

Czech University of Life Sciences Prague

Faculty of Economics and Management

Department of Management



Master's Thesis

**Digital diplomacy; a comparative study of social media
platforms of developing country (Syrian Arab Republic)
and developed country (Czech Republic)**

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CZECH UNIVERSITY OF LIFE SCIENCES PRAGUE

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DIPLOMA THESIS ASSIGNMENT

Zeina Ali, BA

European Agrarian Diplomacy

Thesis title

Digital diplomacy; a comparative study of social media platforms of developing country (Syrian Arab Republic) and developed country (Czech Republic)

Objectives of thesis

The aim of this thesis is to compare between the platforms of governmental bodies social media platforms of a developing country (Syrian Arab Republic) and a developed country (Czech Republic) in terms of efficiency, popularity and the representation of the nation's image.

Methodology

This thesis comprises two main parts – Theoretical and Practical the Theoretical part will be based on a thorough review of current and recent academic and other reliable literature. The Practical part will be based on an analysis of the social media platforms of the ministry of foreign affairs of both countries, using Facebook as a case study.

The proposed extent of the thesis

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Diplomacy, government relations, public relations, Communications, Social media

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Constantinou, C. M., Kerr, P., & Sharp, P. (Eds.). (2016). *The SAGE handbook of diplomacy*. Sage. 722pp, ISBN: 978-1446298565

EVANS, V. – DOOLEY, J. – BLOOM, M. *Public relations : student's book. Book 1-3*. Berkshire: Express Publishing, 2016. ISBN 978-1-4715-5292-2.

Ittefaq, M. (2019). Digital diplomacy via social networks: A cross-national analysis of governmental usage of Facebook and Twitter for digital engagement. *Journal of Contemporary Eastern Asia*, 18(1), 49-69.

Mahmood, F., & Yasin, Z. (2019). Using Facebook for Government Public Relations Campaigns: Relationship between Information Seeking Attitude and Effectiveness of Public Relations Outcomes for Facebook. *Journal of Media Studies*, 34(1).

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Declaration

I declare that I have worked on my master's thesis titled "Digital diplomacy: a comparative study of social media platforms of developing country (Syrian Arab Republic) and developed country (Czech Republic)" by myself and I have used only the sources mentioned at the end of the thesis. As the author of the master's thesis, I declare that the thesis does not break any copyrights.

In Prague on 30 March 2023

Zeina Ali

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Digital diplomacy; a comparative study of social media platforms of developing country (Syrian Arab Republic) and developed country (Czech Republic)

Abstract

This master's thesis focuses on Digital Diplomacy on social media as a niche topic within the field of soft power and international diplomacy studies. While major players in international politics like China, Russia, and the USA have been widely studied in this field, smaller countries like Syria have been almost ignored, especially those that have suffered turmoil recently. This thesis aims to shed light on Syrian Digital diplomacy by analysing the Facebook page of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and comparing it to a more developed and established model, that of the Czech Republic. The research will compare the Facebook pages of the two countries' MFAs in terms of efficiency, popularity, and image presentation, analysing their relationship with their audience, audience growth, engagement, and content strategy. The data collected from the Facebook pages using Fanpage Karma showed that both pages maintain an engaging relationship with their audience, the Syrian MFA being especially popular among the Syrian diaspora abroad, while the Czech MFA uses its diplomatic connection and privilege at the EU to spread its content beyond its basic approximate.

Keywords: Digital Diplomacy, Public Diplomacy, Facebook, Syria, Czech Republic.

Digitální diplomacie; srovnávací studie platform sociálních médií rozvojové země (Syrská arabská republika) a vyspělé země (Česká republika)

Abstrakt

Tato diplomová práce se zaměřuje na digitální diplomacii na sociálních sítích jako na úzce specializované téma v oblasti soft power a studií mezinárodní diplomacie. Zatímco hlavní hráči v mezinárodní politice, jako je Čína, Rusko a USA, byli v této oblasti široce studováni, menší země jako Sýrie byly téměř ignorovány, zejména ty, které v poslední době utrpěly nepokoje. Tato práce si klade za cíl osvětlit syrskou digitální diplomacii analýzou facebookové stránky Ministerstva zahraničních věcí a jejím porovnáním s rozvinutějším a zavedenějším modelem České republiky. Výzkum porovná facebookové stránky MZV obou zemí z hlediska efektivity, popularity a prezentace obrázků, analyzuje jejich vztah s publikem, růst publika, zapojení a obsahovou strategii. Data shromážděná z facebookových stránek pomocí Fanpage Karma ukázala, že obě stránky udržují poutavý vztah se svým publikem, přičemž syrské MZV je oblíbené zejména mezi syrskou diasporou v zahraničí, zatímco MZV ČR využívá své diplomatické spojení a privilegia v EU k šíření svého obsah přesahující jeho základní přibližný.

Klíčová slova: Digitální diplomacie, veřejná diplomacie, Facebook, Sýrie, Česká republika.

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1. Introduction

Soft power is the art of persuasion and convincing rather than forcing and coercing on an international level. This thesis is going to explore a niche topic within the field of soft power and international diplomacy studies, it will explore Digital Diplomacy on Social media.

The Arab Spring was a turning point in the way academics and policymakers viewed social media as a tool for social change and diplomacy. The uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and other Arab countries in 2010 and 2011 were characterized by a massive use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to organize and mobilize the population (Bjola, Corneliu, and Jiang, 2015, pp. 80-85). Many scholars have since examined the use of social media by governments (Huang, 2020, pp. 18), and international organizations for various purposes, including public diplomacy, soft power, and information warfare (Nye, 2008 p. 97). Overall, the Arab Spring was a catalyst for the emergence of a new field of research and practice that focuses on the intersection of social media and international relations, known as digital diplomacy.

There is an increasing number of publications in this field about China, Russia, USA (Golan, Manor, and Arceneaux, 2019, p. 1671) and other major players in international politics. In the post-Arab Spring era, digital diplomacy has become a crucial component of foreign policy, especially for countries that are struggling with political instability, conflicts, and isolation. The COVID-19 pandemic has further emphasized the importance of digital diplomacy, as it has forced many embassies and MFAs to rely more on online communication and public engagement due to the restrictions on physical travel and gatherings (Manor and Pamment, 2022, p.2). Recently some interest has been shown to smaller countries, such as Poland, Czech republic (Peterková, and Tomalová, 2017) and others. However, some smaller countries in the Middle East have been almost ignored in this field, especially ones that suffered turmoil recently are almost forgotten. Embassies and MFAs have turned to social media platforms to convey their messages, build relationships, and influence public opinion, which is the Syrian case. Social media has enabled them to reach broader and more diverse audiences, including diaspora communities, youth, and marginalized groups, and to interact with them in real-time. Thus, the Arab spring started interest in the field and the COVID-19 pandemic had accelerated the adoption of digital diplomacy as an effective means of conducting foreign policy.

The case of Syria's digital diplomacy on Facebook is of particular interest due to its unique challenges and limitations. The country has been under international sanctions since 2011, which has restricted its ability to engage with the rest of the world, including through traditional diplomacy (Clara, 2012). As a result, the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has turned to social media as a way to project its voice beyond its borders. However, Syrian MFA digital diplomacy strategy is towards a niche audience. Most notably, the content is only available in Arabic, which restricts its reach to the Syrian diaspora and Arabic-speaking audiences.

On the other hand, the Czech Republic's Facebook digital diplomacy approach stands out for its success in spreading its message throughout the world. A larger audience can access its information because of the nation's prioritization of English as a medium of communication. The Czech Republic also has an organized approach to digital diplomacy that is well-documented and has specific goals and performance indicators.

On one hand, The Czech MFA has developed a comprehensive and coherent digital diplomacy strategy that aligns with its overall foreign policy goals and values. The Czech MFA has also invested in its human and technological resources to ensure the quality and relevance (Peterková and Tomalová, 2017, pp 330 - 331). However, countries with limited resources and narrow diplomatic circles must cultivate a unique Digital diplomatic strategy to stand out in the overwhelming world of social media. Countries like Syria face tremendous challenges in projecting soft power online. Therefore, this thesis is an attempt to shed light on Syrian Digital diplomacy through analysing the Facebook page of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. To evaluate Syrian Digital diplomacy, the researcher will compare it to a more developed and more established model that is the Czech Republic.

The thesis will compare between the Facebook pages of the two countries MFAs, on efficiency, popularity and Image presentation. This includes, on one hand, analysing the FB pages relationship with their audience, audience growth, weekly and monthly engagement. On the other hand, content analysis of the pages and how they take advantage of viral events as well as coordinate online/offline events.

The comparison between the Czech and Syrian digital diplomacy strategies on Facebook highlights the different approaches to engaging with online audiences in the realm of international relations. The Czech Republic's approach emphasizes clear communication objectives, a coherent strategy, and a focus on engaging a broad global audience. By contrast, Syria's strategy is more niche, focused on engaging its diaspora and Arabic-speaking

audiences, and lacks a clear structure or defined objectives. However, both approaches share a common recognition of the importance of social media in projecting a country's image and shaping international perceptions. By analysing the strategies and content of the Czech and Syrian MFA Facebook pages, this study seeks to contribute to our understanding of how social media is being used as a tool of digital diplomacy in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

According to data collected on the Facebook pages of the Sy and Cz MFAs using Fanpage Karma, the research found the following; both pages maintain an engaging relationship with their audience, Syrian MFA is especially popular among the Syrian diaspora abroad. The Czech one uses its diplomatic connection and privilege at the EU to spread its content beyond its basic approximations. Both pages are efficient in riding waves of viral events online to boost their page ratings and promote their content.

2. Objectives and Methodology

1.1 Objectives

This thesis will analyse the Digital Diplomacy strategy of MFA Facebook pages of Syria and Czech republic.

The main objective of this thesis is to conduct an analysis of the Digital Diplomacy strategies employed by the MFA Facebook pages of Syria and Czech Republic. Through this analysis, the strengths and weaknesses of each country's approach will be identified, and recommendations will be made for further improvement.

- It will evaluate the performance of these two pages based on efficiency, popularity and image presentation.

The evaluation of the performance of the Facebook pages of the Czech and Syrian MFAs will be based on three main indicators: efficiency, popularity, and image presentation. These indicators correspond to the tactics of agenda setting, presence expansion, and conversation generating discussed in the literature. By analyzing how the pages perform in these areas, it will be possible to identify their strengths and weaknesses and make recommendations for their improvement.

- These elements will be evaluated based on audience size, engagement indicators and content analysis of two MFA's Facebook pages.

The evaluation of digital diplomacy efforts of both the Czech Republic and Syria on Facebook will be based on three main elements: audience size, engagement indicators, and content analysis. The analysis will assess these aspects by examining the effectiveness of their digital diplomacy strategies and their ability to connect with their target audiences.

- Finally create a summary comparison table of the two MFA Facebook pages and a list of recommendations for the Syrian side.

The table will function as a summary and guideline for future analysis as well as demonstrating the advantages and disadvantages of the pages Digital Diplomacy strategies. Finally, it will set the ground for a comprehensive list of policy recommendations for general Digital Diplomacy strategy and especially for the Syrian side.

1.2 Methodology

The method will be broken into both quantitative and qualitative:

The Quantitative section will follow two authors, Corneliu Bjola and Marcus Holmes, who explain how to measure diplomatic impact on social media by introducing these three goals of DD: agenda setting, presence expansion and conversation generation (Bjola, Corneliu, and Jiang, 2015, pp. 80-85). These aims can be quantified easily by analyzing the number of posts MFAs of both Syria and Czech Republic, and the engagement indicators of these posts (numbers of shares, likes, emotions, and so on). To achieve this goal, FanPage Karma, social media analytics tool (Fanpage Karma, online analytics tool). This tool provides analytics to Facebook pages using historical data of posts in a specific period.

