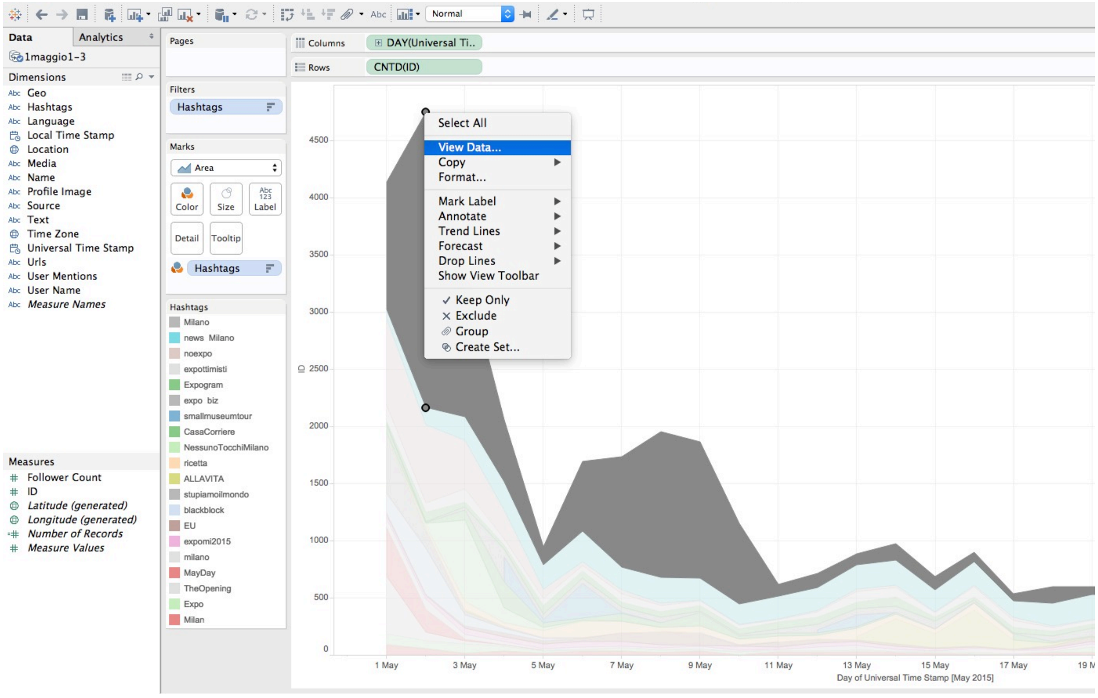

Figure 5 – Tableau: exploring or exporting a subset

Finally, this tool also offers the capacity for traditional computer-aided analytical approaches such as basic content analysis and word, content or URL frequency.

3.5.3.1.2 Network mapping and geovisualisation: Gephi and CartoDB

Two other two ways of visualising the data contained in our dataset are by arranging them in the form of networks and according to their geographical distribution. In this section I will first describe Gephi,[38] a powerful open-source network visualisation software program, along with some methodological insights about the network analysis approach. I will then introduce the characteristics of the geovisualisation software CartoDB.[39]

Gephi is well established in academia and used in various disciplines (genomics, biology, sociology, etc.). It has a user-friendly interface and is free and compatible with the most popular operating systems. It can deal with large network (over 20,000 nodes) and allows for analysis of exploratory data, links and social networks, revealing the underlying structures of associations between nodes. It also runs some metrics, like centrality to show how well a node is connected. The main feature for Twitter network analysis is that it visualises edges among users in the form of networks. Such edges can represent mentions or hashtags, users and URLs, etc. Therefore, the software helps us visualise the underlying relations in the dataset by combining different types of information contained in the export files, as shown in *Figure 6*.

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[38] http://gephi.org
[39] CartoDB is now known as CARTO https://carto.com.

Relationships can be undirected/reciprocal or directed: the latter is when an edge indicates the direction of the link, important for understanding direction and flows of information.

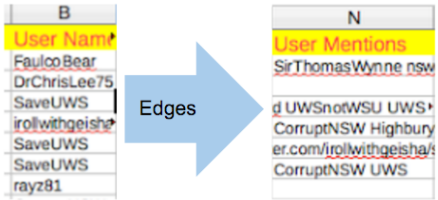

Figure 6 – How Gephi creates relationships or edges

Once the software has calculated relationships, an algorithm creates a better visualisation. The layout algorithm used in this research and the most popular in computational Twitter analysis is called ForceAtlas2, a force-directed layout that simulates a physical system. Nodes repulse each other (like magnets) while edges attract the nodes they connect (like springs). These forces create a movement that converges to a balanced state. This final configuration is expected to help the interpretation of the data. The result is different from a Cartesian projection: the graph does not have *y* and *x* axes, and hence the position of a node has to be interpreted in relation to the others (Jacomy et al. 2014, 2). After the graph is manipulated to obtain a better network spatialisation, nodes can be coloured and shaped according to certain metrics automatically calculated by Gephi, such as outdegree (the number of tweets sent by a node) or indegree (the number of mentions). The visualisation requires a long exploratory process, during which the researcher applies different parameters to make the visualisation meaningful and to highlight the main features of the networks according to the research's aims. This may lead to filtering some of the users or focusing in on one or more clusters in the network (Figure 7).

This methodological process cannot be generalised here, as each graph in this thesis required the combination of several metrics made available by the software. However, to make this process explicit, the visualisation criteria will be expounded in the descriptions of all graphs published in this work.

Two main types of social media network visualisation can be distinguished at this stage:

1. Actors network: usually directed, it maps relations among users (mentions or retweets).
2. Issues network: usually undirected, it can focus on both actors and content by visualising relations among users and hashtags, keywords, or URLs, or through a network/thematic analysis that maps relations among hashtags and creates thematic network clusters.

While the first focuses on actors and is more appropriate for mapping the flow of information among users, the second focuses more on issues, which can be defined as matters of shared concern that produce agreement or disagreement (not necessarily in a binary way) (Burgess and Matamoros-Fernandez 2016, 80).

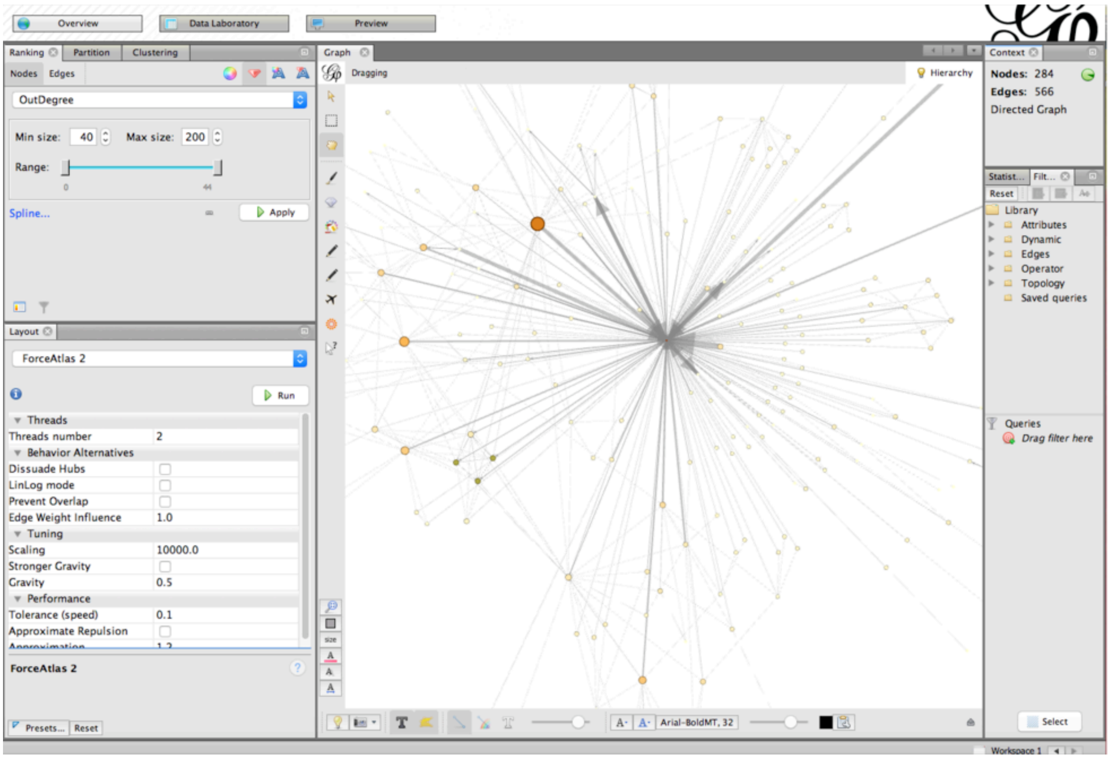

Figure 7 – Gephi Overview Interface.

Left side: the settings for nodes' and edges' colours and shapes, and layout algorithms. Right side: number of nodes and different filter options. Centre: overview of the graph.

From the first attempts to map online controversy on the web (Marres and Rogers 2005), these mapping strategies have combined digital methods with actor–network theory – mainly based on Latour's (2005) methodological approach – and have provided the possibility of mapping relations and sociocultural issues. Such a mapping approach could be defined as a new form of cartography, where

> [t]he map is not the (observed) territory, neither should it be. […] To be of any use, social maps have to be less confused and convoluted than collective disputes. They cannot just mirror the complexity of controversies: they have to make such complexity legible (Venturini 2012, 797).

Therefore, this process of data discovery does not limit analysis to a description of the online debate, rather unveiling the underlying connections in our dataset hidden by the messiness of the data, which makes this approach very useful for public diplomacy listening activities in the noisy digital environment. Also, these online debates can shed light on controversies that are unfolding in society, even though generalisations are limited by all the considerations related to the characteristics of the datasets and the platform itself. The fact that computational digital methods make such complexity of current salient issues on Twitter more legible can represent an important tool for advancing public diplomacy listening activities and policy research, as will be demonstrated in the two case studies. In this respect, public diplomacy could embrace social media analysis as a resource "for identifying key positions and key points of contention in controversies", which is in contrast with a more communicational perspective that deploys "controversies first and foremost as an *occasion* to study the workings and relevance of social media platforms themselves", to mention a distinction made by Marres and Moats (2015, 2).

However, we should be aware of the fact that the main limitation is that machines cannot decode – or interpret – human communication yet, and this is particularly true in the case of computational sentiment analysis, which remains a work in progress (UK House of Lords 2014, 48-9). This is particularly relevant in relation to the fact that *active* public diplomacy listening aims to intercept the tone of people's messages. If computers cannot help on this, we need to manually access the data, and this cannot practicably be done with such large datasets. Therefore, a selection of smaller subsets is still needed. In addition, the mapping approach needs to be readapted for our purpose, which is to evaluate public diplomacy listening and communication approaches on Twitter. To accomplish this, analysis of the dataset will focus on public diplomacy actors *within* their context formed by the issues and non-diplomatic actors. After visualising the whole conversation, I will focus on particular issues related with the communication goals and narratives that public diplomacy actors at all levels were trying to promote. This will be done by selecting specific tweets in our dataset and undertaking further computational and manual analysis.

Thus, such an approach allows us to make sense of the complexity of the networks created by Twitter debates, both in terms of actors and of issues, and to focus on public diplomacy communication activities within such networks.

3.5.3.1.3 Geolocation

Finally, since public diplomacy debates usually involve international publics, it is valuable to map where the tweets in our dataset come from. Indeed the growing use of smartphones and of locative media has challenged the idea of the web as a "placeless space" (Rogers 2013, 23). By linking users and geolocation and overlaying these two parameters onto a world map, we can geographically visualise our data. This can also be done intersecting hashtags and location and mapping the data over time, showing not only how the hashtag spread geographically but also its time trend. The tool that allows this, among others, is CartoDB, an online, user-friendly software package that visualises geolocation data. This tool will generate heatmaps to show the intensity of international responses.

The main limitation of this visualisation lies in the data captured from Twitter, since only about 0.7% of users usually enable geolocation in their Twitter settings (Graham, Hale, and

Gaffney 2014). Some other key data points contained in user profiles can help locate tweets, such as time zone or location (city, region, etc), but processing this data poses difficulties and does not usually increase the percentage of users located to more that 36 per cent (Hecht et al. 2011, 237). Nevertheless, even if such visualisations ought to be interpreted with care, the limited number captured could be considered a sample.

3.5.3.2 Thin description

3.5.3.2.1 Qualitative Twitter analysis

I have argued that an important bias of computational analysis (thin description) is the fact that it does not take into account the context of Twitter conversations and the tone of the content. As boyd and Crawford (2012, 667) note, "what it quantifies does not necessarily have a closer claim on objective truth", but findings coming from quantitative analyses can be tested through a closer look at the data. Thick description has been suggested as an essential integration "to bridge and/or reveal knowledge gaps" produced by big data (Wang 2013b, para. 4). Others consider thick data as small and insightful social media datasets focused on complexity rather than generalisation of insights (Latzko-Toth, Bonneau, and Millette 2017). As anticipated earlier in this chapter, the paradox is that social media data can be both big and 'small' and can allow for thin and thick levels of analysis.

It is important to note that, in my approach, the use of the machine to analyse large datasets anticipates and makes possible the thick level of the analysis. The maps' capacity to zoom in and out allows to make the data qualitatively manageable. This second level of analysis is not an established method, and it is difficult to generalise how the subsets or units of information will be selected from the main datasets. However, drawing on (Gerbaudo 2016, 97), two main sampling techniques will drive the selection of the tweets for the qualitative level of analysis: "top sampling" and "zoom-in sampling". In the top sampling I select tweet according to popularity metrics, such as number of retweets or likes, already discussed earlier in the chapter. This sampling techniques uses Twitter metrics to select highly shared content.

With zoom-in sampling, I select tweets that are particularly significant to interpret the conversation, such as:

1. tweets selected in a certain timeframe that are tagged with a specific hashtag (e.g. a peak in the volume of tweets that is related to an event occurring in the ground).
2. tweets posted by influential public figures/organisations – defined as 'mediators' in chapter 1 – or public diplomacy actors engaging with a hashtagged discussion;
3. tweets reported by the mainstream news media and tweets that amplify the mainstream news media coverage;

4. tweets posted by ‘peripheral users’ – usually ordinary citizens – often missing in the thin level of analysis due to their low contribution levels.

Particularly, the last criterion allows me to take into account those voices that may be excluded in analysis of large Twitter debates. Many Twitter users have a low incidence in Twitter conversations, and “top sampling” alone risks focusing only on the influential voices. The possibility of zooming into the dataset will provide the opportunity to also listen to these voices that represent the opinions of ordinary citizens. The criteria used for the selection of ordinary citizens’ tweets will be described in more details along with the analysis of the two case studies in chapter 5 and 6.

The units of information in the datasets – which contain texts, images and URLs – are the objects of a second layer of analysis. The objects at this level are not hashtags or mentions or time or location, but the content of single tweets, Twitter profiles, links and pictures. This qualitative level supports the analysis by:

1. offering additional insights that cannot be obtained through Twitter metrics, as for example providing information about who users are (are they journalists, activists, citizens, Twitterbots etc.) and what else they said and did (when it helps in contextualising their contribution to the discussion);
2. including ‘ordinary’ Twitter users’ contribution that could be obscured due to the low frequency in their participation;
3. complementing and juxtaposing the findings to avoid misleading interpretation of the data, also with the analysis of extra-Twitter sources.

3.5.3.3 Contextualising Twitter discussion: non-Twitter sources

Thick description of the data need not rely only on the content of the tweets and can also contextualise the data within the broader political and strategic context. Non-Twitter sources have been selected to support the pre, during and post-event contextualisation of the Twitter discussion. The pre-event contextualisation has been conducted through the analysis of the political agenda and issues discussed before the two events, focusing on the political debate, leaders’ public statements and news article that helps to contextualise the two events. During the events, similar sources emerging from and mentioned in the Twitter discussion have been selected when relevant for the interpretation and contextualisation of the diplomatic-related issues discussed. In the post-event, news media articles discussing the two events’ communication outcomes have been selected to get insights about the perceived public impact of the two events.

The selection of non-Twitter sources is contextual and exploratory. Different strategies, described in the analysis of the two case studies in Chapter 5 and 6, are employed and guided by the issues discussed in the Twitter conversation.

Two sources are particularly relevant for the contextualisation of the analysis of the case studies: governmental policy documents and news articles. The first type of source helps to clarify, describe and contextualise public diplomacy actors' communication strategies and foreign policy. The second helps to contextualise the Twitter discussion within the broader media ecology.

3.5.3.3.1 Policy articulation

The analysis of communication strategies and foreign policies is conducted in chapter 4 to describe the evolution of public diplomacy practices and strategies. To find out how foreign offices articulate their public diplomacy strategies in relation to social media, I examine documents and reports published by the two selected foreign offices, as well as media releases and statements from diplomats and politicians and other relevant texts that helps to contextualise the two case studies and the two countries' foreign policy.

Furthermore, reports, texts and websites from international organisations, such as Bureau International des Expositions or the G20, are considered important sources for contextualizing actors' discourses in relation to the selected case studies.

3.5.3.3.2 Media reports

The researcher's ability "to bring contextual sensitivity to the content, its manifest and latent characteristics, and its place within the larger media ecology" (Lewis, Zamith, and Hermida 2013, 48) is also employed to provides an additional comparison between the Twitter debate and the traditional media representation of the selected events and the connections between them.

Indeed, the emergence of convergent media industries[40], such as news corporations, with their greater resources of symbolic power, has produced the new phenomenon of media convergence (Meikle and Young 2012, 35-58), and it has become so widespread that a number of studies have shown that most news content on the internet is repurposed or supplied by traditional media sources (Downie and Macintosh 2006, Sparks and Calabrese 2004). URLs provide an important connection between platforms and allow flow of information between social media and journalistic sources to be tracked. Indeed, the public diplomacy

[40] It refers to the fact that the distribution of content from different media industries is now converging on digital platforms.

communicational potential cannot be limited to the Twitter conversation: it can be also found in its amplification through online and traditional newspapers.

In particular, the case study about the G20 will provide additional insights about the correlation between media coverage and Twitter discussion, mining additional data from Google News[41] to support the Twitter analysis. In this case, I select a particular ‘keyword’ that emerges from the Twitter conversation. I manually filter the articles scraped from Google News and explore how mainstream news media address the topics discussed on Twitter and the correlations and flow of information between social media and mainstream news media. These additional data provide relevant insights for contextualising tweets within the larger media ecology, as mentioned earlier. More insights about the sampling technique employed for Google News will be provided in chapter 5.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have translated the theoretical considerations made in the previous chapters about public diplomacy social media listening into a mixed method approach.

In chapter 2, I have argued that a thin level of listening supports what I have defined *tactical listening*, while the thick level supports *active listening*, which aims to provide an in-depth account of Twitter conversations. In this chapter, I have described the proposed mixed method approach that combines large-scale social media listening with in-depth, contextual and layered account of tweets. By making explicit all the different stages involved in Twitter analysis, I have also pointed out the methodological challenges embedded in the process of capturing, polishing and analysing social media data. The focus on digital listening has also specified how and why my understanding of thick description differs from its common use in ethnography and anthropology. The combination of thin and thick description applied in this research can also enhance public diplomacy digital listening practices, as well as it will be applied and tested in the two case studies.

I have also explained the rationale for selecting the two case studies, which will be the objects of analysis in the following chapters. In particular, in the next chapter I critically assess the Australian and Italian public diplomacy strategies, focusing on their social media communication strategies. I also provide insights on how the two selected countries interpret and conduct listening on social media.

In chapter 5 and 6, I present the analysis of the two selected Twitter events and the actual practices of the two countries within those non-governmental actors that are now part of

[41] More insights about this aspect of the method will be provided in chapter 5.

international communication. The case studies also provide an opportunity to illustrate how thin and thick description can be effectively and practically combined.

4 Australian and Italian public diplomacy strategies and communication approaches

In this chapter I describe the main features, programmes and institutions of Australian and Italian public diplomacy, with a particular focus on the strategic use and understanding of social media in public diplomacy. I provide contextual information relevant to the two case studies presented in the two following chapters.

To differentiate public diplomacy listening with mere organisation-centric forms of listening I have proposed in chapter 2 the concept of *active* listening, which requires that a public diplomacy actor must be seen to listen, which means that it should create spaces for meaningful and fruitful social media listening. Following my focus on listening, engagement has been considered a two-way process, defined as dialogic engagement. A failure to listen effectively could indicate a lack of adequate organisational culture, policies, technologies, skills, structures and resources (Macnamara 2015, 8). Such organisational requirements are essential conditions for listening intended as a communication enabler, beyond message spreading. Listening requires an important organisational corollary, what Macnamara calls the "architecture of listening" (Macnamara 2015, 2016).

I argue that Australian public diplomacy is undertaking its first steps towards digital listening, even though it is still framed in terms of *tactical* listening. By contrast, Italy's public diplomacy lacks listening strategies and practices in its policy implementation.

Despite claims of listening in public diplomacy strategies, especially in the Australian case, much of the communication activity is focused on message diffusion. When listening activities are undertaken, these are usually *tactical* or listening *in* activities, as opposed to what I have defined as *active* listening (explained in chapter 2). This chapter will expand upon these claims, analysing Australian and Italian public diplomacy and taking into account:

1. the evolution of public diplomacy strategies and guidelines;
2. targeted audiences (domestic, international or diaspora communities);
3. public diplomacy initiatives;
4. each country's understanding of social media communication to advance their international policy agenda;
5. preferred social media platforms;
6. online listening: monitoring activities employed on social media and whether these activities are used for readjusting and/or evaluating public diplomacy social media strategies.

The chapter contextualises the two case studies examined in chapter 5 and 6, as well as highlight the tensions between strategies and their actualisation in Australian and Italian public diplomacy. This analysis illustrates that a coherent communication approach – achieved through the integration of public diplomacy actors' listening activities and dialogic engagement, as argued in chapter 2 – can enhance public diplomacy actors' international credibility. Consistency between public diplomacy message and foreign policy is particularly relevant for middle powers. In general terms, great powers can expect to be listened to, while small powers might hope to be. Middle powers instead engage in a more complex dance of listening and being listened to, and require an associated choreography of these activities to further their diplomatic aims.

I conclude this chapter by arguing that, with respect to the two case studies that follow, my spectrum of listening can help to make sense of the confusion and disjuncture between public diplomacy actors' discourse about social media listening and their actual practices.

4.1 The Australian public diplomacy strategy

In this section I describe the emergence and evolution of the Australian public diplomacy strategy, with the recognition of the need for a public diplomacy strategy in 2008-11, the following strategy disconnection in 2011-15 due to the change in government, and the recent focus on social media as a foundation of a revitalised public diplomatic digital strategy.

What emerges from the recent literature that addresses the Australian public diplomacy strategy is an unclear definition of the national interest and a consequent "overall lack of coherence regarding Australian diplomacy's core purpose" (Byrne, Conley Tyler, and Harris Rimmer 2016, 587). This might be a reflection of "a widening disconnect between its domestic politics and foreign policy objectives" that requires engaging "with domestic publics […] to clarify the substance and direction of Australia's national interest" (587).

Such a disconnection has particularly emerged in the tension between Australia's refugee policy and its international reputation as a country that supports human rights. The growing number of refugees coming from Indonesia and reaching Australian soil by boat between 2007 and 2013 fuelled the political debate during the national elections in 2013. The Liberal–National Coalition's leader Tony Abbott promised to "stop the boats" during the political campaign in 2013. Once elected, Abbott delivered his promise and commenced a military-led operation to force people-smuggler boats back to Indonesia. This policy resonated significantly with the Australian electorate (Johnson and Wanna 2015) and effectively stopped the arrivals of boats to Australia. However, as Murray (2017, 441) notes, "this achievement has come at a significant reputational and relationship cost, particularly with Indonesia". Indeed, the unilateralism of Abbott's policy, along with other diplomatic tensions between the two countries, brought about a deterioration in relations with Indonesia. From a public diplomacy point of view, the “stop the boats” policy also reinforced some international perceptions and stereotypes, especially in the Asian region, that Australia is a racist country (Ang, Tambiah, and Mar 2015). This perception has its roots in the White Australia Policy,[42] and had resurfaced again in the controversy around episodes of racial violence against Indian students in Australia in 2009 (Varghese 2013). The “stop the boats” policy has limited the reputational potential of Australia as a multicultural and diverse society, thus working against Australian public diplomacy strategy (DFAT 2014b), and of the country’s commitment to human rights. (Tensions between the country’s international reputation and domestic policies will also be a central issue in chapter 5 in relation to the Australian government’s stance on climate change during the G20 meeting in 2014 in Brisbane).

These challenges in Australian public diplomacy have led some to conclude that the country suffers a soft power deficit (Ang, Tambiah, and Mar 2015, Green 2013) and a diplomatic deficit (Byrne, Conley Tyler, and Harris Rimmer 2016, Gyngell et al. 2009), especially in the Asian region.

Despite this perceived deficit, several soft power rankings (e.g. Portland and USC Center on Public Diplomacy 2017) have considered Australia’s lifestyle, economic growth, political stability, natural beauty and attractiveness for international students as strong soft power assets.[43] Moreover, Australian public diplomacy is now moving towards a more coherent public diplomacy strategy.

Recently, DFAT has been actively incorporating the use of digital tools as part of Australian foreign policy with its *Digital Media Strategy 2016–18* (DFAT 2016) and implementing a new student exchange program, the New Colombo Plan, that aims to promote a better domestic understanding of the Indo-Pacific among Australian students, with the belief this will support future economic ties (Byrne 2016, Lowe 2015).

The recent New Colombo Plan has been inspired by the previous Colombo Plan implemented in 1951, which represented an important shift in the Australian understanding of its own geopolitical position. After WWII, Australian foreign policy was still revolving around the framework of the British Empire, of which Australia represented “the beleaguered white outputs” (Oakman 2010, 1). With the contribution of the Minister for External Affairs (1949-51) Percy Spender, the Australian government started recognising the strategic importance of the geographical proximity with Asia. In 1951, this renewed strategic awareness was

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[42] A series of policies adopted from the eighteenth century and progressively dismantled between 1949 and 1973 that prevented non-European people from immigrating to Australia.
[43] These strengths have also been highlighted in the *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper* (Australian Government 2017a, 110).

practically translated into the Colombo Plan, which provided assistance to Asian countries in terms of economic and material aids and offered the possibility to Asian students to access education in Australia.

The Colombo Plan has to be contextualised within the broader geopolitical landscape at that time. The tensions of the Cold War were arising along with the consequent need to contain the Soviet influence in Asia, especially after the advent of communism in China (Oakman 2010). The growth of the Soviet influence in the region was a shared concern for countries that formed part of the West Block, and in particular for the Commonwealth, that became the platform under which the plan was implemented (Adeleke 2008). The first Colombo Plan marked the beginning of a greater attention by the Australian foreign policy to the nearby Asian and Pacific region, and has also inspired recent public diplomacy initiatives undertaken by the Australian government, described in the following subsections.

4.1.1 Recognition of the need for a public diplomacy strategy (2008-11)

In the past decade, the Australian government has worked in different directions to build a coherent public diplomacy strategy able to effectively project a positive image of the country abroad. In doing so, the strategy has shifted over time from a focus on advocacy programs, to cultural and educational exchanges, to the current focus on digital engagement. At the same time, academic attention to Australian public diplomacy has grown, and the area can no longer be considered "*terra nullius*", as Chitty (2008, 314) warned in his discussion of the Senate Committee's report *Australia's Public Diplomacy: Building Our Image* (2007).

The 2007 Senate Inquiry into the Australian public diplomacy practices highlighted a lack of coordination and suggested "a whole-of-government long-term strategic plan for Australia's public diplomacy" (Australian Senate 2007, xiii). Two points proved to be particularly relevant in driving the subsequent development of Australian public diplomacy: the importance of "taking full advantage of advances in technology to reach the global audience", and a lack of "mechanisms in place to monitor and assess adequately the effectiveness of its public diplomacy programs" (xi-ii).

Similar remarks were made in the report published by the Lowy Institute for International Policy titled *Australia's Diplomatic Deficit* (Gyngell et al. 2009). The report warned about "inadequate measurement of effectiveness" and the lack of coordination and integration in Australian public diplomacy, which "tends to be seen as a separate and often marginal activity rather than a mainstream part of the policy process to be integrated with it at every stage" (32).

The Senate Inquiry led to the creation of the DFAT's Public Diplomacy and Information Branch and the creation of the *Public Diplomacy and Advocacy Handbook* (DFAT 2011). This internal document promoted public diplomacy as a "core element of the work of DFAT" and a “key component in developing effective policy responses to international issues and challenges and making other countries and non-state groups more receptive to our views” (para. 5). The focus was on enhancing Australia’s global influence through “cultural and other events, visits and people-to-people links, […] public advocacy and strategic communication techniques and delivering messages to target audiences” (para. 24-25).

4.1.2 Strategy disconnection (2011-15)

Since the renewed geopolitical awareness brought by the Colombo Plan in 1951, Asian countries have been a central focus of Australian foreign policy. In particular, under Labor Prime Minister Julia Gillard in 2012, the Australian Government published the White Paper *Australia in the Asian Century* (Australian Government 2012). The White Paper reaffirmed the strategic importance of Asia on the international stage and the importance of stronger links between Australia and the countries of Asia.[44] Focusing on trade, investments, security, and economic and business collaborations with Asian partners, the White Paper suggested some points that resonate with typical public diplomacy activities. Indeed, it highlighted the importance of “cooperation based on trust, mutual respect and understanding” and deeper and broader “people-to-people links” (251). The White Paper also recognised for the first time in the Australian foreign policy context that public diplomacy plays “a core role” in advancing the Australian national interest across Asia by “listen[ing] to, engag[ing] with, and try[ing] to influence the views of this broader constituency” (258). Although the document mentioned “listening” activities, its focus was on international broadcasting – a one-way medium-term form of public diplomacy as described in chapter 1 – that would “allow Australia’s ‘voice’ to be available throughout Asia” (260).

The governmental focus on international broadcasting as public diplomacy tool did not last for long. In May 2014, the new Coalition Government decided to axe the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s (ABC) $220 million, 10-year contract with DFAT to run the Asia-Pacific television service, despite the ABC being in only the second year of the contract which was granted by the Gillard Government (Metherell 2014). It was not – according to the Australian Parliament’s Budget Review 2014–15 – a “cost-effective vehicle for advancing Australia’s broad and enduring interests in the Indo-Pacific region” (Wade 2014, para. 6).

The closing down of Australia’s international television service represented a marked change in the Australian public diplomacy strategy. Indeed, international television broadcasting was a traditional tool for promoting Australia’s culture internationally. The ABC’s international television and online service broadcasted 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to approximately 44

[44] The strategic importance of Asian countries has been recast by subsequent coalition governments as an Australian commitment to a stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific, also confirmed in the recently released *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper* (Australian Government 2017a).

countries in Asia and the Pacific, a mix of programming including lifestyle, drama, sports, English-language learning, and children's programming as well as news and current affairs.

Indeed, international broadcasting had been a fixture of Australia's international public profile since 1939, when Radio Australia was launched, while international television broadcasting started with the foundation of Australia Television in 1994. In 2001, the government announced that it would fund, through DFAT, a new international television service in Asia, and in 2005 the ABC won a five-year contract that provided funding of AUD 50 million, launching in 2006 a rebranded service called the Australia Network (O'Keeffe and Oliver 2010, 52). The history of Radio Australia and the Australia Network traces an erratic international broadcasting trajectory. In 2010, the Lowy Institute for International Policy (O'Keeffe and Oliver 2010) reviewed the operations of ten prominent international broadcasters, including the British BBC World Service, Al Jazeera, China's CCTV and China Radio International, Voice of America, Germany's Deutsche Welle and France 24. In stark contrast to Australia's erratic support for Radio Australia and the Australia Network, the research found that, globally, government-funded international broadcasting had expanded rapidly, with broadcasters launching into television for the first time (for example Al Jazeera) (7-8).

At the time of writing, the ABC no longer receives government funding from DFAT for its international service, which means that Australia no longer invests in international broadcasting as a public diplomacy tool. The ABC has readjusted its international services as a direct consequence of the funding cut. Radio Australia is still operating as before, while the Australian Network is now called Australian Plus Television and provides a limited television service available exclusively via a network of partner broadcasters in Asia and the Pacific (ABC 2016). As part of this readjustment, in September 2014 the ABC launched a website called Australia Plus for Australian content in Asian and Pacific languages (ABC News 2014a).

As a consequence of the shift in government policy, public funds were relocated to new public diplomacy initiatives with a major focus on enhancing people-to-people ties with the Indo-Pacific region. In 2014 the Australian Government committed AUD100 million over five years to the New Colombo Plan. While the Colombo Plan in 1951 targeted students coming from Asia to study in Australia, the New Colombo Plan supports "Australian undergraduates to study and undertake internships in the region" (DFAT 2014a, para 1). It represents a new way of engaging with the Indo-Pacific targeting Australian citizens, "replacing the largely one-way flow of Asian students to Australia" (Lowe 2015, 462). The plan has been defined as one of the government's "signature initiatives" and "a practical manifestation of Australia's commitment to learn from our neighbours, just as we know students from our region benefit from their experiences in Australia" (Australian Government 2017a, 111-2). This underlines the Australian Government's interest in favouring initiatives that target domestic public awareness to improve "domestic understanding of DFAT's role" (DFAT 2014b, iv).

This New Colombo Plan is also an attempt to bridge reciprocal perceptions of "cultural distance" between Australia and Asian countries (Ang, Tambiah, and Mar 2015). As mentioned, Australia suffers a "soft power deficit in the region", caused by a superficial knowledge among Asian countries of contemporary Australia and a lack of common heritage and history with Asian countries. In addition, the focus on economic relations and trade by both parties has not supported mutual and long-term cultural understanding. Unilateral cultural projection focused on marketing and branding strategies "with much less attention being given to reciprocal cultural exchange" may explain why Asian perceptions of contemporary Australia are still dominated by cultural stereotypes and simplistic iconic representations, such as koalas and kangaroos (138).

In 2014 DFAT finally published its first public diplomacy strategy for the triennium 2014–16 (DFAT 2014b), which – at the time of writing – is the official strategy for Australian public diplomacy. While the strategy has been amended several times since its publication, with minor readjustments regarding Australia's international role and its priorities, [45] its core points remained unchanged in the most recent version of May 2016, the version which will be taken into consideration here.

The Strategy highlights the focus on "economic diplomacy" and "Australia's high levels of ethnic diversity and social harmony and our commitment to democracy, rule of law, human rights and freedom of speech, cultural diversity, gender equality, respect for people with disabilities, and respect for Indigenous cultures" (3). It also reaffirms the importance of engagement with the Indo-Pacific region, continuing the Australian commitment in the region.[46]

The shift in terminology from Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific is not innocent. On the one hand, the new terminology serves to differentiate the Liberal regional strategy from the previous implemented by the Labor Party in the White Paper (Wilson 2014). On the other hand, it aims to expand Australian foreign policy's interpretation of the geographical boundaries of the region. Namely, this means to work in creating stronger ties with India, in addition to the previous focus on the relations with the U.S., Japan, China, South Korea and Indonesia (Bishop 2015).

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[45] For example, the part addressing Australia's commitments as host country for the G20 2014 has been amended.

[46] The strategy aims to achieve these goals through cultural diplomacy, media engagement, sports diplomacy, science diplomacy, the New Colombo Plan, aid programmes, diaspora communities and investment in public diplomacy content.

To conclude, the New Colombo Plan and the public diplomacy strategy mark a shift in the Australian public diplomacy approach. The New Colombo Plan has the potential to support a better understanding of Asia in Australia (and vice versa) by creating a new generation of Australians that can lead to future regional collaborations (Lowe 2015). At the same time, the Australian public diplomacy is now much more focused on people-to-people links, as opposed to the outward and unidirectional flow of information characterising previous international broadcasting activities. Despite the overall reduction in funding public diplomatic efforts, this focus is potentially much more dialogic in orientation.

4.1.3 Renewed efforts and the digital media strategy

In 2010 the Lowy Institute published a policy report (Hanson 2010) in which the author indicated the urgent need for the DFAT to embrace digital technologies. In the following years, others encouraged the Australian government to "catch up" with the rest of the world (Cave 2015b). Despite the growing number of social media accounts, Cave (2015a) has noted that "Australia's digital diplomacy is stuck in broadcast mode, rarely progressing beyond posting official releases" on the DFAT's social media accounts.

This has changed, at least at a strategic level, with the launch of the DFAT's Digital Media Strategy published in December of 2016 (DFAT 2016). This move was encouraged by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Julie Bishop – considered the initiator of what has been labelled "emoji diplomacy" (Di Stefano 2015) – who is now leading Australian diplomacy from the prudence of the 2014–16 strategy to a more consistent and comprehensive digital planning approach.

With its new digital strategy, the Australian government has included digital media as part of its overall diplomatic strategy. The main goal of the three-year digital media strategy is to build "a culture where staff routinely incorporate digital tools and media into all aspects of their work" (DFAT 2016, 7). As digital diplomacy does not have a unanimous definition, DFAT provides its own understanding of the term, which is "the use of social media for diplomatic purposes […] to engage in information sharing, public diplomacy, international negotiations and crisis management" (3). The need for a digital strategy is justified as a way "to communicate directly with stakeholders, inform people about Australia's interests and win influence" (6). The strategy explicitly mentions the significance of listening to domestic publics for gaining "domestic perspectives on what we're doing" (6). In this way, DFAT recognises that social media platforms are not only a tool for promoting Australian government policy but also for "creat[ing] and implement[ing] it" (3). The DFAT identifies five principal components of its digital strategy: equip, listen, explain, engage and influence.

Equipping diplomats means providing both resources (for example, a centralised social media content library) and skills (mentoring and specialist recruitment) that can lead to a confident use of social media by staff (11-13).

Another component of the strategy is listening, which – according to DFAT – will “add to our understanding of the world in which we work” (14). The focus on listening recognises and gives importance to an activity that has been agreed as being pivotal in public diplomacy (refer to chapter 1). According to the strategy,

> Parliamentary and Media Branch will manage a range of high-level web and social media reporting and analytics tools that will identify influential groups and conversations, track sentiment towards Australian policy, measure the department’s global social reach and enable centralised reporting on the progress of major campaigns (14-15).

The strategy does not specify which analytics tools will be employed. However, the focus seems to be on the analysis of the diplomatic presence on social media, based on metrics such as content views and number of clicks (DFAT 2016, 15).

The dissemination of strategic messages – which traditionally fell under advocacy and broadcasting activities in public diplomacy (refer to chapter 1) – has been included in the strategy under the strand “explain”. Consistency in the dissemination of content seems to be a major concern for DFAT, which provides diplomats with a centralised multimedia library – a collection of images, videos and audio files (DFAT 2016, 16-18). DFAT has also created a “social media stream” to disseminate the “Australian online diplomatic footprint”. This webpage (DFAT n.d.) gathers in one place all content circulated online by DFAT and its diplomatic posts around the world.

One of the priorities of the strategy is to generate engagement. According to DFAT’s digital media strategy, engagement is a way to “strengthen and extend Australia’s relationships through digital diplomacy, networking and by taking part to online discussions” (DFAT 2016, 19). Despite the DFAT’s understanding of engagement as “taking part in online discussions”, in practice the strategy suggests looking at “key performance indicators to ensure content has maximum *impact*” (DFAT 2016, 20, emphasis added). Therefore, although the strategy recognises that it needs to engage dialogically, it evaluates its engagement in terms of impact. This diverges with the evaluation of engagement as part of *active* listening proposed in chapter 2. More importantly, it suggests, once again, the difficulty for public diplomacy actors to consistently translate communication goals into appropriate online listening methodologies. In this regard, it is significant that DFAT launched a blog in December 2016 as part of these engagement activities.[47] On this blog, Australian diplomats share their experiences online,

[47] https://blog.dfat.gov.au

which perhaps may serve as a platform for disseminating Australian perspectives on certain issues but does not reveal much about audiences' engagement with Australian policies.

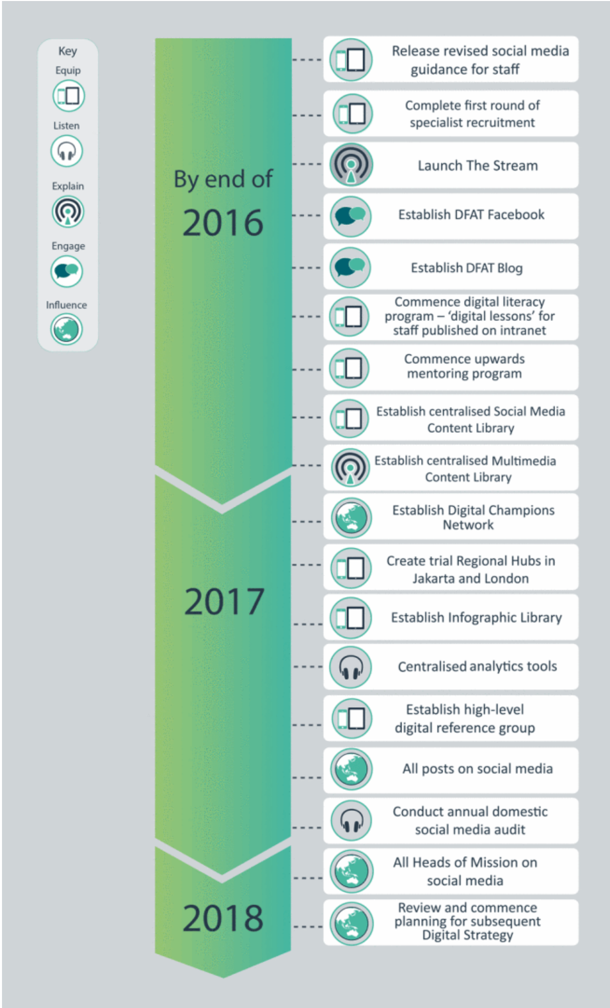

Figure 8 – Figure 8 – Major milestones implementation timeline (DFAT 2016, 21).

Finally, by enhancing its digital presence and getting all diplomatic posts on social media by 2018, DFAT hopes "to influence behaviours and shape outcomes that advance Australia's interests" (DFAT 2016, 21-22). In this way, the strategy seems to suggest that social media presence is equivalent to influence, an unquestioned assumption that reflects the overall focus of the strategy on digitally "equipping" the Australian public diplomacy.