This method can propose independent and dependent variables. Firstly, independent variable: effective digital communication strategy. This variable can be studied through analyzing performance indicators of Facebook pages of MFAs of Syria and Czech Republic by FanPage Karma, such as engagement indicators (likes, shares, comments & emotions).

Secondly, the dependent variable: successful management of digital diplomacy. This variable will be defined by the Digital Diplomacy goals established by Corneliu Bjola and Marcus Holmes; agenda setting, presence expansion and conversation generating.(Bjola, Corneliu, and Jiang, 2015, pp. 80-85). Considering that success of Digital diplomacy depends on the three factors mentioned before, effective digital strategy has a huge impact on success of Digital Diplomacy.

The qualitative side will involve content analysis of various posts from both MFAs Facebook pages. The posts will be chosen based on the unique engagement indicators, being one of the most popular posts in a chosen period. Or the posts will be chosen as a sample of a month's worth of content to analyse the usual monthly content of MFAs FB pages of both countries.

This methodology will be followed quantitatively and qualitatively to reach a comprehensive analysis and evaluation of Digital diplomacy of both countries of choice while establishing guidelines to operate an effective Digital Diplomacy strategy of a developing country like Syria, while taking into consideration that Czech Republic is the more developed mature example.

3. Literature Review

1.3 Introduction to Literature Review

This literature review aims at surveying different theories regarding Soft Power, Public Diplomacy, and Digital Diplomacy. The review will examine the different definitions and approaches in understanding Digital Diplomacy. The author of this work will suggest a definition that fits the purpose of this thesis, which is a common practice among other similar studies. The thesis will simultaneously present how important social media has been in both mobilizing the Arabic speaking population and shaping their public opinion for the last decade. Then it will have a brief visit to literature on Syrian diplomacy or rather the lack of literature, agency, and representation of Syrian diplomacy. Afterwards, a more extensive visit to Czech diplomacy, representing a more mature, well-developed example of Diplomacy, with a huge emphasis on Czech Digital diplomacy.

Then, the review will trace the line of digital diplomacy on Facebook and the role of Embassies in this field while considering cases that somewhat resemble the Czech and Syrian cases. This literature review will give special emphasis to Czech digital diplomatic experience on social media and government websites as it has unique elements to it. The Czech case is essential to draw a framework of analysis for the Syrian diplomatic experience as it lacks in volume and connections due to political turmoil in the country.

Finally, the literature review will visit the most prominent and relevant work of studies analyzing digital diplomacy on social media and carefully examine their methodology. These studies utilize tools created to evaluate digital strategies of Facebook accounts, which is also applicable for evaluating the Social Media presence of diplomatic missions or Ministries of Foreign Affairs. This has been mainly achieved by using historical data collected by Social Media analytics tools such as Fanpage Karma. The review will finally suggest the diameters and unit of analysis for the study. It will lay down the basic design of the methodology adopted by this thesis revolving around using both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis.

1.4 Surveying the Definitions of Digital Public Diplomacy: Digital Public Diplomacy and The Role of Embassies in The Literature

It is not possible to talk about Public Diplomacy, Soft Power, nor more modern terms such as digital diplomacy without quoting the father of Soft Power Joseph S. Nye (Nye, 2008 p. 98), as he provides one of the main definitions of public diplomacy in his work of “Public Diplomacy and Soft Power” as the term became more evident during the Obama administration.

Nye provides the following definition: “Public diplomacy is an instrument that governments use to mobilize these resources to communicate with and attract the publics of other countries, rather than merely their governments” (Nye, 2008 p. 95). Therefore, the first point to learn about public diplomacy which also distinguishes it from classic diplomacy is the relational nature of the concept.

Public diplomacy focuses on the relationship between a sovereign state and a foreign population which is different from classic diplomacy, that is traditionally defined by the relationship between two independent sovereign states.

Nye’s work on public diplomacy and soft power in the cold war era is mainly focused on the U.S. projection of Soft Power in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly the countries belonging to the Warsaw pact. He carefully examines the tools the U.S. had at hand to communicate with populations beyond the Iron Curtain and penetrate the Soviet information blockade over these countries (Nye, 2008 p. 97). This also offers a framework of analysis and evaluating soft power tools like international news agencies.

Nye, and due to the timing of this one publication does not truly reflect on the role of new media (Social Media Networks) in empowering news agencies and diplomatic missions in targeting and engaging with foreign audiences. For that matter, Ulrike and Svensson, offer a very good analysis of how the new media can offer non-traditional media influencers the opportunity to overpass gatekeepers and reach a bigger audience. For example, alternative news like CGTN and RT can have much bigger audience in the Western World using social media (Golan, Manor, and Arceneaux, 2019, p. 1671), but also Embassies and MFAs of smaller countries like Syria and Czech Republic can have more opportunities to connect with foreign audiences.

This shifts the debate from News agencies and classic media to social media and smaller actors, embassies, and MFAs. This opens the door for further definitions of Public Diplomacy or Digital diplomacy on Social Media.

First definition comes from Adesina's work on Foreign Policy in The Era of Digital Diplomacy, while the author offers a review of other definitions, the author shifts to offer a final definition that fits the purpose of the research, which is a common practice. Finally, Adesina refers to digital diplomacy as "the growing use of social media platforms by a country in order to achieve its foreign policy goals and proactively manage its image and reputation" (Adesina, 2015, .p. 175). In essence, this definition has a quantitative approach to Digital diplomacy.

Second definition the literature usually refers to is mainly regarding the quantity and volume of communication. Potter puts a heavy emphasis on the level or nature of communication and makes a subtle reference to the rapid base of digital diplomacy. He and other scholars such as Cowan and Arsenault (2008) distinguish the different layers of fast, medium, and slow digital diplomacy (Evan, 2018, p. 229). His study includes analyzing Canadian national branding in China, he refers to a one of the most popular Social Media platforms popular in China, which is Weibo and the popularity of the Canadian ambassador there (Evan, 2018, p. 231). He identifies the Digital Diplomacy style of the Canadian ambassador in China as a fast based one. For the sake of his study, the author settles on a specific definition of Digital diplomacy which is the use of a new media to interact with foreign audiences on daily and hourly bases to manage the digital diplomacy strategy (Evan, 2018, p. 229). This definition and methodology can be recognized as quantitative based on studying Digital Diplomacy within a specific period.

Third approach entails yet another game-changing variable for Public Diplomacy and its function, that is Social Media allows the audience to participate in the conversation, leave comments, engage with posts, tweets and videos. The activities of the users power the algorithms of social media, which means that audiences have a great say in either promoting or demoting news feed and content on platforms like Facebook. Elyse Huang talks about this very phenomenon in the publication "Facebook Not Statebook" (Huang, 2020, pp. 18) referring to engagement and interaction audiences leave on a post (likes, shares, comments, and emotions) that allows content on the new media to spread and reach a bigger audience.

Before concluding this survey of digital diplomacy definitions, it is rather important to mention that many authors argue there are two layers of public diplomacy, first of Ministers of Foreign affairs and the second layers are the embassies spread around the world (Olubukola, 2017, p. 2017). This is fundamental for this thesis as it will be focusing on the role of Foreign Ministries on Facebook to contribute to Digital Diplomacy.

In conclusion of this short survey of definitions, one can find different approaches in the literature addressing digital diplomacy. On one hand the focus is on the content and its nature, studying the quantity, quality and engagement techniques with the audience, the foreign populations. On the other hand, one should focus on the actors, news agencies, politicians, diplomats, or MFAs. For the sake of this thesis, the focus is MFA of Facebook pages of the Syrian and Czech Republic and the author will utilize this original digital diplomacy definition: Digital Diplomacy is the framework and structure that allows MFAs to manage their digital Diplomacy Strategy on Facebook effectively.

This article contributes to highlighting the role of MFA of small countries like the Syrian Arab Republic and Czech Republic on Digital Diplomacy on Facebook. Syria will be the less developed model with a big room for improvements, while the Czech Republic is the more mature example to follow.

1.5 Social Media and Digital Diplomacy Arab World

When looking at social media studies in the Arab world, one must consider two major aspects. First, the Arab spring, as it brought tremendous geopolitical changes to the region. Second, digital diplomacy in the Arab world, as the region has always been an arena for foreign influence using social media as a platform mainly by international news agencies, and sometimes by embassies and foreign ministers.

Firstly, social media has become instrumental in world politics and the Arab Spring is evidence of it. The Arab spring caught the attention of many researchers in the field, especially how social media can mobilize foreign populations on political and social issues, to the level of spreading unrest and motivating revolutions (Bjola, Corneliu, and Jiang, 2015, pp. 80-85). However, little has been done in the aftermath of the Arab spring, which some would refer to today as the Arab winter. This is due to its undesirable outcomes in some countries like Syria, Yamen, and Libya. Therefore, right after 2011 the whole academic, security, and media community of scholars started looking at social media from a new perspective (Golan, Manor, and Arceneaux, 2019, p. 1671). It is no longer the new experimental media; it is a powerful force that can induce tremendous change. Therefore, understanding and researching it further in the Arab world and beyond is the gateway to successful digital diplomacy.

When it comes to embassies' influence the literature proposes the following: Social media can assist diplomatic missions and give a huge boost to a state's national branding

beyond its traditional media sphere limited by geographic or linguistic barriers. In East Asia, social media has been significant in persuading local populations by foreign embassies as it helped many European diplomats there in breaking ice and cultivating an engaging two-way communication relationship with the local population (Bjola, Corneliu, and Jiang, 2015, pp. 80-85). Engagement is the key in the new media game and its use by diplomatic missions. Social Media influencers regardless of their status will always try work on relationship-building with their audiences, if these influencers are diplomats, or heads of MFAs they have more reasons to focus on the essence of utilizing Facebook to receive feedback from the audience they are trying to reach and learn from this experience. Therefore, social media is the perfect tool for MFAs and diplomats to expand their influence.

1.6 Quantifying Digital Diplomacy (DD) in The Arab World

There are no direct attempts to quantify digital diplomacy in the Arab world, but there are many similar experiences in other parts of the world that can be instrumental and instructive in building a framework of analysis. The works of Corneliu Bjola and Marcus Holmes from Oxford university and Shanghai School of Foreign Policy. They attempt to measure the digital diplomacy impact of three embassies in China targeting the Chinese population, there are U.S. embassy, EU mission and Japanese embassy accounts on Chinese Weibo (Bjola, Corneliu, and Jiang, 2015, pp. 80-85). This kind of analysis is important for this thesis. As an attempt to replicate this with the Social Media accounts of the Syrian and Czech Foreign Ministries.

Corneliu Bjola and Marcus Holmes' contribution is laying down a very clear and well-structured framework to analyze the work of other Diplomatic missions on Social Media. They introduce three elements that can define criteria diplomatic missions can use to measure the efficiency of their social media strategy and they are: agenda setting, presence expansion and conversation generating (Bjola, Corneliu, and Jiang, 2015, pp. 80-85). This thesis argues that the three elements can be used by diplomatic missions as well as MFA in looking at developing their Digital Diplomatic strategy. This will become more evident as the focus of the review and the thesis will shift to measuring the success of the Czech case and deploy the lessons learned from the Czech MFA in making policy recommendations for Syrian Digital Diplomacy.

1.7 Introduction to Syrian Diplomacy

While surveying the literature covering the Syrian Diplomacy, the elements involved are very limited. The lack of literature on this topic is rather fascinating, the only work one can refer to is historical, and concerning international diplomacy. Another recurring issue referring to Syrian diplomacy is the lack of agency. Syrian diplomacy is mainly associated with the war, refugees, or terrorism. In certain instances, Syrian diplomacy is only measured and framed with diplomacy of other partners, Russia, and Iran or in international conventions like UN, EU meetings and U.S. interests in the region. To have a glimpse on Syrian diplomacy, one must look at works referring to Syria before 2011, before the war. Regarding that, publications vary from Syrian diplomacy towards Europe to the one towards the U.S.

Referring to diplomacy after the war, some of the issues discussed before such as the lack of agency, representation and independent framing become very relevant. However, some lessons can be also drawn here. This thesis is taking a huge responsibility in covering such a sensitive topic. Therefore, any minor or major findings from this thesis are going to be significant in pushing the conversations towards revisiting Syrian diplomacy with fresh eyes and overcome some of the cliches that limits other authors from looking at Syrian diplomacy as a legitimate actor. The little work published on Syrian diplomacy before the war is essential here and it breaks into two categories. Firstly, the one covering the relationship with Europe is rather brief and the one covering the relationship with the U.S. slightly more extensive and complicated.

1.8 Syria's Diplomacy Towards Europe

After the transition of power between Al Assad father and son, Bashar in 2000 decided to shape his own foreign policy and diplomatic ties. According to Hinnebusch who studied Syrian diplomacy for decades, he says “[Al Assad] first state visits outside the Arab world were not to Moscow, the old ally, but to Western Europe – France, Spain, Germany and Britain”. (Hinnebusch, 2003, pp. 197-200). The author contextualizes the new president viewed alignment with Europe as crucial to Syria's economic future and as providing a political shield against US hostility (Hinnebusch, 2003, pp. 197-200) and that during the 2000s there were not many options as the Socialist camp has collapsed recently.

To complement diplomatic ties, Syria had more and more reasons to cultivate trade deals with the west says Hinnebusch on this,

“Syria had an increasing economic incentive to participate in the partnership since, after the collapse of the East Bloc, its trade had shifted significantly westward, making the EU Syria’s main trading partner. The EU took 60 percent of Syria’s exports and provided 30 percent of its imports in 2000.” (Hinnebusch, 2003, pp. 197-200).

Before the war erupted and the turmoil in the country, Syria had ongoing diplomatic and trade ties with the west. As for national branding, there was little to be discussed and the literature does not describe this much. However, data shows that Syria was a tourist destination as it enjoys a rich history, of both Roman, and Islamic empires, Syrian justice and accountability Center says that “Before the conflict began, Syria’s tourism industry was booming. It contributed to nearly 14% of the country’s GDP and employed 8.3% of the workforce” (Syria Justice & Accountability Centre, 2021). As the field of digital diplomacy has become prominent only after the Arab spring and the war in Syria, it is no surprise that there is not much or rather any literature written on this topic regarding Syria. Syrian diplomacy has been reduced to the bare minimum as well as acute issues related to the lack of agency and representation. The two other articles discussed here can be a good demonstration of the issue at hand.

1.9 Refugee Diplomacy, Turkey, Lebanon, and Jourdan

Due to the refugee crisis, Syrian diplomacy was minimized to the refugee question and refugee diplomacy, thus making the countries hosting the biggest number of refugees the main negotiators of Syrian diplomacy. Countries like Turkey, Lebanon and Jourdan gained so much leverage in negotiating the refugee’s status in international organizations. Tsourapas presents this issue by forwarding some of the main questions regarding Syrian refugees’ diplomacy (Gerasimos, 201). He describes how unfortunate for the refugee community was the behavior of the host countries as they used the opportunity to make profit and gain benefits on behalf of refugees. Tsourapas explains two different stages of the rent-seeking refugee-hosting countries. He says, “examining the foreign policy responses of three major host states Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. While all three engaged in post-2011 refugee rent-seeking behaviour, Jordan and Lebanon deployed a back-scratching strategy based on bargains, while Turkey deployed a blackmailing strategy based on threats.” (Gerasimos,

2019, pp.470-475). For the purpose of this article it is only desirable to explain the motives and reasons behind lack of literature on Syrian diplomacy, and the review found that the very literature touching on the topic excludes the Syrian agency from the discussion.

1.10 Syrian Diplomacy in Contexts of Partners and Rival

The last section on lack of Syrian diplomacy or disguise of Syrian diplomacy is framing Syria only in the context of partners and rivals. Scholars pointed out different strategies, and views dealing with the Syrian conflict from policy makers perspectives in the West. The other approach is constantly framing Syria in the context of Syrian partners like Iran and Russia. Barnes-Dacey, Julien, and Daniel Levy and their policy recommendations are all about navigating Russian and Iranian influence in the region. For example, the authors say, on one instance, “Moscow’s military intervention is a potentially pivotal development in the conflict, shifting the expectations of the various actors in a manner that could open a window of political opportunity” (Barnes-Dacey and Levy, 2015). Looking at Syrian diplomacy from the lenses of Russian policy is yet another example of lacking agency in discussing the topic. On another instance the authors compare Syrian diplomacy to the nuclear deal in Iran. The authors again, “It has long been recognized that Iran’s active role on the ground in Syria and potential leverage with the Assad government make it a critical actor to engage, but the West’s nuclear preoccupation and concern at the risk of trade-offs between the files” (Barnes-Dacey and Levy, 2015) All of these examples of diplomatic misrepresentation of Syria, and lack of Syrian agency while it sets in the core of the discussion.

In conclusion Syrian diplomacy is critically lacking in the literature and the only proper representation of it is literature dating back to before the war started. When it comes to digital diplomacy there is nothing on this topic because the field mainly emerged after the Arab Spring and turmoil in the region. This thesis is ground-breaking in its attempt to fill a gap that has been long forgotten and is the first ever written paper describing Syrian Digital Diplomacy by a Syrian diplomat after the war and turmoil in the country.

1.11 Public Diplomacy Czech Republic

The thesis choice of analyzing Czech Republic Digital diplomacy is for many reasons. Firstly, the position of the author allows a special access to understanding and analyzing digital diplomacy in the Czech Republic. Secondly, Czech Digital Diplomacy is very well developed, with a clear structure and offers a good example for comparison and learning experience for countries that aim to develop their own Digital Diplomacy strategy. Thirdly, Czech public diplomacy is challenged by language, history, size, and economic influence of the country, thus, the relative success in their DD is a very good case to be studied and researched. This literature review will examine the main documents referring to Digital Diplomacy in the Czech Republic, the main concepts, structure, and lessons to be learned.

The works of Jana Peterková and Eliška Tomalová offer a huge contribution to understanding and analysing DD in the Czech Republic (CZ). In contrast to the Syrian case, DD in CZ offers many resources and analysis on this matter. The two authors firstly introduce the definition of Public Diplomacy for Czech MFA, “[MFA] frames public diplomacy in a more foreign-policy-dimensions-division-oriented context and focuses mainly on cultural affairs, branding and the positive image of the state-related activities.” (Peterková, and Tomalová, 2017, 324-336). This means that Czech MFA looks at the topic from a national branding point of view that is mainly related to crafting the country’s image based on cultural association. To put more emphasis on national branding the authors explored some of the main documents and concepts offered by Czech MFA publications, “Czech foreign policy – *Koncepce zahraniční politiky České republiky* (Foreign Policy Conception of the Czech Republic), where public diplomacy falls into the category ‘*dobré jméno v zahraničí*’ (a positive image or reputation abroad) without being explicitly mentioned (Peterková, and Tomalová, 2017, 324-336).”

The authors do a great job identifying all the documents referring to DD in CZ, and they point out two that of most importance to this debate:

“*Strategie činnosti Českých center v letech 2016–2019* [the Strategy of the Activities of the Czech Centres for 2016–2019]” regarding tracking the activities of Czech cultural centers around the world and their performance in promoting CZ DD and the second is “*Koncepce podpory umění v České republice na léta 2015–2020* [the Conception of the Support for Art in the Czech Republic for 2015–2020].” Both documents are mainly oriented towards culture and art which is an asset for the DD strategy of any country. These documents are being edited and reproduced on yearly basis sometimes. “The reflection and

preparatory process for the new version of the former document already started in 2017” (Peterková, and Tomalová, 2017, 324-336)

This also shows how DD and its strategy is in constant development and evolution as MFA invests in improving nation branding techniques and strategies. This is a huge difference from the Syrian case when the whole concept of DD was overpassed due to the war and turmoil in the country.

Other than identifying the main documents, the two authors also do a great job at identifying the main actors. “Among the existing actors, the MFA and its various departments, such as the Department of Public Diplomacy or the Department of Special Representative for Compatriotic Relations, have an exceptional status” (Peterková, and Tomalová, 2017, 324-336).

As many of the documents and concepts discussed earlier are the product of MFA then it is not a surprise to see the authors placing MFA as the head key actor in the strategy and management of Czech DD. However, this also offers an insight on different departments and the structure involved in the shaping and managing public diplomacy. For example, the Czech MFA has dedicated a special body for the Department of Public Diplomacy; this is not a common case in many countries. Thus, the Czech MFA has invested in developing public diplomacy and utilizing it. This could be a lesson to be learned for many countries that are aspiring to develop and manage their national branding. According to the authors, Czech MFA has placed another department in close response to managing DD. This department is Special representative of Compatriotic Relations.

The authors themselves hint that this structure might not be the best structure. There are an overwhelming number of organizations and agencies that are involved in shaping and influencing DD in the Czech Republic. The authors mention Czech Centres and offices of Commissioner Generals, as well as ministry of culture, and not to forget The Standing Senate Commission for Compatriots Living Abroad. (Peterková, and Tomalová, 2017, 324-336). The authors recognize and refer to these actors and their frequent influence on Czech DD. This phenomenon has been captured also by another author, a Ukrainian scholar in the field that analyzes DD in Czech. Yana Matchuk from the National University of Kyiv, shares a very similar opinion and analysis of the previously mentioned authors. Matchuk writes while analyzing the legal and structural framework of DD in Czech Republic:

“Czech Centers established by initiative of the MFA and aims at promoting the country abroad. Initially the network of centres in 22 countries has been conceived as a powerful

leverage for public diplomacy sharing materials about the country, promoting the culture, language, tourism thus, creating its favourable image in the recipient countries.” (Matchuk, 2020, pp.166-180).

This method has its own advantages, but also disadvantages when it comes to identifying and managing one single DD for Czechia. The three authors agree on the overwhelming number of institutes involved in this and hint at the necessity of establishing one independent, centralized body that manages the national brand (Peterková, and Tomalová, 2017, 324-336). Nevertheless, DD in Czechia is well developed and worth looking further into, especially examining the different tools and instruments utilized to project and manage DD.

There is a range of tools at hand of MFA and different organization, embassies to manage national branding, for example, Jana Peterková and Eliška Tomalová mention “While the website with information on events in the Czech Republic is still available at www.czech.cz, there is a profile on Facebook managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the address [Czechia.eu](https://www.facebook.com/Czechia.eu)” (Peterková, and Tomalová, 2017, 324-336). It is very important that the authors placed the MFA Facebook page as one of the main tools of DD for Czechia, because this thesis is based on analyzing FB pages of both Syrian and Czech MFA. In addition to Facebook pages and websites, Matchuk explains that DD in Czechia is special due to two instrumental components, firstly the direct relationship with the press department that deals with the management of national branding in relation with foreign countries, international institutes, and embassies (Matchuk, 2020, pp.166-180).

Finally, DD in Czechia stands out because it actively trains and educates its diplomats and different responsible bodies for DD in the field, Matchuk also hints at this phenomena, “it is worth mentioning that it has become one of the first countries establishing a position of cyber attaché and sending its diplomats on such specific mission to Washington, Brussels and Tel-Aviv. It is allegedly building a network in the strategic partner-countries” (Matchuk, 2020, pp.166-180). This is happening in the context of Digital diplomacy as the technical skills acquired in cyber training do find many common grounds with managing and projecting national branding online. The risks that come with exposing DD to the cyber world require proper skills and training.