The inclusion in the strategy of a timeline of milestones (figure 8) allows both citizens and the government to assess advancements in the implementation of the digital strategy. Nevertheless, the milestones merely focus on equipping diplomats and diplomatic posts around the world, while it remains unclear to what extent the understanding of successful engagement goes beyond the mere attempt to disseminate messages using digital platforms. In other words, communication goals and related listening approaches call for a declaration of principles that will need to be operationalised in future practices but are not included in this strategy.[48]

The understanding of listening that emerges from the strategy can be considered as one of *tactical* listening, since its focus is on measuring the size of the audience and the reach of the message. Indeed, according to the strategy, social media monitoring and analysis aims to "ensure our content and messaging is reaching intended audiences" (DFAT 2016, 14). This is also confirmed by DFAT's Annual Report, which emphasises the growing number of social media impressions (32.9 million between January 2016 and June 2017) and website visits (DFAT 2017, 83, 86). The report confirms that most of DFAT's efforts are still focused on expanding its social media presence "in line with the department's inaugural Digital Media Strategy" (DFAT 2017, 83). As Spry (2016) argues in his review of the Digital Media Strategy, the DFAT should not "get lost in a competitive chase for metrics […] The significant challenge is to identify and then take opportunities to participate – in real time – in various linguistic, cultural and political contexts" (para. 8-9).

The Digital Strategy and the recently published *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper* (Australian Government 2017a, 110) recognise that "digital engagement supports a more open and consultative form of government, one in which governments both communicate their own messages and listen to diverse views". However, DFAT's Annual Report seems to stress basic "social media metrics", closer to my definition of 'listening *in*' proposed in chapter 2. In addition, the White Paper emphasises the Australian focus on soft power and "Australia's ability to persuade and influence others" (Australian Government 2017a, 107-115). This is clearly an agent-centric framing of Australian international engagement, an understanding of public diplomacy already critiqued in chapter one where I addressed the concept of soft power. The change in the terminology used by the DFAT is not accidental since – in contrast with the previous strategies – the White Paper does not mention public diplomacy.

In 2017, the DFAT published another strategy titled *Australia's International Cyber Engagement Strategy* (Australian Government 2017b). The latest developments of the DFAT's strategy suggest yet another shift in the Australian approach to digital technologies. The new strategy replaces the previous focus on digital communication platforms as a means for international engagement with a new understanding of "cyberspace" mostly as infrastructure of highly strategic importance. This reinterpretation of the digital results in additional emphasis on issues such as digital trade, cyber security and internet governance.

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[48] These remarks on the Australian digital strategy are limited, since they only take into account the public strategy made available by DFAT. Part of the research design of this research was to capture DFAT's understanding of and strategies for listening on social media through interviews with practitioners working at DFAT. As anticipated in 3.2, the interviews never took place due to the institutions' unwillingness to engage with this research.

The novelty is that this strategy seems to focus more on the challenges of "cyberspace" in a competitive international environment and the consequent need to "deter, mitigate and attribute malicious cyber activity by criminals, state actors and their proxies, including those that seek to interfere in the internal democratic processes of states" (5-6). This is certainly a reaction to those new forms of propaganda and cyberespionage mentioned in chapter two. The cultivation of international partnerships among states is thus meant to protect Australia against enemies in cyberspace. It also indicates that the DFAT puts less importance on public diplomacy in the digital realm and it seems to imply a reversion to more 'defensive' forms of listening (e.g. surveillance or surreptitious listening).

The terminology and framing of Australian foreign policy has seen changes even under the same foreign minister. This moving target of public diplomacy strategies that constantly change and reframe the Australian approach to international communication and digital media poses challenges for those who operationalise public diplomacy, particularly in terms of consistency within long-term communication activities.

Despite DFAT's good intentions, perhaps the most relevant limitation of the Australian public diplomacy is limited resourcing, especially compared to the funds allocated to the Department of Defence, as noted by Oliver (2017). In a certain sense, it seems that the 'digital' is also being seen as a synonym for 'cheaper', in relation to the costs of international broadcasting.

DFAT's Digital Strategy has been an important step towards enhancing Australian diplomats' digital skills. However, it remains unclear what kind of engagement Australia seeks in relation to its communication approach and its articulation of the country's national interests. As recommended by Spry (2017, para. 16), "more specific goals, identified by location and audience, would be beneficial". In addition, the lack of long-term foreign policy strategy does not help the development of a coherent approach.

4.1.4 Equipping Australia for listening

DFAT's use of social media in diplomacy has become more sophisticated over the last few years. In particular, the digital strategy has evolved from the mere advocacy of the *Public Diplomacy Strategy 2014-16* to one that now addresses many aspects of social media use in public diplomacy, especially in terms of technologies and skills.

Despite DFAT's aims, it seems that the practical articulation of digital listening is still undertaken through the measurement of message 'reach' and 'impact', while the communication strategy is greatly focused on digital presence. This approach reflects an unclear definition of engagement, which risks remaining nothing more than a buzzword if DFAT does not clarify strategic actors and stakeholders to engage with and the types of political ties and relations that Australia aims to forge in the international arena. Nevertheless, it should be recognised that the DFAT digital strategy has clearly moved towards the creation of an organisational culture (Macnamara 2016) that will likely create confident, skilled and equipped digital diplomats. How Australia employs these resources in practice and what kinds of engagement it seeks will be further explored in chapter 5.

4.2 Italian public diplomacy: practices more than strategy

In this section, I present Italy's approach to public diplomacy and its recent and growing use of social media in diplomacy. As I note earlier, at least according to its public articulation, as of the mid-2010s Italy's strategy appears considerably less developed than Australia's.

Italy has a large network of diplomatic posts around the world. In 2016, the country counted 296 posts abroad – compared with an average of 192 posts for the G20 countries – with 124 embassies, eight permanent representatives, one special diplomatic delegation, 80 consular offices and 83 Italian Cultural Institutes (MAECI 2017, 22).

In contrast with Australia, Italy has a longer tradition of cultural diplomacy and nation branding. This is due to the large differences of geography, language and colonial history. For example, Australia, to some extent, has built its public diplomacy efforts upon the work of the U.S. and the U.K., and utilised the considerable power and reach of the English language and media. Also, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, initial attempts of international engagement by the Australia government, such as the Colombo Plan in 1951, were part of a common effort framed within the intergovernmental framework of the Commonwealth. By contrast, Italy has needed to develop an independent national strategy and create its own agencies for the promotion of its language and strategic interests abroad.

In particular, the pillars of Italian cultural diplomacy are the well-known and widespread network of Italian Cultural Institutes, its reputation for quality products in creative industries such as fashion, food and furniture (branded as "Made in Italy"), and its diasporic communities, which constitute an important asset for the promotion of Italian culture and products abroad.

Currently, the branch of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, MAECI) that oversees Italian public diplomacy is the Directorate General for Cultural and Economic Promotion and Innovation (Direzione Generale per la promozione del sistema Paese). Its strategy is based on an "Integrated promotion of Italy around the world", with the synergy of "economic, cultural and scientific diplomacy through the diplomatic and consular network and Italian Cultural Institutes" (MAECI n.d.-b).

However, the strengths of Italian soft power have been constrained by political and economic instability and endless corruption scandals that have affected the country's reputation in the last few decades. For example, Albano (2013, 189-200) has explored the consequences of Silvio Berlusconi's[49] "Playboy diplomacy", which was characterised by sexual scandals and institutional conflicts.

Aside from the negative consequences of these endemic problems in Italian domestic politics and economy, the numerous changes in government have created a lack of consistency in the overall public diplomacy strategy over time. Short-term public diplomacy initiatives have usually focused on the internationalisation of the Italian economic system, under the umbrella of "Promotion of the Italian Economic System" (*Promozione del Sistema Paese*), the Italian economic diplomacy strategy launched in 2011 (MAECI 2011). The Italian approach to public diplomacy is thus an "integrated strategy" that aims to "harmonise economic diplomacy and cultural diplomacy" – as defined by the head of the department for the Promotion of the Italian Economic System, Enzo De Luca (2016, para. 2, my translation).

Within this policy framework, the promotion of Italian culture and language is undertaken on a permanent basis through the networks of Italian Cultural Institutes and of Italian schools abroad. While the general policy guidelines are articulated in the reports published annually by MAECI – also called La Farnesina, named after the head office building – Italian public diplomacy is a peculiar model that has been run with a lack of long-term strategies but with a solid and widespread network of Culture Institutes, embassies, consulates and several other Italian institutions around the world. This would suggest that the Italian public diplomacy model is a rigid structure – one that goes back to the former Kingdom of Italy (1861–1946) – that does not easily adapt to change. Nevertheless, the physical diplomatic network abroad has guaranteed a strong promotion of Italian culture and language, even though this has caused a lack consistency in the overall public diplomacy approach.

Within this context, the use of social media platforms in Italian diplomacy is gradually emerging from practice more than from the strategies developed by MAECI. In the last few years, La Farnesina is increasingly using social media platforms with ad-hoc content to engage with both domestic and foreign publics.

4.2.1 Italian culture and diaspora diplomacy

4.2.1.1 Italian Cultural Institutes and Italian schools abroad

The Italian Cultural Institutes represent one of the oldest assets of Italian public diplomacy. Founded in 1926 during the fascist dictatorship of Benito Mussolini, the Institutes were created

[49] Former Italian Prime minister, in office three times: 1994–95, 2001–06, and 2008–11.

for the promotion of Italian culture overseas and the development of cultural ties with foreign countries, areas that the Institutes continue to cover today. Among these activities, the Institutes were created to organise lectures and conferences and promote the study of Italian history, opera, and art, as well as manage government-funded scholarships abroad (Carrera, 4-5).

However, it was only after the end of the Second World War that the network of Institutes spread worldwide, and today it has 83 branches around the world. The Institutes promote Italian culture through the organisation of events "with a focus on art, music, cinema, literature, theatre, dance, fashion, design, photography and architecture" (MAECI n.d.-d, para. 2). The network also offers Italian language courses, promotes Italian scientific capabilities, and provides some library resources in Italian.

Even older than the Italian Cultural Institutes, are the Italian schools abroad, whose origins go back to the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Italy, Francesco Crispi, in 1889 (Carrera 2002, 1). In 2017 Italy has 148 Italian schools abroad, plus 110 schools around the world that teach some courses in Italian and 109 Italian lectureships based in foreign universities and funded by MAECI (MAECI 2017, 112). According to MAECI, the Italian schools abroad are "a resource for the promotion of Italian language and culture, as well as for maintaining the cultural identity of the children of Italian citizens abroad and people of Italian descent" (MAECI n.d.-c, para. 1, my translation). The schools represent an important asset for the promotion of the Italian language abroad since the large majority of the students enrolled are not Italian citizens (MAECI 2017, 113).

4.2.1.2 "*Italianità*", diaspora diplomacy and international broadcasting

Another aspect that has characterised Italian public diplomacy comes from the "continuing history" (Tintori 2013, 126) of Italian migration to Europe, North and South America and Oceania, which has formed large Italian diaspora communities around the world. The Italian diaspora has developed according to a "spontaneous and independent process" driven by personal, political and economic factors (Battiston and Tintori 2012, 96) resulting in an ever-increasing number of Italian citizens living abroad – approximately 5.4 million according to recent figures (MAECI 2017, 5).[50] In the past three decades, the Italian government has incorporated the diasporic communities as part of its "Promotion of the Italian Economic System" strategy and its overall public diplomacy strategy.

One of the peculiarities of Italian diaspora diplomacy is that, unlike many countries, expatriate Italians can elect their own representatives in both houses of Parliament. Elected members of

[50] This figure does not include many Italians abroad who lost their citizenship before dual citizenship was introduced by the Italian government in 1992 (MAECI n.d.-a).

parliament are called to represent their Italian diaspora communities. Since 2003, when the law enabling this ability was passed, the Italian government has demonstrated a strong commitment toward maintaining ties with Italians abroad. It has also established institutions that encourage political participation among Italians abroad. Besides the traditional network of consulates and embassies, Italian law has allowed for the election of Committees of Italians Abroad (Com.It.Es) for each consular jurisdiction in the world. This has produced vibrant diaspora communities that still engage actively with Italian domestic politics (Battiston and Tintori 2012).

With the creation of the Ministry of Italians Abroad in 2001, the diaspora communities "were transformed from a history of loss and exile into a source of pride and economic power", increasingly conceived as "business communities" (Hayward 2008, 142). In other words, Italians abroad were integrated into the "Promotion of the Italian Economic System" strategy, both as a policy justification for domestic political debate largely driven by the conservative party *Alleanza Nazionale* (National Alliance) and through the incorporation of the diasporic communities into Italian economic diplomacy. Italians abroad are now considered an important asset for the promotion of the Italian Economy System, both as potential consumers as well as business people that can promote and facilitate the distribution of "Made-in-Italy" products abroad.

From a public diplomacy point of view, the "Italians abroad" policy framework is also reflected in the peculiarities of Italian international broadcasting, conceived as a "conduit between Italy and Italians abroad", especially in the last three decades (Hayward 2008, 135). Indeed, since 1940, Italy has been providing discontinuous international radio and television broadcasting in regions such as Europe, the Americas and North Africa, with news programmes and entertainment provided in Italian and in local languages. In particular, agreements between the Italian government and Italian public broadcaster RAI included a certain amount of non-Italian-language content. These activities were conducted through the transmission of Italian programmes by other local broadcasters (64-75).

It was only in the 1990s that RAI received a mandate from the Italian government to directly broadcast internationally using satellite technology under the name 'RAI International'.[51] The channel currently broadcasts, only in Italian, a mix "of what are believed to be the most important Italian assets: religion, soccer, music, food, and general entertainment" (Ardizzoni 2016, 134). The decision to broadcast only in Italian has transformed Italian international broadcasting from a public diplomacy instrument to a public service to Italians abroad (137). Indeed, it reflects a political choice that sees Italian expatriates as RAI International's

[51] Now called 'Rai Italia'.

exclusive audience, since "RAI International's programs […] usually require a quasi-native level of proficiency" (135). In this sense, "knowledge of the Italian language was to serve as the gatekeeper to the international audience that was imagined" (Hayward 2008, 138). This crucial choice highlights the centrality of language in the Italian case compared with English-speaking nations, such as Australia or the U.K. as English's status as a *lingua franca* widens the reach of content for international publics. Conversely, RAI International's choice to broadcast in Italian has been also driven by the fact that it is cheaper to re-broadcast content produced for the domestic service, avoiding the cost involved in the production of ad-hoc content in foreign languages.

Since the Italian diaspora is considered by the Italian government as a resource for promoting the "Italian Economic System" strategy, Italian broadcasting and the encouragement of political participation among expatriates aim to cultivate national identity. *Italianità* (Italianness) thus becomes a prerequisite for Italians abroad becoming a central and "authoritative" asset for the promotion of economic diplomacy. The international broadcasting service aims to bridge the differences that inevitably emerge between the governmental projection of Italian culture and spontaneous articulations produced by Italian diasporic culture (Ardizzoni 2016, 142). For example, linguists have studied the evolution of the Italian language and dialects by Italians abroad and the creative mix of dialect, Italian and English in Australia (i.e. Rubino 2014), which creates new linguistic entities that diverge from the evolution of the language at home.

One limitation of this approach is in the imagining of its audience as homogeneous and in "fostering unequivocal notions of national identity" (Ardizzoni 2016, 142). This can be considered an example of what Ang (2011, 91) defines as "an attempt to capitalise on the history of mobility of populations across national borders for national purposes" in the contemporary globalised world. The incorporation of the Italian diasporic communities within the "Promotion of the Italian Economic System" strategy ignores the permanent "tension between freedom and belonging, embrace of the new and fidelity to the old" (93) that expatriates experience. This risks creating an "illusion of community", where the Italian government considers expatriates as a homogeneous "state category", and an "illusion of continuity" of the nation state, where the Italians-abroad policy is justified at home (Tintori 2013, 147).

Moreover, a new wave of highly skilled Italians migrating to countries such as the U.K. and Australia is currently taking place as a consequence of the European debt crisis of 2009 (Armillei and Mascitelli 2016). These migrants are actively creating online communities that shape migrants' expectations and the negotiation of their experiences abroad (Davis 2017). Perhaps the introduction of social media in public diplomacy represents an opportunity for the Italian government to cultivate new forms of interaction, especially with younger emigrants, and reconsider the current policy. Satellite broadcasting remains a one-way form of communication with expatriates, which is unlikely to be appealing to the new generation of Italian migrants. Online media affords a variety of channels to access content in one's mother tongue and enables dialogic forms of communication. New technologies and a renewed policy framework could include a recognition of the diversity of expatriates' experiences, of their old and new identities, representing an innovative and creative tool for diaspora diplomacy.

4.2.2 Italian public diplomacy on social media

As described above, the Italian articulation of public diplomacy activities has been defined more by its practices than its strategies. Italian digital diplomacy is no exception.

The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs opened a YouTube account in 2009 and a Twitter account, @ItalyMFA, in 2012. Since then, the Twitter account has been used as a means to amplify content distributed to the press or published on the ministry's official website. The goal is to broadcast and reach those people that use social media as their source for news and information. Such content posted on Twitter has been adapted to the platform by simply adding images or links to the press releases.[52]

The only official digital strategy publically available is titled *Guidelines on the use of social media* (Linee guida sull'utilizzo dei social media) (MAECI 2014). The three-page document addresses diplomatic staff and "encourages the so-called 'e-diplomacy'". The guidelines recommend "transmitting and spreading" through social media the policy lines about the most important international topics relevant to MAECI, "adapted to local contexts" (1, my translation). Social media platforms – according to the guidelines – are a source of information on which users "confer significance and credibility", but as they are vulnerable to cyberattacks, the guidelines suggest a "stringent and constant control over the access credentials of the official profiles" (2, my translation).

In the articulations of political statements, diplomatic posts should pay attention to the local norms of "political, cultural, ethnic, and religious sensitivity" (1, my translation). Stringent restrictions are also in place regarding diplomats' and staff members' personal profiles. As the guidelines point out:

> It is always necessary to specify that the messages sent [from personal accounts] reflect personal opinions and not the official point of view of the Ministry. […] Texts and images are therefore liable to be misunderstood and exploited, causing damage not only to the staff member but also to the organisation […]. It is advisable to raise awareness even among staff's household members, especially in regard to staff with greater responsibilities (2-3, my translation).

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52 This was verified in an informal interview conducted in 2015 with a staff member of the Press and Institutional Communication Service branch (Servizio per la stampa e la comunicazione istituzionale).

The guidelines also encourage the creation of a backup of the "history" of the dialogue between the organisation and online users, even if it does not specify the reasons for doing so (2).

Since 2014, the digital practices of MAECI have progressed, even though this has not been clearly stated in the public strategies. Following the general trend of creating institutional social media accounts to engage with both domestic and international publics, as described in table 2, in 2016 La Farnesina launched official accounts on Facebook @ItalyMFA.it (MAECI 2016a) and Instagram @italymfa (MAECI 2016c) and started a social media campaign called #ItaliaIn. A short press release (MAECI 2016b) described this new digital diplomacy initiative stating that the social media campaign will portray – through images, videos and infographics – a number of aspects of Italian diplomatic activities around the world on the official channels on Twitter and Facebook (figure 9). The campaign has been designed as a journey through the consular network around the world. Each month one of the diplomatic posts presents the activities it undertakes "in defending Italy's interests and values, providing assistance to Italian citizens, supporting Italian companies abroad and promoting Italy's excellence" (MAECI 2016b). However, the content of the campaign has been predominantly in Italian, limiting the potential of the campaign to reach a broader international audience.

Figure 9 – "Pack your bags. #ItaliaIn is about to leave:
a journey to discover the work of our Embassies and Consulates in the world"

The strict limitations imposed on Italian diplomats by the *Guidelines on the use of social media* now seem to have been overcome. In both the Australian and the Italian cases, it seems that a maturing strategy needs to overcome these strict guidelines in order to provide some autonomy to individual diplomatic agents. This can also be interpreted as evidence of the development of a more sophisticated social media strategy. Strict codes of conduct, although they guarantee a certain degree of accountability and consistency in their communication approach, limit the kind of flexibility required to properly and actively respond to contextual factors such as sudden changes in political agendas and in online debates. Dialogic engagement and active listening can hardly be achieved under strict limitations and guidelines.

The need to use social media in a more engaging and dialogic fashion might explain why practices have taken over guidelines in the Italian case. Italy has now a growing number of social media accounts managed by embassies, consulates and Cultural Institutes, listed on the #SocialFarnesina webpage (MAECI n.d.-e).

However, the lack of a public strategy makes it difficult to say whether Italy has in place any listening activities to monitor and assess its online and social media communication. The MAECI's *Statistical Yearbook 2017* (MAECI 2017) shows an increase in users visiting the official webpages of both La Farnesina and the consular network and a 35% increase in @ItalyMFA's Twitter followers (97) and retweets (196). These insights indicate that the success of the digital practices is measured through basic social media metrics that say little about the types of engagement initiated by users.[53] At the same time, the practice that emerges from the analysis of the official reports and documents is the use of social media as a mere broadcasting tool that aims to amplify the messages posted online by the Italian diplomats in a one-way fashion.

This is also confirmed by the social media campaign #ItaliaIn, which aims to present and legitimise the activities of MAECI more to a domestic than an international audience, since most of the content is in Italian.[54] The campaign attests that while MAECI is creating specific content for the social media platforms, it still generally neglects the dialogic potential of social media. The growing number of social media accounts managed by the consular network indicates a clear intention to amplify the message. However, MAECI is far from taking advantage of the full potential of social media by monitoring, assessing, and identifying relevant topics, influencers and stakeholders, and engaging with them.

4.2.3 A lack of listening

Despite the peculiar strategic articulation in the promotion of Italian foreign policy described in this section, listening seems to be mostly neglected. Well-established public diplomacy

[53] This was confirmed in an informal interview conducted in 2015, during which it was stated that MAECI's monitoring activities were limited to follower and retweet counts.
[54] Nevertheless, the use of Italian language could be a strategic choice to communicate with diaspora communities, especially in regard to consular warnings or announcements.

activities – the Italian Cultural Institutes, the Italian schools abroad, the diaspora diplomacy – are understood as an apparatus of Italian economic diplomacy. The integration of economic and cultural diplomacy is based on unquestioned assumptions that this combination of culture, language, *Made in Italy,* and diasporic communities can be fully successful. In fact, this is difficult to assert without listening to publics or monitoring the effectiveness of these activities.

It has also emerged that Italian public diplomacy struggles to clearly define its publics. This is a more generalised problem for public diplomacy practices for non-English speaking countries. Indeed, while Australia does not seem to give the language issue much consideration – it simply assumes that foreign publics will understand English, which is part of Australia's linguistic complacency – in the Italian case the choice of the language marks quite clearly the boundaries of its imagined audience. While the use of the Italian language seems to be a clear strategic choice in Italian international broadcasting – because it is cheaper and aims to target Italian diaspora communities – its rationale remains unclear in the digital environment. The inference is that social media is seen more as a tool to communicate with the domestic audience and thus is perhaps perceived as a means of legitimating and clarifying foreign policies for the domestic public (refer to chapter 1).

Overall, the challenges brought by the use of social media in diplomacy requires the Italian government to rethink its strategies and audiences. For example, the current organisational structure of MAECI still frames social media communication as part of the 'pressroom' activities under its Press and Institutional Communication Service branch, which bucks the trend among other foreign affairs ministries around the world of establishing public diplomacy branches.[55] The creation of a separate public diplomacy department could renew MAECI's organisational culture and enhance staff skills. It could also support planning based on more sophisticated monitoring activities employed for readjusting goals, effective strategy/programming and creating long-term relations. At the same time, the predominant production of digital content in Italian may be integrated with the use of English as lingua franca at the ministerial level of communication (those accounts managed by La Farnesina), and the use of local languages by the diplomatic network around the world.[56]

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[55] For example, the public diplomacy branch at DFAT in Australia or the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs in the U.S.
[56] Italian diplomatic posts seem to neglect the use of local languages on social media, posting predominantly in English and Italian.

4.3 Conclusion

The two case studies indicate that there is no general formula for success that can applied by different public diplomacy actors when it comes to communication in public diplomacy. Strategic approaches are connected to the social, cultural and organisational practices, as well as to the country's geographical position and cultural proximity, history, language, understanding and interpretation of its international role. Strategies themselves are the result of the negotiation and reinterpretation of a country's historical evolution, where policy discourse is often articulated to differentiate approaches between past and new governments.

Both middle powers examined in this chapter possess what Nye calls 'passive' soft power capabilities (Nye 2011, 131), which means that the countries' attraction is exercised through resources already established such as their culture, lifestyle, natural beauty and historical richness (refer to chapter 1). Social media presence and nation-branding activities, through the promotion of the two countries' culture and lifestyle, might support awareness or advocacy about them. However, middle powers' influence in international relations requires coalition building: they rely on international collaboration to be effective in the international environment. In this sense, the creation of spaces for meaningful international conversations on relevant international policy can produce favourable conditions in which middle powers can operate more effectively. This, however, requires going beyond the promotion of soft power assets towards clear and consistent foreign policies and public diplomacy strategies and avoid disjuncture between strategies and practices.

In this regard, the Australian strategy has highlighted the fact that branding Australia as a multicultural and diverse society also requires a real commitment at the policy-making level. At the same time, the Australian embrace of digital media needs to clarify strategic actors and the types of relations and engagement sought.

Conversely, in the Italian case, the focus on the promotion of the Italian Economic System strategy and the political instrumentalisation of diaspora communities might work in the short-term – insofar as the interests of the Italian diasporic 'business communities' will correspond to those of the national state. However, it remains unclear how this mix of language and economic promotion, combined with diaspora diplomacy, will be capitalised into diplomatic and international reputation in the long term. This is a general problem of Italian public diplomacy being characterised by a lack of listening activities since it is founded on uninterrogated assumptions about the effectiveness of its practices.

In terms of the use of social media in diplomacy, what emerges from the analysis of the two countries' public diplomacy strategies is a general tendency to increase the number of accounts and embrace new platforms. This focus on 'equipping' diplomats suggests that public diplomacy activities are constantly measured against tangible and quantifiable outputs, which ‘equipping’ seems amenable to. This approach might be effective for the evaluation of message amplification, but it does not provide any insights into whether social media users are paying attention to such messages.

As Macnamara (2016) points out, the foundation of an architecture of listening rests on the creation of spaces where “people can interact with organisations in mutually beneficial ways” (246). Social media listening can thus take place especially when these communication spaces are created. The following chapters explore further the variable degrees of listening by examining the two case studies – the G20 in Brisbane and the Expo in Milan. When spaces for listening are not created, social media users will usually react critically with frustration, anger and, in the best scenario, with irony, as argued in chapter 2. This means that meaningful listening requires a visible disposition on the part of the government to actively listen. Therefore, broader political posture of public diplomacy actors and their organisational architecture – whether they are heads of state, ministries, ministers or diplomats – are reflected in the quality of listening and online engagement. In the following chapters, I address the Australian and Italian public diplomacy practices on social media by looking at two selected events, the G20 2014 in Brisbane and Expo 2015 in Milan.

5 Public diplomacy on Twitter during the G20 2014

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, I have described the complex landscape of Twitter communication in public diplomacy. Governments struggle to attract users' attention, and public diplomacy on social media has become part of a more complicated system of relations that has introduced new actors and practices. Within this convoluted landscape, several factors affect public diplomacy actors' attempts to legitimise their government's foreign policy. Diplomats' communication efforts are challenged or facilitated by multiple actors – or nodes, to use network analysis terminology – participating in online discussions. In this context, mediators, introduced in chapter 2, affect people's perception of diplomats' key messages. It follows that public diplomacy listening on social media needs to go beyond an understanding of influence as a top-down process, since social media influence is built within networks of actors and issues. This line of reasoning has also led me to introduce listening as a critical element of public diplomacy on social media.

As discussed in chapter 3, the G20 2014 summit in Brisbane provides a meaningful case study for exploring the challenges of Twitter communication for public diplomacy actors. On social media people are potentially exposed to different messages emanating from news media, NGOs and all the actors participating in a Twitter discussion. Therefore, strategic awareness of the Twitter discussion requires an understanding of the bundle of message elements. Methodologically, this task will be accomplished by applying and testing the combination of thick and thin description described in chapter 3.

The context of the G20 summit in Brisbane was characterised by a complex combination of the Australian government's political agenda, as chair of the meeting, and the agendas of the various leaders of G20 countries. The first part of this chapter contextualises the principal actors and issues involved on the eve of the G20 meeting. This is accomplished by summarising the Australian government's political agenda, particularly with respect to its "economic growth" goal, as well as the tensions that developed shortly before the G20 meeting between Australia and Russia, and the various political positions among the governments participating in the G20.

The second and third section of the chapter employ both thin methods (metrics and network analysis of Twitter datasets) and a close reading of individual tweets (thick) analysis. In addition, non-Twitter sources, such as journalist reports, conventional government briefings, media appearances and press releases, are analysed to contextualise the Twitter debate within the broader media ecology and political debate, as described in chapter 3.

Broadly, this case study critically examines Australia's diplomatic communication in the context of its hosting of the G20 meeting in Brisbane. It provides practical insights into the consequences, in terms of influence and credibility, of neglecting social media listening on the part of Australia's then prime minister, Tony Abbott. His failure to listen will be compared with other leaders who, by contrast, chose to address and listen to the Twitter debate. In this analysis, I also provide examples of the roles played by mediators – introduced in chapter 1 – in social media debates. In employing the thick and thin description methodology described in chapter 3, I also test and support the proposed method as a powerful means of making sense of messy but insightful social media conversation.

5.2 The history and current context of the G20

As mentioned in Chapter 3, Australia, as host nation, drew international attention during the 2014 G20 summit in Brisbane. It has also been noted that the G20 is a largely mediated event, as well as a planned and cyclical mega-event. Mega-events (Roche 2002) provide a space for public discussion in which a wide array of different international actors participate.

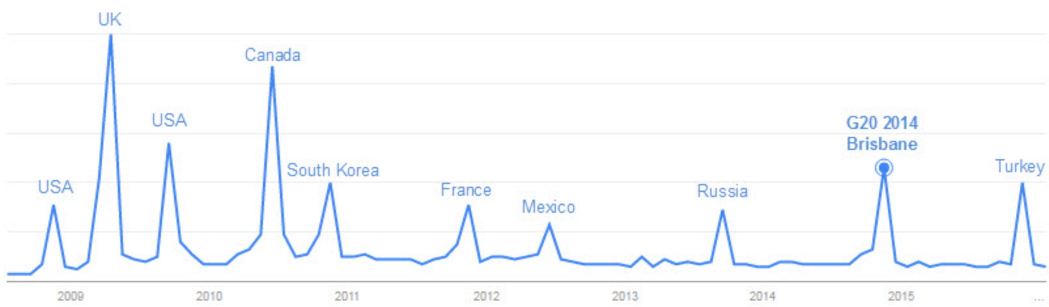

Figure 10 – Google Trends for the keyword 'g20'

A simple and powerful way to understand the relevance of this event in the online environment is to query Google Trends[57]. Figure 10 shows the Google searches for the term 'g20'. The peaks in the graph represent the intensity of searches associated with the annual summits and the respective host countries since the first meeting in 2009. This figure also illustrates how every peak in the graph corresponds to the capacity of the G20 to attract internet users' attention.

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[57] Google Trends is a website operated by Google that provides visualisations about the volume of searched terms over time by language and region. For more details: https://trends.google.com/trends/

To better understand what the G20 is and why its annual summits are relevant public diplomacy events, it is worth briefly introducing its historical evolution.

Officially, the G20, or Group of Twenty, is an international forum of the 20 governments and central bank governors of the major economies. Its key role is to provide a forum for discussing international economic issues. The objectives of the G20 are "to establish an informal mechanism for dialogue among systemically important countries within the framework of the Bretton Woods institutional system" and "promote discussion and study and review policy issues among industrialised countries and emerging markets with a view to promoting international financial stability" (The G20 Research Group 2010, para 5-6).

The group was first founded in 1975 as the G7, at which point it included the seven member states of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Membership was extended to Russia in 1999, to form the G8. The first G20 heads-of-state summit was hosted by George W. Bush in Washington, DC in 2008, as a response to the global financial crisis and due to the interconnectedness of economies and the need to include and support large developing economies (Hajnal 2014, 11-18). Despite the fact that the forum is mainly focused on the economy and finance, the themes discussed vary from year to year according to the current affairs and political agendas of its members. The short history of the G20 demonstrates that the forum is becoming a permanent institution and an international arena to discuss worldwide issues, with more continuity in its agenda, which is also expanding beyond purely economic issues and trying to be more inclusive by including newly emerging economic powers and middle powers, such as Australia.

Since the 1999 formation of the G8, the annual summit has been associated with public controversies and protests, especially questioning the legitimacy of this "informal" institution to make international and strategic decisions with broad economic, social, environmental and cultural implications (Slaughter 2013, 72). Particularly during the G8 2001 in Genoa, the leaders' meeting was surrounded by protests that were part of the anti-globalisation movement. Some of these demonstrations escalated, leading to the death of a demonstrator at the hands of Italian police. As a consequence, the G8 was moved to more remote locations in subsequent years (Hajnal 2014).

The perceived lack of legitimacy of the G8 led to the creation of the G20 in order to secure a broader consensus for G8-generated ideas (The G20 Research Group 2010). This also was a response to emerging powers that lobbied to gain access to the group. Paradoxically, those countries not included in the original G8, rather than contesting these new forms of global governance, attempted to gain access to this important forum, producing "a much greater incentive to actively engage with the G20" on the part of smaller economies (Cooper 2014, 1). As had occurred for the G8, the G20 did not prove immune to protests, some of which turned violent, for example in London 2009 and Toronto 2010, although protests have been peaceful in recent years.

Attempts to legitimise the G20 have also seen the involvement of new actors to relaunch its "effectiveness, legitimacy and credibility" (Byrne and Blakemore 2015). This shift was materialised with the G20 2014 in Brisbane and its call for "action from across society". For the first time, five engagement groups were established, namely the Business 20 (B20), Civil Society 20 (C20), Labour 20 (L20), Think 20 (T20) and Youth 20 (Y20) (G20 Australia 2014b).

Along with the organisational changes, the concurrent evolution in the forms and articulations of the protests around the G20 ought to be noted. Recently, street protests and independent communication platforms on the internet have been partly replaced by social media communication (Earl et al. 2013, 495). For example, during the G8 summits, the alternative globalisation movements created self-organised platforms, such as the Independent Media Center (Indymedia), which tried to create a democratic media process using the internet and contributing to the global exchange and organisation of ideas and activities during the first wave of protests against the G8 and other international economic organisations, particularly against the World Trade Organisation (Pickard 2006).

The technological developments that brought about web 2.0 and the consequent emergence of social media platforms have opened up new communication possibilities, especially in relation to the use of Twitter for back-channel communication for small and big events (refer to chapter 2). Previously, social media was used as a tool for mobilisation in London (Beaumont 2009) and for coordination and information-sharing among protesters in Toronto (Poell and Borra 2012, 695). Paradoxically, the uptake of social media channelled critical voices away from radical, independent and democratic networks, like Indymedia, toward a few centralised, global, and corporatised social media platforms[58] (refer to Pickard 2006).

The number of protesters on the streets has dropped in recent years (Press 2014) and it is difficult to say whether this is due to the reorganisation of the G20, new forms of communication or a crisis within the anti-globalisation movement. Nevertheless, critical voices and governmental actors now share the same means of communication, the effects of which were particularly evident in the case of the G20 2014 in Brisbane and the large volume of the Twitter discussion that surrounded it. This has proved that the G20 has become an

[58] Note that this is part of a broader critique of the information monopoly that is emerging on the internet, where a very small number of social media platforms (such as Facebook and Twitter) are dominating the use of the internet. Scholars, such as Lovink (2011) and Srnicek (2017), have warned about the consequences of this information monopoly in journalism, access to information, political participation (also briefly mentioned in chapter 2) and economy.

important public diplomacy event, with the communication of such a variety of actors now converging on a few mainstream social media platforms, namely Facebook and Twitter.

Also, the G20 has become an important annual nation and place-branding event which the host city and country may use to promote its national and/or local image. For example, the G20 2014 was seen as an important opportunity for the state of Queensland and the city of Brisbane to make “a leading appearance on the world’s stage” and “to promote Queensland as a great place to do business” and one of “endless opportunities” (Queensland Government 2014, para. 1, 3).

The economic forum now attracts the interest of media and broader publics around the world. Therefore, the event can now be considered an international stage where strategic topics concerning the different participating countries are discussed. During a G20 annual event, the host country and its political leaders can set the international political agenda – which otherwise would require a huge diplomatic effort – while taking advantage of the unique opportunity it offers to enhance both the local and national image.

5.3 Leaders’ agendas

The G20, as with any diplomatic summit, is characterised by closed-door bilateral and multilateral negotiations, where complex issues are discussed and divergent positions mediated. Therefore, the following description of the leaders’ agendas cannot be exhaustive, nor does it aim to be so. Instead my intention here is to provide some key points that help the reader to understand the issues that were most debated on news media and on social media. In particular, this section summarises the issues advocated by the G20 leaders in their public statements. The analysis is enriched and supported by contextualising online conversations through the selection of relevant non-Twitter sources – as described in chapter 3.

5.3.1 The Australian G20 Agenda

The host country of a G20 summit plays an important role in setting the summit’s priorities and leads the discussion at the meeting, since its government is also the chair. Therefore, it is important to explore some of the key issues that the Australian chairship of the G20 2014 put on the negotiating table. In chapter 4 I outlined Australia’s broader public diplomacy strategy; here I summarise the key aspects of public discourse that characterised Australia’s chairship of the G20 summit in 2014.

The Australian government had a clear focus on economic growth. Two priorities were highlighted in the document *G20 2014: Overview of Australia‘s Presidency* (G20 Australia 2013, 3): promoting stronger economic growth and employment outcomes, and making the global economy more resilient to future shocks. According to then Prime Minister Tony

Abbott, “while a strong economy won’t solve every problem, it will make almost every problem easier to tackle” (Abbott 2014, para. 12). The rationale behind this political choice was simple: the G20 is an economic summit and therefore must address economic issues. This will be revisited later in this chapter when a diversity of criticisms of the Australian political agenda will be explored. For the moment, it is important to highlight the Australian government’s intention to focus on economic growth, in the wake of several prior G20 summits which had focused on dealing with the economic crisis of 2007–08 and how to overcome it.

This emphasis on economic growth has to be understood in light of Australian domestic politics. Indeed, the Liberal–National Coalition’s Economic Action Strategy was focused on economic issues, and the Australian diplomatic strategy was focused on economic diplomacy.[59] This was part of a broader Liberal–Conservative domestic political agenda, which clarifies the reasons why Tony Abbott insisted on promoting the economic growth issue right until the end of the summit, as well as why the Australian prime minister boasted of his domestic achievements in his G20 welcome speech to the leaders, despite the fact that many leaders were not aware of the domestic political debate (Bourke 2014).

5.3.2 “Shirtfront” threats and addressing the Ukrainian crisis

Each year the Australian National Dictionary Centre selects a “Word of the Year”, and in 2014 “shirtfront” was declared the winner “on the basis of having come to some prominence in the Australian social and cultural landscape during the year” (Gwynn 2014, para. 1). The term – a rugby term referring to a type of hip-and-shoulder bumping of an opponent – was little known outside the Australian rugby context, where the word originates.

The reasons that led to this word’s fame in 2014 is connected with the tragic story of the 27 Australians, who were among 298 passengers killed on Malaysia Airlines Flight 17. The plane was travelling from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur when it was shot down on 17 July 2014 in Ukraine. The Russian-made missile that struck the plane came from an area in the country that was under the control of Russian-backed separatists. This led to suspicions of the involvement of Russia in the shooting down of the passenger airplane (Weaver 2015).

After this event, a reporter asked Tony Abbott during a press conference in Queensland, a month before the G20 summit, whether he would raise the issue of the downing of flight MH17 with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Abbott answered:

> I’m going to shirtfront Mr Putin (…) I am going to be saying to Mr Putin Australians were murdered. There’ll be a lot of tough conversations with Russia and I suspect the conversation I

[59] This is part of a broader foreign policy strategy also highlighted in the *Australia Public Diplomacy Strategy 2014–16* discussed in chapter 4.

> have with Mr Putin will be the toughest conversation of all (Abbott cited by Massola 2014, para. 6).

This event opened a debate about Putin's participation in the G20, a dispute that lasted up until the Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit on 11 November, just a few days before the G20 summit. During this occasion, Putin and Abbott had a short meeting, in which Abbott raised his concerns about Russian involvement in the MH17 downing and asked Putin to ensure access to the crash site for international investigators. Ironic commentary, both in Australia and internationally, emphasised the fact that there was no 'shirtfronting' from the Australian Prime Minister (rt.com 2014a, Kenny 2014).

Simplifying an immensely complex context, this pressure exerted by Australia on Russia took place amid broader tensions among several countries, mostly European countries and the United States, concerning the role of Russia in the Ukrainian crisis, which began on 21 November 2013. After Russia annexed Crimea on 18 March 2014, demonstrations by pro-Russian and anti-government groups took place in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine. Meanwhile Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovych chose not to sign a political-association and free-trade agreement with the European Union in November 2013, at the same time trying to establish stronger ties with Russia. This led to a protest movement that resulted in the ousting of Yanukovych and the formation of a new interim government in February 2014. Concurrent pro-Russian protests in southern and eastern Ukraine escalated into a civil war between the separatist forces of the self-declared Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics and the Ukrainian government. At the time of writing, a fragile ceasefire is in place as result of the Minsk Protocol signed in September 2014. Europe and the United States currently support the Kiev government, while the type of support Russia is providing to the other faction is still unclear.

In July 2014, just before the G20, the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine and the shooting down of MH17 pushed the United States and the European Union to extend their sanctions against several individuals and firms in Ukraine and Russia. The sanctions produced a strain in the relationships between Russia and the Western countries not seen since the fall of the Berlin Wall. The Ukraine crisis was an important issue debated during the meeting on the sidelines of the G20 and was a topic extensively mentioned on social media and in news media coverage of the event.

Another event that fuelled tensions just before the G20 summit was the sending of a Russian fleet of warships towards Australia. Although the warships were in international waters and there were no infringements of international law, this action was interpreted by the Australian news media as a Russian attempt to display of muscle-flexing before the G20 (Wroe 2014).

The colloquial 'shirtfront' statement expressed by Tony Abbott was an unusual manner of expressing disappointment in an international relations context. Despite the fact that it was directed to the Australian audience to reassure it that the Australian voice would be heard internationally, the tone of the message, evoking a physical confrontation, produced the opposite effect on social media, as it will be explored in the following sections.

5.3.3 G20 leaders' agendas

Along with the Australian political agenda and the major international events such as the Ukraine crisis leading up to the summit, each head of state attending the G20 aimed to achieve, or at least advance, their national political goals. Certainly, each country did not have the same political weight in the G20 negotiations, and the description in this section can only provide broad outlines.

However, some key agendas have been summarised by the Project on International Order and Strategy at Brookings in its report *How Unified is the G-20?* (Nalaskowski, Keane, and Wright 2014, 1). The study considers different sources for each country but is largely derived from news and press releases. While limited in its capacity to be definitive about each county's political agenda for the event, the analysis does provide a schematic description of the G20 countries in relation to the major international topics at that time.

As can be seen in table 7 published in the report mentioned above, Russia's role in the Ukraine crisis was the issue that was the most divisive: five countries supported Russia, five were neutral or ambivalent and eight condemned Russia's actions. Controversies around this issue were actually predictable: indeed, it can be seen in the table that the division reflects international alliances. The United States and its allies condemned Russia, while Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) and Latin American countries did not. Moreover, the United States' strong commitment to all the major global issues must be noted, while the strongest agreement can be seen in the case of the contribution to containing Ebola.

Table 7 – Positions of G20 states on major global issues for the 2014 summit (Nalaskowski, Keane, and Wright 2014, 1)

POSITIONS OF G-20 STATES ON MAJOR GLOBAL ISSUES

G-20 Member States	Criticism of Russia's actions in Ukraine	Contribution to containing Ebola in West Africa	Contribution to fighting ISIS	Criticism of China's maritime policy in South China Sea	Confidence in resolution of nuclear issues with Iran	Contribution to addressing climate change
Argentina	Negative	Neutral/Ambivalent	Neutral/Ambivalent	Neutral/Ambivalent	Positive	Neutral/Ambivalent
Australia	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Neutral/Ambivalent	Negative
Brazil	Negative	Positive	Neutral/Ambivalent	Positive	Positive	Positive
Canada	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Negative	Neutral/Ambivalent
China	Negative	Positive	Positive	Negative	Positive	Positive
France	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Negative	Positive
Germany	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive
India	Negative	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Neutral/Ambivalent
Indonesia	Neutral/Ambivalent	Neutral/Ambivalent	Positive	Positive	Positive	Neutral/Ambivalent
Italy	Positive	Positive	Positive	Neutral/Ambivalent	Positive	Positive
Japan	Positive	Positive	Neutral/Ambivalent	Positive	Positive	Negative
Mexico	Neutral/Ambivalent	Neutral/Ambivalent	Neutral/Ambivalent	Neutral/Ambivalent	Positive	Positive
Russia	Negative	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive
Saudi Arabia	Neutral/Ambivalent	Neutral/Ambivalent	Positive	Neutral/Ambivalent	Negative	Negative
South Africa	Negative	Positive	Neutral/Ambivalent	Neutral/Ambivalent	Positive	Negative
South Korea	Neutral/Ambivalent	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive
Turkey	Neutral/Ambivalent	Positive	Positive	Neutral/Ambivalent	Positive	Positive
UK	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive
USA	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive

● Positive ● Neutral/Ambivalent ● Negative

Overall, convergence in every issue reflected pre-existing alliances and regional strategic interests, except one: climate change. Indeed, Australia and Japan did not support the discussion on climate change, differentiating their position from those of the other most developed countries. This can be explained in part by important strategic imperatives, such as Australia's energy exports and Japan's reliance on fossil fuels post-Fukushima nuclear disaster in March 2011 (Nalaskowski, Keane, and Wright 2014, 3).

However, the G20 is not only marked by agreed topics for conversation, but also at times by those not agreed upon. In 2014, climate change was not on the agenda. This was a surprise to many since concerns about climate change had been among the most topical issues in international debate in the last three decades. Since the mid-to-late 1980s the politics of climate change have been closely interconnected with the politics of energy and economy, while many global interests have been competing to set climate change policy. In 1992, at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the international community publicly recognised this issue for the first time and adopted the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. This resolution aimed to control greenhouse gas concentrations "at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic (human induced) interference with the climate system" (United Nations n.d., para. 5). This was followed by the Kyoto Protocol which established targets in greenhouse emissions to be met by participating countries. However, the fact that the protocol was not legally binding and that the U.S., one of the most developed countries and a major international power did not sign this protocol limited its effectiveness.

At the APEC summit in 2014, just few days before the G20 in Brisbane, China and the U.S. signed a bilateral agreement on climate change. This agreement laid the groundwork for further negotiations that could involve other governments. Indeed, the two countries are among those nations with the highest levels of carbon emissions. The G20 in Brisbane represented a great opportunity, especially for U.S. President Barack Obama, to build upon the progresses made during the APEC summit. This was confirmed by the events following the G20 in Brisbane that led to the Paris Agreement in 2015, which established legally binding limits to carbon emissions.

The Australian government's attempt to avoid a discussion of growing importance on climate change proved to be its Achilles' heel. Indeed, this affected Abbott's domestic and international reputation, especially after Obama openly addressed the climate change issue in his speech at the University of Queensland, discussed later in this chapter. The analysis of the pre-G20 Twitter discussion in the following section will illustrate how the climate change issue became central, demonstrating that social media listening could have anticipated much of the criticism to Abbott's foreign policy agenda for the G20.

5.4 The role of NGOs

On the eve of the G20 heads-of-state meeting, there was a growing discussion on Twitter about the event (figure 11). By examining the most used hashtags and the most mentioned Twitter accounts that relate to the event, the aim of this section is to demonstrate how *tactical* social media listening can help foresee key issues and indicate influential users – such as the 'mediators' defined in chapter 1 – who are relevant to public diplomacy actors. Ongoing social media listening can be employed to better understand public sentiment and to undertake an appropriate and effective communication approach. This is what I have defined as *tactical* listening in chapter 2. Twitter discussions can unfold in unpredictable ways, as this case study will demonstrate, and listening provides crucial insights into public diplomacy actors on a short-term and tactical level. This tactical level can be integrated with dialogic engagement, when a public diplomacy actor is seen to be *actively* listening. In this case, public diplomacy actors participate, contribute and create opportunities for international dialogue. This section will provide examples of both *tactical* and *active* listening through analysis of the conversation unfolding before the G20.

As anticipated in more detail in chapter 3 where I discussed in detail the data collection process, this section analyses 323,942 tweets containing the keyword 'g20' captured in the lead-up to the heads-of-state meeting (in the period of 1–14 November 2014) using the extraction tool DMI-TCAT.

An insight that can be very meaningful in an initial phase of the analysis of a Twitter dataset can be derived from hashtag frequency (refer to chapter 3). Figure 12 shows hashtag frequency in the 15 days before the G20 kicked off. Each hashtag visualised in figure 12 represents subcommunities addressing specific issues within the G20 discussion. A first glance at the bar chart suggests that the most frequent hashtags refer to the Australian domestic debates (#auspol and #abbott), news items (#news, #abcnews25 and #7news), as well as world leaders and international issues (#putin, #obama and #ebola). The visualisation indicates that the conversation on Twitter reflects the global issues that were also part of the leaders' agenda explored in the previous section. Twitter users – both citizens and mediators – reshape and reinterpret these agendas in a bottom-up manner. This can be clearly seen in figure 12 where the most frequently used hashtag was #onmyagenda that was promoted by a group of NGOs. This chart shows the top 25 most frequently used hashtags. The volume of tweets tagged #g20 has been excluded, since this hashtag is included in all tweets.

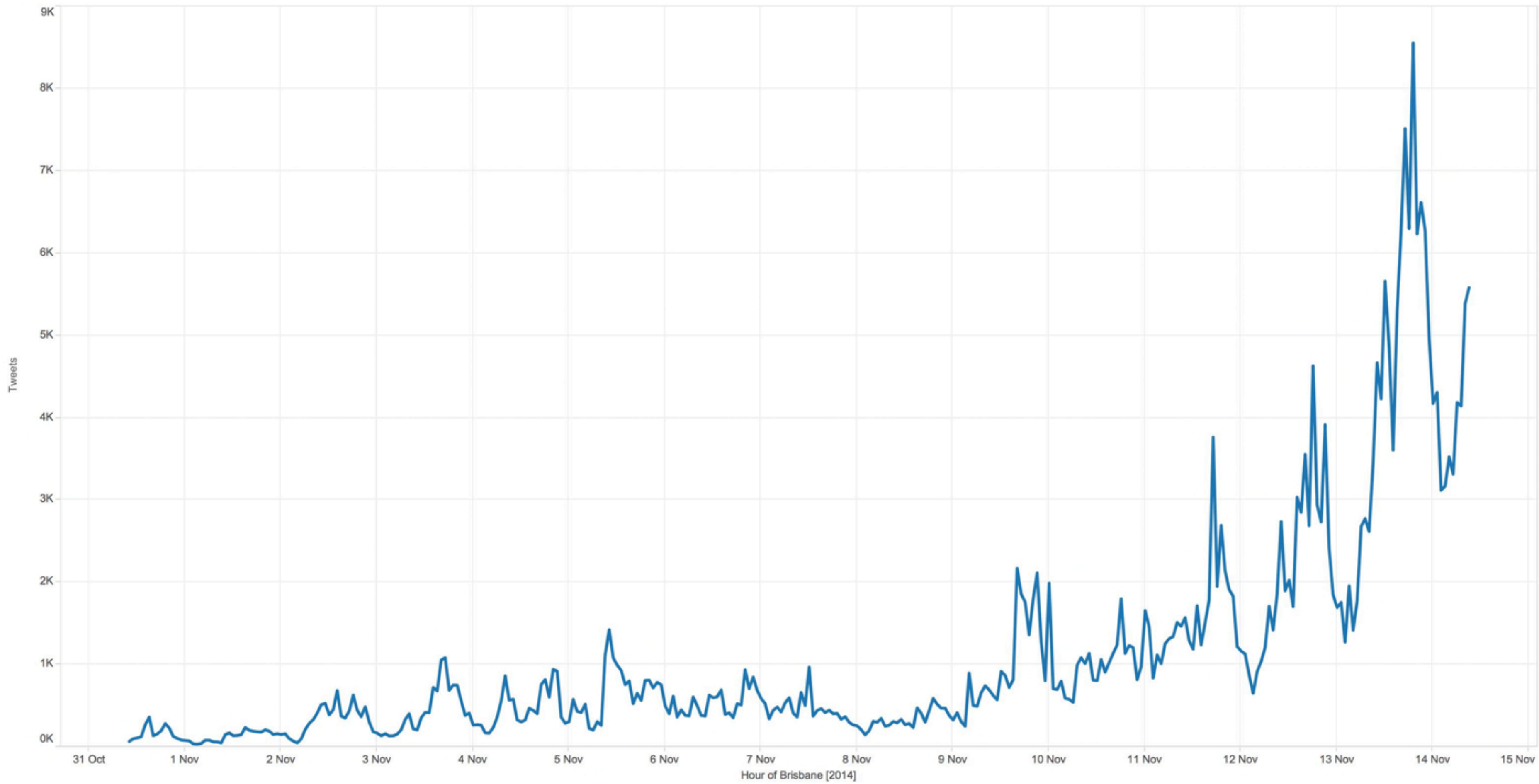

Figure 11 – Volume of tweets (31 October–14 November, Brisbane Time)

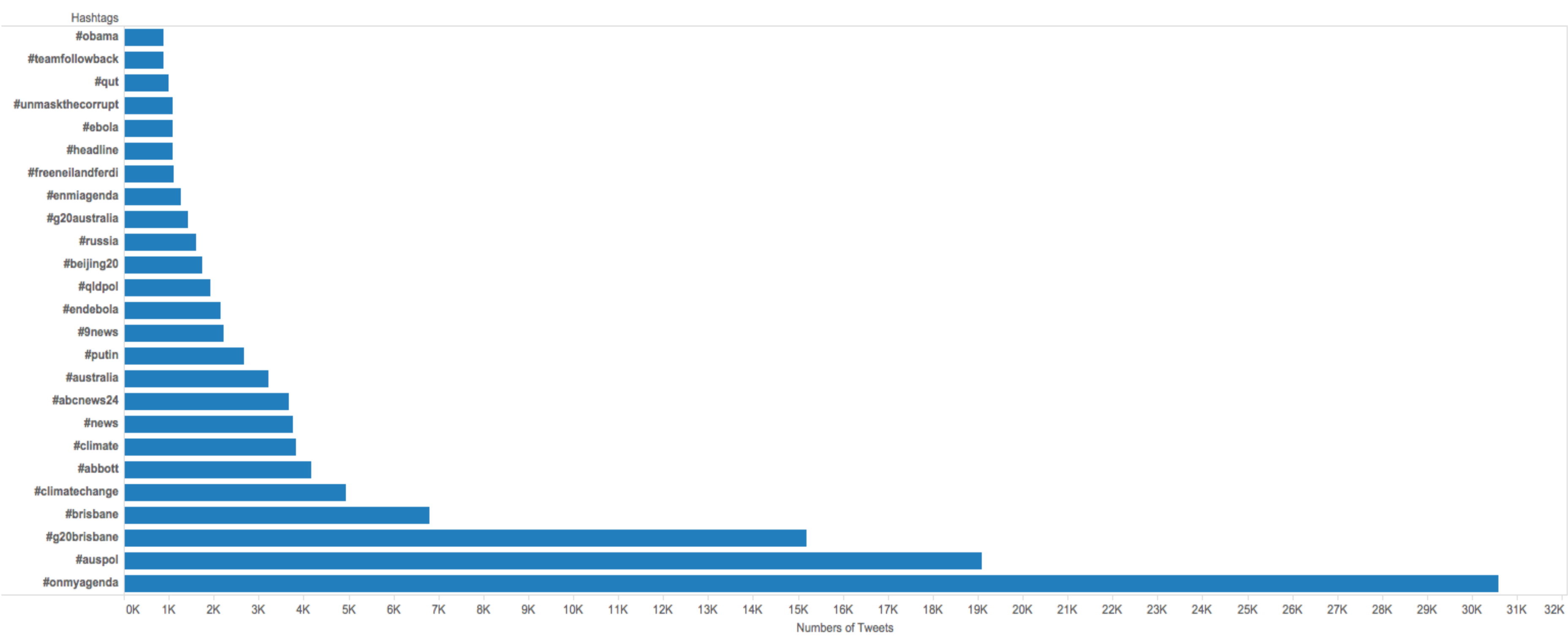

Figure 12 – 'g20' hashtag frequency (filtered)

Therefore, this initial stage of the analysis suggests the need to look in greater depth at the content tagged with #onmyagenda, for four reasons. Firstly, it was the most frequent hashtag used before the G20 to discuss this event. Secondly, the Australian government was reluctant to include it in the forum agenda. Thirdly, it is a relevant example for exploring the role of NGOs in Twitter conversations. Finally, in the case of the hashtag #onmyagenda, it can be assumed that the use of this tag implied support for action on climate change.

Figure 13 – Screenshot of the website onmyagenda.org

Indeed, a group of international NGOs, namely the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Greenpeace, GetUp!, 60+ Earth Hour, Australian Youth Climate Coalition (AYCC), Oxfam Australia, Australian Conservation Foundation, 350 Australia and 1 Million Women promoted a social media communication campaign that had as its goal to raise awareness on climate change. This initiative was based on the website onmyagenda.org (Figure 13), on which people were invited to tweet to the G20 leaders through a pre-filled window containing this text: "Climate Change is on my agenda, will it be on yours at the G20? #OnMyAgenda #G20". The coding of this website meant that the tweet could then directly be sent to a specific leader, or to all of them. Indeed, the dataset shows that 15,853 tweets[60] containing the hashtag #onmyagenda came from the onmyagenda.org website. On the website, leaders who supported actions for addressing climate change were signposted, namely Angela Merkel (Germany), Barack Obama (U.S.), Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (Turkey), David Cameron (United Kingdom) and Jean-Claude Juncker (European Union). This highlights the way social media can be used to lobby leaders to discuss issues with large public support, such as climate change.

[60] The presence of the keyword "g20" in the pre-filled tweets assured that all tweets that were part of the campaign were captured in the dataset.

By narrowing down the dataset and selecting only the tweets containing the hashtag #onmyagenda, the @mentions network can be visualised, which shows the most targeted leaders in this campaign. In figure 14 the node size is proportionate to the number of mentions received by a node (known as indegree in network analysis), while the darker shading represents the number of tweets sent by a node (outdegree). From the network graph it can be noted that the most-mentioned Twitter account belongs to G20 leader Tony Abbott, followed by that of Stephen Harper, the Canadian prime minister, and that of Barack Obama. More interestingly, even the leaders who were in favour of addressing climate change at the meeting were targeted.

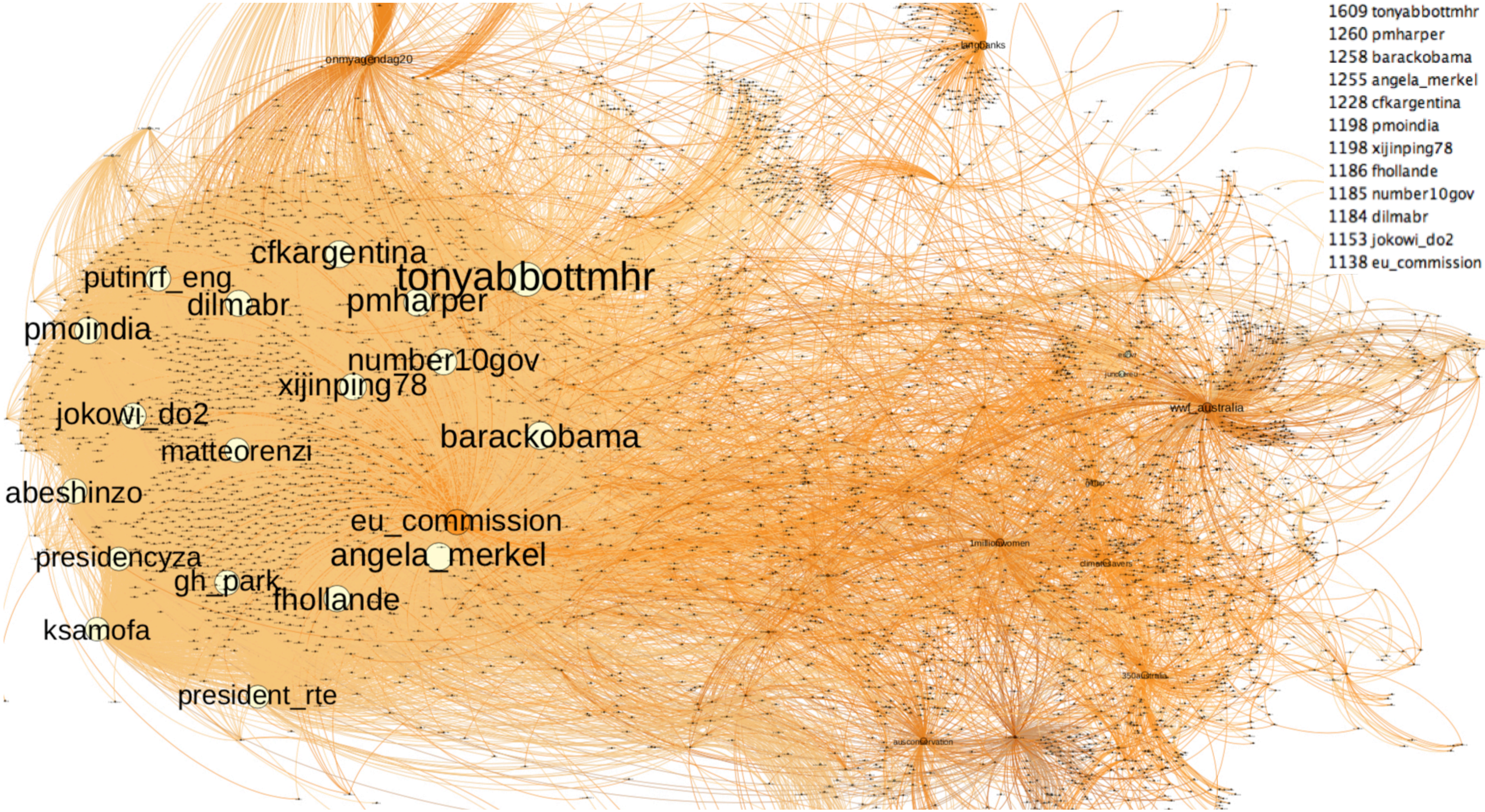

Figure 14 – G20 #OnMyAgenda @mentions network pre-G20 (1-14 November 2014).
Node size = indegree; node darkness = outdegree. Top-right corner: Frequency of the top ten hashtags.

From a public diplomacy point of view, it is worth noting that @EU_Commission is the only node targeted by the campaign with a darker shading. This indicates that the EU Commission engaged with the #onmyagenda Twitter discussion. More interestingly, the European institution not only reacted to the discussion but also seized the opportunity to engage dialogically with NGOs. Indeed, figure 15 shows @EU_Commission's reply to @WWFEU with the inclusion of the #onmyagenda hashtag. This is an example of *dialogic* engagement since it acknowledges the #onmyagenda discussion and, at the same time, invites Twitter users to read the EU Commission's factsheet about the G20 (European Commission 2014), which contained a commitment to addressing climate change during the meeting in Brisbane. Furthermore, the tweet directly engages with one of the most prominent NGOs who led the #onmyagenda campaign. The EU Commission gave a clear sign that it was paying attention to NGOs and Twitter users while highlighting its political stand on climate change, an example of what I have described in 2.3.5 as *active* listening with "direction and purpose".

Figure 15 – @EU_Commission's tweet on the #G20 #OnMyAgenda discussion

This also reinforces my remarks in chapter 2 where I argued that the use of the right hashtag is a way not only to better categorise a tweet in the big jumble of posts on Twitter but also to participate and acknowledge a discussion, to reach not only followers but also those users who engage with a particular topic. In short, the use of the hashtag represents a clear sign of listening in this case. @EU_Commission demonstrated that the European institutions were following the online conversation by participating in the #OnMyAgenda discussion before the G20. Moreover, the European Commission communicated its commitment to engagement and participation by making available its contribution to addressing global warming at the G20 in Brisbane. Therefore, the tweet had a twofold function: showing that the European Commission was listening to Twitter users and NGOs (*dialogic* engagement) and showing support for the NGOs' campaign by using their social media network to circulate its agenda (on a *tactical* level). The *tactical* level also aimed to redress potential public misperceptions, since the @EU_Commission account was a target of the #onmyagenda campaign too.

This case also reveals that dialogic engagement cannot be effectively articulated on a short-term basis. The fact that the EU Commission's factsheet about the G20 addressed the climate change issue indicates that the European institution had already been considering this issue for some time and expected that the climate change would be a relevant topic at the G2O.

Figure 14 also shows that the most active users (outdgree) in the network visualisation were NGOs, as result of their intention to support the #onmyagenda campaign. The Australian NGOs were particularly active, such as for example @earthhour_au, @WWF_Australia and @onmyagenda20, which were both receiving and sending mentions/replies, along with @1millionwomen (appendix 1). This can be seen in the darker nodes in the graph.

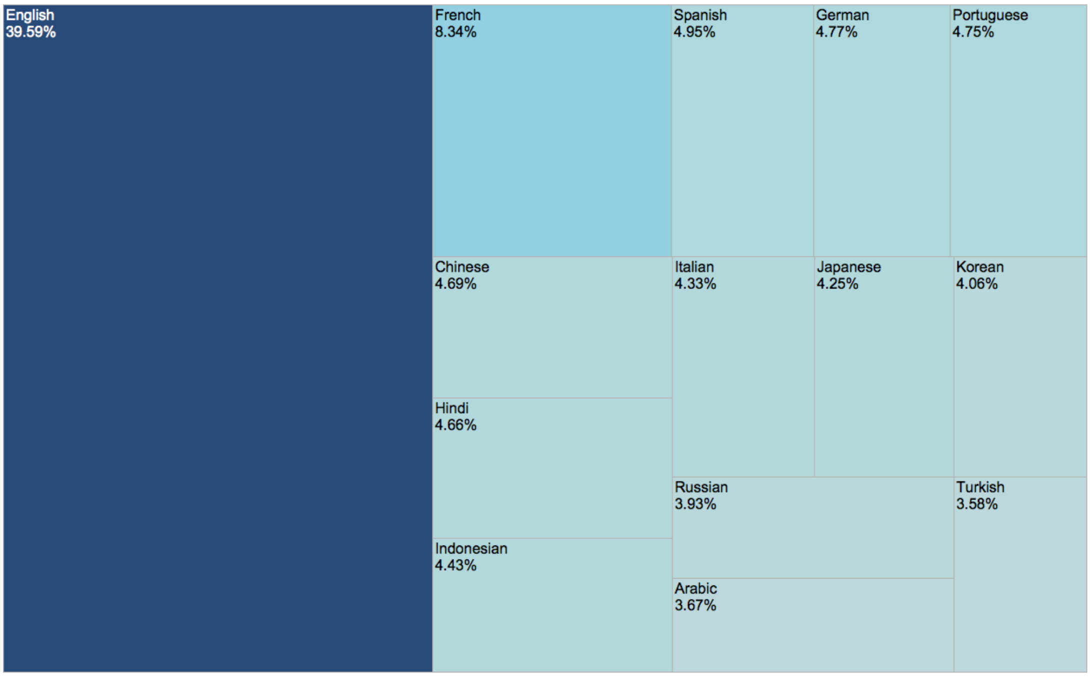

Figure 16 – Users' languages #G20 #OnMyAgenda before the G20 summit.

The #OnMyAgenda discussion had a fair distribution in terms of languages (figure 16) and a worldwide geographical distribution, shown in figure 17. In particular, the latter visualisation compares the entire #G20 datasets, marked by red dots, and the tweets tagging #onmyagenda, marked by blue dots. This illustrates that the #onmyagenda campaign almost geographically coincides with the #G20 discussion in Australia, which reveals the importance of this issue for Australian Twitter users. Moreover, it is interesting to note how the advanced-economy countries participated more actively in the climate change discussion, though it needs to be recognised that this may reflect the geographical distribution of the platform. The geographic distribution of social media is clearly a limitation of digital listening on Twitter. For example, the low participation in the discussion in Africa is not surprising since there is low general penetration of Twitter in the continent.

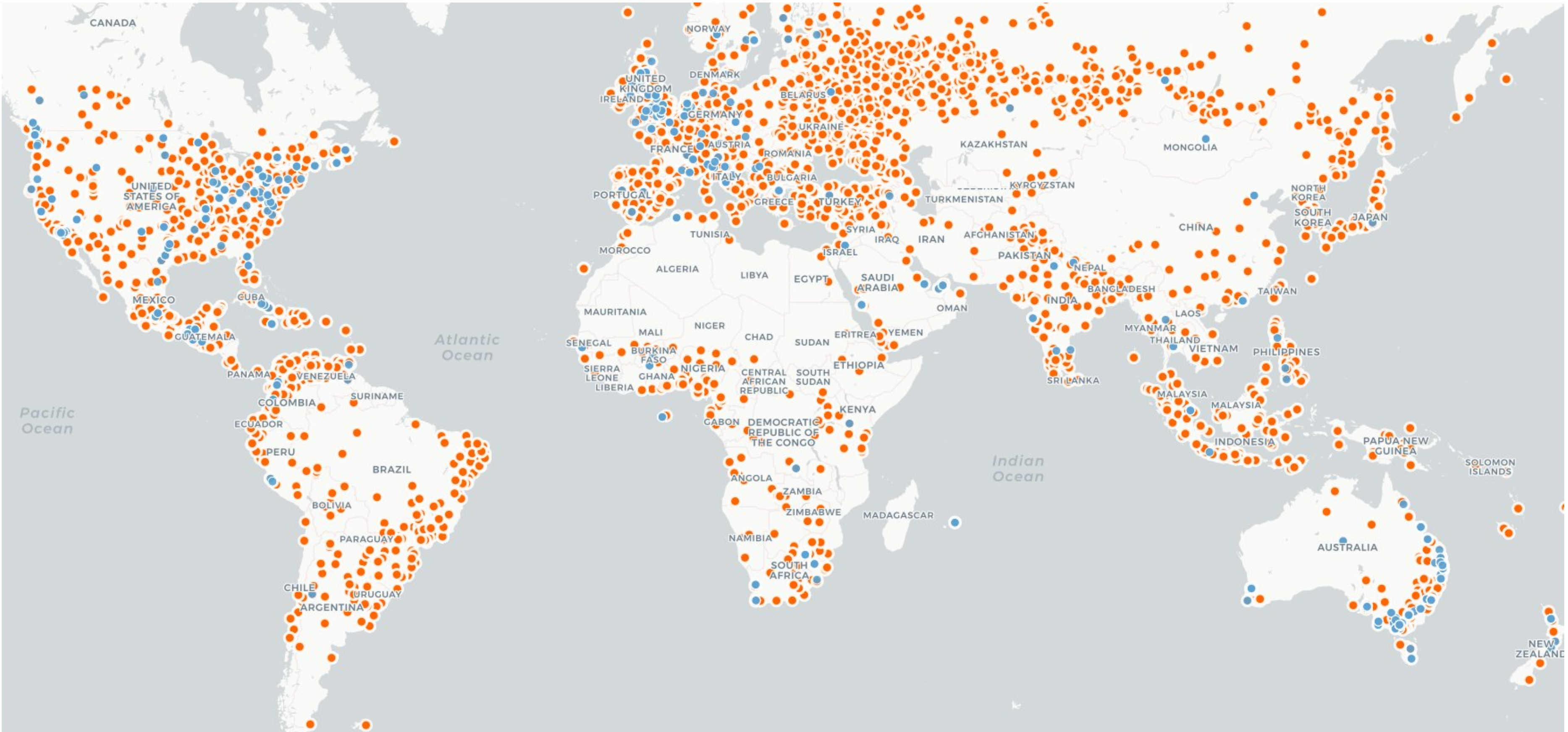

Figure 17 – Geolocation of tweets tagged #OnMyAgenda (marked by blue dots) compared with #G20 tweets (marked by red dots)

To sum up, the description of the Twitter debate before the G20 begs the question: what do these findings mean in terms of public diplomacy communication strategy and listening activities?

By visualising a large amount of tweets containing the #G20 hashtag on the eve of the G20, it is clear that the most mentioned hashtag was #OnMyAgenda, which was connected with the social media campaign promoted by several Australia-based NGOs. This identification of popular hashtags could have been useful for predicting key issues that were to become central in the Twitter discussion during the head-of-state meeting. In addition, the network visualisation I carried out delivered information about influential actors, their roles and their connections in the network (*tactical* listening). This kind of analysis delivers information about key actors to engage with and can help public diplomats identify influential actors taking part in a specific conversation, which may open up opportunities for *active* listening (as with the EU Commission). Moreover, I have also pointed out that there was a fairly consistent domestic discussion about the G20 under the hashtag #auspol, which will be analysed in the following sections. The geolocation map illustrated that the conversation about climate change was predominantly localised in Australia, central Europe and Western U.S. and especially in big cities. The particular attention paid by the Australian public to the climate change issue will be confirmed by further analysis in the next section.

This initial phase of our analysis already points out the discrepancy between Abbott's "economic growth" agenda and the Twitter discussion. Australia's extensive preparation in setting the political agenda for the forum was being challenged even before the G20 event began. Listening to the Twitter discussion could have produced a readjustment of the Australian communication strategy before the G20, or at least induced the Australian government to rethink its strategy by acknowledging and addressing the discussion on Twitter, as for example the EU Commission did. However, as has been argued in this section, *active* listening requires ongoing attention and a long-term perspective. The lack of consensus on the Australian government's political agenda was already compromising the international and domestic legitimacy of its foreign policy on Twitter.

This section has also provided insights into how NGOs mediate and influence public diplomacy actors' communication efforts and narratives. This confirms that for public diplomacy efforts to be influential it is necessary to act and perform *in relation* to the networked online environment. On social media different voices and different political agendas 'battle' each other and these are not limited to NGOs and governments, as will be considered in the following section. In such a context, it is crucial to engage in listening activities to be aware of the communication environment, even if only at a short-term tactical level.

5.5 During the G20 summit

The second dataset analysed in this chapter is composed of 527,611 tweets containing the word 'g20', posted 15–16 November (UTC+1) while the heads-of-state meeting was taking place in Brisbane.

The Twitter conversation during the G20 summit is an example of the use of the platform as a backchannel for events, as mentioned in chapter 2. When events are discussed on Twitter, peaks in volume usually correspond to something happening on the ground. In this case, the two peaks in the volume of tweets in English in figure 18 represent two important moments at the G20 in Brisbane: Obama's speech at the University of Queensland and the debate about the meeting's achievement after the release of the Leaders' Communiqué. This section will focus on the Twitter conversation in English, the dominant language used, in order to analyse some global trends in the public conversation about the G20.

Parenthetically, the role of language in public diplomacy has been already explored in chapters 1 and 4. In particular, it has emerged that English is used as a lingua franca in global Twitter conversations. The peaks in figure 18 of languages other than English, especially Russian, reflect different time zones and different issues discussed in different national contexts. Methodologically, tweets in non-English languages could be selected and analysed separately, since they do not necessarily follow the discussion in English. For example, if we look at the discussion in Spanish, the first and highest brown peak on the left represents a massive sharing of an article published in the *El Universal* (2014), a Mexican newspaper, regarding Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's opening speech at the G20. It is important to note focusing our analysis on tweets posted in English represents a methodological constraint.

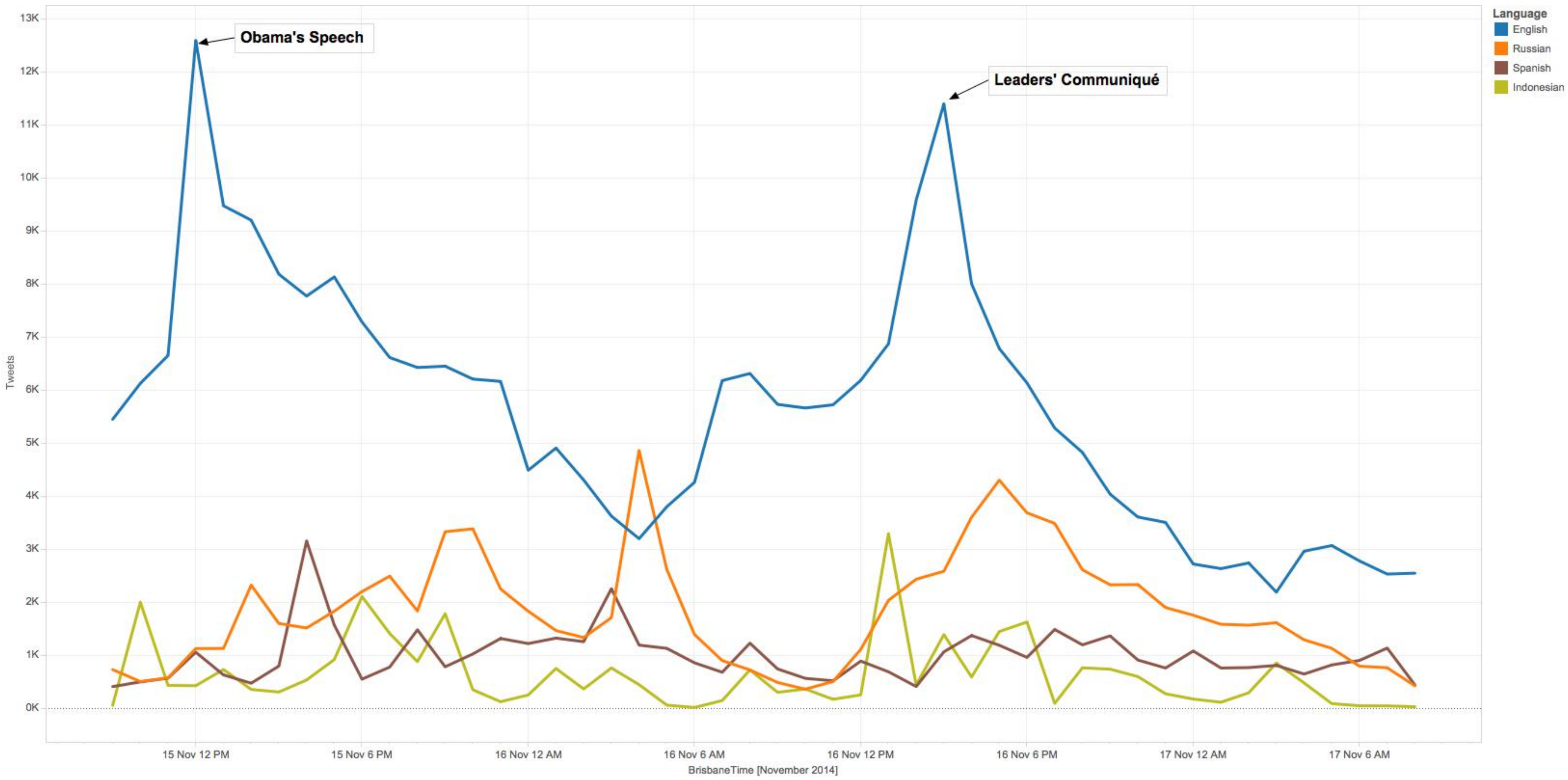

Figure 18 – Volume of Tweets by language. 15–16 November 2014 (only languages with over 1,000 tweets per hour overall).

In the first part of this chapter I relayed the main topics discussed before the G20 and considered how these were defined and mediated by NGOs through the communication campaign #onmyagenda. Here I want to explore the relations within the themes discussed on Twitter by mapping the hashtags and their associations. This thin level of analysis can be carried out using the co-hashtag graph (figure 19), which exemplifies the strength of the connections between two hashtags, which is to say the frequency of their combined use in the same tweet. This network graph allows the identification of connections among hashtags and helps to identify overall thematic trends and patterns in the discussion (called issue mapping, described in chapter 3), which will drive the analysis of the dataset in this section.

The algorithm employed for this visualisation positions hashtags on the graph according to the strength of their relations (refer to chapter 3). In figure 19, hashtag frequency is represented by node size. The colours of the nodes represent the association of the nodes to clusters which are groups of nodes that are more closely connected. One of way of detecting communities or clusters of nodes is to calculate the strength of connections between nodes using a formula in network analysis known as modularity. This calculation assigns a value to each node known as its "modularity class", that is used to group nodes into communities (Heymann 2015). I will use this calculation again to detect clusters in this and in the next chapter.

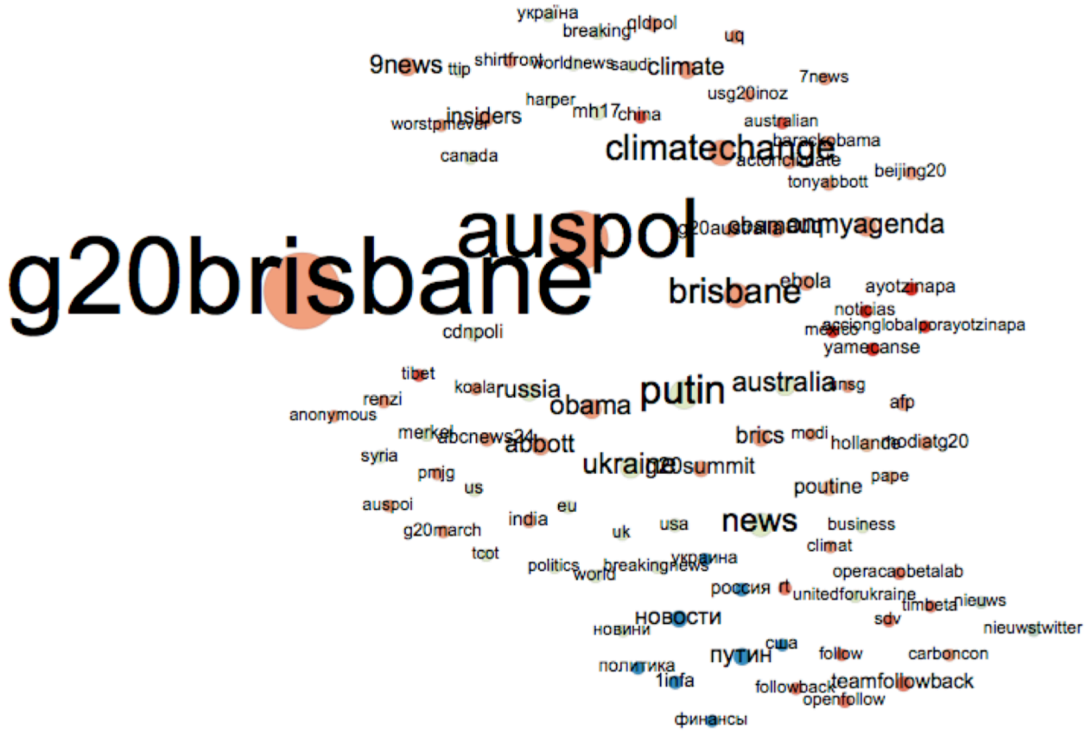

Figure 19 – Co-hashtag graph: node size = word frequency, node colour = modularity class (filtered)[61]

In figure 19, #auspol[62] emerges as the most used hashtag, following #g20brisbane (appendix 2). This contrasts with the trends explored in the previous section, where #onmyagenda was the most frequently used hashtag. Although this is not surprising, figure 19 also indicates that #auspol is connected with other issues (coloured red), which means they are part of the same thematic cluster, such as climate change (#climatechange, #onmyagenda, #climate, #actionclimate), Obama (#obama and #obamauq – used to comment on Obama's speech), Abbott (#abbott, #tonyabbott) and the Australian news media (#9news, #abcnews24 and #7news). This reveals that the debate about the G20 was strongly correlated with the domestic debate, since figure 19 highlights the strong connections among #auspol, two world leaders (Abbott and Obama), Australian news media (9news and 7news) and the issue 'climate change'.