In conclusion of Czech Digital Diplomacy there is a clear line of development and strategy Czech MFA deploying in defining Digital Diplomacy. MFA dedicates a department to oversee national branding, but this department must work and cooperate with multiple

institutes and organizations on different levels and layers. Therefore, the literature points out a necessity of a more independent centralized center for DD or national branding that can operate more effectively. However, DD in the Czech Republic remains highly well developed and an example to follow as MFA is well established on social media and diplomats are being consistently trained in the field. This is a very different case from the DD situation in Syria due to reasons explained before. Thus, making the comparison between the two is rather a framework for policy recommendation for Syria and other countries that aspire to develop their own DD strategy.

1.12 Digital diplomacy on Facebook by Embassies and MFAs

Now, this paper must examine digital diplomacy on Facebook, the different uses of the term especially and puts a particular emphasis on embassies' role in projecting digital diplomacy on using the popular platform.

In Elyse Huang's approach on analysing diplomacy on Facebook, the author points out "This article summarizes four modes of participation: expression, interaction, membership, and campaign, a framework built on online political participation research. The concept focuses on the flow of dialogue and action between diplomatic and individual actors, to which social platforms offer indispensable support" (Huang, 2020, pp. 18). This platform is Facebook, as this article discussed before in the literature review. The article "Facebook not Statebook" puts emphasis on the interaction nature of the communication style Diplomatic Missions and individuals must consider when interacting with their audience. Facebook plays a great role as a platform for analysis, this is due to the size of the audience on Facebook, popularity of it and the nature of its ability to engage, number of options (emotions, sharing, comments) and a whole diverse level of interaction that describes the two-way communication style.

Damien Spry and his publication "Facebook diplomacy: A data-driven, user-focused approach to Facebook use by diplomatic missions." he argues for some strong points for Facebook to be used by diplomatic missions and for researchers learning about Digital Diplomacy. He says "Facebook is the most used social media platform, both generally and for diplomatic purposes, ... [Facebook allows] accessing publicly available data and de-identifying user information. This allows for the reproducibility of the research for the purposes of testing or expanding upon this study" and consequently Facebook could and

should be used by this study to learn about Digital diplomacy strategy of both Syrian and Czech MFAs.(Damien, 2018, pp.62-80).

1.13 Digital diplomacy in Bucharest

Simona-Nicoleta Voicu writes and analyses digital diplomacy scenery in Bucharest performed by the different embassies and compared against each other in level of interaction and impact. The author in their article, Digital Diplomacy a new microsphere of Public Diplomacy. Voicu says:

“Thus, digital diplomacy can be perceived as a micro-sphere of public communication through which career diplomats have found a breath in their ongoing struggle to maintain a balanced world. This article also presents a parallel between the number of followers of foreign embassies in Romania in 2015, with those in 2020 on social networks Facebook and Twitter. This analysis includes a number of 30 embassies based in Bucharest.” (Simona-Nicoleta, 2020, pp.160-176).

This approach to embassies and diplomats on social media being a micro-sphere of digital diplomacy is a result of a high-level independence and individuality in its approach to DD. This thesis will be following similar steps but rather looking at the grand DD presented by MFA on Facebook. There is an overwhelming number of scholars, practitioners and articles that refer to Facebook and its powerful role in changing the nature of Diplomacy, and it cannot be ignored neither by underdeveloped states nor by developing ones. This research will demonstrate how a developing country lacks tremendously on this subject and set a framework or a guide to establish some of the basics for a healthy Digital Diplomacy regardless of the size of the country and size of the budget as much of these strategies depend on a trained staff rather than investing in technology.

1.14 Methodological Comparison

So far this literature review managed to survey on one hand the theories on Digital

The review makes Digital Diplomacy of MFAs on Facebook the centre of gravity and attention. Therefore, the very last section of this literature review is about making subtle comparisons between the most effective relevant methods of analysis for this thesis. Diplomacy and its development, the different perspectives discussed in the literature from a

methodological point of you will occupy the coming paragraphs. On another hand, the review presents the historical and structural background of Digital Diplomacy research.

The research will demonstrate the units of analysis that must be used by different countries in evaluating the Digital strategy of their MFA. Now, the basic Digital Diplomacy standards any MFA must demonstrate is having an official Facebook/Twitter for the MFA, followed by other pages for the minister, spokesperson, and other institutes participants in DD strategy. The main level of analysis is the data analysis of the Social Media engagement and presence of the MFA of Syria and Czech Republic on Social Media.

This methodology will be followed quantitatively and qualitatively to reach a comprehensive analysis and evaluation of DD for both countries of choice while establishing guidelines to operate a healthy Digital Diplomacy of a developing country like Syria, while taking into consideration that Czech Republic is the more developed mature example.

1.15 The Methodological choice

Following works of previous scholar the method will be designed in a way that satisfies both quantitative and qualitative elements:

The Quantitative section will follow two authors, Corneliu Bjola and Marcus Holmes, who explain how to measure diplomatic impact on social media by introducing these three goals of DD: agenda setting, presence expansion and conversation generation (Bjola, Corneliu, and Jiang, 2015, pp. 80-85). These aims can be quantified easily by analysing the number of posts MFAs of both Syria and Czech Republic, and the engagement indicators of these posts (numbers of shares, likes, emotions, and so on). To achieve this goal, FanPage Karma, social media analytics tool (Fanpage Karma, online analytics tool). This tool provides analytics to Facebook pages using historical data of posts in a specific period.

This method can propose independent and dependent variables. Firstly, independent variable: effective digital communication strategy. This variable can be studied through analysing performance indicators of Facebook pages of MFAs of Syria and Czech Republic by FanPage Karma, such as engagement indicators (likes, shares, comments & emotions).

Secondly, the dependent variable: successful management of digital diplomacy. This variable will be defined by the Digital Diplomacy goals established by Corneliu Bjola and Marcus Holmes; agenda setting, presence expansion and conversation generating.(Bjola, Corneliu, and Jiang, 2015, pp. 80-85). Considering that success of Digital diplomacy

depends on the three factors mentioned before, effective digital strategy has a huge impact on success of Digital Diplomacy.

The qualitative side will involve content analysis of various posts from both MFAs Facebook pages. The posts will be chosen based on the unique engagement indicators, being one of the most popular posts in a chosen period. Or the posts will be chosen as a sample of a month's worth of content to analyse the usual monthly content of MFAs FB pages of both countries.

This methodology will be followed quantitatively and qualitatively to reach a comprehensive analysis and evaluation of Digital diplomacy of both countries of choice while establishing guidelines to operate an effective Digital Diplomacy strategy of a developing country like Syria, while taking into consideration that Czech Republic is the more developed mature example.

1.16 Concluding The Literature Review

In conclusion, This literature review covers a range of topics related to Digital Diplomacy. It begins by discussing the theories and definitions of Digital Diplomacy and public diplomacy and examines the origins of the concept and academic interest in the field. The review also highlights the role of social media in the Arab Spring and its impact on Digital Diplomacy, leading to a focus on Syria and the lack of literature on the topic due to the country's ongoing war and turmoil. The review then shifts focus to the more developed and mature case of the Czech Republic's Digital Diplomacy strategy and uses this as a framework for further analysis.

The review justifies the use of Facebook as a platform for the study and examines previous research on the use of Facebook by diplomatic missions. It links this to the core focus of the study, which is the Digital Diplomacy strategy of the MFA on Facebook. Lastly, the review discusses the methodology used to collect data and analyse the Digital Diplomacy strategies of both the Syrian and Czech MFAs on Facebook. It uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to evaluate the efficiency, popularity, and image presentation of each MFA's Facebook page. The review provides a foundation for the analysis of the case studies and presents a comprehensive overview of the key topics and issues surrounding Digital Diplomacy.

The quantitative method will focus on evaluating the performance of the Facebook pages of the two countries' MFAs based on three indicators established by Corneliu Bjola

and Marcus Holmes: agenda setting, presence expansion, and conversation generating. By analysing these indicators, the study aims to gain insight into the effectiveness of the two countries' Digital Diplomacy efforts in engaging with their audiences and promoting their respective foreign policies (Bjola, Corneliu, and Jiang, 2015, pp. 80-85).

The qualitative methods employed in this study will include interviews with key personnel involved in the development and implementation of the Digital Diplomacy strategies of the two countries. This will provide valuable first-hand perspectives on the challenges and opportunities involved in conducting Digital Diplomacy campaigns in different contexts. In addition, the study will analyse official documents published by the MFAs of the Czech Republic and Syria to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their Digital Diplomacy strategies.

Overall, this thesis aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on Digital Diplomacy by shedding light on the strategies and tactics employed by two countries with vastly different resources and geopolitical positions. By comparing the Digital Diplomacy efforts of the Czech Republic and Syria on Facebook, this study hopes to identify best practices and lessons learned that can be applied in other contexts and to inform future research in this field.

4. Practical Part and Results

1.17 Data, findings and research results in context

This chapter will present all of the data, main research findings and follow up with an analysis and contextualizing part of the results. This is a bridge between the theory suggested before and the empirical evidence of this study, some of the findings can be considered ground-breaking on a level of further understanding reaching out in the field of digital Soft Power and public diplomacy.

The increasing importance of social media in international relations has led to the emergence of digital diplomacy as a critical tool for governments and international organizations. However, measuring the impact of digital diplomacy efforts on social media remains a challenge. This study aims to address this gap by proposing a framework for measuring the impact of digital diplomacy on social media and applying it to the case of Syria and the Czech Republic.

The study employs a mixed-methods approach, collecting data from the Facebook pages of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Syrian Arab Republic and the Czech Republic between 2020-2022. The data was analysed using a social media analytics tool called FanPage Karma to extract engagement indicators such as likes, shares, comments, and emotions. Additionally, a content analysis of the posts was conducted to identify the themes and topics discussed.

The main findings of this research include:

- Identification of the most effective digital communication strategies used by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Syria and the Czech Republic.
- Analysis of the engagement indicators (likes, shares, comments) of the posts on the Facebook pages of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Syria and the Czech Republic.
- Identification of the themes and topics discussed in the posts on the Facebook pages of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Syria and the Czech Republic.
- Evaluation of the extent to which the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Syria and the Czech Republic have achieved the goals of agenda setting, presence expansion, and conversation generation.
- Identification of the challenges facing the development of digital diplomacy for both the Syria and the Czech MFA Facebook pages.

- Mentioning advantages and disadvantages of the strategies and positions of the Facebook pages of both MFA's.
- Proposal of guidelines for the development of effective digital diplomacy strategies in developing countries (a list of recommendations).

The study provides a comprehensive analysis and evaluation of digital diplomacy for both Syria and the Czech Republic while also establishing a framework for measuring the impact of digital diplomacy on social media. The findings of this study will be useful for governments and international organizations looking to improve their digital diplomacy efforts.

1.17.1 Justifying the methods and the timeframe

The time period chosen for this analysis is three years, starting from the date of data collection. The reason for this choice is that it allows for a comprehensive examination of the digital diplomacy efforts of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Syria and the Czech Republic over a significant period of time. This time period encompasses a period that has been marked by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a significant impact on the way governments and international organizations conduct diplomacy. The pandemic has forced many Ministries of Foreign Affairs to shift their focus towards digital diplomacy as traditional offline events have become difficult to conduct. This has resulted in an increase in the use of social media for public diplomacy, which makes it an important time period to study the effectiveness of digital diplomacy efforts. Additionally, this time period enables the analysis of seasonal fluctuations and any long-term trends, which can provide insights into the digital diplomacy strategies of both countries.

It is important to note that the focus of this research is on Facebook, and mentioning the existence of Twitter accounts of MFA's and presidencies, is for the sake of establishing metadata. The twitter accounts will not be a major part of the detailed analysis. The reason for this is that Facebook is the most widely used social media platform, and it has a larger number of active users compared to Twitter. Additionally, Facebook has a more robust set of analytical indicators that provides better insights for data collection and analysis, making it a more suitable platform for this study.

In order to further understand the concept of national branding in digital diplomacy, the authors of this study examined the publications of the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, specifically the document "Czech Foreign Policy - Koncepce zahraniční politiky

České republiky (Foreign Policy Conception of the Czech Republic)"(Peterková, and Tomalová, 2017, 324-336). This document highlights the importance of creating and maintaining a positive image or reputation for the country abroad, which falls under the category of public diplomacy. However, it does not mention it explicitly.

This highlights the organized approach of the Czech Republic in their digital diplomacy strategy. In contrast, the authors found that the Syrian side does not have an explicit digital diplomacy strategy. This highlights the importance of national branding and the need for a well-organized digital diplomacy strategy, which is something that the Czech Republic has effectively implemented. This study aims to identify and evaluate the strategies used by the Czech Republic in their digital diplomacy efforts, and to provide recommendations for other countries, such as Syria, to improve their digital diplomacy efforts.

1.17.2 Meta Data on the social media indicators, introducing the two countries in Data

Due to the lack of documentation from the Syrian side, and previously discussed reasons regarding limiting the development of the Digital Diplomacy in the country, due to sanction limitation on resources and staff discussed in the literature. It is important to establish a guideline that shows the basic tools of Syrian Digital Diplomacy. This includes going through the social media accounts of the presidency, MFA on both Facebook and Twitter. Firstly, checking the availability of these accounts and their publications in different languages.

The research shows that both the Syrian and Czech side enjoy the following list of Social media accounts and are utilized for Public diplomacy purposes while using different languages, dealing with different audience sizes and deploying varying methods of fulfilling their role.

Profile	Network	Fans	Post interaction	Posts per day
EU2022_CZ	TWITTER	20k	0.09%	14.46428571
MZV ČR	TWITTER	64.5k	0.06%	4

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic	FACEBOOK	11k	0.22%	0.214285714
وزارة الخارجية والمغتربين في الجمهورية العربية السورية Mofa - Syria	FACEBOOK	112k	0.19%	2.357142857
Syrian Presidency	TWITTER	205k	0.18%	0.678571429
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Syria	TWITTER	71	0.00%	0

Table (1): 1st-28th of Dec 2022 of Social Media indicators of the selected 6 accounts (collected in Dec 2022)

The pages discussed in table (1) in order are: Presidency Czech Twitter, MFA Czech Twitter, MFA Czech Facebook, MFA Syria Facebook, Presidency Syrian Twitter, MFA Syria Twitter.

It is also important to note which accounts use which language to better understand the communication strategy. These are the available accounts for Syrian and Czech public diplomacy efforts, it is noteworthy to mention that Syrian MFA on twitter has a very small number of followers, and it mainly retweets the presidency page. Therefore, Syrian MFA on twitter will be excluded from this analysis and the focus will be on the MFA on Facebook and the presidency page on Twitter for the Syrian side. However, for the Czech side, all pages will be considered. Lastly, due to lack of resources and experience in the field, the Syrian side almost always and only posts content in Arabic. It is not clear if this is a deliberate audience targeting choice or lack of resources and experience. This is not an obstacle for the researcher as Arabic is within their language expertise.

1.18 Applying The Three Principles of Public Diplomacy Agenda Setting, Presence Expansion and Conversation Generation

1.18.1 Firstly, Czech Digital Diplomacy MFA Facebook, Data Findings and Analysis

The Czech side stands out with the delicate documentation that entails a well designed strategy, as discussed above and in previous chapters which include but are not limited to “Czech foreign policy – Koncepce zahraniční politiky České republiky (Foreign Policy Conception of the Czech Republic)(Peterková, and Tomalová, 2017, 324-336). This Allows the Czech public diplomacy and institutions involved in the making of it to have an explicit clear strategy. This is not only helpful for researchers to observe and analyse Digital diplomacy of a certain country, but also rather necessary to communicate and standardized instructions among different agencies and institutions responsible for Digital Diplomacy, here are a handful of these institutions (Czech Centres and offices of Commissioner Generals, as well as ministry of culture, and not to forget The Standing Senate Commission for Compatriots Living Abroad) (Peterková, and Tomalová, 2017, 324-336). These centres, institutes and even embassies will be appearing in analyzing Digital Diplomacy as they are active in many of the steps of spreading Czech influence digitally. Explicit strategy is a blessing for the sake of standardization, normalization and initialization of Digital Diplomacy communication among a greater number of institutions.

The Czech Republic stands out as a well-developed case study in the field of digital diplomacy. Analysing its digital diplomacy efforts can therefore be used as a standard or a guideline for evaluating and contrasting those of developing nations, such as Syria. Researchers can learn a lot about successful digital diplomacy tactics by looking at the Czech MFA's digital diplomacy content and referencing interesting results back it to the literature that describes Czech Digital Diplomacy. This can serve as the foundation for suggestions on how other nations, like Syria, should strengthen their digital diplomacy efforts. In order to have a more complete picture of their digital diplomacy initiatives, it is crucial to additionally evaluate this page. By doing so, this study can offer valuable insights into the world of digital diplomacy and inform future efforts in this field.

Page	Network	Average Post Interaction	Biggest Number of Fans
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic	Facebook	53.34591195	10905
EU2022_CZ	Twitter	32.03024055	20.6K
MZV ČR	Twitter	27.46960402	<u>64.5K</u>

Table (2): Jan 2021 - Oct 2021 Social Media indicators of both FB and Twitter accounts of Czech Main Digital Diplomacy platforms. (collected in Dec 2022)

1.18.2 Firstly, Czech Digital Diplomacy MFA Facebook, Data Findings and Analysis

Firstly, looking at the follower growth of Czech MFA Facebook page shows healthy normal growth indicators from figure (1), the data is collected from 1st of Feb 2021 till 31st of Dec, this is due to the tool only starts taking notes of pages after they reach a certain number of fans only if the page has been registered on the tool, unfortunately before this date, the page has not been noticed by the tool. Therefore, the limit of the data is only started by Feb 2021 on the number of fans. However, when it comes to reaction with the page the tool can find data as old as Jan 2020.

MFA Czech republic Facebook
Total Reactions, Comments, Shares
 2020 - December 2022

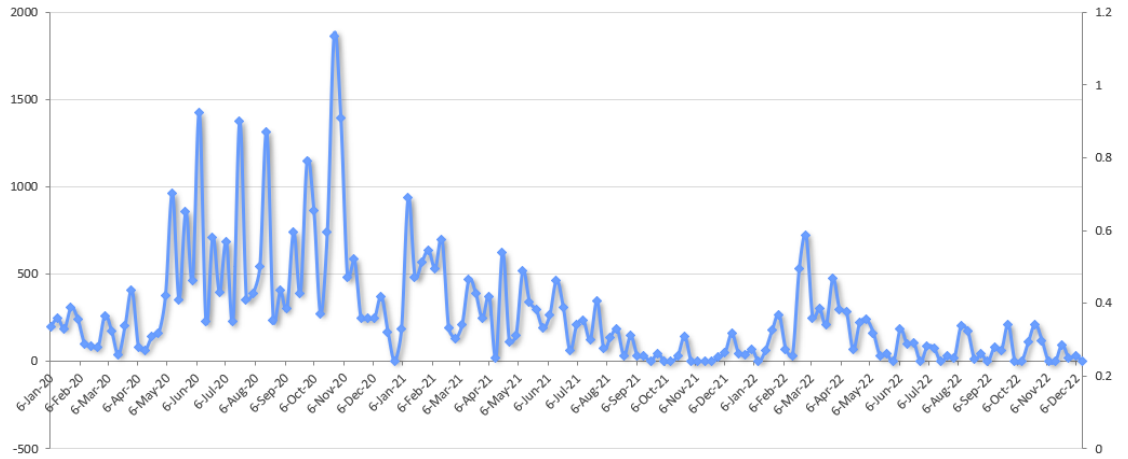


Figure 1 MFA CZ FB total reactions Jan 2020 - Oct 2022 (collected in Dec 2022)

Number of Fans on Day of Post vs. Date

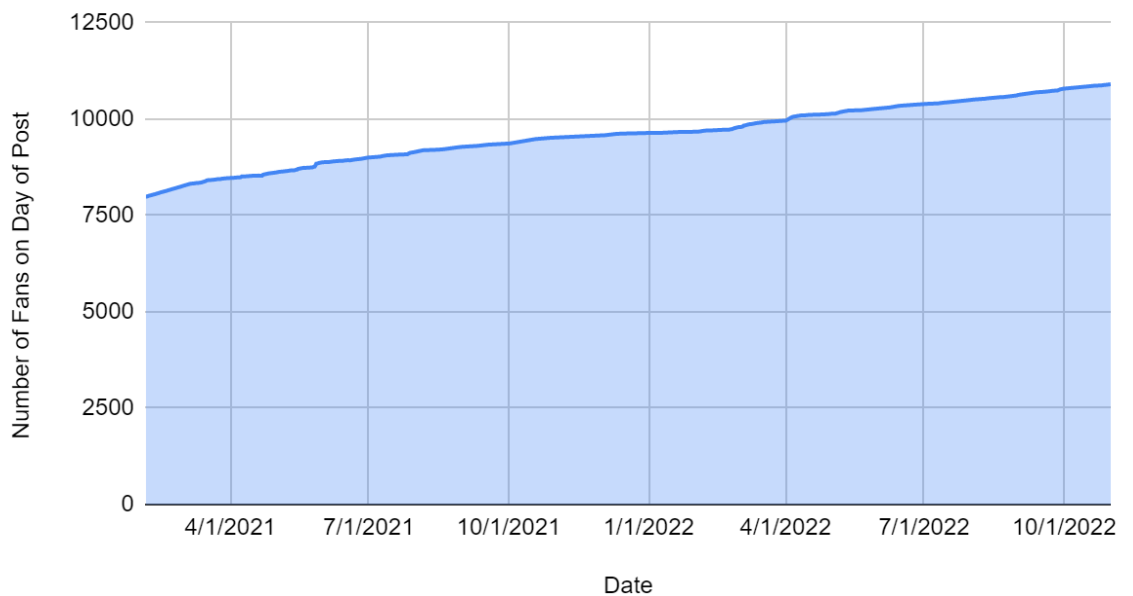


Figure 2 Followers growth MFA CZ Facebook Feb 2021 Oct 2022. (collected in Dec 2022)

Notice that the page maintains a healthy level of interaction with their audience with total reactions of every 6 months reaching over 18K but overall maintains around 8K. The page is growing its audience and has an effective strategy of interaction with the audience having some months more successful than others.

Fanpage	Date	Average Reactions	Total Reactions
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic	31 Oct 2022	41.87336245	9589
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic	31 May 2021	44	8222
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic	24 Dec 2020	82.70175439	18856
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic	29 May 2020	31.90555556	5743

Table (3) average reactions and total reactions every 6 month MFA Czech Facebook from Jan 2020 till Dec 2022 (collected in Dec 2022)

In table (3), we learn that the MFA FB page is able to maintain a successful and engaging relationship with its audience being analyzed in different time epochs, weekly, or every six months. It is an evidence that the relationship is flourishing as both followers growth and engagement rates are always above a certain level. Occasionally, the page will reach a much bigger audience, and receive further engagement, like the period between June 2020 and Dec 2020, as the average over 82 and total was 18K making this period the most active and makes double the engagement in comparison to other periods. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the Czech Republic's digital diplomacy strategy, the study analyzed the most active posts on their Facebook page over a period of one year. This analysis provided insights into the choice of content and the strategies used by the Czech Republic, as well as the factors that contributed to the success of their digital diplomacy efforts.