I have also visualised Abbott's and Obama's accounts in a polarised network that shows the hashtags connected with the two actors (figure 20). This network graph visualises the hashtags used in the tweets mentioning Abbott and Obama. While this map does not clarify whether

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[61] The 169 most frequently used hashtags without "g20". Frequency of the top 10 hashtags: #g20brisbane 33,557; #auspol 24,448; #putin 8,839; #climatechange 7,243; #brisbane 6,902; #news 6,116, #ukraine 4,695; #australia 4,200; #onmyagenda 4,164, #obama 3,991.

[62] #auspol is a popular hashtag established in 2010 which gathers tweets about trending political topics in Australia and therefore is employed as a sort of stream that assembles tweets regarding the Australian domestic debate (Bruns and Sauter 2015, 2013).

there is a positive or negative attribution of these issues to the two leaders, we know from their public statements that their views are opposed. Therefore, figure 20 shows the polarisation of the discussion on climate change. This polarisation can be explained by the events unfolding on the ground. In particular, figure 20 confirms the connection among hashtags in relation to climate change, the domestic debate (#auspol) and Obama's speech on climate change (#obamauq). This aspect will be analysed further in the following section.

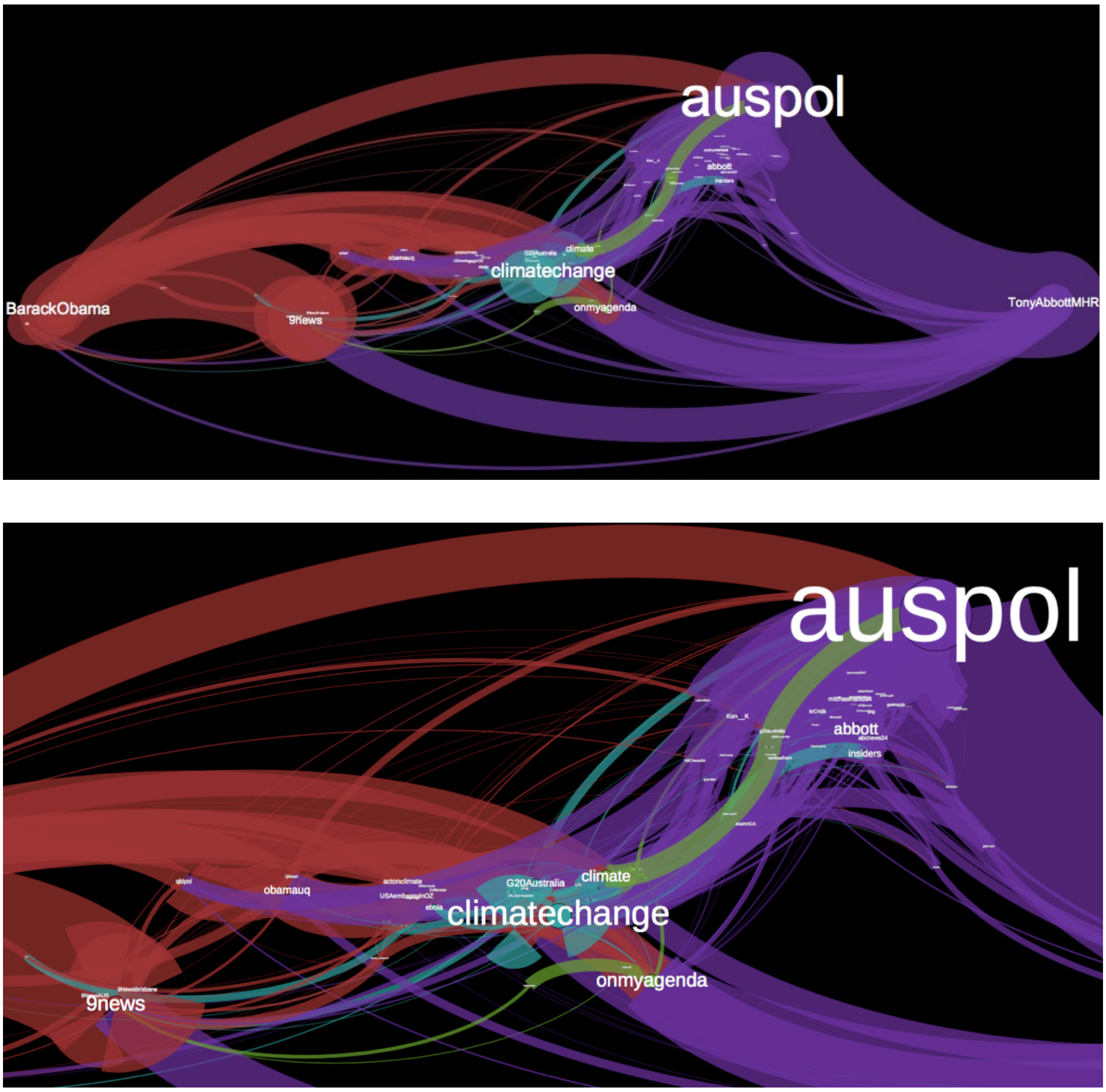

Figure 20 – Hashtags and mentions graph: Obama vs Abbott.

Node size = weighted degree, node colour = modularity class. The lower image is a magnification of the one above.

Another point that can be made by looking at figure 19 relates to the green cluster, which is characterised by three main hashtags: #putin, #mh17 and #ukraine. This seems to illustrate a more international debate that connects different issues, such as #ttip (which stands for Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership), #us, #usa, #eu, and #worldnews. This small and consistent cluster, centralised around the hashtag #putin, represents the controversy about the flight MH17 and Putin's participation in the G20, described earlier in this chapter.

Moreover, a large amount of visual content was shared on Twitter during the G20, as usually happens in online conversations (refer to chapter 2). An analysis of the conversations tagged #shirtfront and #koala will provide the opportunity to analyse some of the most popular visual content. These hashtags had a high degree of user diversity, as can be seen in more detail in appendix 3, which suggests that they reached a wider Twitter audience.

Starting from the observations that form part of the thin level of analysis,[63] the following sections will zoom in on the dataset to describe how the two principal actors in the Twitter discussion, Obama and Abbott, were positioned in regard to the climate change issue. This will be then connected with the importance of the domestic audience in public diplomacy. The zooming in will move the analysis from thin (large-scale) to thick (focused and contextualised). A closer look at the conversation tagged #koala will provide an opportunity to get some insights about visual content in digitally mediated public diplomacy. The #shirtfront issue will act as a starting point to describe the role played by the mainstream news media in mediating the leaders' attempt to set the agenda. Finally, a detailed and qualitative look at the tweets posted by the G20 leaders will deliver some insights about the performative and symbolic dimensions of leaders' interactions on Twitter.

5.5.1 Obama's speech on climate change and reactions on social media

As a result of the ongoing international negotiations on climate change before the G20 and the #onmyagenda campaign, addressed in the previous sections, this issue became popular on social media before the G20, as well as being a central component of Obama's political agenda that led to the Paris agreement in 2015. Obama gave a speech at the University of Queensland which marked a shift in the G20 agenda from the political priorities of Australia as chair of the economic meeting, focused on economic growth, to a broader concept focused on addressing global warming concerns.

The following sections will analyse Obama's use of conservation and environmental concerns to appeal emotionally to the Australian and international public. To carry out this investigation, this section will examine Obama's speech and the consequent discussion on social media. This exploration will reveal how *active* listening, indented as manifest signs of listening to audiences, can result into what I have called 'empathic force', described in more detail in 2.3.4. This section will also provide an example of the reputational cost of not listening, as in the case of the Australian government in its attempt to avoid a popular topic on Twitter, that of climate change.

[63] Thick versus thin analysis in relation to Twitter is described fully in Chapter 3.

5.5.1.1 Obama's speech

On the 15 November, during the G20 heads-of-state meeting, the U.S. president gave a speech at the University of Queensland. The speech offers interesting insights into the role of empathic forces in public diplomacy, described in chapter 2. Obama was able to appeal to a young Australian audience in addressing widespread international issues and adopting a stance that young Australians are known to support, such as support for climate change action, women's and gay and lesbian rights, and health equality in relation to the Ebola crisis (Obama 2014). He made a joke about the Australian political debate on climate change and galvanised the audience by emotionally connecting the climate change issue with the natural beauty of the Great Barrier Reef, as this passage in his speech indicates:

> We can get this done. And it is necessary for us to get it done. (Applause.) Because I have not had to go to the Great Barrier Reef – (laughter) – and I want to come back, and I want my daughters to be able to come back, and I want them to be able to bring their daughters or sons to visit. (Applause.) And I want that there 50 years from now (Obama 2014, para. 46).

His audience, mostly young Australians, was enthusiastic after his speech, and the passionate excitement was reported by news media.[64]

Journalists and news media especially highlighted Obama's focus on climate change in stark contrast with Abbott's G20 political agenda. Indeed, Obama not only mentioned climate change, he also invited the Australian government to act on this issue, a clear provocation that demonstrated he understood the audience's dissatisfaction with not being listened to.

Obama's speech was simultaneously a clear public diplomacy action and a direct message to the Australian PM Tony Abbott for the imminent G20 discussion. It was both a theatrical and diplomatic act designed to disrupt the agenda of the Australian government. The issues that Obama mentioned on his speech are certainly part of a broader political agenda. However, the decision to make this specific speech in front of educated young Australians, with several direct and indirect references to the domestic political debate, can be considered a public diplomacy manoeuvre targeting the Australian audience. Obama's speech raised the issue to ensure its prominence during the G20 forum.

5.5.1.2 Reactions

Undoubtedly, Obama's speech influenced the Australian domestic debate. A closer look at the content shared on Twitter during the speech demonstrates that many of the tweets were actually comparing Obama's agenda with Abbott's. Indeed, during the speech and in the hours

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[64] For example, the *Brisbane Times* asked to one of the attendees his opinion on Obama's speech, and this was the answer: "'I thought it was fantastic,' he said. Why? He paused. 'I don't know. It was just great'" (Remeikis 2014, para. 32-33). This suggests an "emotional" connection between the audience and Obama.

that followed, the most shared tweet was sent by Wayne Swan, former Australian Labor Treasurer in the Gillard government, who took the opportunity to attack Abbott and the Liberals (figure 21).

Figure 21 – Wayne Swan, Australian Labor MP

Particularly, ironic commentaries compared Obama's opening speech with Abbott's (figure 22), considered to have focused on Coalition policies with little or no impact on global politics. Another tweet ironically described Obama as 'shirtfronting' on climate change (figure 22).

Figure 22 – Greg Jericho, The Guardian. Ben Cubby, Sydney Morning Herald.

Climate change was included in a paragraph of the Leaders' Communiqué released at the end of the G20 (G20 Australia 2014a, 3). This was interpreted on Twitter as the final indication that Abbott was not able to keep this issue off the G20, despite his efforts. Moreover, at the G20 press conference a journalist asked the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, to clarify whether the meeting's focus was on economic growth or climate change. He answered stating that "climate change is the defining issue of our times; therefore it is only natural that G20 leaders should focus much more on this" (Ban Ki-moon 2014). This statement, reported by the UN official Twitter account, was retweeted in significant numbers (appendix 4), while other political commentators said that Abbott was "humiliated" by Obama (figure 23).

Figure 23 – Bernard Keane, Crikey

Neither Abbott nor Obama got actively involved in the Twitter discussion, except for a few tweets unrelated to climate change that will be examined later in this chapter. However, referring back to the observations made concerning figure 19, the G20 example reveals how tactical social media listening can provide insights that can prevent or confront points of resistance within online networks. Influence is a two-way street (refer to the discussion about soft power in chapter 1), and trust does not "reside in a source" but rather "is bestowed on a source by an audience" (Gass and Seiter 2009, 156) (refer chapter 2). In such a communication environment, public diplomacy actors, along with other influential actors, do not exert full control over the issues debated online. Hence, even if an actor refuses to listen, thus avoiding directly addressing a popular issue, such as climate change, (s)he will be connected to the issue anyway when it is publicly addressed and perceived as critical by the audience. In this sense, Abbott's main communication mistake during the G20 was a lack of listening and a lack of understanding of his own tactical position. Abbott insisted on keeping climate change out of the discussion, despite the efforts of other leaders and Australian NGOs. This paradoxically had the opposite effect, since Abbott ignored – and involuntarily fomented – increasing levels of international indignation both on social and news media. At the end of the G20, the paragraph on climate change in the final communiqué defined Abbott's credibility and reputation more than all the other points on his agenda, which, it must be noted, constituted the greater extent of the whole G20's diplomatic outcomes.

In summary, the findings presented in this section indicate that influence is a complex process fostered by the credibility of the actor and their capacity to listen and communicate national foreign policies. The reputational effects of dialogic engagement, such as Obama addressing public opinion's widespread concern with climate change, are proportional to the actor's investment in listening. Climate change was an issue that Obama had long 'owned'. This was confirmed a week before the meeting in Brisbane, when Obama and the Chinese President, Xi Jinping, announced that both countries would limit their greenhouse gas emissions over the next two decades (Landler 2014). The emotional connection witnessed during Obama's speech on climate change was the result of the U.S. President's long-term commitment to the issues and his demonstrated capacity to listen to international publics. In contrast, Abbott, who tried to avoid an issue that in the Australian domestic debate was perceived as an agenda driven by the Labor Party and the Green Party, tried to impede the discussion on climate change. This had the consequence that the Australian leader's image projected abroad was the one shaped by the critical domestic debate surrounding the G20.

This leads to another point, related with the domestic dimension of public diplomacy. Abbott ignored the international debate and focused too much on domestic issues: this demonstrates how public diplomacy actors must always deal with tensions between the domestic and the international political spheres. The ability to balance *both* spheres, and to appreciate the significance of timing and the appropriate environment and context for different agendas is another aspect that needs to be considered in public diplomacy communication, where the boundaries between the domestic and public audience are becoming blurred in the digital environment.

5.5.2 Comparing thin and thick analysis: the example of "koala diplomacy" on social media

From the few examples reported in this section, the popularity of political sarcasm can already be perceived, used especially in relation to Abbott. Emotion, visual content and sarcasm on Twitter during the G20 are crucial aspects of social media engagement, especially in the hashtagged layer of communication. In chapter 2 I introduced the emotional aspects of social media engagement and their significance for the formation of trust and credibility in public diplomacy. In particular, the importance of humour and its different forms of expression on social media were highlighted. The methodological challenges of listening to these 'emotional' aspects of social media communication were also noted. This is why I introduced the notion of thick description in chapters 2 and 3, which supports understanding these emotional forces when it comes to the analysis of *tone,* and the *cultural* and *situational* context of the message. The G20 debate on Twitter provides an opportunity to analyse the emotional aspect of social media communication and explore the listening potential of the thick level of my method against the mere measurement of content dissemination.

At the end of the first day of the heads-of-state meeting for the G20 in Brisbane, the leaders took part in a reception at Brisbane's Gallery of Modern Art. This was an opportunity for them to meet in a friendly environment and pose in photos with koalas, an animal that denotes Australia in the international imaginary.[65] These photos of leaders hugging koalas were considered a success given their popularity on social media. Indeed, the most retweeted tweets

[65] It is not the first time that animals play a role in diplomacy. For example, the Chinese government donating two pandas to Malaysia in May 2014 was defined as "panda diplomacy" (Taylor 2014). At the G20, animals were deployed not to strengthen the diplomatic ties between two countries but rather as a place-branding operation to promote Australia and Queensland internationally.

during the G20 were the photo of Obama with a koala posted by the White House and the one with Putin posted by *The Economist* (figure 24).

Figure 24 – The two most retweeted tweets during the G20

Commentaries highlighted that the "koala diplomacy" was the most successful part of Australia's soft power projection for the G20 (Harris Rimmer 2014), including press speculation about a 600-page DFAT report addressing the use of koalas as a part of the official soft power strategy (Arup 2014). Indeed, after the G20 summit, the Australian Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, endorsed the potential of koala diplomacy since "it portrays Australia in a soft light and promotes our values as an open, free, tolerant democracy" (Bishop cited in Arup 2014, para. 4). The photos of koalas went viral in the mainstream media, becoming the summit's "most memorable images" according to the BBC (Donnison 2014).

In addition, given also the amount of staging required to have world leaders spend time with the koalas, these photos are also indicative of a collective attempt at public diplomacy. In the case of Australia and Russia was an attempt to defuse tension and distract attention from more controversial issues, in particular in relation to interrogated Russian involvement in Flight 17.

In terms of users' response to this collective attempt, it is undeniable that the photos went viral. However, the assessment of public diplomacy merely in relation to message diffusion has already been critiqued since it does not reveal much about the quality of users' engagement. The photos were largely retweeted, but I have also indicated that the interpretation of retweeting as a sign of engagement is not straightforward (refer to chapter 2). Thus, we should also question why the photos with koalas were shared so widely and what this tells us in terms of the quality of social media engagement from a public diplomacy point of view.

This is precisely the kind of question that the thick level of analysis can address. A closer look at pictures and texts shared on social media reveals that koalas became a viral subject particularly in relation to the fact that they were held by leaders. Therefore, it can be hypothesised that what has been interpreted as the success of the koala diplomacy strategy was actually a result of the fact that leaders, along with what they represent in terms of political agendas, held those koalas. Indeed, it is not a coincidence that the most retweeted tweets were the photos of Obama and Putin with a koala (figure 24). Shares were actually boosted by the presence of the leaders in the pictures.

For example, the texts associated with the photos shown in figure 25 portraying Abbott and Putin with koalas suggest the collapse of Australia's diplomatic strategy. In these tweets the cuddliness of the koalas is only circumstantial: diplomatic and political failure is what dominates the content. Indeed, those photos were interpreted as the final sign that Abbott's threat to 'shirtfront' Putin had failed miserably.

Figure 25 – Jane Wardell, Reuters. Simon Banks, PR person.

Consequently, Twitter commentators connected the shirtfront issue to the leaders' photos with koalas, confounding the different issues such as climate change, shirtfronting, flight MH17 and leaders' agendas. In short, my argument here is that this kind of visual content should be interpreted according to its symbolic and humorous political power rather than as successful evocations of the idea of 'Australia' and 'Queensland' as brands. More than a place-branding operation, the photos with koalas were readapted by the public as an opportunity to visually express political dissent and frustration with the way the Australian government was leading the G20.

This confirms the theoretical and methodological remarks about the combination of thin and thick description in social media listening made in the previous chapter. In this case the act of retweeting the photos was also an opportunity to express political dissent and hijack the governmental branding strategy. An assessment of the Twitter communication limited to the thin level would not have captured this lamination process (refer to chapter 2) embedded in the online practice of retweeting.

In strategic terms, this example indicates that being a credible international actor is part of a broader effort that requires consistency and constancy in policies and in the image projected. Indeed, the shirtfront threat and the cuddliness were unlikely to be conjunctly understood as a coherent message by audiences at home and abroad. At the same time, the Australian prime minister's credibility was already challenged by his refusal to listen to users' concerns about climate change and his shirtfront statement. This inability to listen resulted in sarcasm on the part of social media users, as already mentioned in 2.3.4.

However, it would be unfair to entirely impute to Abbott responsibility for the public's misinterpretation of the koala diplomacy. In broader terms, it should be also questioned whether promoting Australia through already well-established stereotypes about the country can be considered as an advancement for Australian influence abroad (Ang, Tambiah, and Mar, 138), an aspect that has been already scrutinised in more detail in the previous chapter.

5.5.3 The role of news media: the "shirtfront" issue

The most retweeted content in the dataset was actually posted by journalists or opinion leaders (refer to appendix 4). If the most viral content came from leaders and journalists, questions should be posed about what and who public diplomats can listen to and engage with on social media. This is part of a general debate about the relevance of Twitter explored in chapter 2, and it justifies why I have introduced 'mediating actors' in chapter 1, also mentioned earlier in the chapter in regard to the role played by NGOs.

In particular, I have pointed out in chapter 3 that some previous studies have shown that most of the news content on the internet is repurposed or supplied by traditional media sources, producing the so-called media convergence and the consequent transpositions of media content from platform to platform and from traditional to digital media. For example, during the G20, the tweet containing the front page of the Brisbane's *Courier Mail* in figure 26 shows how content from traditional media, such as from a newspaper, can be then shared on social media. This is an example of content flow from one media source to another.

Figure 26 – Damon Meredith, Sunrise, Channel 7.

The role played by mainstream news media on Twitter has been already the object of discussion in communication studies. Particularly, in the case of Twitter, Kwak et al. (2010, 591) found that the majority of topics are headline news or persistent news in nature.

This section aims specifically to examine the role of the mainstream news media in mediating audiences' perceptions of leaders' agendas.[66] It argues that such processes are mediated and framed not only by NGOs, as discussed earlier in this paper, but also by the news media in two key ways. Firstly, the media play a significant role in framing the discussion before and during an economic forum by connecting issues and actors (the G20 leaders in our case). This is related to the well-known 'process' part of agenda-setting theory (Shaw 1977, 96) which argues that, even though there is potential for direct communication between public diplomacy actors and citizens, this communication flow can be framed and partially mediated by the

[66] This section of the case study has been presented at the ANZCA (Australia and New Zealand Communication Association) Conference 2016, Newcastle, Australia.

mainstream news media within and beyond Twitter. In turn, the mainstream news media amplify the discussion unfolding on Twitter by reporting on it in newspaper and television news coverage. In this latter case, the leaders' agendas are framed by mainstream news media following the Twitter discussion.

Figure 27 confirms that many of the URLs shared on Twitter belong to mainstream news media. The graphs visualise the frequency of the URLs in the dataset and the number of unique users. Big international media organisations, such the *BBC, The Guardian*, and *RT* (formerly *Russian Today*),[67] along with the Australian mainstream media, like the *ABC,* held the most-shared internet domains. Outside Australia, heads of states' websites, such as thewhitehouse.gov, narendramodi.in and eng.kremlin.ru, featured prominently in the dataset. These figures show that during the G20 the large majority of content shared on Twitter originated from mainstream media and then spread through users' retweets. More interestingly, the prominence of state's communication channels indicates the significant public diplomacy efforts and intervention from countries such as U.S., U.K., India, Russia. In particular, the U.K. and Russia, with their publicly funded international news channels, *BBC World Service* and *RT*, are prominent and antagonistic actors on social media during international events, a point highlighted in previous studies (e.g. Hutchings et al. 2015). This dominance, in more general terms, reflects the capacity of some countries to intervene, through established media outlets, in the international debate on social media more than others.

The URL analysis provides a thin level of analysis of the content shared on Twitter during the G20 summit. However, many of the framing activities unfolded before the meeting, particularly in relation to Abbott's colloquial statement that he would shirtfront Putin.

[67] Even though it is not one of the highest positions on the graph, it should be taken into consideration that RT uses different domains for its several editions in different languages.

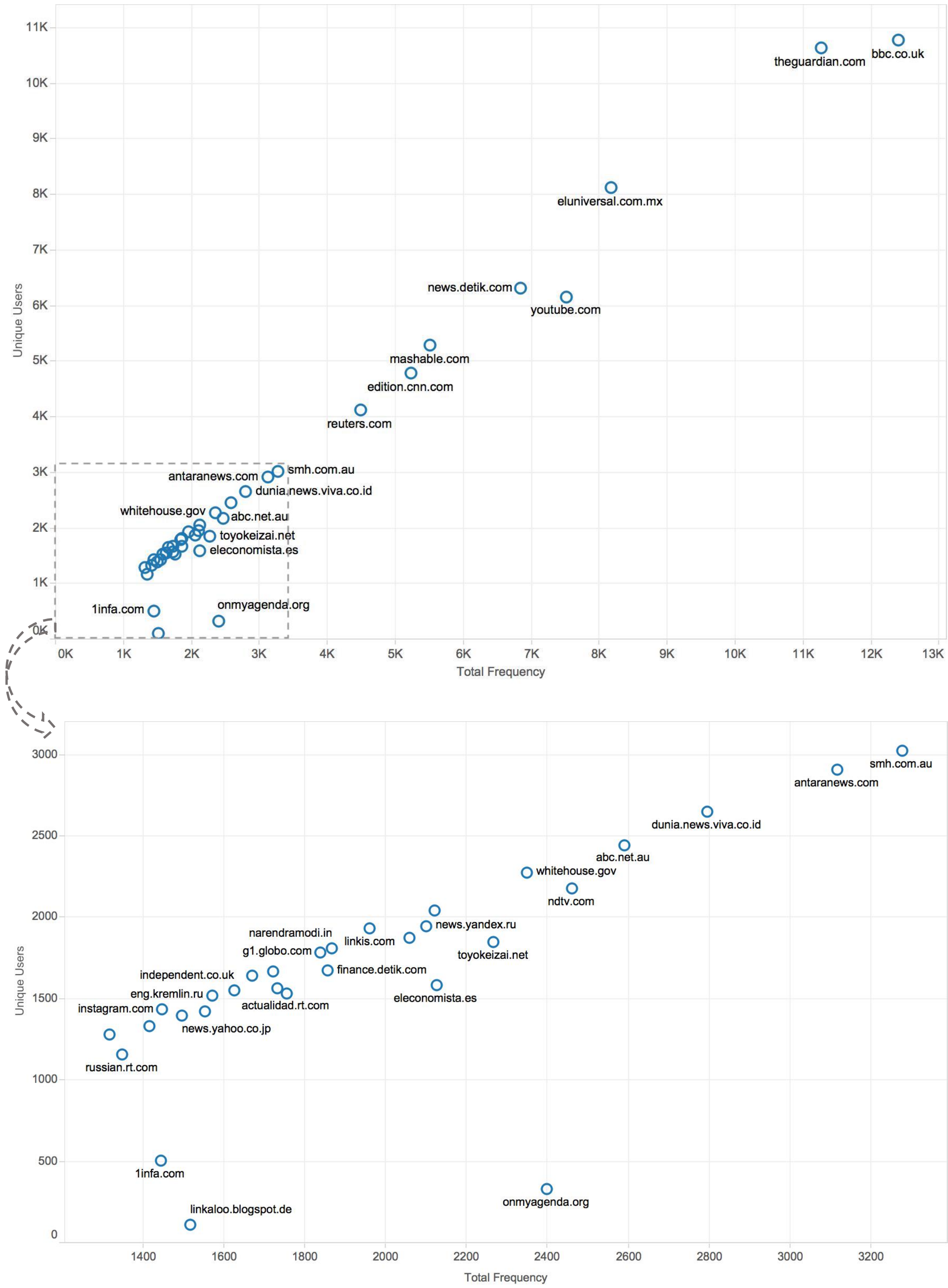

Figure 27 – Most shared domains by Unique Users/Frequency during the G20.

The lower image is a magnification of the one above.

Mainstream news media also helped keep an old issue, the shirtfront statement, relevant over time. For example, *The Guardian*, among others, published an article a day before the leaders' summit to explain why Abbott's colloquial expression was important to understanding the G20 in Brisbane (figure 29). Although Abbott had already met Putin during the Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit on 11 November, newspapers like *The Guardian* continued to relaunch the shirtfront statement a few days before the G20 summit.

Figure 28 – Google searches for the term 'shirtfront'

If we look at Google searches for the words 'shirtfront' (figure 28), we can see that the first peak represents the time when Abbott made his statement in October 2014. The issue then became irrelevant, suddenly rising again on 13 November. The hypothesis here is that while the first peak was caused by Abbott's first use of the term, the second peak was produced by news media redirecting the public's attention to the issue just before the G20. Indeed, the news media relaunched the shirtfront threat, highlighting its importance for understanding the political context of the economic forum (e.g. figure 29). This framing activity resulted in influencing the debate surrounding the G20 and, consequently, influenced the Twitter debate too.


G20 Brisbane 2014

What is shirtfronting? A guide to understanding the G20

The phrase shirtfronting may be common to many Australians but it will be a mystery to much of the world

Martin Farrer

Friday 14 November 2014 05.17 GMT

Shares 65 Comments 33

Save for later

Fiona Stager inspects a t-shirt her shop will give away featuring Russia's President Valdimir Putin and a quote from Australia's Prime Minister Tony Abbott threatening to "shirt front" Putin Photograph: William West/AFP/Getty Images

Figure 29 – The Guardian, 11 November

However, our Twitter dataset does not provide relevant data to gain a deeper understanding of the role played by news media in framing the shirtfronting issue before the economic forum. Consequently, I also collected data from Google News, employing the Google News Scraper tool[68] made available by the Digital Methods Initiative. As I have anticipated in chapter 3, this tool helps contextualise and enrich my thick description. It generated a list of online articles published from 1 October to 17 November 2014 that contained one or more of the following keywords: 'shirtfront', 'shirtfronting' and 'shirt-front'. The list was arranged according to relevance assigned by the Google News algorithm.[69] The dataset required a careful manual inspection to filter out irrelevant results, mostly related to Australian football news.

Comparing the volume of the tweets and news obtained from the Twitter and Google News datasets, we can observe that the peak in the news that preceded and was about the G20 heads-of-state meeting and the peak in the 'shirtfront' Twitter discussion (figure 30). This suggests that the shirtfront issue was reinforced by news media before the G20 summit took place.

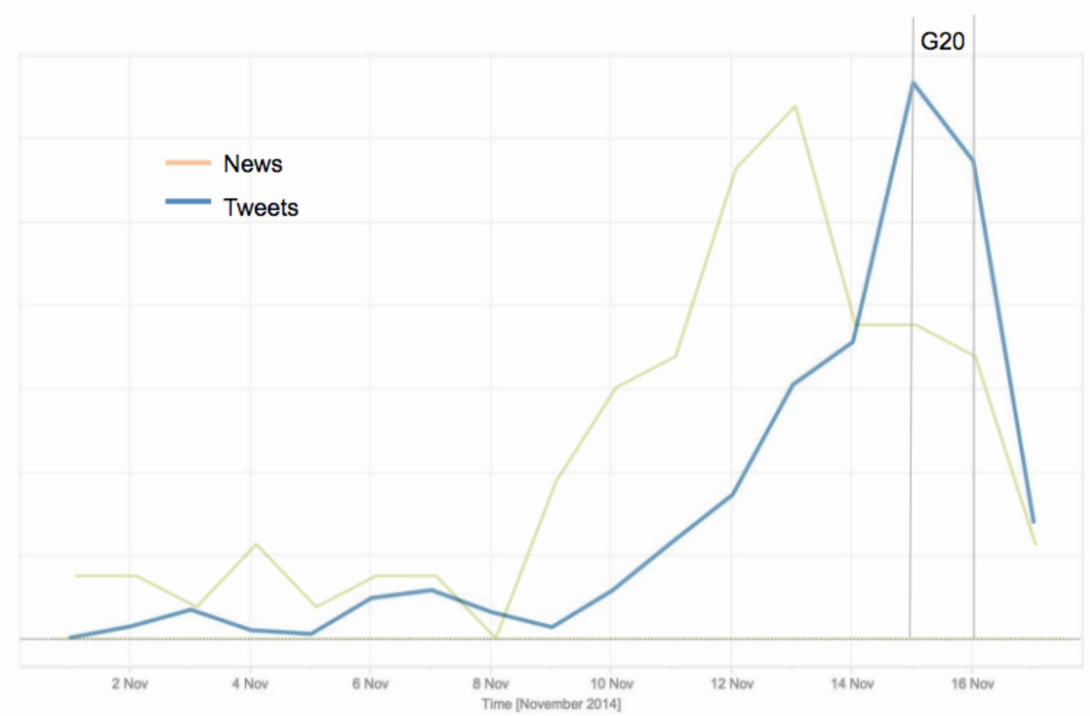

Figure 30 – Volume of news and tweets about 'shirtfront' compared

Matching the article titles with the newspaper name in the Google News dataset, I generated another visualisation (figure 30) that shows how many times an online news media outlet reported the shirtfront issue. We can see that the majority of the articles were published by the Australian mainstream news media. Although this graph is limited to online news content, it

[68] https://tools.digitalmethods.net/beta/googleNews/
[69] For more information about the criteria used by Google to rank the news, refer to https://support.google.com/news/publisher/answer/68292?hl=en.

shows how strongly the Australian media stimulated the shirtfront debate. The issue would probably not have been so significant on Twitter without the agenda-setting activities led by Australian mainstream media, particularly the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the Australian edition of *The Guardian* and *ABC Online*.

This indicates how a statement made in a national press conference, and then widely reported by the news media over the month before the G20, became a popular term during the G20 Twitter debate. This also indirectly gave rise to the humour surrounding the photos of Putin and Abbott holding koalas (figure 25). It can therefore be claimed that the news media framed and maintained the connection between the shirtfront issue and the two actors, Putin and Abbott.

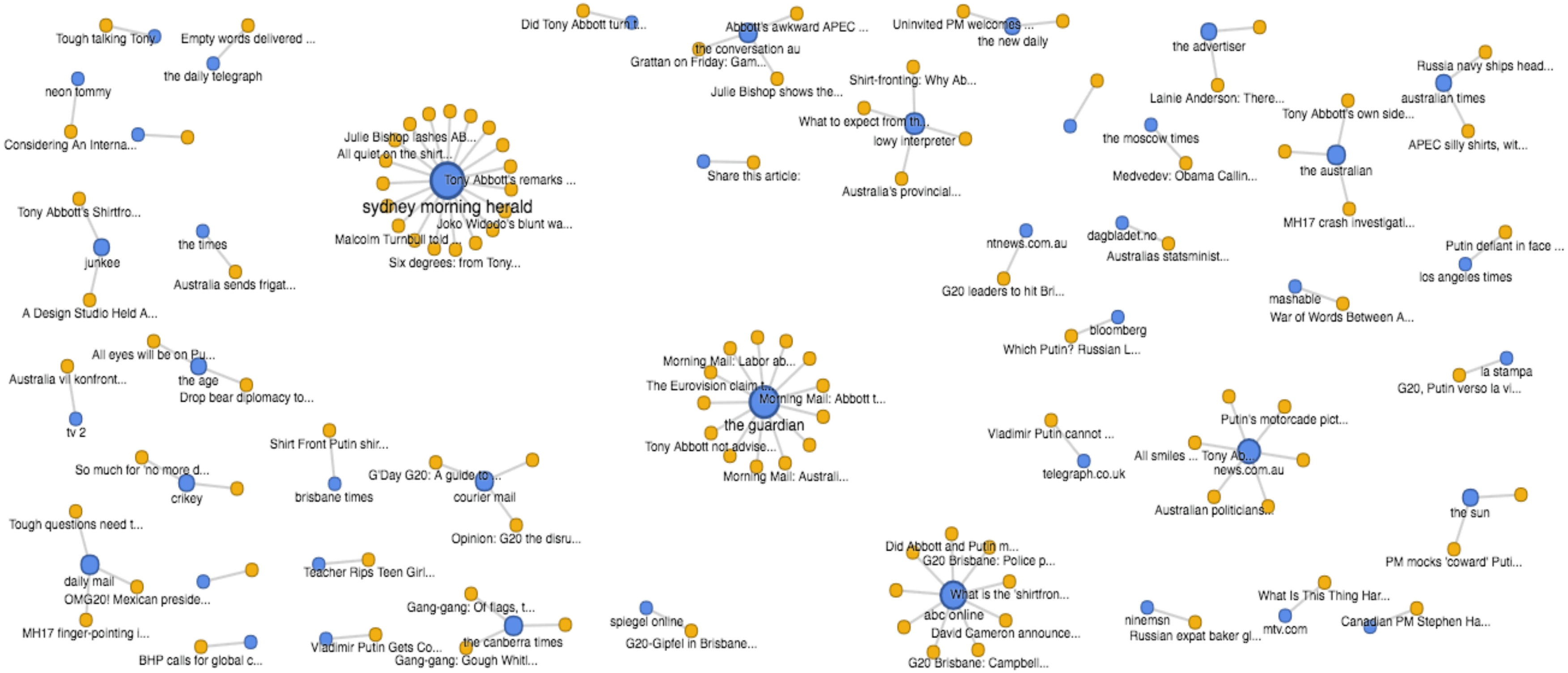

Figure 31 – Online articles that are about or mention the "shirtfronting" before the G20.
Blue nodes = Online publishers, yellow nodes = articles

To mention one compelling example among many from the Google News dataset, the Australian ABC current affairs TV programme *7.30* aired a skit about Tony Abbott's pledge to shirtfront Putin on 11 November, three days before the G20 summit.[70] In the video, a male voice sarcastically introduces the "showdown of the century": "Tony 'Tough Talk' Abbott versus 'Virile' Vladimir Putin. How much macho can you take?" (figure 32).

Figure 32 – 7.30, ABC, 11 November 2014

This example shows how mainstream news media still play an important role in driving the conversation, including on Twitter. Although the pluralisation of actors has brought much more complexity to the communication landscape, public diplomacy listening and engagement is still largely mediated. While public diplomacy scholars have reasonably focused on the potential of social media to engage directly with foreign publics, it is important to remember that mediators play an important role in the circulation of content and narratives, as introduced in chapter 1.

In turn, information shared on social media can also be relaunched by news media on different platforms. This points to another limitation of platform-specific digital listening, suggesting the necessity of analysing the Twitter debate in conjunction with its digital and offline context. A tweet can reach new audiences through other platforms, as can be seen, for example, in the practice of inserting tweets or flows of tweets into online news articles, current affairs TV programs and newspapers. For example, the screenshot in figure 33 shows an online article that relaunched tweets posted during the G20 (see also ABC News 2014b).

Another important aspect of this phenomenon is the users' potential awareness of the whole Twitter conversation and its trends in real time. An illustrative example of this is provided by the *G20 Hypometer* and the *Mapping the G20 Project,* both run by the Queensland University of Technology Social Media Research Group. The two projects provided online and real-time

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[70] The full skit can be accessed at http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2014/s4126438.htm

insights into the Twitter #g20 discussion; their work was also reported by news media (Mitchell et al. 2014, Foreshew 2014).

Figure 33 – rt.com, 15 November[71]

From a public diplomacy perspective, this section suggests that engaging with Twitter conversations is important not only for reaching citizens. The recent evolution of Twitter as a newsgathering platform, discussed in chapter 2 and empirically analysed in this section, suggests that much of the Twitter communication is still mediated by mainstream news media. Public diplomacy listening on Twitter also provides the opportunity to understand how mainstream news media outlets frame political agendas and narratives for their publics.

The role played by the mainstream news media can also be seen in relation to the koala photos. Indeed, without the support of the mainstream news media – which spread the photos internationally – 'koala diplomacy' would not be considered such a relevant topic. The news media emphasised the fact that 'koala diplomacy' was born at the G20 in Brisbane (e.g. Donnison 2014) – a somewhat dubious assumption since the prominence of koalas in terms of diplomatic ties is difficult to be ascertained, as argued in the previous section. Thus, the role of the news media in the case of the G20 went beyond its framing activities. The mainstream news media supported the idea that the "koalaty moment" (figure 24) was a public diplomacy success, despite the fact that there was no evidence that the most prominent tensions, such as the ones over climate change and Ukraine, were actually diminished by the koala diplomacy. In a nutshell, the mainstream news media established which issue was authoritative and therefore worthy to be considered as representative of the leaders' attempts to inform the public and articulate their influence on Twitter.

On one hand, this case study confirms the relevance of Twitter as a powerful space for engaging with mediators. On the other, this can limit the possibilities for direct engagement with 'ordinary' Twitter users, as well as the possibilities in listening to 'peripheral voices'. Indeed, this section has shown that popular tweets usually emanated from journalists, activists

[71] https://www.rt.com/news/205855-g20-abbott-putin-koala/

or institutions. This highlights the difficulties involved in detecting voices with a low level of participation on Twitter. This is a topic that will be taken up further in the following chapter where I examine the Expo 2015 Twitter discussion.

Overall, what has been described in this section helps us to appreciate the complexity of digitally mediated public diplomacy and the role of the mainstream news media in presenting and mediating leaders' agendas to publics. Such complexity confirms, once again, the importance of identifying influential actors in social media networks to improve tactical awareness.

5.5.4 The performative dimension of Twitter diplomacy

Twiplomacy, a term coined by the public relations firm Burson-Marsteller (Twiplomacy 2018) refers to the use of Twitter to carry out public diplomacy activities. In chapter 1 (table 2), I have introduced the role played by leaders in Twitter communication and in the listening process. In chapter 3, I referred to previous studies that have analysed the networked relations among nations and heads of state on social media. These studies have shown how leaders interact on social media according to the most accessible metrics. However, following the approach I have used in this chapter to analyse public diplomacy activities around the G20, it is also important to look as the performative dimension of Twitter diplomacy, which means analysing how interactions among leaders on social media are perceived and interpreted by audiences.

Figure 34 shows the interactions among the world leaders during the G20 and the directions of the mentions. Apart from the president of Indonesia, Joko Widodo, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and the Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, all leaders interacted with other leaders on Twitter during the G20. This network visualisation mainly reflects the bilateral meetings during the G20 and the ritual photos of handshaking taken during the economic forum. As one would expect, the most mentioned leader was the host, Tony Abbott, followed by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a well-known effective Twitter user. This is confirmed by their central position in the network.