1.19 Czech Agenda Setting and Content Strategy

Furthermore, the study also identified the three most popular posts on the Czech Republic's Facebook page during the most popular week within the last two years of digital diplomacy efforts. This analysis provided a deeper understanding of the types of content and strategies that are most effective in engaging the audience and achieving the goals of digital diplomacy. These insights can be used as a guideline for other countries looking to improve their digital diplomacy efforts. The findings of this research demonstrate the advanced communication strategy of the Czech Republic on Facebook and how it can be a good example for other countries to follow, especially developing ones like the Syrian diplomacy that will be studied in this thesis. The following posts presented here are the three most popular posts in the most popular week within the last two years of Digital Diplomacy effort.



Figure 3 screenshot, facebook post MFA CZ Ministry of Foreign affairs Czech Republic. Facebook page. Oct. 2020. Screenshot Facebook, MFA CZ (collected Dec 2022)

The first screen shot is of (1st post) a post from the week of national holidays and independence day for the Czech republic. The page is celebrating and sharing how different cities around the world have joined Czech in this celebration (MFA Cz Facebook, 2020) .

This is good evidence of the hard work of different institutions and associations in spreading Czech soft power through physically being there on the ground and coordinating with local bodies of authorities. These places include but are not limited to, Dubai, Ankara, Lima, Delhi, Sarajevo. Obviously the most smart and thoughtful thing is to share that back on social media motivating local authorities to share it back again making double use of the physical digital content reaching literally over thousands of new audiences. This strategy continues for over a week. This post reached 112 shares, over 400 reactions very impressive for Facebook diplomatic page.



Figure 4 Screenshot, Facebook post, MFA CZ Ministry of Foreign affairs Czech Republic. Facebook page. Oct. 2020. Screenshot Facebook, MFA CZ (collected Dec 2022)

Same goes for the second popular post, here there is further emphasis on the history and Czech journey into independence, which is both more politically charged and assertive. It would be interesting to see which part of the DD team is responsible for which posts and their overarching strategy (2ed post) (MFA Cz Facebook, 2020). Here, and due to the emphasis on politics and history, this post received over 22 comments, and 230 shares which does wonders to the essence of conversation generation and reach enlargement as well as most importantly agenda setting, the pillars of successful DD measurements. Here agenda setting has been induced like the Trojan horse, of using the hype and momentum of the independence day to share the most important political agenda and make its stand on sensitive political matters especially, the independence of the country and the history that led to that independence.

 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic is in Old Town Square. ...
October 27, 2020 · 🌐

The Prague Astronomical Clock, or Prague Orloj, is one of the most famous tourist attractions in the historical centre of the city. 🕒 It is a medieval astronomical clock mounted on the southern wall of the Old Town City Hall. First installed in 1410, it is the third-oldest astronomical clock in the world and the oldest one still in operation. 🇨🇪



Figure 5 Ministry of Foreign affairs Czech Republic. Facebook page. Oct. 2020. Screenshot Facebook, MFA CZ (collected Dec 2022)

The third screenshot (3rd post) is again about Czech Culture and less politically charged (MFA Cz Facebook, 2020). The strategy strikes again, it is sandwiching the political agenda with cultural one. There is not much written in the documents about this issue but rather it is impressive how they reached this content strategy. It must be a planned coordinated work otherwise, it is difficult to perform, but maybe perhaps not all the documents available publicly are the ones that instructs organizational content strategy. However, it is well known; Koncepce zahraniční politiky České republiky (Foreign Policy Conception of the Czech Republic) (Peterková, and Tomalová, 2017, 324-336). One can learn from the documents the number of institutions that are also responsible for assisting the DD of the Czech Republic, such as Czech diplomacy and cooperation institutes around the world.

The work of different layers of Czech digital diplomacy is truly impressive. The level of organizational commitment in centralizing and popularizing the content is on a professional coordinated effort. CZ MFA Facebook page Digital diplomacy assisted by the

different institutes is well-organized, well-developed and well-maintained. It is worth mentioning the names and origins of pages resharing their content from the three most popular posts during the most popular week. It is a mix between pages of Czech partnership institutes and other pages from closer diplomatic connections to the Czech side

Cooperation and others	Czech
<u>Turkish Embassy Prague</u>	<u>Ambasada Republike Češke u Bosni i Hercegovini</u>
<u>ATSL - Amitiés tchéque et slovaque - Luxembourg</u>	<u>Wedevågs lánghus, på Kvarnbacka Ö.</u>
<u>American Sokol</u>	<u>Embajada de la República Checa en Colombia</u>
<u>Kosovo Embassy</u>	<u>Consulate General of the Czech Republic in New York</u>
<u>Swedes in Prague - Svenskar i Prag</u>	<u>Embassy of the Czech Republic in Washington, DC</u>
<u>Suomi-Tsekki-seura / Finsko-česká společnost</u>	<u>Embassy of the Czech Republic in Sofia</u>
<u>KVH Geronimo Reenactment group</u>	<u>Embassy of the Czech Republic in Tbilisi, Georgia</u>
<u>Amazing Czechia</u>	<u>Embassy of the Czech Republic in Nigeria</u>
<u>Czech Heritage Society of Texas - Bexar County</u>	<u>Embassy of the Czech Republic in Lusaka</u>

<u>Czech and Slovak Club Tauranga</u>	<u>Embassy of the Czech Republic in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia</u>
<u>Češi a Slováci v Edmontonu</u>	<u>Consulate General of the Czech Republic in Toronto</u>
<u>Austin Czech Historical Association</u>	<u>Embassy of the Czech Republic in Accra</u>
<u>KVH Geronimo Reenactment group</u>	<u>Embassy of the Czech Republic in Bucharest - Ambasada Cehiei</u>
<u>Amazing Czechia</u>	<u>Embassy of the Czech Republic in Kabul</u>
	<u>Embassy of the Czech Republic in Helsinki</u>

Table (4) of the most significant official gov and non gov bodies sharing the content published by the Czech MFA on Facebook From the week on October 2020, (collected Dec 2022)

The right column from the table above shows all the Czech Republic embassies in other parts of the world, or at least consulate offices around the world. This is part of a coordinated effort of the public diplomacy machine of the Czech Republic powered by a network of diplomatic missions and social media pages to spread Czech DD. It is a rather effective and explicit method.

The left column from the table above shows a list that contains a combination of organizations that are either a cooperation body with the Czech side, such as “Austrian Czech Historical Association” or other diplomatic missions such as “Turkish embassy in Prague” or “Swedes in Prague”.

One can always provide insights and certain assumptions regarding coordinated effort to spread Czech Digital Diplomacy. However, it is more challenging to provide waterproof evidence of a coordinated effort among the different Czech agencies and the non-Czech ones. One can assume that it is indeed through offline diplomatic efforts Czech diplomats managed

to bring their counterparts closer to them and keener to share their content and prehaps Czech pages do the same in retirement. It is a bridge of cooperation and coordination provided by positive diplomatic experiences. It must be a cumulative effort based on personal relationships, a kind will and good presentation of diplomats' home counties. The most convincing evidence of this practice is other diplomats' willingness to share Czech national content online.

Certainly, it is worth noting that the success of Czech Digital Diplomacy cannot solely be attributed to offline diplomatic efforts and personal relationships. The Czech Republic has also invested heavily in their digital strategy, with a dedicated team and resources focused on crafting and executing a comprehensive plan. As the literature review shows training of their staff and diplomats in American schools (Peterková, and Tomalová, 2017).

In conclusion, regarding this issue, a successful digital strategy must be assisted and further developed in the real world as both of these strategies go along together at the end of the day. This brings the research back to the Syrian side and how its Digital Diplomacy suffers from limitations related to language resources, human resources, complicated diplomatic situations and so on. The Czech side is more leveraged on these issues and can allocate more resources and find opportunities to benefit from a multivector Digital foreign policy position and strategy.

1.20 Advanced Agenda Setting from the Czech Side

The new media world requires acting fast and sharp, especially the social media one, as it moves really fast and reactions to it requires publishers to constantly be ready to ride a wave. Therefore, it is necessary to make use of every possible opportunity especially when it comes to agenda setting. The Czech case on crisis management and PR capture of the early breakout of the war in Ukraine is a very successful case. The week following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Czech MFA ended up using the opportunity to spread the news about Czech financial aid to Ukraine, humanitarian aid and other agenda. It is a classical positive boosting of the national brand. Basically riding the wave to set a specific agenda similar to the method discussed before.

The Czech MFA took advantage of the fast-paced social media world and the need to act quickly and sharply by using the opportunity to spread news about Czech financial aid to Ukraine and humanitarian aid. This was a classic example of agenda-setting and positive boosting of the national brand.

This approach highlights the importance of a coordinated effort between digital diplomacy and traditional diplomacy to achieve successful crisis management and PR in the fast-moving media landscape of today.



Figure 6 Screenshot on Czech aid to Ukraine first week of war Ministry of Foreign affairs Czech Republic. Facebook page. Feb. 2022. (Collected Dec 2020)

These posts start with the question of “How Czech is helping Ukraine”. Then, it goes on saying that “the Czech public contributed almost 40 million euros to help Ukraine through NGOs and the Embassy account!” (5th post) (MFA Cz Facebook, 2022). This is a clear reference for public diplomacy and its effect on the ground, again the relationship between online and offline activities in promoting digital diplomacy is visible and cannot be denied.

Riding on a viral event to promote digital diplomacy is a successful method that can be deployed by marketing teams in the business world and the social media teams of embassies around the world. The successful chase over this week registered at 1844 in total reactions with almost 400 shares of Czech contribution and stand on the war in Ukraine. This is yet another proof of the successful tactics deployed online and on the ground by Czech

Diplomatic missions and their officials, as well as their contribution through public aid and the Czech people's reputation in helping their Ukrainian counterpart.

Looking further into what kind of reaction the most popular posts receive is also an insightful indicator on the audience's reaction and their willingness to spread messages

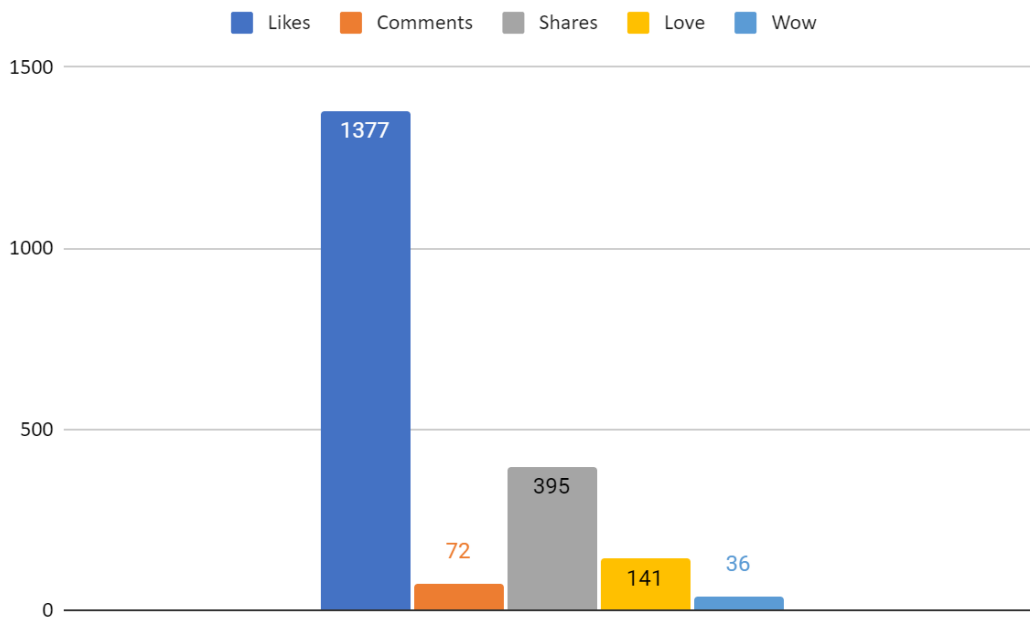


Figure 7 Breaking engagement by type feb-march 2022 most popular month in the year, (collected Dec 2022).

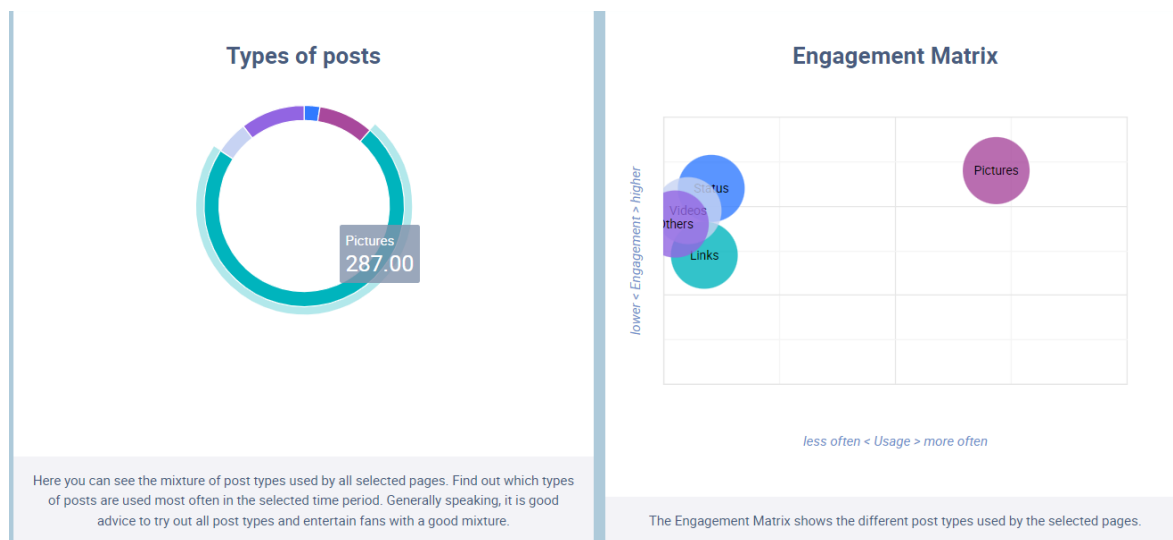


Figure 8 Types and engagement Jan 2020 - dec 2022 (collected Dec 2022)

This graph shows the breakthrough of reactions to the posts published between 15th of Feb and 15th of March 2022, which were over 37 posts. Even the comments and shares

are present here and they are an important indicator for conversation generation about this topic of the main pillars of Public Diplomacy on Social Media.

According to the data provided by Fanpage Karma, Czech MFA Facebook page made 287 picture posts which makes the majority of the posts (graph on the left), followed by Status, links, then videos, finally pure text. It is not surprising that pure texts are the least published. Anyhow, when it comes to engagement rates difference among the categories, the difference is not significant, according to data, links receive the least engagement and pictures the most, but the average reaction to pictures is average 62.6, Videos 27, status 41, and the one of the links is 26.7

Type	Pictures	status	videos	links
Average reactions	62.6	41	27	26.7

Table (5) average reaction on posts per type of post. Jan 2020 - dec 2022 (collected Dec 2022)

In conclusion, this was the main contribution of the Czech MFA deep analysis of its content and countering them against some of the documents and publications the findings are rather impressive, the level of coordination, organization and affiliation. This part also explored the relationship between online and offline activities and the necessity to link the two in order to achieve higher engagement and probably physical impact on the ground that translates in further exposure online and in promoting soft power as well as Digital Diplomacy effectively.

1.21 Advanced Agenda Setting from the Czech Side

Now, it is time to visit the Syrian side and see if the Syrian DD actors are deploying similar tactics to the Czech ones. The research will also shed light on the areas where Syrian digital diplomacy is most successful at and in some instances it surpasses the Cz diplomacy in certain aspects. The research will investigate the reasons behind that success. Finally, the researcher will point out all areas of weakness in the SY DD and make recommendations to improve the overall strategy.

One could argue that the Syrian side has some significant limitations on its ability to project digital diplomacy related to sanctions and linguistic boundaries. This does not allow the Syrian side to follow a complex strategy that fully incorporates both online and offline events. However, the analysis will show that even with limited resources, Syrian Digital diplomacy manages to succeed on certain fronts such as size of audience and engagement metrics, especially with the Syrian Diaspora abroad.

1.22 Advanced Agenda Setting from the Czech Side

As can be seen in table (1) comparing the meta data on the main digital diplomacy accounts of the two countries. The choice of the accounts is based on the urge to compare the two countries' Digital Diplomacy profiles. For instance, the Czech accounts on twitter and Facebook are all very active, goal oriented and hold a reasonable followers base with interactive and engaging relationships with their followers.

The first thing to note about the Digital Diplomacy profile of the Syrian Gov is that the MFA on twitter does not hold a significant followers base and does not produce much original content. It mainly retweets back the presidency page content. Therefore, Syrian MFA on Twitter will be excused from this analysis. It is also important to mention that the Syrian MFA on Facebook, the main unit of analysis for this research, has a significantly big audience 112k followers which is 10 times the size of the Czech one with almost the same level of engagement with their audience. Now, that is already an interesting start and only digging further into the details of engagement and audience growth will uncover this secret. Also, the presidency page on Twitter has a big audience of over 200k which is also 10 folds the size of the CZ side. Both of the pages are worth investigating but due to limited capacities of this research mainly the Facebook page will be under further analysis.

The large audience size of the Syrian MFA Facebook page is an intriguing aspect of this research, as it suggests a significant potential for influence and impact. However, the challenge lies in understanding how the Syrian MFA managed to achieve such a large audience size and how they engage with their followers effectively. It is important to analyse the type of content that is being shared, the tone and style of the posts, the frequency of posting, and the level of interaction with followers. By understanding these factors, it will be possible to uncover the key strategies and techniques that the Syrian MFA is using to attract and maintain their large audience, and to determine whether these strategies can be adapted or replicated by other diplomatic organizations.

1.22.1 Deeper into The Data: Monthly Ratings

After removing outliers from the data set, an analysis of the average interaction over a period of six months reveals the following findings: the monthly interaction rates are relatively stable across the years. Despite a slower growth rate of the audience (which is limited by data constraints and lacks certainty), the page has already established a significant following.

The limitation of data certainty can be a challenge when analysing digital diplomacy efforts. While it is clear that the Syrian MFA Facebook page has a significantly larger audience than its Czech counterpart, it is difficult to determine with certainty the rate at which this audience is growing. This is due to limitations in the available data, such as the inability to track every single follower and the fact that follower counts can fluctuate rapidly.

Overall, it is important to approach the analysis of digital diplomacy efforts with a nuanced understanding of the available data and its limitations. While follower counts and interaction rates can provide valuable insights, they are only part of the picture. It is also important to consider the broader geopolitical context and the goals and objectives of the digital diplomacy strategy. By taking a holistic approach, analysts can gain a more complete understanding of the impact and effectiveness of digital diplomacy efforts.

Average total reactions vs. Time frame

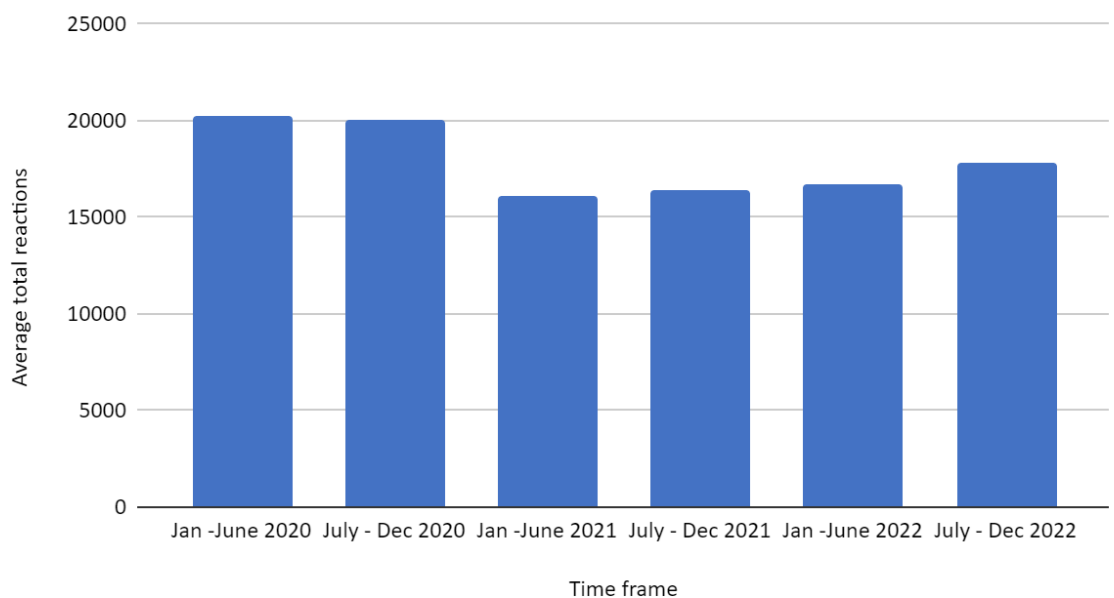


Figure 9 Graph representing the six-month average total interaction of the monthly total interaction of the Syrian MFA facebook page. (collected Dec 2022)

1.22.2 Weekly Ratings

The weekly ratings show similar tendencies. The Weekly Total Interactions rates for Syrian MFA on Facebook, Jan 2020 - Dec 2022 we find stable rates of weekly interactions and stable monthly interaction between 15-20K a week and some of them reaching 25K-30K. However, there are reasons and events that hype the interaction rates of a Facebook page, and the world of diplomacy is no short of that kind.

Total reaction vs. Date

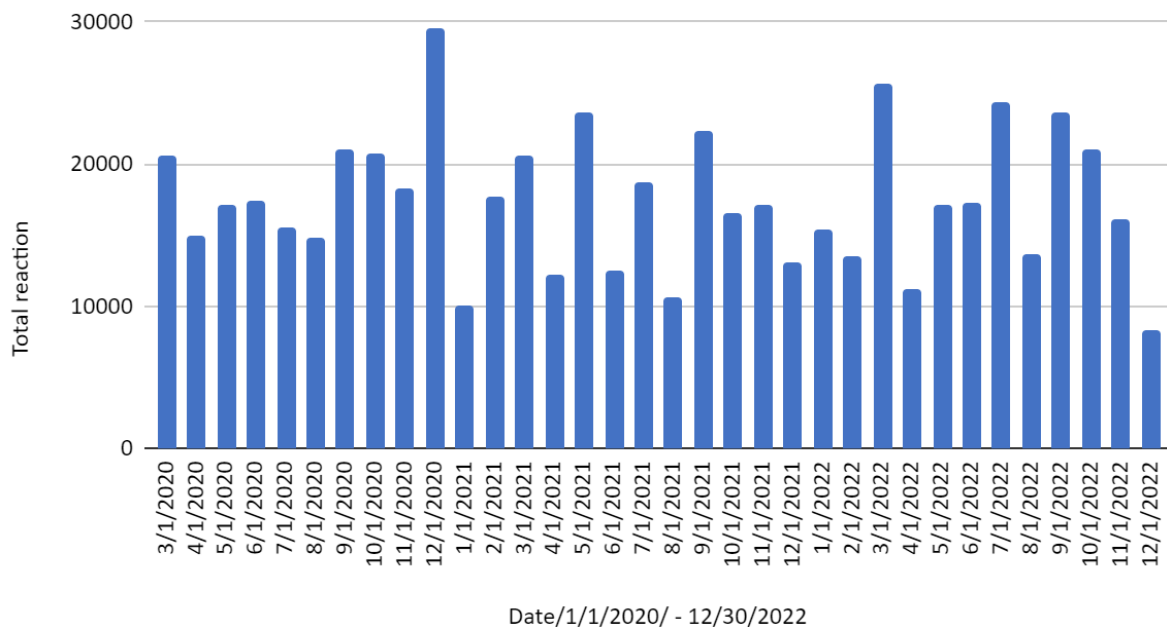


Figure 10 Monthly total interaction of the Syrian MFA Facebook page, between Jan 2020 - Dec 2022

Understanding the effectiveness of the MFA's digital diplomacy activities can be gained by looking at the channel's most popular week over the previous three years. One can identify the factors that led to strong traffic and interaction by figuring out what made this week so special, unique and attractive. Often, this is result of an event going on offline, an event in real life. This can be done by looking at the content published during that week, figuring out any promotions for events or campaigns, and observing how the audience interacted and responded to the content.