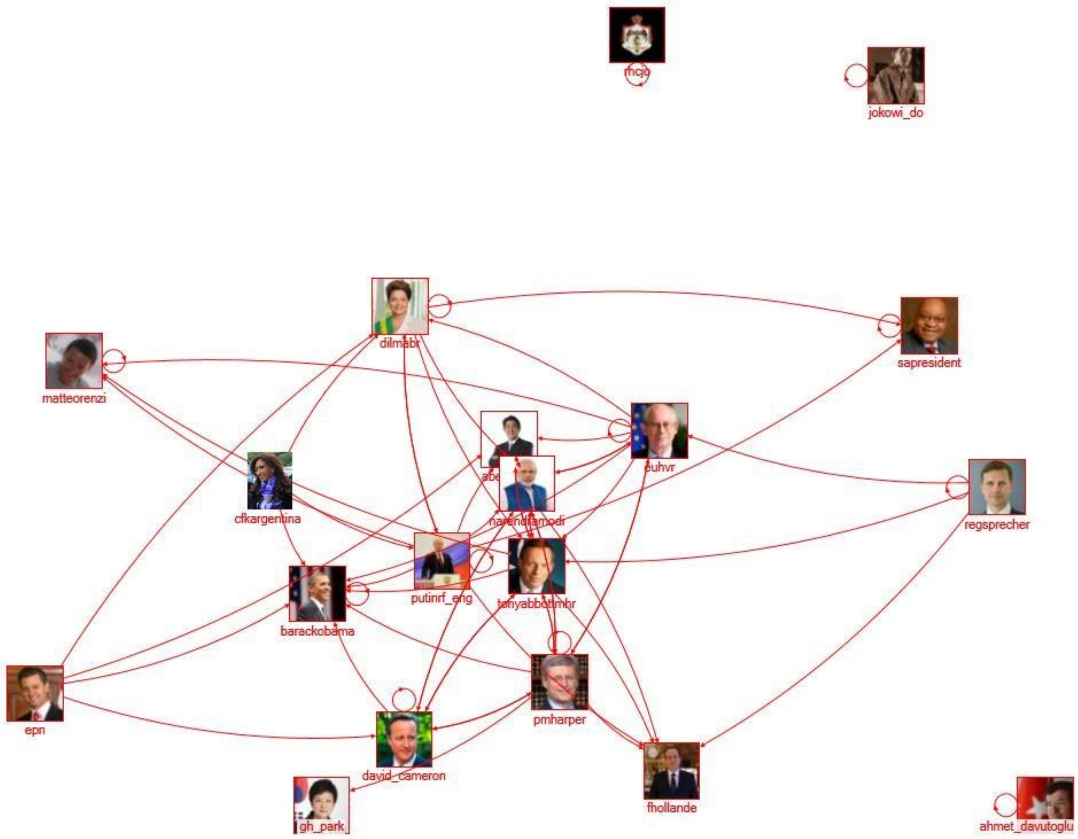

Figure 34 – Leaders' interactions on Twitter during the G20

One of Modi's tweets is particularly interesting: a @reply to a tweet posted by Tony Abbott, in which the Indian leader thanked the Australian PM for the "warm welcome" (figure 35). This reply clearly illustrates the performative aspects involved in diplomatic forums. In this case, the reply aimed to instil confidence and confirm the strong relationship between the two leaders and consequently between the two countries, targeting Australian, Indian and international audiences. Indeed, the newly elected Modi went to Australia as a part of a broader diplomatic visit that took in several events, including his address at the Australian Parliament and his speech at the Allphones Arena Olympic Park in Sydney in front of around 17,000 people, many of them part of the Indian diaspora in Australia.[72] The tweets in figure 35 were part of a broader diplomatic initiative that produced significant news media coverage both in Australia and India, highlighting the strong ties between the two leaders and countries.

[72] Note that this is also part of the Australian shift in terminology and consequent renewed geopolitical approach from the focus to the 'Asia-Pacific' to 'Indo-Pacific', as described in the previous chapter.

Figure 35 – Modi's reply to Abbott's tweet.

However, since these tweets were then reported by the news media (refer to the previous section), it can be argued that such performative activities target not only social media users and citizens but also journalists. The awareness of leaders of the role played by the news media in the digital environment fosters this performative use of Twitter. Modi's reply, in this sense, targeted Twitter users and journalists, who then reported the two leaders' good relations. For example, the *Wall Street Journal* described the relation between Abbott and Modi as a "bro-mance" (Sugden 2014).

This performative dimension of diplomacy can also be exercised in the opposite way, through the marginalisation and delegitimisation of an actor from the centre stage. In the case of the G20, this strategy was employed against Putin. The news media reported that Putin had been marginalised during the G20 negotiations and as a consequence had left the meeting early (e.g. Wintour and Doherty 2014).

The fact that the Russian leader was associated with several international issues (such as the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17), Abbott's shirtfront statement, and Putin's marginalisation during the G20 colloquies, along with his controversial charisma, resulted in a passionate debate on social media. It was not an accident that the term 'Putin' was the most frequent among the leaders' surnames in the whole G20 Twitter discussion, as shown in figure

36.[73] However, mentions of Putin were largely negative as result of Russian foreign policy and the leaders' attempts to marginalise the Russian president, reinforcing that pure metrics do not reflect sentiment.

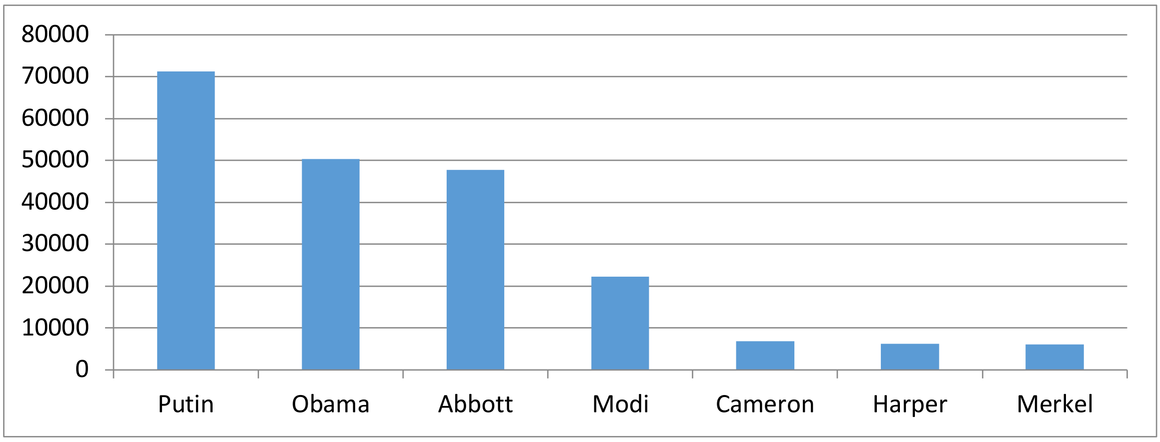

Figure 36 – Leaders' surname frequency during the G20.

Some Twitter users applauded the former Canadian PM Stephen Harper, who allegedly told Putin that he needs to "get out of Ukraine", as a Canadian spokesman reported (figure 37). Harper's statement was widely reported by the mainstream news media on social media, and users opined that other leaders, especially Abbott and Obama, should have acted in the same way against the role played by Russia in the Ukrainian conflict.

Figure 37 – Rolandas Kacinskas, activist.

Others even hoped that the world leaders would break with diplomatic etiquette and prevent Putin from participating in the G20 (figure 38).

[73] Note that in figure 36 I have calculated the frequency of the leaders' surnames in the dataset, as opposed to the number of @mentions received by a Twitter account (also called indegree), as for example in figure 14.

Figure 38 – Anders Östlund, activist.

The last wave of tweets about the Russian president in the dataset was generated by the fact that Putin left the summit earlier than planned, which resulted in rumours about him feeling unwelcome at the G20. More interestingly, this interpretation was supported by all the Western news media and was denied only by the Kremlin (Putin 2014) and the Russian state-owned RT (rt.com 2014b). The public perception of Putin as having been isolated by other leaders represents another example of the performative dimension of diplomacy, where the 'controversial' leader is marginalised by the Western democracies for his foreign policies.

Still, a few tweets criticised the G20 and supported Putin having left the meeting early (e.g. figure 39).

Figure 39 – Ted McDonnell, photojournalist

Therefore, much of the relations among leaders on social media is performative, since in interacting with each other, leaders are actually targeting online users and journalists. Leaders seem to be particularly active on social media when it comes to posting photos of handshaking. These acts are not frivolous, but rather carry a symbolic power and are now becoming part of diplomatic protocol. A photo of handshaking on social media can be more effective than a long press release on social media. As Faizullaev (2013) notes,

> symbols, rituals and ceremonies in diplomacy are designed to create a shared sense and also to motivate and regulate the moods of groups and individuals who directly or indirectly participate in or observe diplomatic practice. (149)

The history of diplomacy is full of symbolic events to appease or gain positive domestic and international public opinion. In this way, the public dimension of diplomacy is oriented towards spectacle, not only because negotiations may be fabricated, but also because it is essential to display a sense of transparency, while negotiations happen quietly behind closed doors, to avoid any risk that they may be compromised by public debate and scrutiny.[74]

However, in the context of social media even this symbolic aspect needs to be informed by listening activities to avoid communication breakdowns, as for example in the case of the photo, analysed in the previous section, of Putin and Abbott (figure 25) holding koalas.

5.6 Conclusion

This case study has described the complexity of the articulation of influence within online networks, and particularly on Twitter. This task has been deliberately undertaken by trying to preserve the complexity of actors and issues participating in the G20-related discussion on Twitter. The aim has been to advance both the practical and theoretical understanding of public diplomacy listening and articulation of influence in digitally mediated public diplomacy, taking into account all the different actors, diplomatic and non-diplomatic, involved in the online discussion around the G20.

It is not known if the Australian government had in place any listening strategy during the G20. However, by analysing listening as a process, through those signs of paying attention that characterise dialogic forms of engagement – as suggested in chapter 2 – this case study has demonstrated the Australian government's lack of digital listening. Analysis of the Australian activities on Twitter during the G20 indicates an overall lack of acknowledgement to the wide public discussion that connected the G20 with the climate change issue, in contrast with other world leaders. *Active* listening would have predicted and acknowledged the climate change issue and the actors involved in generating a very wide and effective public discussion on this before and during the G20, as the EU Commission did. Once actors and issues have been identified (awareness), there must follow an action of engagement, which symbolises the act of saying 'we are listening to you'. In this regard, the example of the European Commission's Twitter account engaging with the #onmyagenda discussion – described in section 4 – is a significant example of dialogic engagement, as is Obama's reference to the Great Barrier Reef in relation to climate change at his speech to young Australians during the event. The report posted by the EU Commission on Twitter and Obama's speech were not mere reactions to the #onmyagenda discussion but rather represented a sign that the two public

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[74] Manor (2016b), paraphrasing Erving Goffman, recognises two distinct spheres: the front and the backstage. The front stage needs to highlight the importance of diplomatic activity, enhancing legitimacy, while the backstage is where the real diplomatic negotiations take place.

diplomacy actors were already listening and committed to climate change as an issue of concern. By contrast, *tactical* listening would have reacted to the climate change issue only when it was clear that the topic had become central to the public debate, with a short-term prospective. The lack of both types of listening on the part of the Australian government demonstrated an overall refusal to listen to both domestic and international publics.

This chapter has also shown how the mainstream news media contribute to defining what is successful in public diplomacy. This suggests that interpretation of success in public diplomacy is not only subjective but also mediated by the context, composed of an array of non-diplomatic actors and online networks, such as the mainstream news media, NGOs and the general public. In this sense, online networks facilitate and constrain the articulation of influence by public diplomacy actors. Digital communication does not necessarily lead to forms of collaboration; rather, this case study has shown how networks can work in a competitive manner. Social media have the potential to enhance international political understanding, but much of this lies in diplomat's capacity to listen to citizens and mediators, to be aware of their own tactical position and to be seen to listen through dialogic engagement.

The necessary references to the many events unfolding on the ground made in this chapter indicate that digital communication is an important corollary of the offline dimension of diplomacy, such as open- and closed-door negotiations, public statements and policy-making. This suggests going beyond the distinction between online and offline diplomacy and looking at the intrinsic hybridity of current public diplomacy practice. Appreciating both power dynamics and people's agency in the digital environment offers a fruitful way of studying public diplomacy. This confirms the argument made in previous chapters of adopting an analytical approach based on listening as a critical element of public diplomacy.

To conclude, this case study has highlighted key aspects of the Twitter discussion surrounding the economic forum. The mixed methods approach that combines both thick and thin description has allowed an examination of the dataset at different scales and an expansion of the dataset to other digital platforms, such as *Google News*. While the case study adopted the general procedure developed in chapter 3, the context and its nuances required a flexible and plastic approach, incorporating supplementary analysis of Australian/Russian relations, climate change debates, Obama's speech and media reporting. This fluidity led to an exploration of possible directions that the analysis of large social media datasets, combined with qualitative examination, can take.

Hence, the case study has advanced an understanding of public diplomacy listening on Twitter in relation to four aspects:

1. by providing examples of dialogic engagement as the main indication of *active* listening;
2. by pointing out the importance of *tactical* listening prior to diplomatic forums to better understand the key actors and issues involved;
3. by testing the proposed methodological approach, exploring its advantages and limitations;
4. by empirically supporting the theoretical remarks made in chapter 2 and showing the practical consequences of listening and refusing to listen.

Another important aspect highlighted in different parts of this chapter is the tension between the domestic and international dimensions of public diplomacy and the overlapping of the two. Separating the two dimensions is no longer possible. A projection of an actor's agenda has to address both publics. Aggressive statements made to appease the domestic public, like Abbott's 'shirtfronting', may function differently at an international level. Narratives directed at the domestic and international publics need to be coordinated and highlight a clear political vision, especially regarding divisive diplomatic issues that affect the relations between two countries – or two blocks of nations – as in the case of flight MH17.

During the G20 summit, the deliberation on Twitter resulted in sarcasm, jokes and satirical visuals. This was mainly caused by the Australian government's refusal to listen and its failure to create communication spaces where the audience could perceive that they were being listened to. As argued in chapter 2, the audience's perception of being listened to can develop positive effects that translate into positive emotions and attitudes in social media communication. By contrast, the G20 in Brisbane attracted many disapproving opinions and disagreements in relation to several actors, especially directed at the Australian prime minister, as a consequence of his refusal to listen.

The next chapter will test my mixed method approach in different contextual conditions characterised by the widespread use of automated voices (Twitter bots) as well as aggressive marketing strategies. The findings will confirm and expand some of the observations made here in relation to listening, domestic and international dimensions, and Twitter engagement in public diplomacy.

6 Public diplomacy on Twitter during Expo 2015

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I further explore public diplomacy practices in another international mega-event. The G20 Twitter discussion provided an opportunity to explore international leaders' public diplomacy practices and the role played by mediators on Twitter. The case study discussed in this chapter, instead, explores public diplomacy practices in a less competitive diplomatic environment. In exploring the Twitter debate during Expo 2015 in Milan, I investigate the role played by automated voices (Twitterbots), the possibility provided by a 'low-politics' mega-event to dialogically engage with domestic and international audiences to advance long-term strategic foreign policy goals, and the possible successful integration of the digital and physical spheres in public diplomacy.

The spectrum of listening introduced in chapter 2 demonstrates how two important concepts in public diplomacy – listening and engagement – are closely related. A communication model that takes advantage of the full potential of social media actors should conduct *active* listening, which entails signs of dialogic engagement. However, the literature has already pointed out that, despite claims for listening made in public diplomacy strategic policy, listening activities are often limited to an assessment of message dissemination. Much of the confusion is due to the fact that listening does not have a single definition because there are in fact different types of listening. Table 4 in chapter 2 made explicit these differentiations and provides a model for the evaluation of social media listening and engagement on social media.

Through a mix of thin and thick description, this chapter will analyse the tweets posted during the World Exposition (Expo) 2015 in Milan. For the first time in the history of Expo, social media provided a source for assessing visitors' opinions about the national pavilions showcased during Expo 2015. By applying this framework based on listening to the conversation hashtagged #expo2015 on Twitter, the chapter will argue that aggressive marketing strategies focused on volume and message reach limit the potential of public diplomacy communication and listening on social media since 'ordinary' users' voices risk being overwhelmed. Indeed, I will argue that the organisation of Expo 2015's understanding of listening and engagement was limited to listening *in.*

6.2 What is Expo?

The Universal Exposition is a global event that – according to the organising institution, the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE) (n.d.-b, para 1) – "aims at educating the public, sharing innovation, promoting progress and fostering cooperation". In addition to the public, it involves a number of institutional actors – governments, companies, international organisations, the private sector and NGOs – and is hosted and organised by a different country every five years. Expo is thus a grand stage where countries display their national culture and technological advancements through expositions or pavilions. During Expo, events, conferences and forums are also run.

Expo usually lasts six months and is held in a host city. Candidatures are presented to the BIE, the intergovernmental organisation in charge of managing and regulating World Expos. Candidate countries present a project with a proposed theme and host cities are elected by the 170 member countries of the BIE. Expo themes aim "to raise awareness of and find responses to universal challenges of our time" (Bureau International des Expositions n.d.-c, para. 2).

The first Universal Exposition took place in London in 1851, housed within the newly built Crystal Palace Exhibition. The Universal Exposition first made manifest a world that was becoming more connected, sharing new ideas and technological innovations. Since 1995, the exposition has been hosted every five years, with smaller events – called International Expos – scheduled in between.

As argued in 3.2, Expo, like the G20, is a planned and cyclical mega-event. It is also an opportunity for the hosting city, region and country to project a positive image abroad. As has been pointed out by Wang (2015, para. 6),

> The Expo is not only to be experienced, but also remembered. As it is a concentrated temporal social occurrence, the outsized event rivets visitors' attention and fascination. Transient as the Expo experience is, one's impression of it can be long-lasting.

Unlike the G20, Expo markets itself as apolitical and as a 'low-politics' event, analogous to other global cultural events (such as World Cup and Olympics), since it aims to create a positive and non-threatening environment to discuss global issues that should lead to international collaboration. Since there are no negotiations, the narrative around Expo is characterised by a rhetoric of "universal improvement" and "hope for the common good of humanity" (Paganoni 2015, 97).

Expo has attracted academic attention primarily from historians and cultural studies scholars. This academic interest has been summarised by Rydell, Findling, and Pelle (2013), who explored the various approaches to the study of Expo. The largest group of scholarship focused on a historical perspective that encompasses histories and anecdotes about past Expos, and associated media coverage through the study of newspaper articles, photographs and posters (e.g. Davis 1999, Anderson and Gosselin 2008). Other studies have focused on analysing and critiquing the audience, in terms of cultural hegemony (e.g. Rydell 2013), drawing on the theories of Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci alongside empirical studies organisers' attempts to influence the experience of fairgoers (e.g. Breitbart 1997). Anthropologists have also focused on Expos as modern ‘potlatches’ and rituals (e.g. Hinsley and Wilcox 2016), while cultural studies scholars have studied these events as idealised forms of national identity and their instrumentalisation by the national state (e.g. Hubbert 2017). Recent studies have particularly focused on the nation-branding and soft-power dimensions of these events, especially in the case of the Shanghai Expo in 2010 (e.g. Winter 2012, Barr 2012, Wang 2013a). In particular, Wang (2013a) compared the marketing approaches and communication outcomes of the participating countries during Expo 2010 in Shanghai by looking at successes and failures. While previous studies had focused on the perception of a single country, Wang calls for a comparative approach that can investigate the different countries’ projections to the mass public by employing survey study and focus groups. His book also explores Chinese soft power and how participating countries targeted the Chinese public, emphasising the significance of Expo “as a global cultural phenomenon and a historical institution” (13).

Since physical visits are the primary means of experiencing Expo, it has never been fully considered as a ‘media event’. However, for the first time in the history of the Universal Exposition, Expo 2015 in Milan had a rich digital communication strategy, investing a considerable amount of public funding into promoting the event on social media (Nappi 2014). The case study of Expo 2015 detailed in this chapter aims to cover an aspect that is becoming relevant, since those attending were encouraged to share their experiences on social media.

While many dimensions of Expo have been explored in relation to place-branding, urban planning and cultural history, this chapter aims to analyse engagement and embedded signs of listening on Twitter (refer to chapter 2). It will analyse the communication model of the organisational Twitter accounts and whether the model created spaces for listening. The signs of listening both on the part of citizens and official accounts will be mapped and examined by applying thin and thick descriptions, enriched by non-Twitter sources, as explored in chapter 3. Public diplomacy actors and issues will be followed and mapped to understand how Italy and the participating countries projected their images on Twitter and how and whether citizens reacted to and/or interacted with such message. This task will be undertaken by looking at both official accounts and ‘ordinary’ Twitter users, to go beyond a mere ‘transmission’ communication model, as argued in chapter 2. The discussion tagged #Expo2015 will be examined as a digital space for interaction and discussion, where signs of listening can be detected and interpreted.

6.2.1 Expo 2015 in Milan

Expo 2015 was quite a controversial Universal Exposition. The bid was won in March 2008, when the first signs of the financial crisis in Italy were emerging. This led to an intense domestic political debate about the pros and cons of hosting such a mega-event.

Expo 2015 was also surrounded by scandals regarding charges of corruption and bribery (Foschini and Tonacci 2014, Parodi 2014), while only 18% of the infrastructure (pavilions and facilities) on the Expo building site had been completed two months before the event, a long way behind schedule (Poletti 2015, Barbacetto and Maroni 2015). These occurrences escalated the budget for the construction of the Expo 2015 site (Mancini 2015). Indeed, the host nation invests considerable economic resources into the development of the exposition site, calculated as 1.2 billion Euros for Expo 2015 (Bazzi 2016). Despite the fact that these funds are considered a form of investment by the hosting country, according to Massiani and Pizziali (2016, 30) the event has had no appreciable impact upon Italy's GDP (gross domestic product).

During the long preparation period for Expo 2015, Italy experienced an economic crisis following the global financial crisis in 2008. In particular, the crisis was related to the increase in Italian budget deficits from 2010 to 2011 relative to the GDP, and the consequent recession. Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi had to resign after international pressure on its government to undertake austerity measures. His successor, Mario Monti, formed a unity government in November 2011 and supported the Expo project, considering it an opportunity for the country "of redemption and for revival of its economy" (Monti cited by Paganoni 2015, 131). The financial crisis lent a particular economic connotation to the Italian official narrative around Expo, an analogy with the previous case study and the Australian 'economic growth' narrative. The government and Expo 2015's organisation keenly felt the pressure and the importance of the domestic debate. At the same time, delays and scandals were also reported in the international press a few days before the opening ceremony (e.g. Povoledo 2015). A positive projection of the country was thus connected to the domestic political discussion. It was critical to convince Italians that the Expo would be a success. This was the beginning of a governmental narrative that was then continued and supported by the following PM, Matteo Renzi, who presided over Expo 2015.

Renzi was also known as 'il Rottamatore' (the Scrapper) due to his determination to renovate the Italian political establishment and its economic and administrative system, and to put an end to the pervasive distrust of the public towards the political institutions. This 'Scrapper' image fit perfectly with the optimistic narrative of opportunities surrounding Expo. The event could finally prove that Italy was recovering from the economic crisis and moving beyond the perceived ineptitude of the previous political establishment.

The narrative in the public statements coming from the Italian government described Expo as a "calculated gamble" (refer to figure 40) and a challenge for the new PM and for the country. A year earlier this was considered an impossible challenge for Italy and its government. By contrast, two days before the opening ceremony, Renzi stressed in a post on his official Facebook page that "the 'Expo' bet has been won" (2015a). "Today" – Renzi continued – "we can say that Italy will be starring on the world stage proud and beautiful… Italy is not only the land of the past but also of the future” (figure 40).


Matteo Renzi added 16 new photos.
April 27, 2015 ·

Tra 4 giorni inauguriamo l'Expo a Milano, con un primo traguardo: sono stati già venduti 10 milioni di biglietti. Un anno fa, quando abbiamo ereditato ritardi e scandali, sembrava impossibile. Non abbiamo ascoltato quelli che ci dicevano: 'non ce la farete mai'. E in quest'anno più lo ripetevano, più siamo stati convinti di aver fatto la cosa giusta. Oggi con grande soddisfazione possiamo dire che la scommessa Expo è vinta, i padiglioni sono bellissimi, e l'Italia si vestirà d'orgoglio e bellezza di fronte al mondo.
Perché l'Expo non sarà semplicemente una fiera, ma una gigantesca occasione in cui l'Italia riflette su se stessa e accetta la sfida del futuro.
Sarà una grande sfida culturale, sarà l'Expo con il maggior numero delegazioni straniere, la più alta concentrazione di ideale per dire che l'Italia non è solo terra del passato ma del futuro. Dichiarare guerra alla fame nel mondo, lottare per un pianeta sostenibile, mostrare il volto gentile dell'Italia. Accogliere 20 milioni di visitatori sarà la sfida del 2015 del nostro paese. Possiamo vincerla tutti insieme, nessuno si senta escluso

Figure 40 – @matteorenziufficiale, Official Facebook page, 27 April 2015[75]

The Italian edition of the magazine *Wired*, in collaboration with three “expo-optimists”, Giacomo Biraghi, Alvise De Sanctis and Luca Ballarini, published a guide titled “#expottimisti” (2014) to explain what Expo is and why it was important. In the e-book, the authors aimed to address misconceptions regarding the costs, goals and characteristics of Expo in the Italian news media. After the publication of the guide, one of the authors, Giacomo Biraghi, was hired as head of digital public relations for Expo’s official social media team, while the title of his booklet – #expottimisti – became one of the most popular hashtags around Expo 2015 (Scoglio 2015). Thus, the controversies in the domestic debate surrounding Expo 2015 produced an emphasis on the Italian audience in Expo’s official communication strategy as an attempt to alleviate criticisms.

[75] My translation from Italian: “In four days we will officially launch Expo in Milan and we have already achieved the first goal: 10 million tickets are already sold. A year ago, when we inherited delays and scandals, this achievement seemed impossible. We have not listened to those who told us: “you’ll never make it”. The more they said it, the more we were convinced that we were doing the right thing. Today we can say, with great pleasure, that the ‘Expo’ bet has been won, the pavilions are beautiful, and Italy will be starring on the world stage proud and beautiful.
Expo will not simply be an exhibition, but it will represent a great opportunity in which Italy can reflect on its own identity and accepts the challenge for the future.
It will be a great cultural challenge, the edition with the largest number of foreign delegations, the highest ‘confluence of aspirations’, allowing us to say that Italy is not only the land of the past but also of the future. We declare a worldwide war on hunger, fight for a sustainable planet, show the gentle face of Italy. Welcoming 20 million visitors will be the challenge of our country for 2015. We can win it all together, nobody excluded”.

6.2.2 Digital strategy

Expo 2015 was also the first Universal Exposition that had a planned presence on social media. In January 2014, more than a year before the event, the organisation established a Social Media Team to manage communication on different platforms, particularly Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. It was also the first time that the vast majority of participating countries managed social media accounts created specifically for the event. Of the 141 participating countries, 120 had a presence on Facebook and 97 on Twitter.[76] This provides evidence of a large communication effort by the participating countries on social media.

Along with the participants, several official channels of communication were set up for the organisation of Expo 2015[77] itself. The Social Media Team also published several strategies for conducting effective communications on social media and reports about their communicational outcomes. The Social Media Team's digital strategy established the following goals (Expo 2015 Social Media Team 2014a, 3): brand awareness, information about the event, *interaction* with potential and actual visitors and detecting *public sentiment*. This latter goal suggests that monitoring activities were in place during Expo (the results of Expo's organisational listening will be analysed in the conclusion). According to the team, the communication goals could be achieved through three main online activities: "mapping the stakeholders", the "production of in-house content" and "third-party content collection". The "third-party" content refers to the sharing of content that was not posted from the Expo official accounts. From the report, it is not clear how public sentiment would be detected; the focus was on the distribution of content, and engagement activities were limited to the re-sharing of "third-party" content.

Overall, the strategic goals of the Social Media Team predominantly focused on the success of the event itself, especially in relation to visitor numbers. Such goals seem to suggest a digital strategy which is profit-oriented rather than political or diplomatic. To be more explicit, it would seem that the Expo's Social Media Team did not have any goals that could be considered a part of a public diplomacy strategy. Yet, the final report (Expo 2015 Social Media Team 2015a) circulated by the Social Media Team (cited below and discussed later in this chapter) reveals Expo's political objectives when it refers to controversies that unfolded before Expo.

> The constant, substantial and highly active presence of a front opposed to Expo generated an extraordinary (and totally unexpected) positive effect. A front on many levels (from No Expo, to the Black Block, and including the most diverse national publications and media). The message against Expo never really fired public interest (unlike the No-TAV protests in Val di

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[76] http://www.socialmediaexpo2015.com/en/participants/

[77] Legally, Expo 2015 S.p.A was a public-funded company.

> Susa).[78] Hence, once the site was open, visitors could choose whose side to take (with Expo or against Expo?). *Expo encourages the taking of sides*, with identification phenomena and consequent *changes in behaviour* (5, emphasis added).

Visiting Expo was thus interpreted as a political act, a way to counteract the dissent that surrounded the event. In the text cited above, the Social Media Team expresses satisfaction that the anti-Expo message produced the positive effect of more visitors attending the Expo (that is, they voted with their feet and to the side in favour of Expo). Recalling what Renzi said in his Facebook post quoted earlier, for the organisers a salient feature of the campaign was encouraging people to bet for or against Expo 2015. The quote above seems to suggest the organisers sought publicity – good or bad – as part of a greater gambit for relevance. The quote also highlights the domestic political dimension of this event: success was an essential element for projecting a positive image of the country abroad. Although public diplomacy goals were never explicitly mentioned in the reports of the Social Media Team, the public diplomacy dimension of the event was implicitly linked to the enthusiastic participation of Italians at Expo 2015.

As mentioned in chapter 1, I am considering as public diplomacy actors those that – in one way or another – engage in activities that involve the projection of a country's image abroad on behalf of the government. Some of the actors involved in the Expo 2015 Twitter debate cannot be considered as 'pure' diplomatic actors, such as leaders, foreign affairs ministries, embassies and consulates. Yet, there is also a myriad of social media accounts that can fulfil a temporary purpose in relation to international events. The organisation of Expo 2015, of which the Social Media Team was a part, was carried out by a publicly funded company. Expo's official accounts managed by the Social Media Team were funded for the purpose of promoting the event and thus contributed to the projection of Italy on behalf of the government.

Indeed, the implicit reference to a positive projection of Italy during the event in the Social Media Team reports has important implications for this study. For example, the theme of Expo 2015 itself clearly had a public diplomacy goal. The question underlining the theme was "is it possible to ensure sufficient, good, healthy and sustainable food for all mankind?" (Expo 2015 2012, 8). This theme was intended to promote a serious international discussion about food access and quality. It aimed to promote awareness and discuss scientific and technological innovations for food safety, security, quality, dietary education, solidarity, and cooperation, by exploring food in the world's cultures and as a way to promote a better lifestyle (Bureau International des Expositions n.d.-a). This fits with the international perception of Italy as a

[78] This refers to a protest against the creation of a 57 km high-speed rail tunnel in Val di Susa, on the border between Italy and France.

place of long and outstanding culinary tradition, as part of the "Made in Italy" branding strategy explored in more detail in chapter 4.

Along with the Expo 2015 theme, a formal document was also circulated: the Milan Charter (2015c), defined as the "cultural legacy of Expo 2015" (Expo 2015 2015, para. 1). The document aimed to address important issues such as hunger, malnourishment, food waste, the environment and world population growth, asserting the importance of the right to food as a "fundamental human right" (2). The goal was to promote constructive and humanitarian issues in a "low-politics" context such as an Expo, and consequently to project an image of Italy as a virtuous country committed to the fight against food-related global problems and challenges. Paradoxically, the positioning of issues as 'non-political' represented itself a political act. The theme itself embodies an important political opportunity to discuss and raise awareness on international issues relevant for the Italian government, as well as a showcase for the participating countries to propose political, scientific and technological solutions through their pavilions.

To sum up, Expo 2015's communication approach was primarily concerned with recovering from the negative image left by delays, inflated building costs and corruption scandals in the lead up to the Expo. In this chapter I show that, despite the disputes unfolding on Twitter in the first days of the event, Expo was able to transmit a successful image of the event. However, this was to be achieved with aggressive marketing strategies that overwhelmed the content posted by 'ordinary' users. Also, from a public diplomacy point of view, the focus on the success of the event itself overcame the more political and foreign-policy related aspects of Expo's themes, particularly the Italian commitment in regard to food policies stated in the Milan Charter, a unique opportunity for fostering international collaboration on a central and global policy issue.

6.2.3 The dataset

As mentioned in chapter 3, this analysis takes into account the tweets tagged #expo2015 posted during Expo 2015 in Milan (which took place between 1 May and 31 October 2015). Due to the large number of Tweets I collected during the six months of Expo 2015, I have split the dataset into two subsets. The first subset is composed of 419,072 tweets from 26 April to 4 June 2015 and refers to the debate around the opening ceremony (1 May 2015). This first subset focuses on the discussion about the launch of the event and the controversies around Expo 2015. The large number of tweets in this subset also allows for the exploration of metrics and general trends of the Twitter discussion. The second subset contains 148,091 tweets, posted from 8 to 31 October 2015, and takes into account the discussion that unfolded in the last days of Expo 2015. It provides the opportunity to make temporal comparisons between the opening and the closure of the event, tracking change in the topics and actors and the potential shift in users' opinions. Further tweets have been collected to analyse the messages posted by specific actors, such as the Expo 2015 official account (refer to chapter 3 for more detail about this method).

6.3 Was Expo listening to itself? Official and automated voices vs. people's voices

Hashtagged debates unfolding on Twitter can be shaped in different ways, as argued in chapter 2. A first indication of whether a space for listening is created in a Twitter conversation, and thus of the quality of interactions, can be captured with some simple analytics. The first subset (from 26 April to 4 June 2015) can provide an indication of some main trends in the discussion and an opportunity to analyse the conversation around the opening ceremony (1 May) and the first reactions to Expo.

As I argued in chapter 2, retweets are signs of engagement with particular content. An analysis of the general trends in hashtagged debates on Twitter provides insights into the conditions under which public diplomacy listening activities take place. The first indication comes from calculating the number of direct tweets and retweets. The pie chart in figure 41 indicates that the majority of posts were retweets (62.13%), while only 37.57% were 'direct" tweets.[79] However, such analytics may also indicate an apathetic form of engagement, as argued in 2.3.2. In other words, a large number of retweets may suggest a lack of 'dialogic engagement' since they could indicate simple reactions to content but not real interaction.

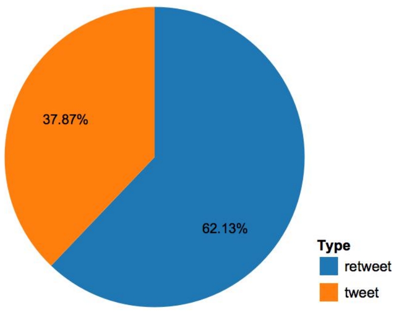

Figure 41 – Percentage of direct tweets vs. retweets

A first explanation for the significant number of retweets can be drawn from figure 42, where the ten most active accounts are identified. The bar chart shows that the users @Businewss_Bot, @chemaz, @laterrazzancona, @Checco_01 posted retweets only, thus suggesting that these Twitter profiles are bots.[80] A closer analysis of these profiles suggests

[79] Direct tweets including everything but retweets.
[80] Twitterbots are software systems that automatically retweet, like, follow or reply to a certain tweet that include a certain word or a group of words.

that these accounts represented individuals and organisations with no connection to the official Expo organisation – groups who were trying to exploit the #expo2015 conversation for commercial interests. From a methodological point of view, Twitterbots make monitoring and listening activities more difficult to conduct, since they need to be identified and filtered. Also, if Twitterbots programmed to exploit Expo attention were not accounted for, they will have compromised some of the published insights about the event's success on social media that were based on the volume of tweets and retweets (discussed below in 6.7). Indeed, the tweets posted by @Businewss_Bot represent almost 10% of the entire dataset I collected.[81]

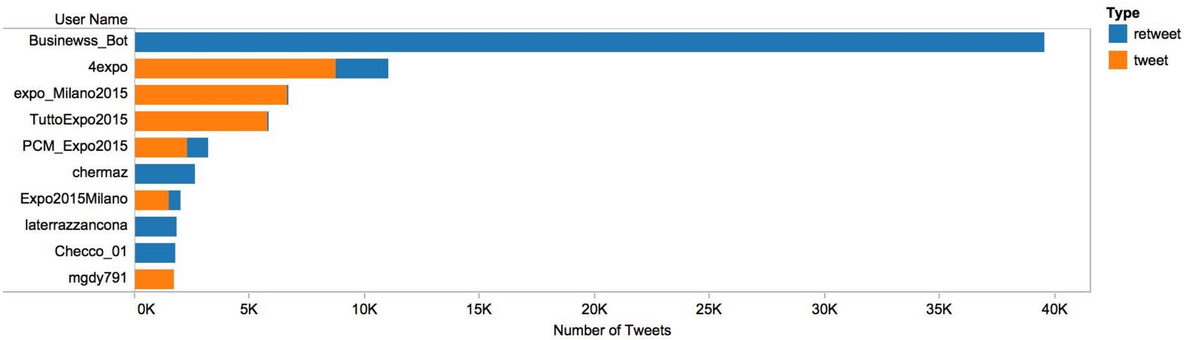

Figure 42 – The 10 most active accounts

The heavy presence of Twitterbots and the prevalence of official accounts in figure 42 raise methodological questions as to how listening can be undertaken in such a noisy communication environment. A way to facilitate this task can be provided by identifying the loudest voices (very active Twitter accounts) and separating them from the softer ones, which is to say ordinary users that have tweeted only a few times. Indeed, in Twitter conversations, there is usually a small group of very active users and a large group of less active users, with tweets per user obeying a power law rather than uniform distribution. By ordering users from the most active to the least active and as suggested by Bruns (2015) for the analysis of Twitter datasets, the distribution indicates a small group of very active users. After removing obvious bot accounts and converting the total number of users to percentiles ranked by tweet volume, I have divided users into three 'sender' groups according to a 1/9/90 division between participants. The top 1% of accounts will be called 'lead users', the next 9% 'highly active users' and the remaining 90% as 'least active users'. This division is summarised in table 8.

[81] All the tweets posted by @Businewss_Bot have been filtered out of both subsets since this account retweeted all the tweets tagged #expo2015.

Table 8 – Number of users, percentage of total, and direct tweets and retweets for each group

Sender group	No. of users	% of total	Direct Tweets	Retweets
Lead users	978	1	80,089	62,448
Highly active users	8,797	9	40,719	69,505
Least active users	87,971	90	37,897	128,414

This categorisation of users allows the behaviours of the three different groups to be compared. Recalling again the distinction between 'direct tweets' and 'retweets', figure 43 shows the different dynamics for each group. This bar chart indicates that lead users produced the majority of the content being shared in the conversation (19.11% of direct tweets). By contrast, less active accounts were more likely to retweet the content posted by the more active accounts. Lead users are mainly official Twitter accounts of institutions, national pavilions, NGOs, enterprises, PRs and bots. This suggests that the conversation was largely driven by official accounts which, in turn, suggests passive forms of engagement by the less active users, indicated by the 30.63% of retweets for the group of least active users.[82]

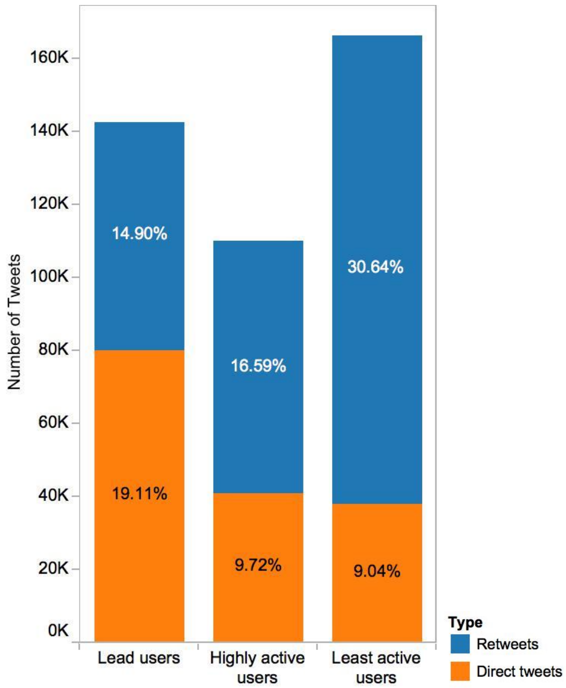

Figure 43 – Direct tweet and retweet volumes in the different groups

A further indication that the conversation was not authentic or organic in terms of the participation of 'ordinary' Twitter users is also evident when we look at a visualisation representing the relative volume of tweets by the sender groups categorised by sources or the application/interface used and created earlier in table 8. The bar chart in figure 44 indicates an

[82] The partition into three different groups will also help further analysis in the following sections.

unusual incidence in the use of professional interface applications for managing social media accounts by lead users (e.g. TweetDeck, GroupTweet, IFTTT, Hootsuite, etc.). Indeed, the highly active and least active user groups reflect the general trend on Twitter established in some studies (e.g. Liu, Kliman-Silver, and Mislove 2014, Brandt 2015) that reveal that more than half of tweets are usually posted from mobile phones. By contrast, in the case of #expo2015's lead users it can be seen that almost 41% of tweets were posted using a professional interface application. This further reinforces the idea that accounts managed by marketing and PR specialists played an important role in the lead users' conversation.

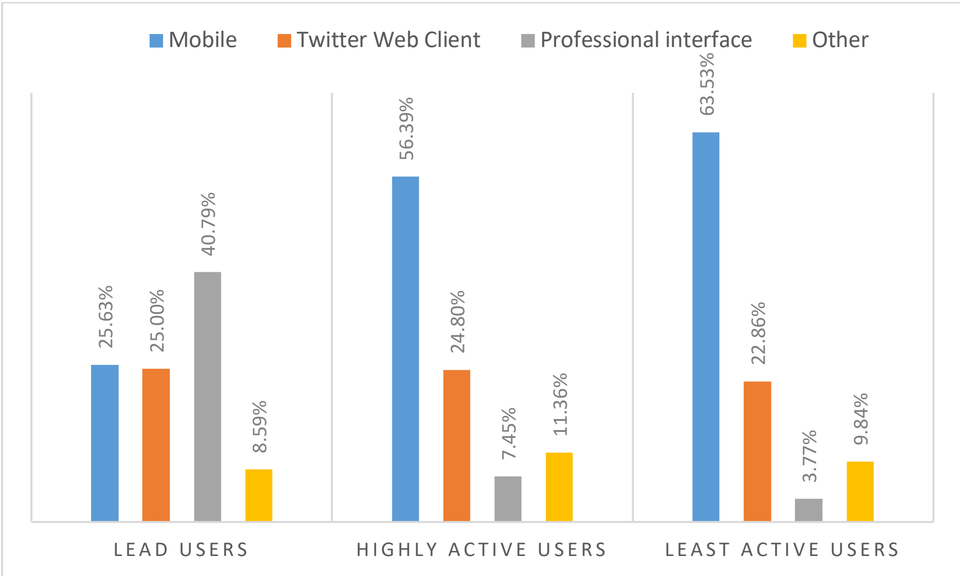

Figure 44 – Relative volume of tweets per source by sender group (filtered)[83]

This first stage of the analysis suggests the prevalence, in terms of 'voice', of official accounts belonging to Expo 2015's organisation and all the different official entities participating in the event. The data indicate important contribution by official organisations, which predominantly received passive engagement (retweets) from 'ordinary' users. This is particularly striking since the data I am taking into account refers to the first month, a period when there was more likely to see active participation from ordinary Twitter users. Indeed, protests and the domestic political debate about Expo took place particularly over the first month. Expo also attracted the attention of the Italian and international mainstream news media especially around the opening ceremony.

The data shows that forms of more 'active' engagement by least active users did take place in the first days of the event. However, such users' engagement was not related to the 'official' narrative, or "storytelling" as it was called by the Expo's social media strategy. By contrast,

[83] Some minor tweet sources have been filtered out.

active engagement addressed predominately controversial aspects of Expo, which I analyse further in the following section.

This section has also suggested that computational analysis can provide a preliminary snapshot of the challenging conditions under which public diplomacy listening activities must be undertaken, and of the dynamics of the #expo2015 conversations itself. A large presence of spam and the significant flow of marketing content requires filtering and careful selection of data. To put it simply, monitoring activities are ineffective if public diplomacy actors predominantly end up monitoring their own voices and marketing spam on social media. The risk of having Expo organisations listening to themselves was high, since this first part of the analysis indicates that the noise created by bots and public relations activities was substantial, overwhelming the activity of 'ordinary' users. This empirically indicates that the communication environment in which public diplomacy listening is undertaken affects the quality of listening, suggesting that communication activities that stimulate interaction (dialogic engagement), rather than those merely focused on message diffusion, can enhance the quality of what is being listened to. At the same time, this also indicates that social media analytics focused on message diffusion and volume can be compromised by automatic and organisational accounts. Paradoxically, the quantitative level of analysis, if critically applied, can offer meaningful insights into the quality of hashtagged discussions on Twitter, as this example has demonstrated.

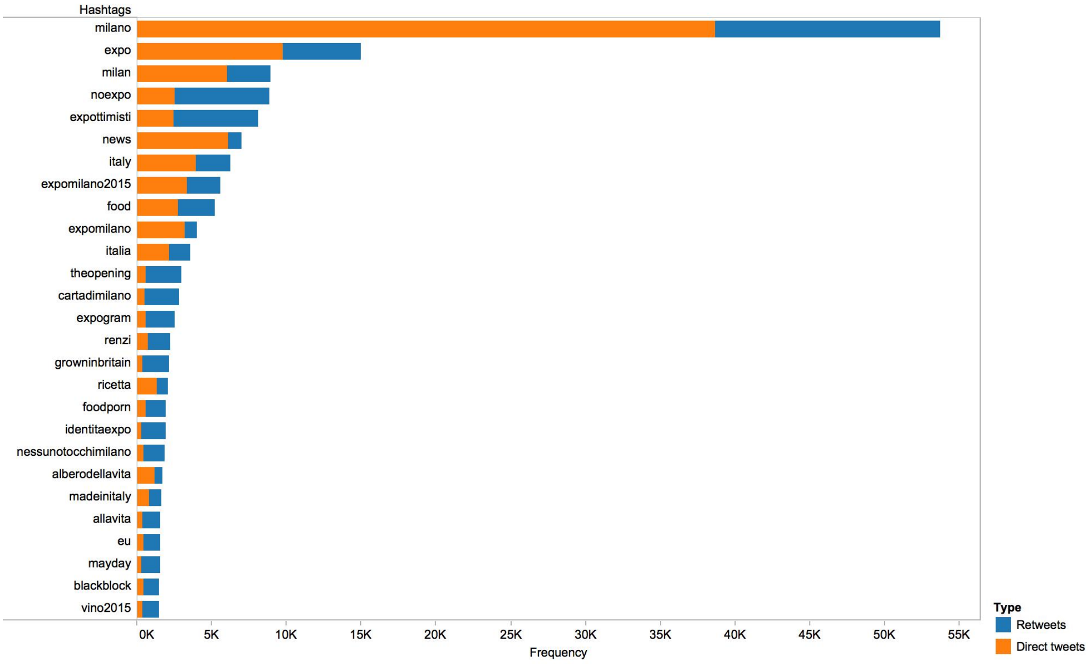

Figure 45 – Hashtag frequency by tweets/retweets[84]

Keeping these considerations in mind and moving to the topics discussed on Twitter during Expo, figure 45 maps hashtag frequency and delivers a simple and powerful way to identify the issues discussed in the first month of Expo. In particular, the bar chart shows that the most-used hashtag was #milano, to which the hashtag #milan can be added. These are wide-ranging hashtags and do not suggest a specific sentiment towards a topic. Hashtags that can be considered more meaningful for this analysis include #noexpo and #expottimisti (expo optimists), as they indicate a conversational tagging practice, as indicated in 3.3.3.1. Indeed, the two hashtags suggest two opposing sentiments and can provide an understanding of the domestic political debate surrounding Expo 2015. Related to these two hashtags are #blackblock and #nessunotocchimilano (hands off Milan). The first refers to the violent dissenters who infiltrated the peaceful march in Milan against Expo 2015 on the opening day, known as the "black block" for their tactic of wearing black clothing to conceal their identities and faces. The second was a response to these violent protesters, tagged with a hashtag that recalls the Biblical phrase "hands off Cain". Also, #theopening and #mayday refer to the opening ceremony on the first of May, while #renzi refers to the Italian prime minister.

Another hashtag that will be analysed further is #cartadimilano (the Milan Charter), which was the Italian diplomatic effort to influence the international debate about food and

[84] It should be noted that the tracked hashtag (#expo2015) has been excluded since it appears in all the tweets.

sustainability. This will provide the opportunity to discuss the foreign policy component of the event.

Along with these, others more mundane hashtags were connected with the Expo 2015 theme: #food, #ricetta (recipe), #foodporn, #cibo (food), #gialloblog (which refers to a popular Italian recipe website), and #vino2015 (wine2015). Some of the hashtags also refer to the Expo site: #alberdellavita (the tree of life, the main attraction at Expo 2015) and #allavita (the Cirque du Soleil show at Expo).

The analysis of these sub-conversations under the tag #expo2015 will follow in the next sections, using the same approach documented in the case study about the G20 2014 in the previous chapter.

6.4 Critical voices

In Chapter 2 I mentioned that public diplomacy scholars are increasingly considering the importance of public diplomacy efforts engaging with domestic audiences as a consequence of the growth in importance of non-governmental actors. The previous case study also provided insights into the relevance of the domestic dimension of public diplomacy. Moreover, as noted earlier in this chapter, during Expo 2015 much of the communication effort was focused on justifying the strategic importance of the event and its legitimacy to the domestic audience. An enthusiastic participation on the part of Italians, along with them sharing their physical experiences in the Expo site, would confer upon the event more visibility and legitimacy. The success of Expo was therefore strictly associated with the positive involvement and enthusiastic participation of the domestic public, which would, in turn, project a positive image of Italy as a country that is able to run a complex and big international event like Expo. Hence, it is worth looking at the opposition between supporters and critics of Expo in the Twitter debate, especially in May 2015, the first month of the event.

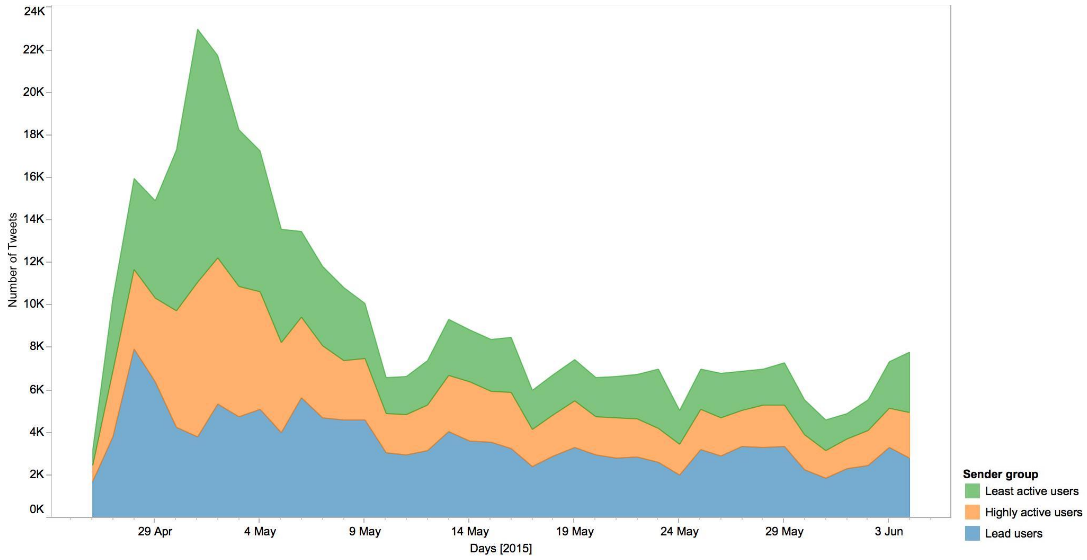

Figure 46 – Volume of tweets by sender group

Figure 46 shows strong correlation in activity between all three groups. However, the peak for the least active users indicates that this group particularly engaged with the discussion tagged #expo2015 in the first week of May.[85] This makes the first days of Expo 2015 important for studying the topics considered as engaging by this group. Accordingly, the dataset has been narrowed down by selecting those hashtags relevant for the analysis of the controversy around the opening of Expo, producing a temporal hashtag visualisation in figure 47. All the selected hashtags have a peak in the first days of the Expo, from 27 April to 5 May. The bigger peak in the graph belongs to the hashtag #noexpo, which indicates the rapid rise and fall of the discussion and thus its volatility. Thus, the 'least active users' are actually most active in response to the anti-Expo hashtag (#noexpo). Despite the use of professional software, bots and offline marketing, it is a negative campaign that drove tweets in this initial stage of Expo. This indicates that people were not listening to Expo official storytelling. Yet, the fact that initial criticisms did not lead to an ongoing campaign against Expo was considered as a positive outcome by the Expo 2015 Social Media Team (2015a, 5), as the quote reported above in 6.2.2 suggests.

[85] After the initial peak in the discussion, the volume stabilises with a constant prevalence of tweets posted by the lead users group.

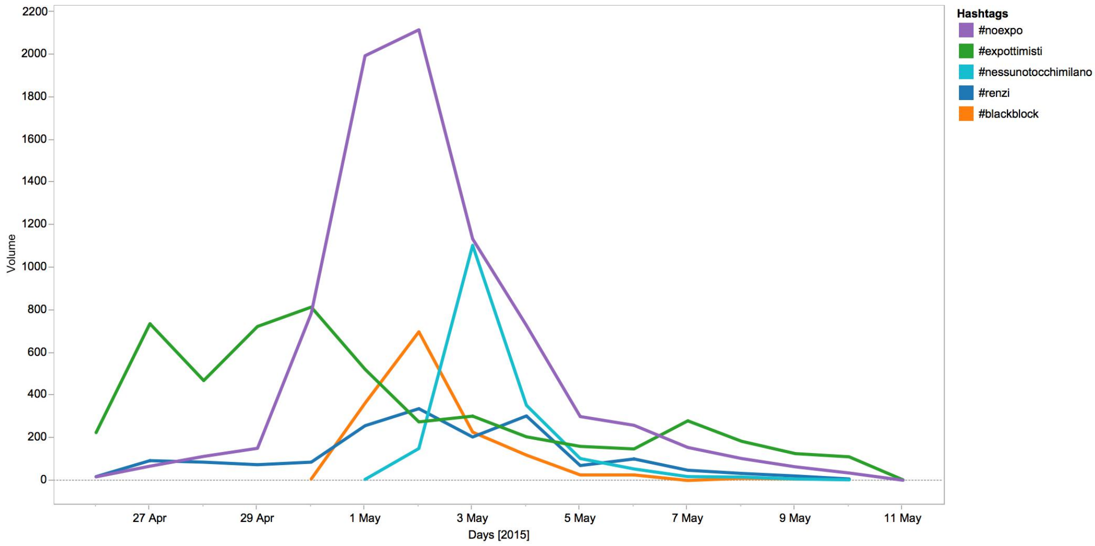

Figure 47 – Expo controversy: hashtag volume

These tweets can be also visualised in a bipartite hashtag-user network graph, which has already been employed and explained in chapter 5. The two most mentioned hashtags – #noexpo (Expo protestors) and #expottimisti (Expo optimists) – have been visualised in figure 48 as a polarised network[86] and thus generate two opposite clusters[87] with very different dynamics.

Recalling that the distance between the nodes in the graph represents the strength of their relations,[88] on the left-hand side of the network can be seen the #expottimisti cluster that shows nodes with a strong connecting component. The green cluster includes two principal users: the first is @expo2015milano, the official Twitter account; the second is @secolourbano, belonging to the ever-present Giacomo Biraghi, the PR man who initiated the hashtag #expottimisti and a member of the Expo Social Media Team. Both accounts can thus be directly linked to the Expo Social Media Team. This indicates that the #expottimisti discussion was principally boosted by the Social Media Team. Also, this cluster is dense and compact, since the users tend to be more connected. This means that the members of this cluster use the same hashtags and mention each other often.

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[86] The network graph in figure 48 shows the relations among users (mentions) and the relations between users and hashtags.
[87] It should be noted that the use of a hashtag does not unequivocally represent users' opinions about Expo. Indeed, the qualitative level of analysis undertaken later in this section will demonstrate that the use of two opposite hashtags indicates more complex opinions than just being pro or against Expo.
[88] The network has been visualised using *ForceAtlas 2*, which is a force-directed layout that simulates a physical system. The existence of an edge between two nodes acts as an attractive force counter-acting their pre-existing mutually repelling force. Refer to chapter 3 for more detail.

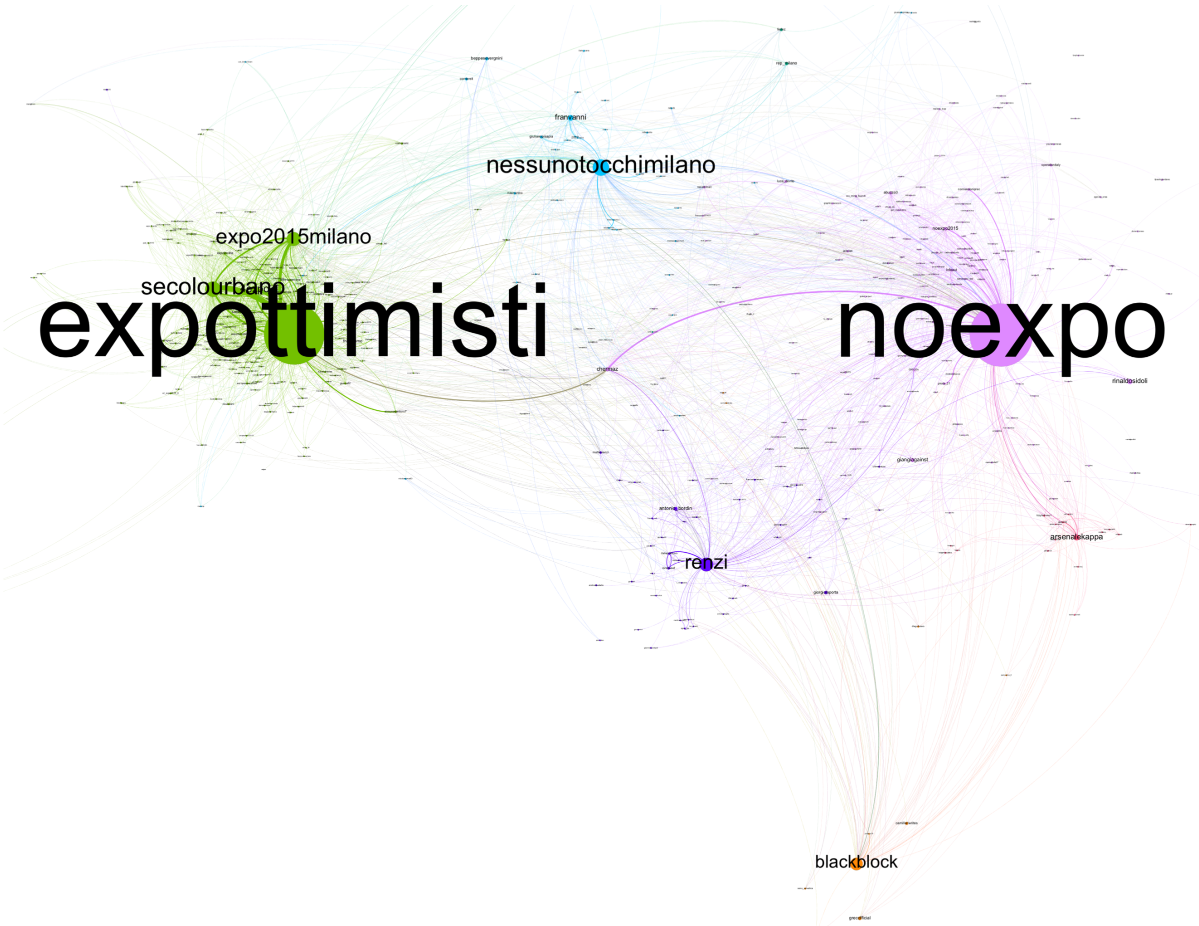

Figure 48 – Polarised co-occurrence network #noexpo vs #expottimisti .

Node size = outdegree; node colour = modularity class.

By contrast, on the right-hand side of the network, the #noexpo cluster has a higher degree of dispersion, since the nodes in the graph are not strongly connected, as is the case in the #expottimisti cluster. This suggests that this is a more spontaneous participation, since the users are temporally grouped together by the use of the hashtag, but they are not part of an ongoing and structured discussion, like the one seen in the green cluster.[89]

[89] The volatility of the discussion is also indicated by figure 48 when the volume of the #noexpo discussion drops dramatically after the 2nd of May.

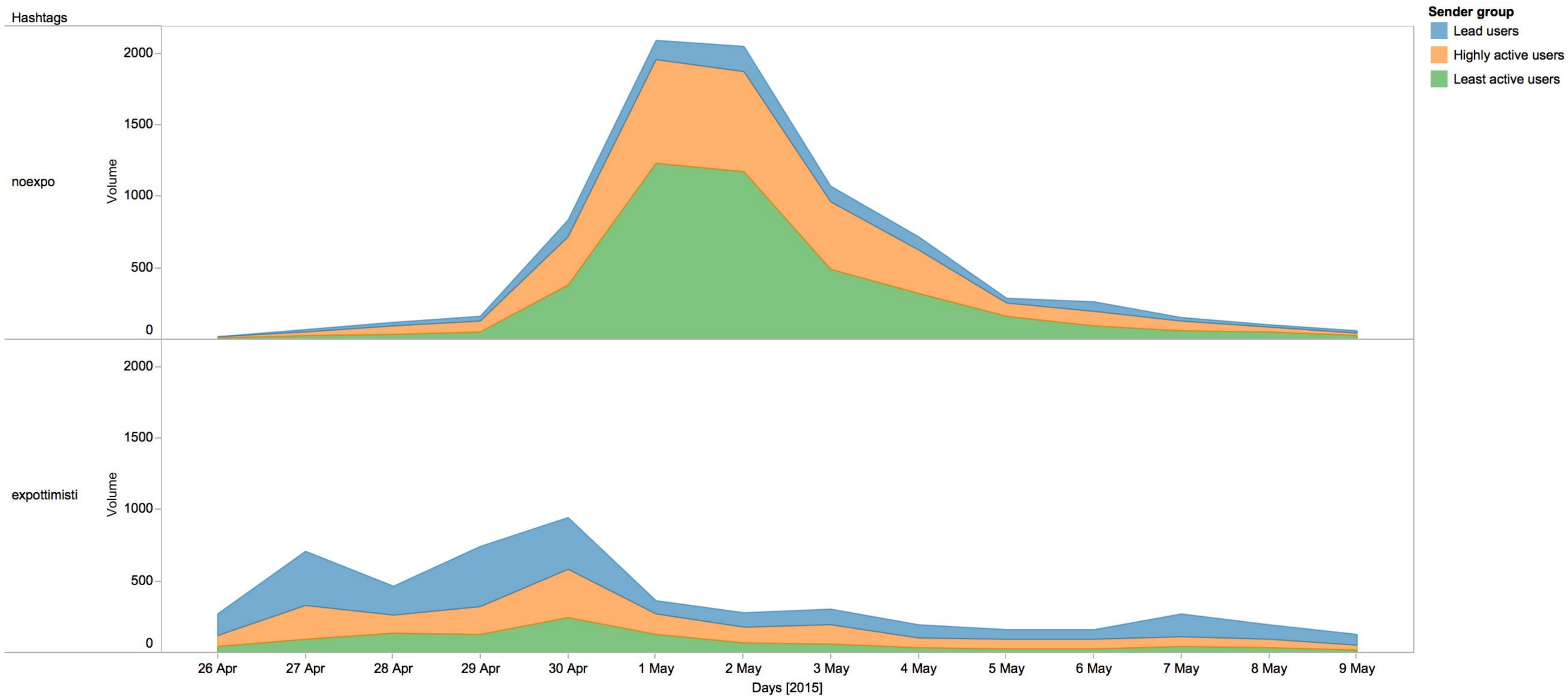

Figure 49 – #noexpo vs. #expottimisti: volume over time by sender group

The dynamics in figure 48 are confirmed by figure 49. This is a temporal visualisation of the volume of tweets tagged with #noexpo and #expottimisti where the different colours in the volume refer to the user groups, created in the previous subsection. In the case of #expottimisti the lead users and highly active user groups are predominant, while with #noexpo there is a prevalence of least active users. This confirms the volatility of the discussion tagged #noexpo, but also it indicates that it was more 'conversational' than the #expottimisti discussion, since it created the conditions not only for dissent but also for conversation among ordinary users. The strategy of massive dissemination of marketing content through organisational accounts did not result in significant participation on the part of ordinary users in the case of #expottimisti. Therefore, the official Expo accounts did not engage with other discussions and focused on the mere broadcasting of messages in a unidirectional form of communication.[90] In mathematical terms, the 'power' term of the power law distribution could be an indicator of the extent to which listening is happening: the lower the term (and hence the more uniform the distribution), the more listening might be said to be happening.

Further qualitative analysis also confirms these findings. The table in appendix 5 shows the most retweeted content in relation to the discussion tagged #noexpo. At the top of the list is ironic commentaries about the excessive cost of food and beverages at the Expo site. For example, the tweet in figure 50 on the left side says: "A bottle of water 5 euro and a sandwich 10 euro, feed the planet but first feed Farinetti[91] #Expo2015 #noexpo" (figure 50, left).[92] Another popular tweet was more political and criticised the Black Blocks for the damage they caused during the protests in Milan against Expo: "don't call them protesters, call them criminals" (figure 50, right). Tweets such as this one were posted by protesters who wanted to distance themselves from the violent Black Blocks.

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[90] This strategic choice, and its consequences for listening and participation, will be analysed further in the next subsection where the analysis will focus on Expo 2015's official Twitter account.
[91] This refers to Italian businessman Oscar Farinetti, owner of the Italian food mall chain Eataly, one of the main business partners participating to Expo 2015.
[92] Several users complained about the prices.

Figure 50 – Furio, Twitter user, 3 May 2015.[93] Rinaldo Sidoli, Italian Green Party member and activist, 1 May 2105.

By contrast, the #expottimisti hashtag generated less viral content (appendix 6). Quite predictably, the top ten under that hashtag were tweeted by the Expo official account and by the very active user @secolourbano (Biraghi). Content was usually promotional with information such as how to buy tickets. However, some tweets were ironically tagged #expottimisti in reference to the delay in the construction of the Expo site, an example of the sarcastic use of a hashtag to hijack discussions mentioned in 2.3.2. An example was the tweet from Nicola Morra, Senator of the Italian Political Party 'Five Stars Movement', who sarcastically posted a revisited version of the logo where, instead of Expo, it was written "WAIT: shall we make it 2016?" (figure 51 on the left).

This is in contrast with more 'aligned' uses of the hashtag #expottimisti such as the one posted by Francesco Nicodemo, a member of the Democratic Party, who supported Renzi's government, where he rhetorically asked "how can one not be #expottimisti?" (figure 51 on the right), sharing alluring photos of the Expo site before the opening ceremony.

[93] Furio is an alias that refers to a protagonist of a famous Italian comedy, *Bianco, rosso e Verdone*, directed by Carlo Verdone in 1981.

Figure 51 – Nicola Morra, Five Stars Movement, 29 April 2015. Francesco Nicodemo, Democratic Party, 27 April 2015.

This analysis reveals the active participation of critical voices in the online discussion on social media in the first 10 days, despite the official attempt to channel the discussion through an aggressive marketing strategy aimed to transmit a positive image of Expo. However, after this first wave of participation of ‘less active users’, the critical voice declined, while the Social Media Team continued in earnest with its attempt to drive the discussion by constantly posting promotional content about the Expo experience, as shown in figure 46.

It should be also noted that many users criticising Expo were discussing the political decision to host an Expo in Italy or were disappointed with the way Expo organisation was managed (delays, waste of public funds, builders’ work conditions, expensive tickets). They did not comment on the Expo experience itself. Visitors’ experiences will be a major focus later in this chapter when the conversation about the Italian Pavilion will be examined in depth.

To summarise, this subsection shows that the official social media accounts ignored critical voices against Expo while continuing to post their planned content, or “storytelling” as defined by the Expo 2015 Social Media Team (2014b, 1). However, division of the volume of the tweets into the three sender groups has shown that this attempt was only partly successful. The participation of ‘peripheral’ participants – mentioned in 2.3.3 – could have provided more legitimacy to the Social Media Team’s efforts to promote the event. By contrast, we will see in the following sections that the Social Media Team’s strategic choice to constantly share promotional content resulted in apathy from ‘peripheral’ voices, indicated by the predominance of retweets from the least active users in figure 52. In particular, direct tweets from least active users decreased after the opening ceremony, when the critical voices started to lose their initial energy. By taking into account the official Expo Twitter profile, the next section will explore why the official communication did not stimulate users' interaction but rather forms of passive engagement.

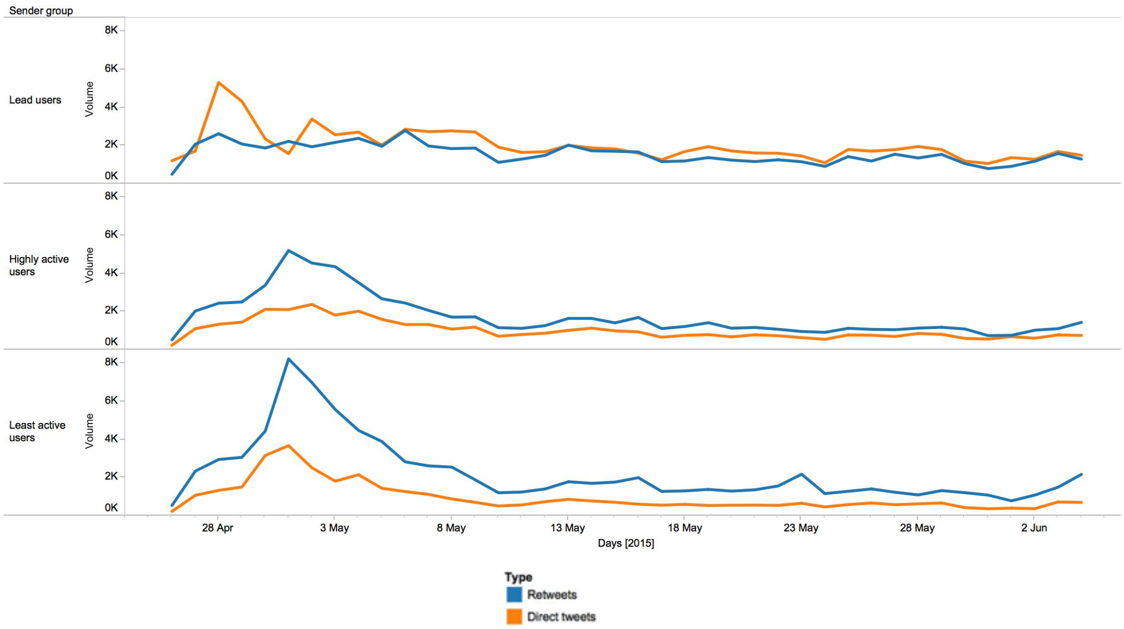

Figure 52 – Volume of tweets and retweets by sender group over time

6.5 @Expo2015Milano: the role of one-to-many communication on social media

While the previous section has described the context of organisational listening, this section focuses on Expo's Twitter communication approach. It will identify the stakeholders perceived as relevant for the success of Expo online communication and critique the Expo's communication approach in relation to the model suggested in 2.3.5.

The central hub of the official communication on Twitter was the account, @Expo2015Milano. This is an example of a thematic account that fulfils a temporary purpose in relation to a specific international event, as described in my typology of Twitter accounts in table 2. While practical information about the visiting experience was channelled to another Twitter account, @AskExpo, the main account @Expo2015Milano was considered the heart of official communication. The account was dedicated to what the Social Media Team called "storytelling" (Expo 2015 Social Media Team 2014b, 1), composed of "narrations" and in-depth stories about the main themes. The account saw an increase of 200k followers from May to October 2015.[94] However, these numbers do not say much about the kinds of engagement

[94] On 26 April 2015 the followers numbered 476,338 and had increased to 685,286 by 31 October 2015.

that the official “storytelling” promoted, nor does it point out the actors the official Expo account was engaging with.

A sample of tweets posted by @Expo2015Milano from 9 to 30 October 2015 was collected to answer these questions. The dataset is composed of 2,372 tweets, with an average of 113 tweets posted per day, the large majority of which were direct tweets. The tweets posted by @Expo2015Milano received an average of 6.75 favourites. While it is difficult to establish whether the average number of favourites is satisfactory, I have already pointed out in chapter 2 that users’ responses to content through the ‘favourite’ button on Twitter is limited in terms of conversational potential. A closer look at the content posted by @Expo2015Milano and users’ reactions can clarify the type of engagement received.

The table in appendix 7 shows @Expo2015Milano’s most liked content. These tweets are not calls to action but are rather part of the unidirectional storytelling activities described in the Social Media Team’s strategy. In order to demonstrate what is intended here as “storytelling” it is worth mentioning two tweets from the list in appendix 7. The most-liked tweet was the Tree of Life (Italian Pavilion’s icon at Expo 2015) coloured blue on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the United Nations (figure 53, left). Another example is a tweet where the official account congratulates all the participating countries during the best pavilion awards (figure 53, right). None of these tweets seek active participation on the part of the followers through asking questions or soliciting opinions. Indeed, in both examples only 3 and 4 replies are recorded, a meaningful indication that the @Expo2015Milano was not able to generate discussion because it was rather focused on message outreach.

Figure 53 – @Expo2015Milano: two examples of most favourited content (9–30 October 2015)

A similar point can be made regarding the actors that @Expo2015Milano engaged with. The bar chart in figure 54 shows the most mentioned accounts, which are all official accounts of pavilions or sponsors of Expo 2015. Many mentions were directed to the official account of the Milan Charter, the accounts of the Italian Minister and Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policy (@maumartina and @MipaafSocial), and the Italian and the U.K. pavilion. When @Expo2015Milano mentioned accounts not specifically created for Expo 2015 (such as that of the U.S. Secretary of State, @JohnKerry) it was only to report the main points of his remarks during his visit to Expo on 17 October 2015.

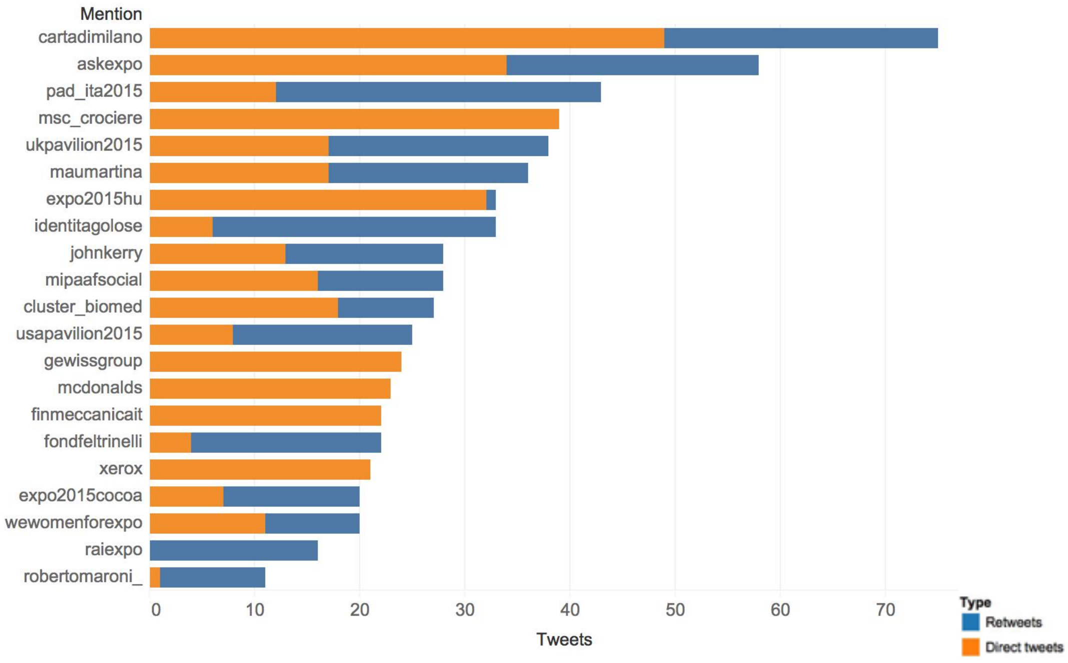

Figure 54 – @Expo2015Milano: mentions

Therefore, it can be argued that the activities of @Expo2015Milano were limited to content diffusion, mentioning or retweeting only those accounts that were part of the official communication of Expo 2015. @Expo2015Milano was the most followed account managed by the Expo 2015 Social Media Team, but the audience was conceived as a content consumer only, which was the main limitation demonstrated by the passive engagement received by the account, according to the listening model proposed in 2.3.5.

Moreover, @Expo2015Milano did not produce any broad discussion of the main theme of Expo, which was the principal long-term goal for the Italian public diplomacy aspect of the event, as indicated in the previous section. The tweets posted by the main official account about the theme were mainly invitations to sign the Milan Charter or segments of speeches given by personalities at Expo, such as the U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, which did not lead to any real engagement with third-party actors or ordinary users.

The official account did not reply to anyone in a dialogic fashion, attesting to the Expo 2015 communication approach as an example of what has been categorised as *listening in* on the spectrum of listening. As I discussed in chapter 2, listening activities on social media ranges from the ideal type of listening, *apophatic*, to unethical listening activities, *surreptitious*. In between these two extremes, there are three approaches for social media listening in public diplomacy: *active, tactical,* listening *in.* The latter is characterised by unidirectional engagement, while listening is undertaken through passive information-gathering activities.

This was coherent with the digital strategy of Expo 2015. Indeed, according to the *Report on Social Media Activities: October 2015* (Expo 2015 Social Media Team 2015b, 2-4), the communication was to emphasise "storytelling activities", defined as a "weave" that would integrate the messages of Expo 2015 with those of the "stakeholders".

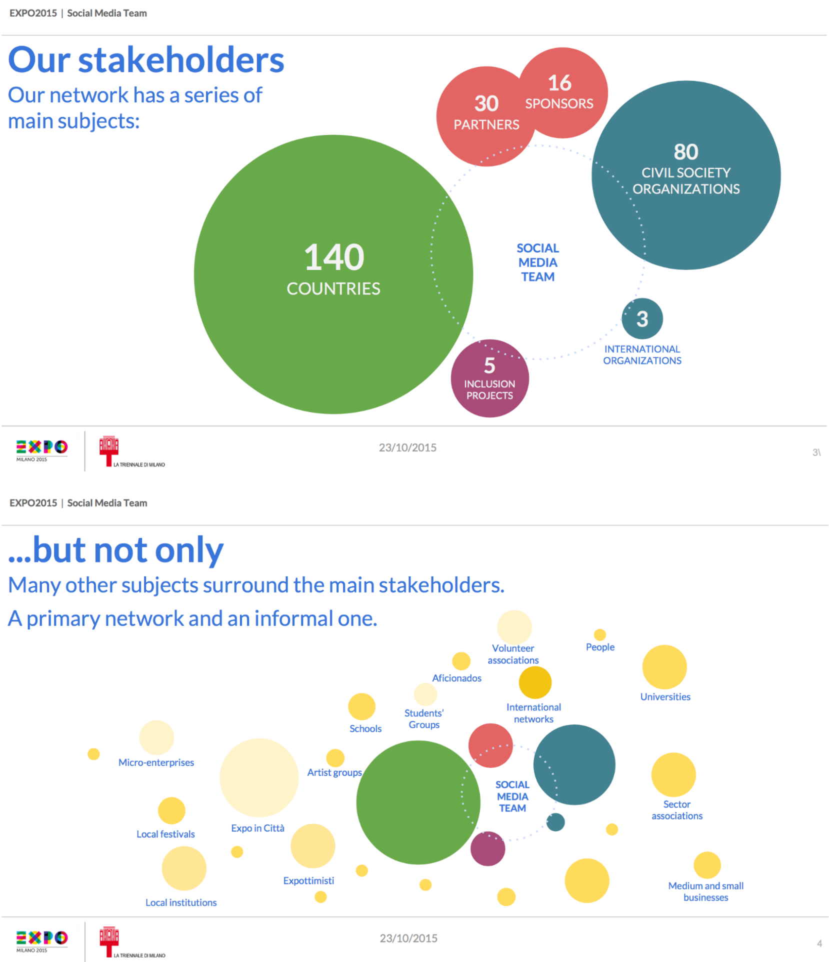

Figure 55 – Expo 2015: stakeholders (Expo 2015 Social Media Team 2015b, 3-4)

The two slides in figure 55 describe the "main" and "informal" groups of stakeholders according to their relevance for the Expo Social Media Team. The international actors on the list are limited to the pavilions of the participating countries and some groups revolving around the event, which mainly reflects the most-mentioned accounts in figure 54. The choice of actors to engage with is a tactical decision. However, it has been argued that forms of *listening in*, focused on message reach and impact, do not create dialogue and meaningful social media listening that can lead to forms of collaboration, indicated as pivotal by the literature on public diplomacy.

Italy could have used this opportunity to expand the network of international stakeholders under the umbrella of its foreign policy goals. Instead, the Social Media Team – instituted as a temporary communication organisation – focused on short-term communication activities (storytelling and event promotion) and engaged with stakeholders already part of the network (Italian businesses or sponsors, interest groups and country pavilions) rather than working on expanding its network. As a low-political event, Expo could have represented a unique opportunity for international dialogue by creating space for meaningful listening, involving audiences in the discussion of important issues part of the Expo 2015 theme. The marketing strategy, characterised by a listening *in* approach and unidirectional messaging, resulted in the silencing not only of critical voices, but also of those citizens who were willing to contribute to the discussion around the theme.

In this regard, Expo 2015 was a missed opportunity that suffered from the lack of a coherent, long-term planning framework in the context of Italian public diplomacy examined in chapter 4. This lack rendered it difficult to frame the communication about Expo within broader foreign policy priorities. Also, the scarce presence of 'pure' diplomatic actors, such as the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the relegation of promotional activities to the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policy and the Expo 2015 organisation – as will be explored in the following section – might indicate that the Italian government did not perceive the potential of Expo as a public diplomacy event that could open up the possibility to foster long-term relations on important issues such as food policy.

This also reflects the general lack of an institutional "architecture of listening" (Macnamara 2016) for Italian public diplomacy that emerged in chapter 4, also suggested by Expo's organisational culture focused on the organisational voice. Engagement with new actors and citizens could have provided more legitimacy to the overall social media communication effort, both at home and abroad.

6.6 Promoting countries and their assets[95]

6.6.1 The Italian foreign policy goal: Food policy and the Milan Charter

Within the Expo marketing strategy, the Milan Charter represented a pure public diplomacy initiative which, although led by the Italian Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policy in collaboration with the Municipality of Milan, had also involved the participation of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the United Nations.[96]

Figure 56 – Screenshot of carta.milano.it/en

According to Maurizio Martina (2015a, para. 5), the Italian Minister of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policy, the Charter was proposed "as a real instrument of global citizenship" rather than "an intergovernmental document for insiders". Anyone could sign the document by visiting the Italian Pavilion or online at carta.milano.it (figures 56 and 57). The website also allowed online users to share the document on social media, although the data show that very few people[97] actually shared it on Twitter. Nevertheless, the Milan Charter was signed by 1.5 million people by the closure of the Expo site, according to Martina (2015b), although the proportion of people who signed online or physically at the Italian Pavilion is unknown.

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[95] This section of the case study has been submitted to the ICA (International Communication Association) Conference 2018 in Prague. The peer-reviewed paper is titled "Listening in Public Diplomacy: the case of Expo 2015".

[96] A list of the organisations that collaborated in this initiative can be accessed here: http://carta.milano.it/contributors/

[97] In the first subset, less than 50 tweets were tagged with #cartadimilano; 36 direct tweets contained the URL of the Italian version of the website, and 32 for the English version.

Figure 57 – Milan Charter, Expo 2015, Italian Pavilion (author's photograph)

In strategic terms, the goal should had been to promote the Charter internationally and get as many signatures as possible, especially online and on social media, where a larger and international audience could be reached, and promote an international debate stimulated by the Italian commitment to food policies highlighted in the Charter. The fact that the Charter was translated into 19 different languages indicates that the aim was for it to be signed by non-Italians as well as Italians. However, looking at online indicators and the Twitter data, it can be argued that this goal was not accomplished.

By putting an enquiry through Google Trends – as already done in chapter 5 – and comparing the volume of Google searches for the terms 'carta di milano' (Italian), 'milan charter' (English) and 'carta de milán' (Spanish), it can be seen that the largest volume of searches was in Italian, with a very low volume in the case of English, and close to zero searches for the Spanish term (figure 58).

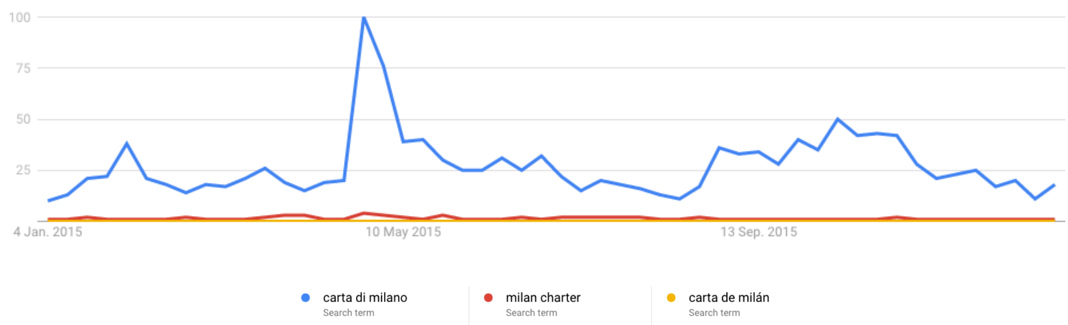

Figure 58 – Google Trends: volume of Google searches for 'carta di milano', 'milan charter' and 'carta de milán'

Going back to the Twitter subset, I previously discussed that the hashtag #cartadimilano tagged the conversation about the Charter. This conversation reflects the trend already explored in the case of the domestic political debate on Twitter: a predominance of high active users and unidirectional broadcasting activity by official accounts. Other hashtags had been sporadically used to refer to the Charter, but since they amount to a very small number of tweets, they have not been considered for this part of the analysis.

The peak in the graph in figure 58 corresponds with the peak in figure 59, which represents the volume of tweets tagged #cartadimilano, coloured by sender group. Precisely, the peak refers to 28 April when the Milan Charter was officially presented at the University of Milan.

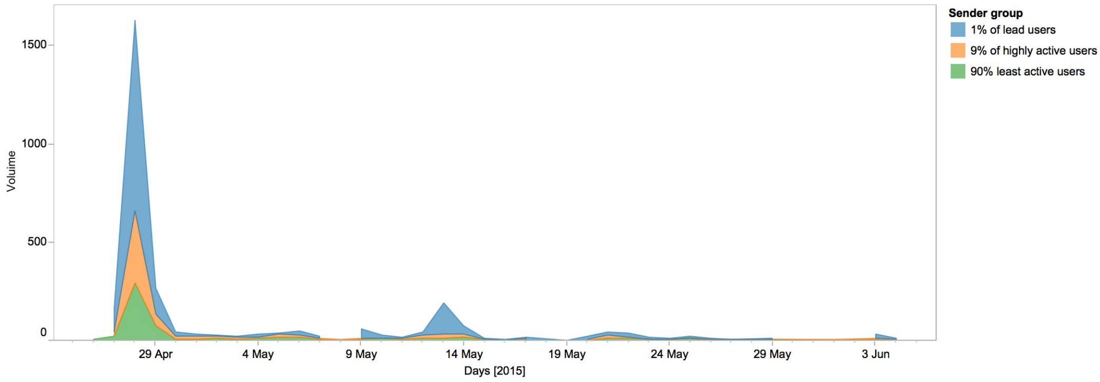

Figure 59 – Volume of tweets tagged #cartadimilano

The communication activities on Twitter promoting the Milan Charter showed a similar weakness in terms of user engagement, similar to that already seen in the case of @Expo2015Milano. The majority of the tweets were circumscribed to the day of the presentation of the Charter, producing an initial peak that then struggled to be maintained in the following days during Expo.

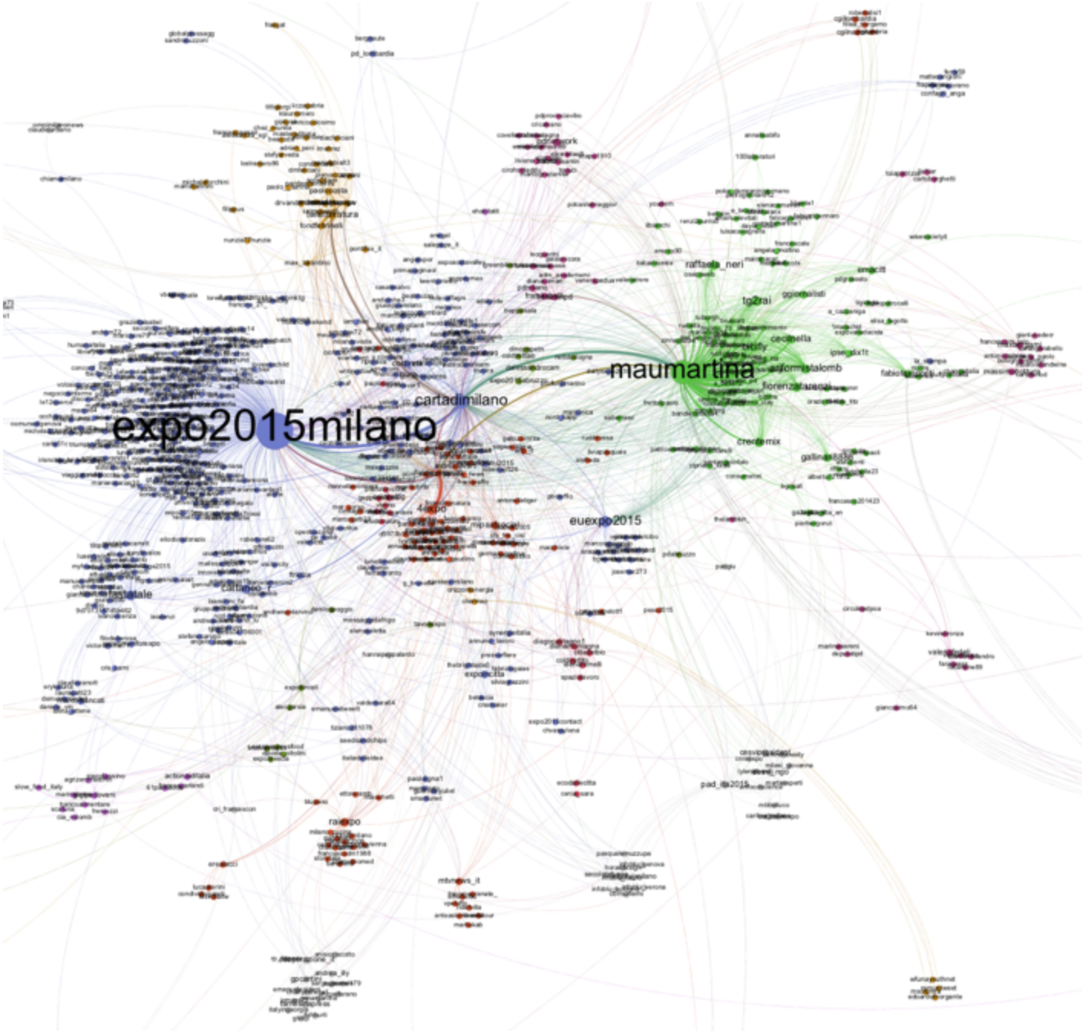

Figure 60 - @mention network of tweets tagged with #cartadimilano

Node size = indegree; node colour = modularity class.

The visualisation in figure 60 shows the network created by the tweets tagged #cartadimilano, where the node size represents the number of @mentions received by a node. This network illustrates the role played by another example of thematic account (as defined in table 2) which is @cartadimilano, the official account created for the promotion of the Milan Charter. In this graph, the node size of @cartadimilano is small, which indicates the low number of mentions received by the account. Also, these mentions largely come from @expo2015milano and the Italian Minister of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policy, @maumartina.

It is not surprising to see in the graph that the most-mentioned account was the official @expo2015milano. It is also worth noting – from a public diplomacy perspective – the green cluster around the account for Minister Martina, @maumartina, that is connected to the official account of the European Union at Expo, @EUExpo2015. This connection between the two accounts was mainly related to the tweet in figure 61, where the EU Pavilion expressed excitement at the diplomatic potential of the Milan Charter.

Figure 61 – @EUExpo2015, 28 April 2015

The network visualisation also indicates that the conversation around the Milan Charter was authentic, since the different clusters were not artificially connected by aggressive marketing strategies, as in the case of #expottimisti. However, the initial participation during the presentation of the Charter did not lead to an ongoing conversation about the Milan Charter during Expo (figure 59). Moreover, the absence of the Italian MAECI in the conversation indicates that the Italian diplomacy apparatus was not strongly committed to the promotion of the Milan Charter.

The Milan Charter promotional campaign would have benefited from the involvement of non-governmental actors, especially from those NGOs that participated in Expo as civil society organisations such as WWF, Oxfam, Caritas (a Catholic Italian NGO) and Save the Children. Instead, the Charter was only promoted by the contributors and Expo official accounts and did not lead to a process of involvement on the part of third-party actors that would provide legitimacy in the effort to raise awareness on important global issues. The lack of active NGO participation in promoting the Milan Charter was made explicit in a letter sent by Actionaid, Oxfam Italia, and Slow Food Italia (2015) to the Italian PM Renzi, where the NGOs asked for more concrete action on the issues addressed in the Charter. The NGOs summarised an action plan in a few points: protection of traditional seeds and promotion of small-scale agriculture, end of financial speculation on food, zero tolerance for the hoarding of agricultural products and fighting climate change.

Another weakness in the promotion of the Charter was the exclusive use of the Italian language in the online communication, making it difficult for foreign audiences to engage. The small amount of content shared in English carried imprecise translations of the Italian version, as in the example in figure 62. This is part of the general problem of Italian public diplomacy and its predominant use of the national language, a choice that limits the opportunities for engagement with foreign audiences, as discussed already in more detail in chapter 4.

Figure 62 – @CartadiMilano, 28 April 2015.

The language barrier was one of the limitations of the overall Expo strategy that was debated before Expo 2015 started. One of the most popular Italian newspapers, *Il Corriere della Sera*, published an article in February 2015 reporting several "blunders" in the English and French versions of official website (Valtolina 2015). The translation inaccuracies on the official website were resolved before the opening, but such inaccuracies were still present during Expo in the @CartadiMilano Twitter account. This experience indicates that strong English-language skills are an important requirement for a social media team that aims to engage with international publics, as also discussed in chapter 2 and 4. The lack of such skills can create communication breakdowns and, even worse, compromise the reputation and reliability of a public diplomacy actor.

The analysis detailed in this chapter shows that the social media activities around the Charter did not produce dialogic engagement for the following reasons. Firstly, the key account emitted sporadic unidirectional messages and only retweeted content from official contributors' accounts; thus the conversation did not involve 'ordinary' users. Secondly, third-party actors, such as NGOs, expressed their concerns about the Italian government's lack of political commitment. This concern was confirmed by the lack of active participation on the part of Italian diplomatic actors in particular MAECI. Thirdly, the language barriers were not overcome and resulted in a lack of participation from international Twitter users. Finally, the opportunity to integrate and generate further engagement from the Italian Pavilion's visitors was missed because of the lack of active on-site promotion to take action online.

To sum up, the Milan Charter was a smart attempt on the part of the Italian Government to make the discussion around Expo 2015 theme more meaningful and enduring by promoting a genuine public diplomacy effort that would involve both governments and citizens around the world. Promoting the policies in the Charter could have provided precisely the long-term goal that Expo 2015 lacked. However, while it was meant to be the political legacy of Expo, the Charter did not foster online conversation, nor was it promoted effectively. The Italian diplomatic commitment to this important document was weak and the message was not even acknowledged by international audiences.

6.6.2 Twiplomacy at Expo 2015

As already noted, Expo is a showcase for nations where they attempt to articulate their soft power assets to the world and in particular to the domestic audience of the hosting country.

This activity takes place through the national pavilions, where each country displays its best assets in relation to main theme of the exposition. Expo 2015 was the first time that the pavilions were present on social media and particularly on Twitter.

Figure 63 compares the number of followers of the pavilions' Twitter accounts in May and October 2015. It indicates to what extent the pavilions increased their followers during the six months of Expo. The difficulty of gaining users' attention – a struggle that has been registered numerous times in the previous chapters – was reflected in the average performance of the national pavilions on Twitter in terms of followers. With the exception of some good performances for the most-followed accounts – especially the Italian Pavilion (@Pad_Ita2015) and the European Union Pavilion (@EUExpo2015) – it seems that country pavilions experienced a common difficulty in increasing their number of followers. Even the pavilions who saw their followers double or triple during the event (May-October 2015) only saw an increase of just a few thousand. Given that there were 21.5 million visitors to Expo 2015 (Ansa 2015), it is difficult to argue that the number of followers could be considered satisfactory given the number of official Twitter accounts and the resources invested into managing them.

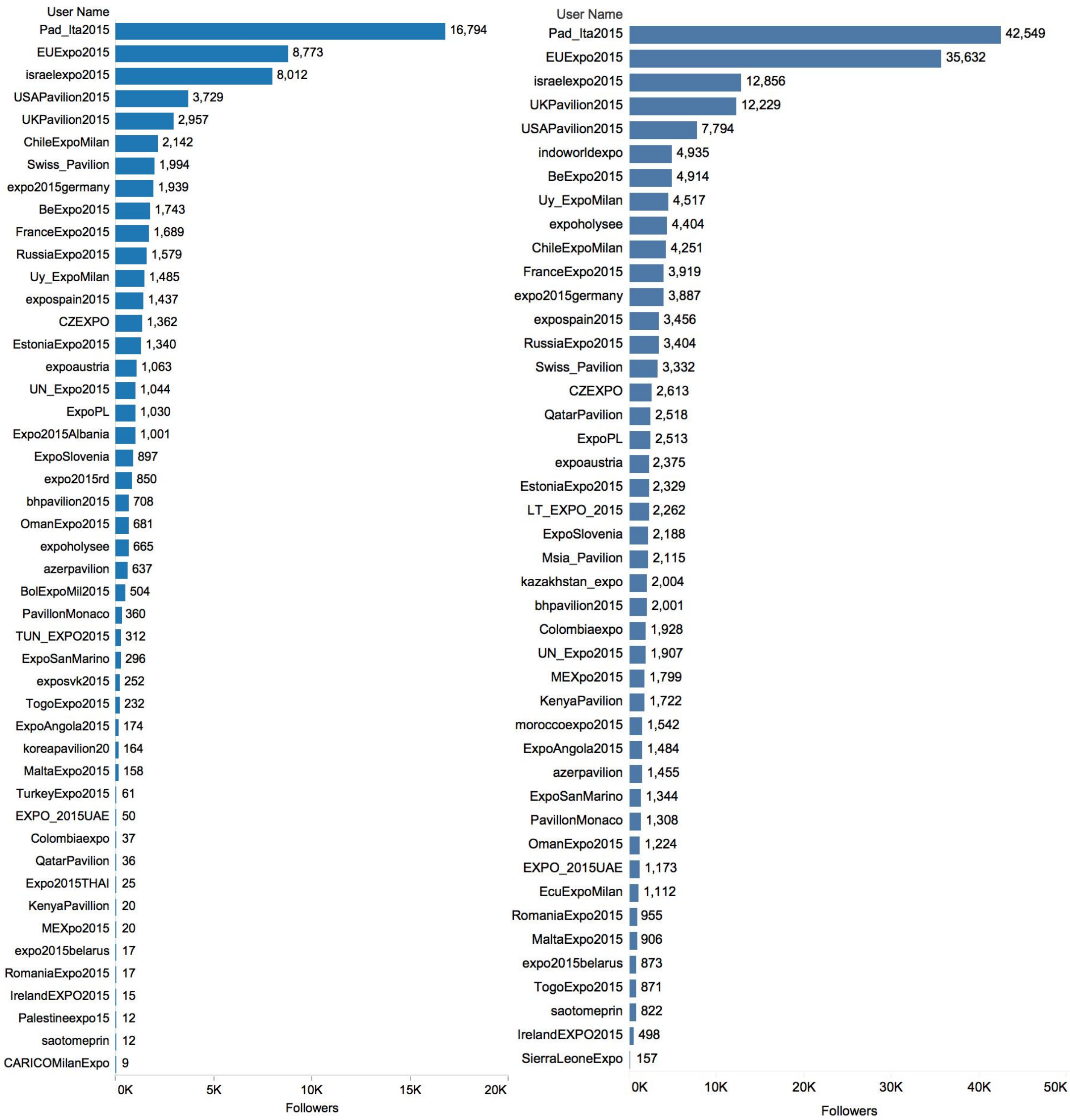

Figure 63 – Pavilions Twitter Accounts: comparison of follower counts in May (left) and October (right) 2015[98]

The analysis also shows that there is not necessarily a correlation between the volume of tweets and number of followers. This can be seen in figure 64. For example, the second, third and fourth most active accounts in terms of volume of tweets posted – the Qatari, Colombian and Swiss pavilions – had low numbers of followers. This indicates that the mere dissemination of messages on Twitter does not necessarily imply gaining users' attention. In other words, a large volume of disseminated content does not necessarily correspond with high engagement.

[98] The follower counts include only those accounts that tweeted in the months of May and October, since these are the periods selected for this analysis. Therefore, accounts that were not active in May or in October do not appear in the bar chart in figure 64.

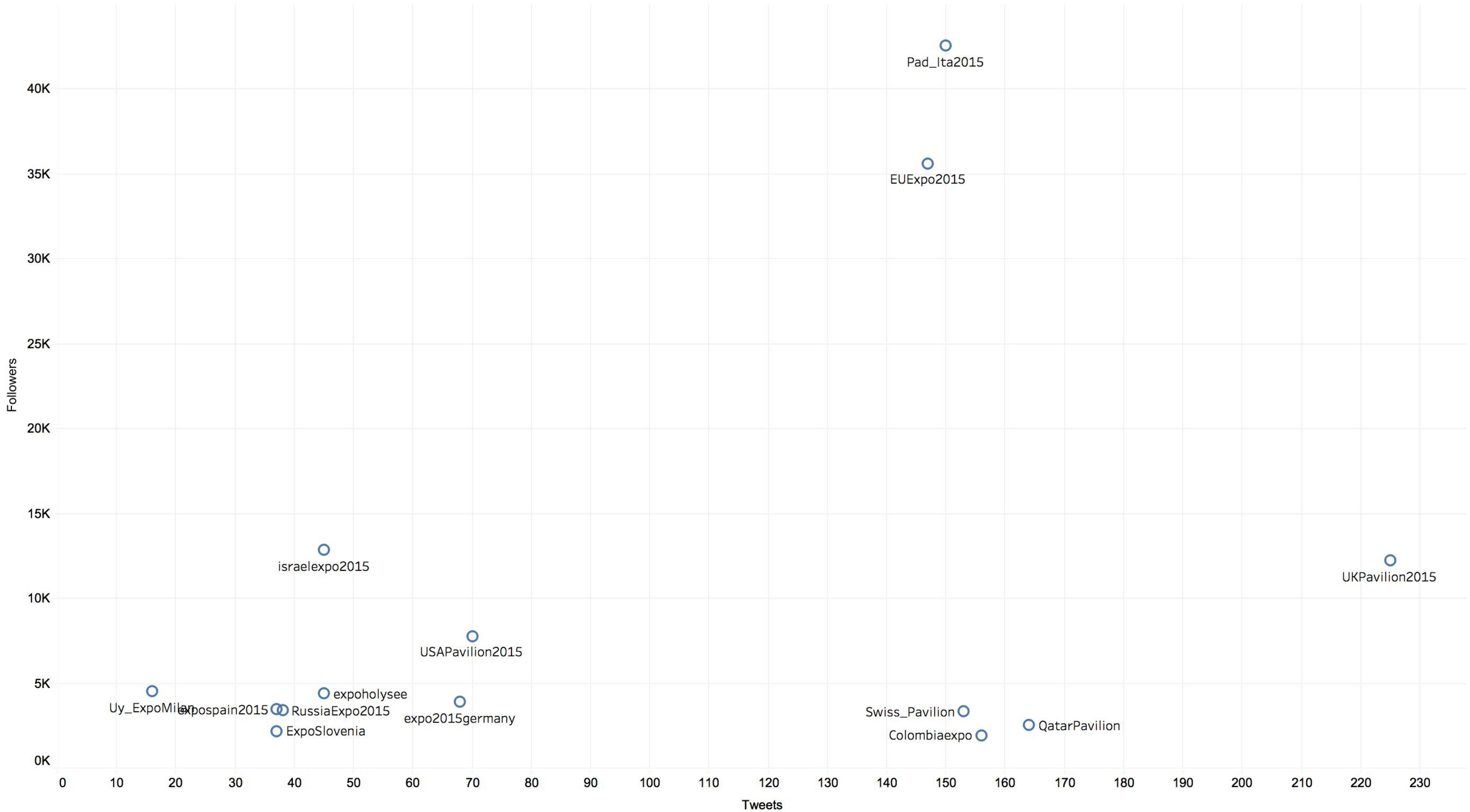

Figure 64 – Pavilion Twitter accounts: followers/tweets (8–31 October 2015).

I have already pointed out that Expo is a place where divisions among states are attenuated since the event does not involve official negotiations and relations between countries are not interest-driven. This is confirmed by the visualisation in figure 65, where mentions among pavilions and the so-called ‘clusters’ – thematic pavilions that bring together two or more nations – are visualised as a network graph. Here node size represents the number of mentions received (indegree), node darkness reflects number of followers, and edge darkness reflects number of favourites a tweet received.

Very few pavilion accounts were not connected. By contrast, central nodes were highly connected, and some of them – such as the Italian, EU, Russian, Angolan, American, French and Swiss pavilions – were very popular in the network according to mentions received (direction of the edges).

The graph also shows the high degree of connectivity of the Russian Pavilion that engaged with several others. Many of tweets described the visits of the Russian mascot Mishka to the other national pavilions, for example to the Swiss Pavilion in figure 66. The Russian Pavilion seemed to be the star of communication among pavilions. Ricorda (2015) – digital strategist of the European Union Pavilion – blogged about the highly responsive Russian Pavilion communication: “You tag them – they react. You mention them – they react. You think of them – they think you back” (para. 5). The dynamic nature of the Russian online public diplomacy activities, which has also been detected during the G20 2014 in the previous case study, reflects the broader Kremlin’s growing efforts “to improve its international image and to strengthen Russia’s global prestige” (Sergunin and Karabeshkin 2015, 359).

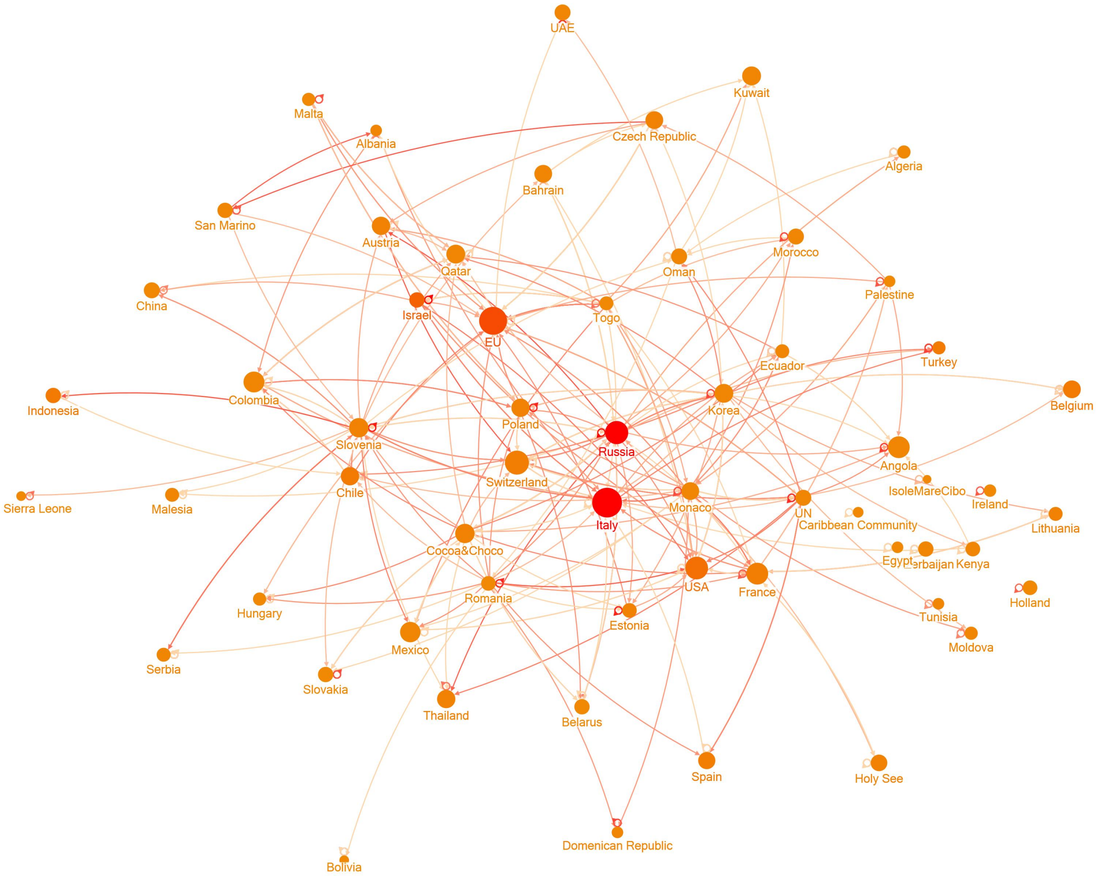

Figure 65 – Pavilions and 'clusters' circle network: node size = indegree, node darkness = followers, edge darkness = favourites count.[99]

Figure 66 – @RussiaExpo2015, 19 October 2015.

The fact that the pavilions were highly connected indicates the low-political environment of Expo, in contrast with more fragmented relations among governments explored in the previous

[99] Some of the pavilions' accounts could not been included in the analysis because they were deleted within a few days of the closure of the event.

case study on the G20. However, while tweets among leaders during the G20 attracted high attention from users and journalists, the discussion among pavilions received very low signs of engagement from users. Indeed, the highest number of favourites received by the tweets captured and visualised in figure 65 was 24, while replies were in low numbers. This is a sign that the discussion among Expo 2015 pavilions seemed to be engaging, but only among insiders. The performative element of international collaboration among countries did not really attract user interest, as in the case of the G20. Even if communication among the national pavilions on Twitter was large in terms of volume, this chapter has shown the difficulties of getting people's attention in a Twitter conversation where organisational voices prevail over ordinary users' engagement. This can also be justified by the fact that leaders build upon their considerable media exposure that pavilions did not have during Expo, in particular not as long as international leaders.

Despite only a small percentage of tweets being from ordinary users, the next section will zoom in on the dataset and capture people's experience of Expo, in particular in relation to the Italian Pavilion.

6.6.3 Listening to 'ordinary' users: The case of the Italian Pavilion

A thick level of analysis can provide a snapshot of visitors' physical experiences of visiting the Expo site. Visiting a pavilion at Expo provides meaningful insights into the assets that a nation perceives as persuasive for display and communicating to visitors. At the same time nations compete with each other to attract visitor attention. Even though Expo is not a contest, visitors evaluate and critique what they see, creating an imaginary ranking while they are visiting the site or discussing the event with friends. This is why academics surveyed visitors at previous editions of Expo – for example Wang (2013a, 10) – and captured visitors' perspectives.

For the first time in the history of Expo, social media provided a novel method for assessing visitors' opinions about the pavilions. As demonstrated, official accounts and Twitter bots dominated the discussion. This makes it more difficult to detect actual visitor experiences shared on Twitter. However, by applying the group division employed earlier in the chapter, it is possible to conduct a qualitative level of analysis of those visitors who shared their experience on Twitter.

The most followed pavilion on Twitter was the Italian one, which was predictable since Italy was the host country and its account was set up in September 2013, collecting 16,794 followers before the Expo even started. This subsection will focus on visitors' experiences of the Italian pavilion.

To do so, it is necessary to narrow down the analysis and zoom in to the dataset. Therefore, the second subset (8–31 October 2015) was filtered by selecting only the tweets tagged with relevant hashtags[100] or mentioning the official account @Pad_Ita2015. Then, it was filtered again keeping only the direct tweets (retweets excluded) sent by the less active group of users. This resulted in a small subset of 138 relevant tweets revealing visitor experiences in relation to the Italian Pavilion, with the promotional and unrelated content filtered out.

The resulting tweets were manually coded – according to content and tone – then cleaned and visualised in figure 67. The bar chart shows that more than a third of the users (34%) who tweeted about the Italian Pavilion enjoyed the architecture of the building, the majority including photos of the exterior with the Tree of Life adjacent to the pavilion (figure 68, left). Another group of tweets (21.64%), mostly including visual content, expressed enthusiasm for Expo or for the Italian Pavilion. These tweets were predominantly posted by Italian visitors and expressed pride in the fact that Italy was able to display such a beautiful building.

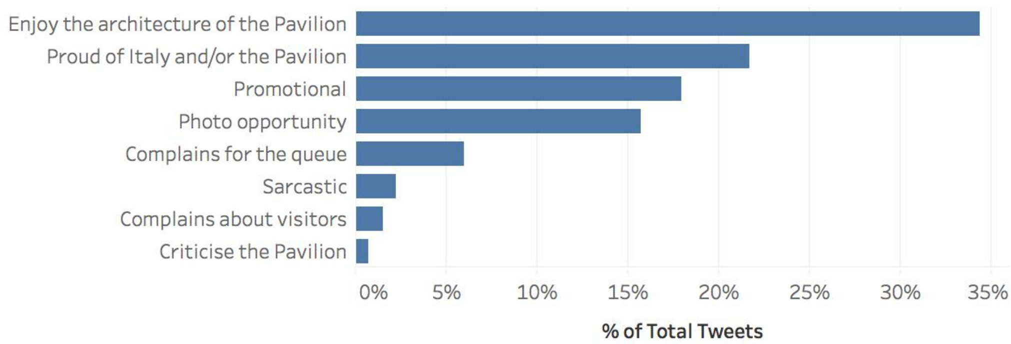

Figure 67 – Volume of tweets about the Italian Pavilion

[100] The hashtags included in the analysis are #italianpavillion, #italianpavillon, #italiapavilion, #italiapavillon, #italypavilion, #italianpavilion, #italypavillion, #italypavillon, #padiglioneitalia, #padita.

Figure 68 – Instagram , @rafplanet, 12 October 2015 (left). Instagram, @ornellaaa___, 9 October 2015 (right)

Many of the tweets contain Instagram posts, since the inside of the Italian Pavilion was a great place to take photos. Particularly engaging was the mirrors room, where photos of Italian landscapes and monuments were projected and then reflected in the mirrors, creating a blurring effect and a perfect photo opportunity (figure 68 on the right).

The central finding of this analysis is that very few tweets criticise the pavilion, except for a few complaints regarding the long queue that only occasionally were ascribed to a lack of proper organisation. Visitor experience was thus enjoyable, while some felt proud of the way Italy was represented in the pavilion.

However, it seems that the main message of the pavilion did not find its way into visitors' hearts. Indeed, by looking at the official website padiglioneitaliaexpo2015.com and the official app made available to enhance visitor experience, it can be seen that Italy aimed to focus its message on the future rather than on its "glorious past" (figure 68, left). The pavilion wanted to be interpreted as a "Vivaio" (nursery), divided into four sections: the strength of workmanship, beauty, limits, and the future.

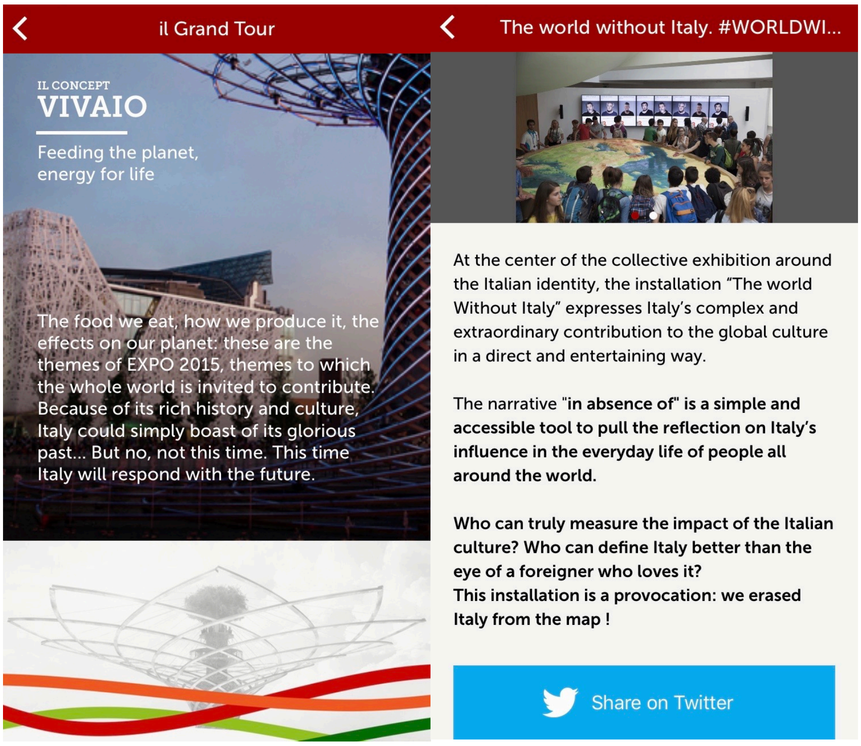

Figure 69 – Screenshot of the Grand Tour app, Padiglione Italia.

The pavilion's central installation was a provocative work of art entitled *The World without Italy* (figure 69). The negative framing of the artwork, as opposed to well-known nation-branding slogans examined in chapter 4 such as "Made in Italy", aimed to stimulate and provoke visitors' reflection on "Italy's influence in the everyday life of people all around the world" (figure 69, right). In the description of the pavilion in the mobile phone application, *The world without Italy* section was the only one displaying a share button which would autofill a tweet containing the hashtag #worldwithoutitaly (figure 69, right). Nevertheless, this artistic provocation did not impress, since Twitter users preferred to share photos of the more engaging mirrors room, where the space provided the opportunity to visitors to take snapshots of themselves reflected in the mirrors. Perhaps, the mirrors room enabled personalisation – something that accorded with the norms of social media.

Figure 70 – The world without Italy, Italian Pavilion, Expo 2015 (author's photograph)

Hocking and Melissen (2015, 12) have called for "the integration of 'offline' and 'online' environments" in diplomacy. Expo could have been an opportunity in this sense. However, the physical setting of the pavilion did not encourage users to share their experience on social media nor to use the official app.[101] This indicates a lack of integration between the physical and digital spheres which could have led to a much more effective use of social media and broader online visitor participation. For example, Fisher (2010, 52) has highlighted the potential of the integration of physical and digital networks as a way of "evaluating the result of physical world events such as conferences and exchanges". However, this research shows that online participation needs to be stimulated both digitally and physically and create opportunities for listening to visitors' experiences. In contrast with closed-door negotiations, such as at the G20, where the performative use of social media is central, this case study has indicated that future public diplomacy events that involve the physical participation of citizens should work to consciously integrate the physical and digital experiences of participants.

Unfortunately, the general inclination of the official accounts of Expo 2015 to broadcast messages in a unidirectional way, along with the lack of integration between the digital and physical spheres mentioned above, did not encourage the digital expression of visitors' experiences. As result, the majority of tweets did not engage with the message of the pavilion but rather with aspects unrelated with the national branding message and Expo's theme on food policy. The Italian Pavilion provided a pleasant experience but failed to communicate a clear message to visitors which could be connected to the Milan Charter as part of the Italian diplomatic effort. The Italian Pavilion and the Milan Charter, instead, had separate websites

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[101] This is confirmed by the author's visit to Expo.

and social media accounts. The connection between the pavilion and the Charter was hardly recognisable online, and thus for the visitors posting about the Italian Pavilion. This contributed to a lack of significant discussion about the central theme of this Expo. A strategy that combined the offline dimension – the exhibition and the architecture of the building – and online user contributions – in relation to the pavilion's message, the theme of Expo and particularly the Milan Charter – would have produced more engagement. More importantly, from a public diplomacy point of view, the engagement would have been more focused on the Italian nation-branding message and Italy's contribution to global food policy.

The analysis of the visitor experience on Twitter also leads to another broad consideration. The pavilion engaged with Italians in particular, reinforcing a feeling of pride in the country's success by displaying its best assets. This emotional response was especially clear in comments about the design of the façade of the Italian Pavilion and the Tree of Life which reflected a positive experience among visitors, thereby overcoming the initial criticisms. This aspect confirms the prevalent domestic dimension of World Expo that worked to bind governmental nation-branding investments with the domestic public in order to legitimise large public expenditures. Even though the political message (relating to food policy) was not discussed on social media, Expo 2015 was generally perceived as a success for Italy (figure 71).

Figure 71 – "Italy is a great country and we all need to believe in this". Twitter, @crisgeste64, 31 October 2015.

Overall, people posting their experiences on Twitter enjoyed visiting the Italian Pavilion and Expo. Even if Italian visitors felt proud of the success of the event, which was one of the goals of the overall communication strategy, the main theme, and in particular the Italian international commitment in terms of food policy, was largely ignored. This would have been a unique opportunity for Italian diplomacy to lead the global discussion on food policy. However, as a reaction to initial criticisms of Expo, the governmental funds for Expo were directed to short-term, *tactical* aspects related to the success of the event itself rather than fostering Italian diplomatic leadership on global issues such the ones addressed in the Milan Charter.

6.7 Conclusion

As with the previous case study about the G20 2014 in Brisbane, this chapter conducted a twofold analysis. It has assessed the communication strategies of different actors that were part of the communication efforts to transmit a positive image of Italy during Expo and promote the Italian commitment on food policy. It also defined novel ways to study and analyse the success of large international events such as Expos on social media. This conclusion will summarise the findings – in relation to this assessment of social media activities around Expo 2015 – and the methodological challenges and possibilities that have emerged in the analysis.

Expo 2015 was successful in terms of visitor experience. However, several limitations in the social media strategy have emerged. These limitations relate to three main points. Firstly, the official account engaged only with official "stakeholders", limiting the possibility of enlarging its network of stakeholders (for example by engaging with NGOs on food policy). Secondly, the tweets were not seeking dialogic engagement and very few signs of interaction with 'ordinary users' were recorded. The strategy was focused on "storytelling" which did not show any signs of active listening, for example by asking users questions about their experiences at Expo. This is directly connected with the third important limitation: the Social Media Team only evaluated the impact of its own digital communication. Expo 2015 could have provided a unique opportunity for listening to visitors (that is, ordinary citizens) if a conversation had been promoted on social media. Instead, the Social Media Team's analysis of its own strategies and activities was too focused on volume and message reach (e.g. figure 72).

The public diplomacy effort related to the Expo did not result in the advancement of Italian foreign policy goals because its communication efforts were limited to the short-term prospective (the success of the event itself); nor did it result in the creation of a communication space for meaningful listening and dialogic forms of engagement for the advancement and legitimisation of Italian foreign policy.

Large-scale events such as Expo inevitably generate large online discussions, especially when artificially boosted by official social media accounts. Expo 2015's communication strategy focused on the volume of tweets and followers and thus monitoring activities focused on superficial signs of listening, at a listening-*in* level, which were also compromised by the presence of large amounts of marketing content and automated tweets designed to exploit the attention the event received.

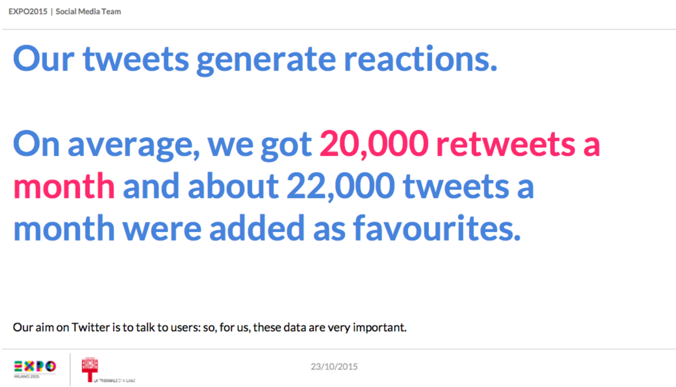

Figure 72 – Expo 2015: Twitter final report (32)

This last point is connected to the methodological dimension of this study. The technique of zooming in and out of the dataset has proven to be an effective way of listening to users' opinions even for a complex and large-scale event such Expo. This method goes beyond the mere counting of 'reactions': it requires a stronger effort than just 'talking to users' to nourish meaningful conversations. Effective listening activities on social media require a flexible strategy that is able to respond to the unpredictable unfolding of events and users' opinions, going beyond mere planned "storytelling". This can be achieved when listening is combined with dialogic forms of engagement by organisational accounts.

After the end of the event, the success of Expo's social media activities was discussed on mainstream news media. Some analysis – mostly coming from social media marketing firms – came to conclusions different to the ones reached in this research. They tracked topics and sentiment of the discussion, concluding that the social media communication was a success (Riotta 2015, 2015b). By contrast, the anonymous research group 'Gilda85' posted some Twitter analytics, reporting the massive presence of bots, the high volume of tweets from official accounts, and the geolocation of the tweets – the majority of which concentred in Milan.[102] This study was then reported by the Italian news media (e.g. Lanza 2015), which lamented Expo's "out-of-date" understanding of success based on volume.

These different conclusions confirm that the method employed for assessing social media activities shapes understandings of success and engagement in public diplomacy and in social media analysis in general. One-way forms of communication on social media can be satisfactorily assessed with purely quantitative methodologies focused on message dissemination volumes (thin description). Dialogue-seeking forms of communication, by contrast, call for a methodological approach that takes into consideration the full

102 https://www.facebook.com/Progetto.Gilda35/photos/pcb.900835509953764/900833493287299/?type=3

conversational potential of social media platforms that can lead to interactions and conversations (thin as well as thick description).

An evaluation of the success of the Expo social media strategy is therefore a methodological issue: assessing criteria is directly linked to the methods applied to the analysis of the data. Methodological approaches define the ‘type’ of engagement detected in public diplomacy listening activities. The contrast between my research findings and Expo’s reporting on their own analytics indicates how different definitions of engagement will translate into different methodologies of listening and, thus, into different conclusions about the success of one’s social media activity.

Moreover, the empirical evidence suggests that social media conversations need to be nurtured to create a space for meaningful listening. This means that public diplomacy organisations need to actively create and promote spaces for listening where interactions can take place. By contrast, unidirectional forms of communication such as those adopted by Expo 2015 produce passivity and a lack of real participation on the part of ‘ordinary users’, who, instead, were more active in the beginning of expo in relation to the conversation tagged #noexpo. When users took part in the Twitter discussion, they did not engage with themes proposed by the Expo Social Media Team, because the official message was seeking not dialogue but ‘reactions’. Nevertheless, users created spaces to express their opinions by refusing to engage with the official communication channels and by interpreting the exposition according to what they found engaging (for example the architecture of the Italian Pavilion).

Expo employed social media analytics software tools to infer that its investment in social media communication was successful. This highlights the importance of social media monitoring not only for the implementation of digital strategies but also for their justification and legitimisation in the eyes of the public. Social media monitoring can also be used to demonstrate the success of publicly funded activities and justify expenditure. This reveals even further the political and ethical importance of carefully considering and critiquing the ways in which social media listening is conducted, since it also justifies the effectiveness of public diplomacy strategies at a domestic level.

The partition of the dataset into three user groups has facilitated listening to ‘ordinary’ users, but it has also demonstrated their small contribution. More participatory discussion on social media would have made Expo’s communication efforts more effective from the point of view of public diplomacy.

Expo’s ‘low-politics’ environment could have been a particularly fruitful opportunity for the discussion of long-term policies and for international dialogue on the issues promoted by the Milan Charter. This was the first experience of strategic use of social media during an Expo.

Perhaps future events will learn from these findings and employ the full potential of digital communication by not only promoting the event, but also by creating spaces where dialogue about important foreign policy issues, such as global food policy, can take place. As I have indicated in the analysis of the Italian and Australian public diplomacy strategies in chapter 4, strict strategies usually mature into more flexible and risk-taking approaches over time. Expo 2015 represents the first experience of using social media during such international events. It provides a starting point for exploring how the quality of and the methods for public diplomacy listening can be advanced during 'low-politics' international events. Future editions of expo might adopt more flexible and dialogic approaches to social media communication, which in turn will facilitate online conversations, meaningful listening on social media and the academic study of expo through social media data.

The following concluding chapter summarises the findings from this and the previous chapters in response to the research questions. In addition, it proposes new enquires that can build upon this study to advance the analysis of public diplomacy listening and engagement on social media.

7 Conclusions

The starting point of this thesis was a recognition that the digital environment has complicated the definition and understanding of listening and engagement in public diplomacy. Publics increasingly demand of their governments evidence that they are being heard.

This study has offered three main contributions. First, I have argued theoretically and demonstrated empirically that *active* listening is a representational force: a public and active response to publics who are increasingly demanding not only to participate in foreign policy implementation, but also to be listened to. Listening has been largely considered in the literature on public diplomacy as a means for monitoring and adjusting strategies, as well as being an outcome in and of itself. This thesis has expanded upon these considerations, arguing further that listening nourishes a public diplomacy actor's authority and credibility. Second, my mixed methods approach helps to overcome several of the limitations of only performing either quantitative (thin, large scale but superficial) or qualitative (thick, deep but unsystematic) analysis of social media engagement in public diplomacy communication activities. The proposed method applies academic approaches from digital ethnography and sociology to the field of public diplomacy. Third, I have included non-governmental actors in my in-depth empirical analysis of public diplomacy activities during two international diplomatic events, with a particular focus on middle powers' social media listening practices. The inclusion of such a large array of actors participating in diplomacy-related conversations on social media has provided greater insights into the ways in which public diplomacy messages travel within networks, how they are mediated by NGOs and news media, and perceived by international publics. While social media certainly makes this inclusion possible, my analysis exemplifies how practices of listening now cut across and complicate boundaries between officialdom and publics, state and non-state actors, and domestic and international participants.

The academic literature on public diplomacy recognises the importance of listening, but the two case studies of the G20 and the Expo suggest that contemporary public diplomacy practice is predominantly shaped around engagement with influential actors, rather than through pluralistic forms of communication in which the general public's voices are reflected back in a process of dialogue. This is demonstrated both by the strategies adopted by public diplomacy actors in relation to social media and in the methods they use to evaluate the success of social media campaigns, where the focus is on audience reach rather than on evidence of dialogic engagement.

This research has demonstrated the necessity of going beyond social media metrics and combining 'thick' (focused and contextualised) and 'thin' (large-scale) analysis. In particular, I have argued that what is needed is a closer alignment of the broad goals of listening in public diplomacy strategy with social media practice.

In this thesis, I have deployed the idea of a spectrum of listening to distinguish different types of listening and engagement. Within this spectrum, *active* listening and the embedded concept of dialogic engagement represents the yardstick for assessing the use of social media in public diplomacy. This spectrum of listening correlates with *a range of methodological options* for the evaluation of the quality of listening and engagement in public diplomacy actors' social media use. I have demonstrated the importance of tracking the 'signs of listening' embedded in social media engagement on the part of both diplomatic and non-diplomatic actors. In this sense, the thesis has provided a definition of another underspecified term – engagement – in conjunction with the concept of the spectrum of listening. I have further suggested a mixed methods approach for the analysis and assessment social media listening. Such an approach helps to analyse levels of dialogic engagement within large Twitter discussions involving both diplomatic and non-diplomatic actors, and generates a wider understanding of public diplomacy communication activities on social media.

7.1 Addressing the research questions

My focus on listening in public diplomacy practices on social media has inspired the following research questions:

1. How are public diplomacy actors (re)articulating their strategies with the introduction of social media? How do public diplomacy actors listen to publics on social media?
2. What methods are most effective for analysing digitally mediated public diplomacy?
3. How can public diplomacy actors advance engagement practices (with their publics) via social media?

In relation to the *first research question* – how are public diplomacy actors (re)articulating their strategies with the introduction of social media? – chapter four explored the evolution of the Italian and Australian public diplomacy strategies. This filled a gap in the literature in regard to the two selected countries' overall public diplomacy and digital strategies, which had not been addressed by previous studies. The two countries represent two very different ways of interpreting and articulating public diplomacy. Australian public diplomacy is evolving from one-way forms of communication, such as international broadcasting and nation-branding, to student exchange initiatives that aim to create a new generation of Australians that can contribute to future regional collaborations. By contrast, Italian public diplomacy is constituted by a rigid but widespread network of Italian schools and Italian

Cultural Institutes abroad under the umbrella of promoting the Italian "Economic System". Another main feature of Italian public diplomacy is the inclusion of Italian diaspora communities in the promotion of the country abroad.

The Australian government has recently developed a digital public diplomacy strategy, while in the Italian case the use of social media is gradually emerging from practice than from strategic policy. In both cases, a general tendency has emerged of increasing the number of social media accounts and embracing new platforms. I have critically assessed this element by pointing out that the growing number of diplomatic social media accounts might amplify the messages of foreign affairs ministries online in terms of volume, but this does not assure that social media users are paying attention to such messages. Although the inclusion of social media in diplomacy seems to have become mainstream practice in both countries, it is unclear how digital communication can contribute to the advancement of these countries' foreign policies and their international reputation.

In relation to the second part of the *first research question* – how do public diplomacy actors listen to publics on social media? – it emerged that the assessment of public diplomacy activities is usually focused on message reach in the Australian case, while Italy usually measures outputs in terms of number of initiatives. By applying the spectrum of listening as an evaluation model, the chapter also pointed out that, despite claims for listening made especially in the Australian digital strategy, many of the monitoring activities are limited to measuring message reach and diffusion (*tactical* listening). In general terms, both countries are reputed to be attractive because of their culture, lifestyle, natural and historical assets. Social media activities might support the promotion and advocacy of these assets. However, this thesis has suggested a conceptualisation of public diplomacy that goes beyond mere nation-branding and creates a favourable communication environment that enhances opportunities for meaningful conversations. In particular, given their focus on specific foreign policies, middle powers such as Australia and Italy can use social media active listening as an opportunity to foster dialogue on specific global issues regarded by their governments as central.

The *second research question* – what methods are most effective for analysing digitally mediated public diplomacy? – has been addressed both theoretically and practically. Although the literature review in chapter 1 has established that there is a general consensus on the need for listening in public diplomacy, there seems to be no such consensus on the *type* of listening that is required. This has caused, I argue, an underspecification of the conceptual vocabulary of public diplomacy, both in academic studies and in actual public diplomacy strategies. Thus, in chapter 1 and 2 I have discussed the *theoretical understanding* of listening on social media, and in particular on Twitter as a prominent example of a digital platform used by public diplomacy actors. I have suggested that listening has to be analysed as a *process* (Dobson

2014, 9). This requires an analytical focus on the evaluation of those signs of paying attention that characterise dialogic forms of engagement. Listening as a process entails a range of methodological options for social media monitoring activities. In this sense, the creation of a spectrum of listening provides a framework for the assessment of public diplomacy listening on social media, ranging from the ideal type of *apophatic* listening to *surreptitious* listening activities. In between these two extremes, there are three approaches for social media listening in public diplomacy: *active, tactical,* and listening *in.* Each of these approaches entails a different understanding of social media engagement. Active listening, which I have endorsed as the yardstick for digitally mediated public diplomacy, is driven by long-term goals, such as the creation of a fruitful communication space where national foreign policy can be advanced through dialogic engagement. In the case studies, I have also provided practical examples, although sporadic in public diplomacy practices, of such dialogic engagement (e.g. Twitter users' positive reactions to Obama's speech on climate change during the G20, discussed in chapter 5).

I also argue that much of the confusion in the practical and theoretical discussion about the introduction of social media to public diplomacy has been caused by a lack of consensual definitions of listening; without such definitions, there is a risk of reducing this foundational concept to a buzzword that is continuously redefined to suit the interests of the speaker. The model helps to clarify why there is a disjuncture between the strategies of public diplomacy actors and their social media practices. A more precise understanding of listening developed in this research supports future academic debate on public diplomacy social media activities by providing clear definitions of the different listening approaches. These definitions can also guide practitioners when implementing their strategies by providing a more articulated terminology and understanding of listening, to avoid the disjuncture between strategic goals and actual practices.

In this sense, I have argued that, in more practical terms, the assessment of social media engagement is primarily framed by the methods applied for its analysis. Thus, tracking *active* listening requires a combination of thin and thick description, a distinction borrowed from Geertz (1973). Thin description supports the analysis of the complexity in large-scale listening, supported by so-called digital methods (Rogers 2013) and big data analysis. This level of analysis focuses on social media analytics and network analysis. In contrast, thick description focuses on contextualising engagement by understanding context and tone. The tools used at this second level are the analytical skills of the researcher to critique the meaning and context of content through the use of software and manual navigation.

The implementation of this mixed method approach supports both the academic analysis of digitally mediated public diplomacy as well as an evaluation of practitioners' listening activities. It addresses the need to build "real quantitative and qualitative research skills [among practitioners] to help determine frameworks to assess which strategies and tactics work in complex environments to build trust and understanding" (Brown 2017, 121). This approach enables the capture of large-scale communication dynamics of public diplomacy within a complex array of mediators, without neglecting the thick elements of the description, such as tone, visuals and irony embedded in social media communication and contextual elements. This study has applied a mixed method approach using two case studies that have enabled me to analyse the public diplomacy social media activities of the Australian government during the 2014 G20 meeting in Brisbane and of the Italian government during the Expo 2015 in Milan.

By providing insights into the practical use of social media in public diplomacy, these two case studies have addressed the *third research question* – how can public diplomacy actors advance engagement practices (with their publics) via social media? Social media have the potential to enhance international political understanding, but much of this relies on diplomats' capacity to listen to citizens and mediators, to be aware of their own tactical position and to be seen to listen through dialogic engagement. What emerges from the case studies is that listening, especially in its *active* form, and dialogic engagement are sporadic in public diplomacy social media activities. This confirms the conclusions of previous studies. However, by applying the concept of the spectrum of listening to the two exploratory case studies, I have highlighted six main factors that public diplomacy actors should take into account if they want to effectively engage with their publics.

Firstly, in the two case studies I have empirically demonstrated what has been argued in the theoretical component of this research, which is to say that *being seen to listen* on Twitter enhances trust and credibility. The two case studies have provided empirical evidence that listening cannot be limited to passive or interest-driven monitoring activities: it needs to be combined with dialogic engagement, which means that public diplomacy actors should actively participate in and listen to diplomacy-related online conversations. Previous studies have founded their evaluation approaches on normative and ethical considerations, suggesting listening by public diplomacy actors as an end in itself. My study, by contrast, has provided empirical evidence of the strategic importance of listening to the achievement of foreign policy goals and the ways in which refusing to listen has negative implications for the effectiveness of one's public diplomacy practice.

Secondly, the empirical findings have also demonstrated that the definition and assessment of successful engagement are tightly connected with listening methodologies. Listening activities based on social media analytics alone – part of what I have defined as thin description – can help to interpret users' reactions to diplomatic content and measure how far messages travel, via number of views, retweets, and so on. However, thin description does not provide meaningful insights about the quality of engagement, even if it remains an essential step to be undertaken in large-scale digital listening due to the large volume of data to be processed. In the era of big data, social media analytics are appealing because they provide tools for cheap and quick real-time digital listening in public diplomacy. However, if limited only to the quantitative level of analysis, this type of digital listening risks providing only a partial assessment of social media communication, as well as leaving aside peripheral voices. This might explain why claims for listening are made while public diplomacy actors' actual capacity to fully understand users' opinions and dialogically engage on social media is limited. The underlying peril of social media analytics is that public diplomacy actors will focus on the production and dissemination of unidirectional messages in their communication activities, since these are the communicational elements evaluated in their listening approaches. This might be sufficient to demonstrate that practitioners' activities have generated value for money – when outputs generate reactions – while failing to demonstrate the impact of public diplomacy activities on the advancement of national foreign policies and international reputation. Thus, this research has empirically tested the applicability of a complementary 'thick' level of analysis in public diplomacy digital listening, to fully investigate how public diplomacy communication activities on social media are mediated and constrained, and to fully capture people's perception of public diplomacy actors and foreign policies.

Thirdly, this research has also provided insights into the relevance of Twitter to public diplomacy. The fact that public diplomacy social media activities rarely result in direct dialogic engagement with citizens is partly justified by the enormous amount of information produced by Twitter users, reflected in the size of the two selected events and the difficulties in addressing such a complex array of mediators and users. Nevertheless, this study has indicated the strategic relevance of Twitter, especially for the creation of a space where public diplomacy actors can interact with mediators, such as NGOs, journalists and opinion leaders. It has also been argued that much of what has been called "Twiplomacy" represents an important performative aspect of diplomacy. Twitter can be used by diplomats to instil confidence and publicly demonstrate strong relationships between two countries to international and domestic audiences. It can also be used to isolate and condemn a government and its leaders, demonstrate the success of a mega-event to enhance international credibility, and publicly address NGOs' concerns. This attenuates the sometimes hyperbolic claims about new forms of civic participation in diplomacy endorsed in previous studies, especially in the initial stages of introducing social media to public diplomacy. However, the findings have indicated that Twitter remains a relevant communication platform for engaging with mediators, and indirectly with citizens, in digitally mediated public diplomacy. Twitter, as well as other social media platforms, can also be very powerful tools for the integration of the digital and physical spheres in public diplomacy, especially in public diplomacy initiatives that involve the physical participation of citizens, such as Expos.

Fourthly, this research has highlighted the interconnection between the domestic and international dimensions of public diplomacy. It has shown that listening needs to take place at both levels. In the digital communication environment, the traditional distinction between foreign and domestic publics is obsolete. This means that domestic policies need to be consistent with foreign policies promoted abroad. It should also be considered that political statements made to appease the public at home may be amplified and reach international audiences. The result is that foreign policy needs to be weighed according to both the domestic political debate and the possible ramifications in terms of international reputation and credibility. At the same time, political controversies that may arise in the domestic dimension can affect international audiences' perception of a country. This is particularly true for English-speaking countries, since English is also the current lingua franca, especially in the digital environment.

This point leads to the fifth factor, based on a comparison in relation to the use of language in public diplomacy between the two case studies. On the one hand, what has emerged in this study is Australia's linguistic complacency, since it simply assumes that foreign publics will understand English. This limits the potential of Australian public diplomacy, especially in relation the country's commitment to engaging with the Indo-Pacific region. On the other hand, in the case of Italian public diplomacy the choice of language marks quite clear boundaries around its imaginary audience since the use of the Italian language targets domestic publics while languages other than Italian consciously signals the intention to reach international audiences. In the case of Italy, it emerged that the use of Italian only has limited its potential for international engagement. In addition, the Expo case study provided examples of the reputational cost of the inaccurate use of English in social media communication. Both case studies have indicated that domestic publics play a role in amplifying public diplomacy messages by engaging with them. This has revealed the importance of working more fluidly using domestic and foreign languages, and creating bi-lingual or targeted social media content.

Finally, both case studies, selected for practical and theoretical reasons as argued in chapter 3, have also provided serendipitous insights about the most pressing issues in the current international stage. In particular, the studies witness Russia' growing and controversial geopolitical role in international relations and its vigorous governmental communication activities on social media. This has emerged both in relation to international political advocacy, as in the case of the state-funded RT (Russia Today) during the G20 in Brisbane, as well as in terms of nation branding activities during the Expo in Milan. Thus, the two case studies have also reflected upon contextual evolutions in the geopolitical and international communication landscape.

7.2 Challenges of digital listening

The methodological limitations of digital listening in relation to the collection (representativeness and demographic), size and analysis of social media data have been extensively addressed in the previous chapters and have supported my main argument about the necessity for combining thin and thick description. There is also an extensive critical literature about the limitations of big data analysis, explored throughout this thesis and in particular in chapter 3. Therefore, more than addressing strictly methodological limitations, already much debated in the literature, my aim here is to highlight the complex nature of digital listening in public diplomacy practices. To put it bluntly, there is no rigid and perfect approach that can fully enabling the listening and responding to diverse and influential actors in order to advance public diplomacy on social media. The need for a flexible method adapted to the different analytical directions that emerged in the two case studies has already supported this important point. In this sense, this research agrees with the conclusions of Macnamara (2016) on organisational listening. He argues that listening is a "wicked problem", which means that

> (1) there are no totally true, false, or perfect solutions; (2) wicked problems are usually unique; (3) there is no "stopping rule" for wicked problems (i.e., a precise mechanism to know the optional time to stop or continue a resolution process); and (4) every wicked problem is s symptom of or linked to other problems. (145)

As a consequence of these observations, Macnamara rightly suggests the creation of an architecture of listening at an organisational level to cope with the complexity of this wicked problem. This is why this thesis has put forward a framework of interpretation rather than rigid evaluation criteria. The exploratory nature of listening and the need to adapt it to different and complex contexts indicates that there is no single definitive solution for conducting 'good' listening. Nevertheless, this thesis has endorsed more contextual and flexible forms of evaluation in public diplomacy practices that combine qualitative and quantitative methods.

This research has focused on the opportunities provided by digital technologies for making sense of large-scale social media conversations, combined with the qualitative level of analysis to understand tone and context. The combination of thin and thick description provides a flexible solution that balances quantitative and qualitative components in social media analysis, to be adapted on a case-by-case basis. This flexible evaluation approach also needs to take into account two broader challenges posed by digital listening, challenges which may be addressed by future research.

The first challenge embedded in digital listening refers to the never-ending evolution of digital platforms, both in their technological affordances and in their use. On the one hand, during the course of this study Twitter introduced many new features, such as changes in its interface, most notably the doubling of character limit of tweets from 140 to 280 for all its users, allowing them to share more detailed thoughts and responses. This poses further challenges for Twitter analysis since it increases the quantity of content and perhaps will make the qualitative level of analysis more time-consuming. These challenges were recently confirmed by the fact that an institution such as the Library of Congress has ceased archiving all tweets (Osterberg 2017) because of issues posed by the technical evolution of the platform. Moreover, there has been a dramatic increase in the volume of Twitter data and in the use of visual content (pictures and videos), making it virtually impossible for researchers to analyse this ever-increasing database.

On the other hand, new, pressing problems for social media analysis are emerging due to an increase in the frequency of automated voices, a challenge encountered in the Expo case study, as well as the dissemination of fake news (Melissen 2018) and digital propaganda (Sanovich 2017). These concerns can be summarised by the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy's provocative question: "Can public diplomacy survive the internet?" (Powers and Kounalakis 2017). These emerging uses of social media platforms as communication weapons rather than bridges, as theorised in public diplomacy, pose serious questions for future research regarding what is listened to on social media and in particular on Twitter. At the same time, these emerging trends make it practically difficult to engage dialogically in such a noisy environment, compromised by bots, false information and well-orchestrated state propaganda.

The second challenge, which is not new in social research, comes from the fact that the thick level of analysis, although pivotal in my research approach, remains time-consuming and perhaps limited in its range of practical applications. The necessity of allocating economic and human resources for the combination of thin and thick description in public diplomacy monitoring activities may limit the feasibility of this approach in an organisational setting. In particular, the qualitative level of analysis is difficult to conduct on a regular basis or, even more problematically, for real-time listening. My own experience in this research has indicated that thick analysis requires time and reflexivity when conducted rigorously. For example, the two case studies have required the collection of additional sources to make sense of and contextualise the Twitter conversations. The technique of zooming in and out of the dataset also involves breakdowns and numerous attempts to identify meaningful data for the qualitative level of the analysis.

Perhaps future progress in computational analytical technologies will eliminate some of the time-consuming tasks that are embedded in the process of zooming in and out. Sentiment analysis is an active area of research, and progress is being made in the automatic detection of sentiments expressions, such as sarcasm (Joshi, Bhattacharyya, and Carman 2018). Nevertheless, it is highly unlikely that computers will be able to simulate diplomats' interpretive skills and foreign policy expertise. Thick description remains, aside from the epistemological considerations, also a form of active listening itself. It responds, at the level of method, to my argument about the need to listen to all voices, to create the conditions for meaningful international dialog and to tackle the risk of listening only to amplified and automated voices on social media.

7.3 Future research

The challenges mentioned in the previous section may inspire new studies, which could follow the following five relevant directions of enquiry.

Firstly, new research could investigate the listening approaches adopted by public diplomacy practitioners, for example through interviews or participant observation. This would represent a unique opportunity to compare the theoretical and empirical observations made in this thesis with the experiences and listening methodologies of public diplomacy practitioners. In this way, listening and evaluation methodologies could provide a fruitful ground for collaboration between public diplomacy scholars and practitioners.

Secondly, the previous section has pointed out the challenges embedded in my methodological approach when it comes to real-time listening. Public diplomacy scholars and data analysts could develop new tools for real-time social media listening that could be of benefit to the study and practice of public diplomacy, as well as governmental digital listening strategies in general. New research could draw ethical and practical boundaries to differentiate *active* listening from *surreptitious* listening and internet surveillance. This is a critical aspect that differentiates public diplomacy listening from other governmental mass-surveillance practices, undertaken especially by defence departments. Public diplomacy has the potential to lead innovative and ethical governmental listening practices and present to policy makers a valid alternative to unethical and illegitimate listening.

Thirdly, my theoretical framework could support the study of Facebook as well as other social media platforms that are now increasingly more popular, for example Instagram, and focus on visual content. Visuals are closely connected with the performative aspect of diplomacy. New studies could address the articulation of these performative elements by analysing leaders' and diplomats' use of visuals on social media.

Fourthly, new research could address the interplay of domestic and international audiences in public diplomacy, as well as study the role played by new technologies in conducting diaspora diplomacy. For example, this study revealed the important role played by diaspora communities in Italian public diplomacy. Nations with large diaspora communities could represent interesting case studies for the investigation of the interactions between the nation state and its diaspora communities abroad. The nation state's attempt to maintain strong ties and nourish diaspora communities' national identity for public diplomacy purposes might provide fruitful case studies in the current international context where migration, both permanent and temporary, is increasing.

Finally, other research designs could be applied to the methodology proposed in this research. For example, a longitudinal research design could provide insights into the evolution in the use of social media for events such as the G20 or Expo. Some indications for conducting successful digitally mediated public diplomacy have emerged in this thesis. Longitudinal or comparative designs could provide very powerful insights for practitioners as to how to use social media can promote dialogic engagement successfully during international mega-events.

7.4 Final remarks

The importance of this study has been demonstrated through an in-depth exploration of two middle powers strategies and communication activities on social media. The case studies have revealed the impact of listening activities in public diplomacy. In line with the recent literature in public diplomacy, they have supported the significance of listening both for strategy implementation and adjustment. As a result of my theoretical account in chapter one and two about relevance of *active* listening and embedded signs of paying attention, the case studies have also demonstrated how listening is a representational force in public diplomacy activities on social media. The spectrum of listening implemented in chapter 2 has contributed to the current academic debate on the use of social media in public diplomacy by listing and defining the different listening approaches available to public diplomacy actors on social media. This study has also developed and applied a mixed method approach that combines thin and thick analysis of social media engagement. Such approaches are proposed as an academic method to analyse diplomacy-related social media conversations that can also be applied by public diplomacy practitioners in their listening activities.

Public diplomacy is becoming an established field of study in academia as well as a widespread governmental activity around the world. Although its conceptualisation and definition remain disputed, it provides governments with the possibility of allocating resources for long-term goals and international dialogue. This might not be directly and explicitly beneficial to the short-term political goals of national governments, but it does provide opportunities for cultivating a country's international reputation in a fast-changing communication environment, and for legitimising its foreign policies.

Social media platforms foster certain forms of engagement, following profit-driven logics. Likes, retweets and views may facilitate more digital interaction, but at the same time these may produce indifferent forms of engagement, as argued in this thesis. Public diplomacy was born to distance governmental communication activities from all the negative connotations of propaganda. It thus represents a communication space for governments to pursue international dialogue through articulated arguments rather than slogans that receive passive digital reactions. This is an important component of public diplomacy that distinguishes it from new forms of propaganda.

New uncertainties and complexities are coming to light in the current geopolitical context. The hype surrounding the introduction of social media in diplomacy has been replaced by concerns about new forms of digital propaganda and the spread of fake news on social media. As mentioned throughout this thesis, the election of Donald Trump and his controversial use of Twitter is likely to attract great attention from public diplomacy scholars. Moreover, the internet is becoming highly strategic because of its potential not only to build communication bridges, as addressed in this thesis, but also to enact new forms of hard power through cyberwar and cyberespionage. At the same time, the popularity of the concept of soft power in governmental circles has directed public diplomacy initiatives more towards place- and nation-branding activities rather than cultivation of diplomatic reputation and advancement of foreign policy. These elements risk transforming digital diplomacy into “little more than electronic propaganda (much as most government-led public diplomacy has amounted to little more than propaganda + marketing)”, as Riordan (2016, para. 1) has warned.

In addition, forms of massive surveillance or surreptitious listening have been confirmed by the revelations of Edward Snowden in 2013, as discussed in chapter 2. Recent events have also revealed that a private company, Cambridge Analytica, was able to breach Facebook policies and illegitimately acquire personally identifiable information, then used for political and electoral purposes (Solon 2018).

The current context may dissuade new research that addresses listening in public diplomacy and precipitate a move towards a new research agenda that deals with these pressing challenges arising from the current digital environment. This, I believe, would be a reaction to current events rather than an advancement in the theoretical and practical framework in public diplomacy. Although geopolitical and technological evolutions need to be taken into account, this research has deliberately taken a step back and has critically assessed the potential of social media communication in diplomacy beyond utopian and dystopian views about digital technologies and international relations. I believe that the focus on listening as a method for the evaluation of public diplomacy can provide a renewed and proactive, rather than reactive, research agenda inspired by the theoretical tradition of public diplomacy and enriched by the interdisciplinary nature of this field. At the same time, in an epoch in which new surreptitious forms of listening seem to be growing, the academic study of public diplomacy offers a space for ethical forms of governmental listening to be discussed and developed.

Appendix

Appendix 1. In-degree ranking: the most-mentioned accounts in the #OnMyAgenda discussion visualised in figure 14.

Rank	Label
1609	tonyabbottmhr
1260	pmharper
1258	barackobama
1255	angela_merkel
1228	cfkargentina
1198	pmoindia
1198	xijinping78
1186	fhollande
1185	number10gov
1184	dilmabr
1153	jokowi_do2
1138	eu_commission
1128	abeshinzo
1112	putinrf_eng
1096	gh_park
1079	matteorenzi
1041	ksamofa
1037	presidencyza
1002	president_rte
299	wwf_australia
277	onmyagendag20
273	thunderclapit
190	langbanks
160	1millionwomen
139	climatesavers
125	350australia
118	ausconservation
96	getup
81	junckereu
72	euhvr
63	jackthelad1947
61	brisbaneairport
61	earthhour_au
54	annarose
50	a_davutoglu_eng
48	aycc
47	palazzo_chigi
47	wwf_uk
45	g20australia
45	wwfeu
44	ali_m_martin
43	irinagreenvoice
41	greenmovesaust
38	climatewwf
37	david_cameron
37	climaterealitya
36	brisbanetimes
35	thesourcenews1

Appendix 2. #g20 discussion: hashtag frequency in figure 19.

Rank	Label
33557	g20brisbane
24448	auspol
8839	putin
7243	climatechange
6902	brisbane
6116	news
4695	ukraine
4200	australia
4164	onmyagenda
3991	obama
3466	9news
3290	abbott
3106	climate
3074	russia
2963	путин
2714	brics
2706	новости
2570	obamauq
2331	g20summit
2244	insiders
1807	poutine
1803	ebola
1748	teamfollowback
1167	cdnpoli
1162	mh17
1148	abcnews24
1141	g20australia
1092	qldpol
1056	india
1053	modiatg20
1028	yamecanse
1027	россия
989	hollande
966	1infa
966	uq
959	ayotzinapa
954	changepenang
945	afp
943	rt
936	merkel
925	actonclimate
839	usa
760	china
756	политика
755	renzi

Appendix 3: User diversity ranking per hashtag during the G20 (figure 19).

Appendix 4: Top 50 most retweeted tweets during the G20.

Retweet	Frequency
RT @TheEconomist: Putin's warmest encounter at the G20 was with a koala, and even the animal looked alarmed http://econ.st/1A73gx0 RT @WhiteHouse: Sharing a koalaty moment in Australia. http://t.co/mbSY0ZQLxD #G20 http://t.co/roeOMwh33h	2055 1478
RT @edward2959: So #G20 hire own photographers for handouts… Democracy at work. Crap in Crap out = the #G20 Don't blame Putin for leaving e…	1385
Путин сфотографировался с коалой на саммите G20 в Австралии	1363
RT @TonyAbbottMHR: A warm greeting with @narendramodi #G20Brisbane #G20 http://t.co/2jTmUzFvJ4	1286
RT @TonyAbbottMHR: The BBQ lunch with @narendramodi and @BarackObama was an opportunity for #G20 Leaders to talk in a relaxed atmosphere ht…	1175
RT @narendramodi: The G20 family. http://t.co/lzFPOYbHY4	1132

Песков опроверг слухи о досрочном отъезде Путина с саммита G20	936
RT @Quirinus0: Hollande s'assoit avant de serrer la main à Poutine et se tape encore la honte... #G20 http://t.co/LMKYn4rWwL	689
RT @Geschichter: Первый канал опубликовал подлинное групповое фото с саммита G20. http://t.co/zEvdi6O0MF	686
RT @narendramodi: Spoke on "Reform Experience and Thrust Forward" during the Retreat for G20 leaders. http://t.co/WS7zB7PWSN http://t.co/2v…	625
Саммит G20 в 2016 году пройдет в Китае	622
RT @LosGenoveses: ¿Podría explicar Rajoy a sus colegas del G20 que habiendo cobrado en B se puede ser Presidente del Gobierno?. http://t.co…	614
RT @UN: Ban Ki-moon at #G20: #climatechange is the defining issue of our times. More: http://t.co/IQNwTaH4tq @G20Australia http://t.co/GLa6…	606
Владимир Путин обнял коалу на саммите G20	599
RT @Alexey_Pushkov: Обама идет на обострение: на G20 он вновь сравнил Россию с эболой. ИГИЛ для него уже меньшая угроза.Таких выпадов не бы…	593
RT @VRebyata: Сложилось ложное впечатление, что Владимир Путин на саммите G20 провел встречу только с коалой. Это не так. Были еще два кенг…	589
Встреча Путина и Кэмерона в рамках G20 проходит за закрытыми дверями	587
RT @BrigadierSlog: "They keep mentioning Climate Change Peta. Make them stop." #G20 #G20Brisbane http://t.co/4tXHTxpP9a	502
RT @narendramodi: It has been a productive 2 days at the G20. Met world leaders, talked about further strengthening bilateral ties & other …	492
RT @PMOIndia: News from G20: India's concerns on Black Money & Tax Avoidance have found an echo & have been taken on board the final G-20 c…	479
RT @ia_1infa: В австралийском Брисбене открывается саммит G20 с участием Путина http://t.co/GuIRN67Qg5 #Путин #Россия #G20 #США http://t.co…	476
RT @petesouza: President Obama holds a koala before the start of Saturday's G20 Summit in Brisbane, Australia. http://t.co/kCZHcqOHp9	461
RT @MikeCarlton01: Imagine the speech Whitlam, Hawke or Keating might have given to the G20. Then compare it to Abbott's embarrassing, hoke…	454
RT @vilnezheettya: Вся суть G20 в одном фото. http://t.co/IwDAnApM3S	437

RT @PMOIndia: Another photo from G20 Summit. http://t.co/oJ0HLXq9Ui	433
RT @AbeShinzo: It's always a great pleasure to see you .@TonyAbbottMHR You and I can make a solid bridge bet. Australia & Japan #G20 http:/…	429
RT @PMOIndia: G20 family, in this photo. http://t.co/OKzgx6XR9r	425
RT @JulianBurnside: Obama's speech to UQ students will inspire a generation. Abbott's opening speech at #G20 was profoundly embarrassing. #…	423
RT @narendramodi: Here are the highlights of my statement on Energy, shared during the G20 Summit. http://t.co/9g2AAsdOIW	405
RT @pmharper: With my new friend, Jimbelung the koala at the start of the second day of the #G20 Summit in Brisbane #G20Brisbane http://t.c…	386
RT @theqldpremier: Fantastic to welcome @narendramodi to Brisbane City Hall to talk QLD/India relationships #G20 http://t.co/2PZa7MLY9x	375
RT @latingle: An unfortunate message on ABC24 'Due to G20 coverage, Big Ideas will not be seen at this time'	373
RT @mohitfreedom: RT @PMOIndia: #India PM @narendramodi, PM @TonyAbbottMHR & President @BarackObama at the #G20 Summit. http://t.co/uEACMf5…	369
RT @dilmabr: Participam do encontro, em Brisbane, @PutinRF_Eng, @NarendraModi, Xi Jinping e @SAPresident #BRICS #G20 http://t.co/POUUD1kUHL	368
RT @narendramodi: My Statement on "Delivering Global Economic Resilience" at the G20 Summit. http://t.co/QDopA83gl3	368
RT @PMOIndia: PM @narendramodi, PM @TonyAbbottMHR & President @BarackObama at the G20 Summit. http://t.co/vtmp8F9C6a	367
Путин встретился с представителями Профсоюзного саммита G20	366
RT @DHughesy: Fair to say the G20 was great apart from that it cost billions and achieved fuck all. #skypenexttime	358
RT @PMOIndia: PM @narendramodi with dignitaries during the G20 Summit. http://t.co/9iBmYsPH5A	355
RT @Qazaqstan_: После четырехчасовой беседы с Путиным, в кулуарах саммита G20, Меркель предложила ужесточить санкции в отношении России #пе…	353
RT @mashable: It's not all business at the G20 summit. Here's Vladimir Putin cuddling a koala: http://t.co/EqBF1ntmXN http://t.co/VAkBWeKp5A	350
RT @SiPeroNo1: ¿Estamos locos? ¿Rajoy, responsable de un país con el 25% de paro dando una conferencia en el G20 sobre "crecimiento y emple…	347

RT @mohitfreedom: RT @narendramodi: The G20 family. http://t.co/2sSU9GIpaM	342
RT @Fake_MIDRF: Владимир Владимирович отжал не только Крым, но и стол на обеде в G20: http://t.co/O3QLIb1qYH	340
Песков опроверг сообщения о досрочном отъезде Путина с саммита G20	332
RT @cveren: Пути опять всех переиграл, все лидеры G20 в понедельник будут как сонные мухи , а он один как огурчик в Кремле!	328
RT @nicolaschapuis: Au sommet du #G20, il a aussi été question de l'emploi des femmes ds le monde. Entre hommes. 4 femmes seulement sur les…	327

Appendix 5: #noexpo: most retweeted tweets.

Text	Frequency
RT @Giangiagainst: Acqua a 5 euro e panini a 10 euro, nutrire il pianeta ma prima nutrire Farinetti.#Expo2015 #noexpo	231
RT @rinaldosidoli: Non chiamateli manifestanti, ma delinquenti.#noexpo #Expo2015 **http://t.co/oYZG9V7RU5**	179
RT @Giorgiolaporta: Dalla parte delle Forze dell'Ordine. Senza esitazioni.Grazie ragazzi! #Expo2015 #noexpo #iostoconleforzedellordine ht*ƒ*	83
RT @rinaldosidoli: La miglior risposta ai vandali devastatori di #Milano: l'amore per la propria città.#noexpo #Expo2015 http://t.co/hqGV*ƒ*	78
RT @rinaldosidoli: Il selfie della fiera dell'imbecillità.#noexpo #Expo2015 **http://t.co/ZhnDIzb7cG**	73
RT @ArsenaleKappa: Black Bloc: la soluzione ci sarebbe. #noexpo #Expo2015 #PrimoMaggioSeguici anche su Facebook https://t.co/lAlZGmNJuG ht*ƒ*	67
RT @camilleriwrites: Io mi vergogno per questa ragazza che si fa foto davanti a disgrazie altrui #noexpo #Expo2015 **http://t.co/8oscY06G2j**	63
RT @expd2015: Ecco due teneri pensionati che guardano i cantieri di Expo. #Expo2015 #noexpo **http://t.co/Ge8Rb01GSh**	62
RT @rinaldosidoli: Leggi più severe e certezza della pena contro questi criminali. Solidarietà alle forze dell'ordine.#noexpo #Expo2015 ht*ƒ*	58
RT @IlPaoloGiordano: Questa sembra la foto ricordo che rende al meglio lo spessore culturale dei #noexpo. http://t.co/3DmgWGKIiF #Expo2015 *ƒ*	57
RT @jaripilati: Una #Milano emozionante risponde ai blackbloc. #noexpo #expo2015 #Rai #Tg3 http://t.co/gxOmfwQUv9	56
RT @rep_milano: L'agente di polizia picchiato dalle tute nere: FOTOSEQUENZA http://t.co/7cPDiYsrh5 #Expo2015 #NoExpo http://t.co/jBIqYWuVd6	52

RT @ArsenaleKappa: Ma potrebbero anche essere gli stessi. #Expo2015 #McDonalds #noexpo Seguici anche su FB: https://t.co/lAlZGmNJuG http://ƒ	50

Appendix 6: #expottimisti: most retweeted tweets.

Text	**Frequency**
RT @maxperri71: .@triomedusa ci aiutate con un RT? Grazie #Nepal #Expo2015 @agire #expottimisti http://t.co/EJoDJ3IcoP	81
RT @secolourbano: Il primo maggio si entra in #Expo2015 con il normale biglietto dalle 10. NON è a inviti #Expottimisti @Expo2015Milano	48
RT @NicolaMorra63: #Expo2015 (più o meno).#expottimisti http://t.co/SUGMYbNEfX	45
RT @fnicodemo: Come si fa a non essere #expottimisti? #Expo2015 http://t.co/VV4emMs8FW	37
RT @secolourbano: #Expo2015 inizia ufficialmente #expottimisti @Expo2015Milano http://t.co/14iQoqy6Ho	36
RT @Expo2015Milano: A 2 giorni da #Expo2015, ti aspettiamo alla festa di tutti gli #Expottimisti. Non mancare! https://t.co/utwhy3B7nN	33
RT @Expo2015Milano: #Expo2015 è di tutti, anche tua. Iscriviti al club degli #Expottimisti http://t.co/AtEUMLBwZE http://t.co/6ZCsC45Sqq	32
RT @secolourbano: Complimenti a @Expo2015Milano e ai suoi mezzo milione di follower proprio ora! #expo2015 #expottimisti	32
RT @fnicodemo: Come si fa a non essere #expottimisti? #Expo2015 /2 http://t.co/mzOMgIgims	31
RT @secolourbano: Ce l’abbiamo fatta #expottimisti #Expo2015 @Expo2015Milano @ExpoinCitta @RaiExpo @NewsExpoMi2015 @Expo2015Contact	31
RT @secolourbano: Grazie ad investimento di 20 milioni di euro di #Expo2015 #milano ritrova la sua #darsena #expottimisti #expointempo	31
RT @Expo2015Milano: Vuoi essere parte di #Expo2015 ma non sai come fare? Iscriviti al club degli #Expottimisti http://t.co/AtEUMLBwZE	30
RT @fnicodemo: Come si fa a non essere #expottimisti? #Expo2015 / 4 http://t.co/2aJcWeHVKP	30
RT @secolourbano: Vi aspettiamo mercoledì“ 29 a 2 giorni da #Expo2015 a festeggiare tra #expottimisti Ingresso,birra e spumante liberi!!	29

Appendix 7: @Expo2015Milano’s most ‘liked’ tweets.

Text	**Frequency**

gli accessi al sito espositivo di #expo2015 dal 5 all’11 ottobre http://t.co/hf6hck6zje http://t.co/kibre0i0na	176
in occasione del 70esimo anniversario della fondazione delle nazione unite, l’albero della vita si tinge di blu! https://t.co/ugflzfcdq7	146
“l’albero della vita rimarrà in #expo2015” giuseppe sala https://t.co/papmnjganh	125
mohammed assaf live sul palco del pad. palestina al cluster zone aride! #expo2015 https://t.co/podurdxuqf	124
complimenti a tutti i paesi partecipanti che hanno reso possibile il successo di #expo2015! https://t.co/q8fzgddabg	112
ready for tonight? see you at mediolanum forum for @mtvema 2015 with @mtvitaly! #expo2015 #mtvema https://t.co/yuozfsyohn	108
l’albero della vita si unisce alle oltre 300 opere del mondo che si tingono di blu per i 70 anni di @un! #expo2015 https://t.co/ykiobkpkiw	103
musica, colori, costumi e tanti eventi. una giornata a #expo2015 https://t.co/gocdxegdjj https://t.co/5tff2hch7l	98
“la nebbia a expo!” #expo2015 #expodellagente - giuseppe sala https://t.co/kiac9w4ftr https://t.co/y8oao9nnda	94
musica, colori, costumi e tanti eventi. una giornata a #expo2015 http://t.co/gocdxegdjj http://t.co/x5igrwenih	94
a #expo2015 l’albero della vita si tinge di blu per i 70 anni delle nazioni unite @un https://t.co/ulfdotc7su https://t.co/plxcpozcuq	92
the longest baguette in the world: another record has been broken at #expo2015 https://t.co/x2zwc66w7o https://t.co/u1rzbctyiy	92
the tree of life turns blue for the 70th anniversary of the united nations @un #expo2015 https://t.co/tcvnuve2cg https://t.co/ov3rotuqoz	89

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