The MFA's capacity to mobilize web traffic and responses can also be clarified by this analysis. We may evaluate the MFA's capabilities in digital diplomacy by evaluating how well this specific week went. We can determine which tactics—like the use of images or the

frequency of posts—were most successful at boosting engagement and which tactics—like the usage of specific kinds of content—were less successful.

Furthermore, this analysis can inform recommendations for future digital diplomacy efforts. By understanding what worked well in the past, the MFA can replicate successful strategies and avoid less effective ones. It can also help to identify new opportunities for engaging with audiences and promoting the country's interests online



Figure 11 SY MFA FB total reactions, Comments and Shares Jan 2020 - Dec 2022

The outlier value is the week that minister of foreign affairs Walid Al Muallem has passed away and the MFA has mobilized its network of diplomats and influenced closer circles to spread the message regarding the loss of the previous minister. This week contains the key and deeper insights on what kind of tactics Syrian MFA uses in its effort of Digital Diplomacy on Facebook. It is also an opportunity to evaluate the success of the Syrian side in managing a media opportunity or a big event.

When the veteran Syrian MFA Walid Al Muallem passed away in 2020, multiple statements and diplomatic letters from other countries were popularized on the MFA Facebook page and its network of followers. During this week, there were 60 posts all related to the death of the MFA. Many countries have sent letters of condolences to the Syrian MFA. These countries are Russia, Cyprus, Norway, Lebanon, North Korea, Armenia, Yamin, Sri Lanka, Algeria, China, Cuba, Venezuela, South Africa, Malaysia, Bahrin, Iran, Belarus, Egypt and many more countries from the Arabic world and beyond.

However, when looking deeper at the data, the total number of shares is staggering 1447, one of the most famous posts of this period scored over 20K in total reaction which is equal to an average month usually with over 720 shares. When looking at the shares list we find out it is mainly Syrian accounts and pages of Syrian diaspora abroad. This is very common among the MFA's audience on Facebook. For example, one of the most popular pages that shares MFA content is "Syrians in the UAE" Facebook group. It is important to have an active digital relationship with the Diaspora, as the Syrian MFA official name in Arabic "وزارة الخارجية والمغتربين" which translates to (Ministry of Foreign affairs and Diaspora abroad), thus maintaining connection with the Diaspora seems to be priority of the ministry. However, the analysis shows that the MFA Facebook posts are almost never shared outside of the already established Syrian circles. I believe this is mainly due to linguistic, diplomatic and even logistic limitations. Logistics here refer to MFA inability to organize many offline events that attracts attention.

The usual posts published by the MFA's Facebook page can be analyzed through studying one month worth of content. For that purpose, the thesis looked into the posts in Dec 2022 and gave special attention to the top 5 by engagement indicators. The themes of these posts are following a specific pattern: Appointing ambassadors 3 times (6th post) (MFA SY Facebook, 2020), and one offline event related to Embassy activities in UAE (7th post) MFA SY Facebook, 2020) and a one official letter of condolences for the death of Jiang Zemin (8th post) (MFA SY Facebook, 2020).

Notice again, these posts receive a high number of likes due to the page's big fan base, and decent number of shares. However sharing and commenting is only in Arabic, making the channel absolutely depend on Arabic groups and accounts in sharing content. That is truly limiting to the page's ability to project soft power beyond its linguistic borders. Even in the posts regarding events in other Arab countries, we find almost no regeneration of content by accounts outside the Syrian circle of diaspora, This can be regarded as digital soft power incompetence. The SY MFA on Facebook is constantly missing opportunities of presence expansion in other languages and bigger audiences as well as becoming better connected with other diplomatic and public diplomacy pages outside the Syrian circle.

Further analyzing the content strategy of the Syrian MFA on Facebook, posts types and posts interaction shows the following:

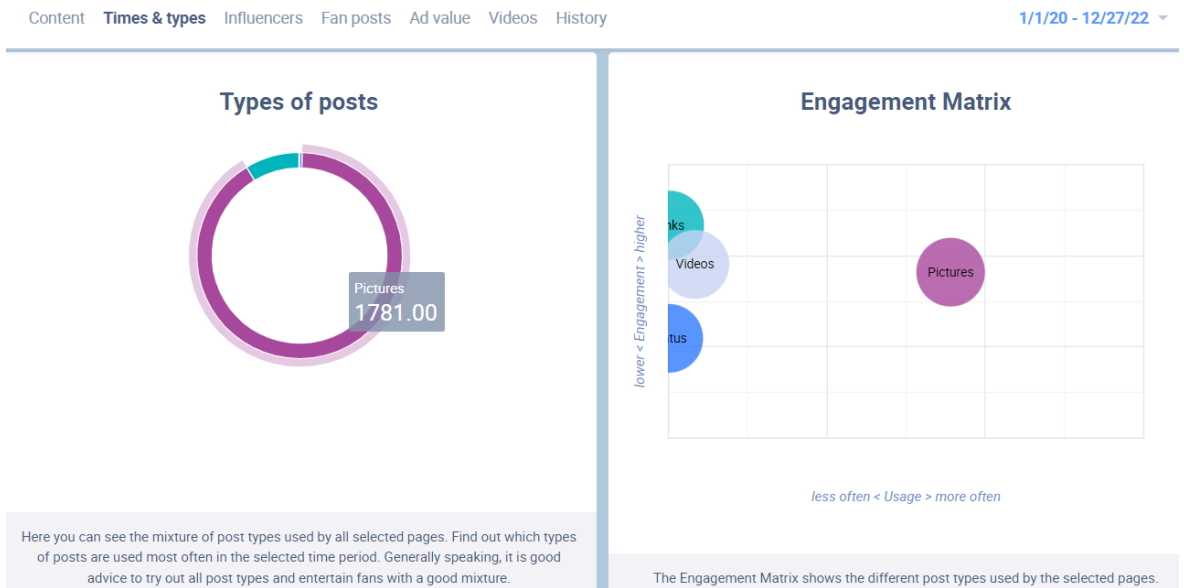


Figure 12 On the left side, the chart shows the ratio of posts with 3 years of publications from the SY MFA on Facebook, 2020-2022. (collected Dec 2022)

The figure on the left shows the ratio of posts broken by type (Pictures, links, videos, status) and one can easily notice that the content is absolutely dominated by pictures, taking over 90% of the content there, the rest is mainly video content followed by links and status. On the right side, one can compare the amount of posts as pictures and engagement received to these posts. It is easy to notice from the graph on the right side that even if pictures are taking 90% of the content, links receive much higher engagement, so do videos as well.

The page administrators are probably not aware of this issue or they might have certain instructions on posting photos regarding diplomatic events from their supervisor.

1.22.3 Concluding the Syrian side

In conclusion, the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has a large audience size and posts on a wide range of diplomatic and international relations topics, including UN speeches (9th post) (MFA SY Facebook, 2020) and sensitive political topics (10th post) (MFA SY Facebook, 2020). Despite this, the content of the MFA's digital diplomacy efforts is primarily in Arabic and targeted towards Syrians inside and outside the country.

The language barrier and target audience are two major limitations that the Syrian MFA faces when it comes to expanding its reach beyond the Arabic-speaking community. Despite having a significantly larger audience than the Czech MFA, the Syrian MFA's

Facebook page is mainly in Arabic, limiting its potential reach to non-Arabic speakers. This is a missed opportunity considering the potential impact that the MFA could have in reaching out to a wider audience and promoting its diplomatic efforts.

The style of publication and choice of content show that the MFA prioritizes connecting with the Syrian diaspora abroad, which is a significant part of its audience. The MFA's Facebook page caters to a diverse audience, including Syrian nationals and the diaspora community living abroad. The MFA's choice of content and style of publication reflects its efforts to connect with and engage the Syrian diaspora community abroad.

The MFA frequently publishes updates on the most recent diplomatic measures, humanitarian operations, and cultural activities occurring in Syria. The portal also includes images and videos that highlight the history and cultural heritage of the nation. The MFA seeks to strengthen the sense of pride and community among the Syrian diaspora community living abroad while also enhancing the country's reputation on a worldwide level by showcasing the positive elements of Syria and its people.

Overall, the MFA's focus on engaging with the Syrian diaspora community through social media is a smart strategy, as it allows the MFA to connect with a key audience and promote its diplomatic efforts and initiatives to a wider audience.

However, the biggest disadvantage faced by the Syrian MFA is the linguistic limitation of only posting in Arabic. This limits the reach and impact of their digital diplomacy efforts beyond the Arabic-speaking community. Nevertheless, analyzing the Syrian case sets the foundation for further research to understand the techniques behind influencing the Syrian diaspora abroad and engaging the Arabic-speaking audience in general. The Syrian MFA's digital diplomacy efforts provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by countries with linguistic limitations in their digital diplomacy strategies.

In conclusion, when comparing the digital diplomacy efforts of the Czech Republic and Syria on Facebook, it becomes apparent that the Czech Republic has a more developed and centralized strategy. The Czech Republic has invested resources into expanding its online presence through the creation of multilingual content and engagement with diplomatic circles. This centralized approach has allowed for a well-documented strategy that provides a clear path towards achieving the goals of their digital diplomacy efforts.

However, one pitfall of this centralized approach could be a lack of flexibility in adapting to rapidly changing circumstances or engaging with a more diverse range of

audiences. By contrast, Syria's approach to digital diplomacy on Facebook appears to be more decentralized and less structured. While this approach may have some advantages in terms of flexibility, it can also lead to a lack of consistency and cohesion in their messaging and outreach efforts.

While the Syrian MFA's Facebook page has a significantly larger audience compared to the Czech Republic's MFA, it is important to note that audience size alone does not determine the success of a digital diplomacy effort. Rather, engagement rates, quality of content, and the ability to mobilize and influence a wider audience beyond the immediate target community are crucial factors for success. The Syrian side as mentioned succeeded in maintaining and engaging its ever growing audience of Arabs and Syrian diaspora, but failed in expanding the demographics of its audience due to linguistic limitations. The Czech MFA's digital diplomacy efforts are more centralized and focused on expanding their presence through multilingual content and diplomatic circles, which has resulted in a well-documented and structured strategy. Although one might think that a centralized approach may limit the diversity and scope of their engagement efforts later in the future. So far, the results have shown little evidence of Czech inability to be flexible and creative on that matter. However, further analysis and researching this topic on a longer period might show some surprising insights on the advantages and disadvantages of a heavily centralized strategy.

Overall, both countries have their strengths and weaknesses in their digital diplomacy efforts on Facebook. However, the Czech Republic's centralized approach provides a more reliable and sustainable foundation for achieving their digital diplomacy goals, while Syria's more decentralized approach may offer greater flexibility but at the expense of consistency and cohesion.

reaction per post vs. Type 3 years of average reactions

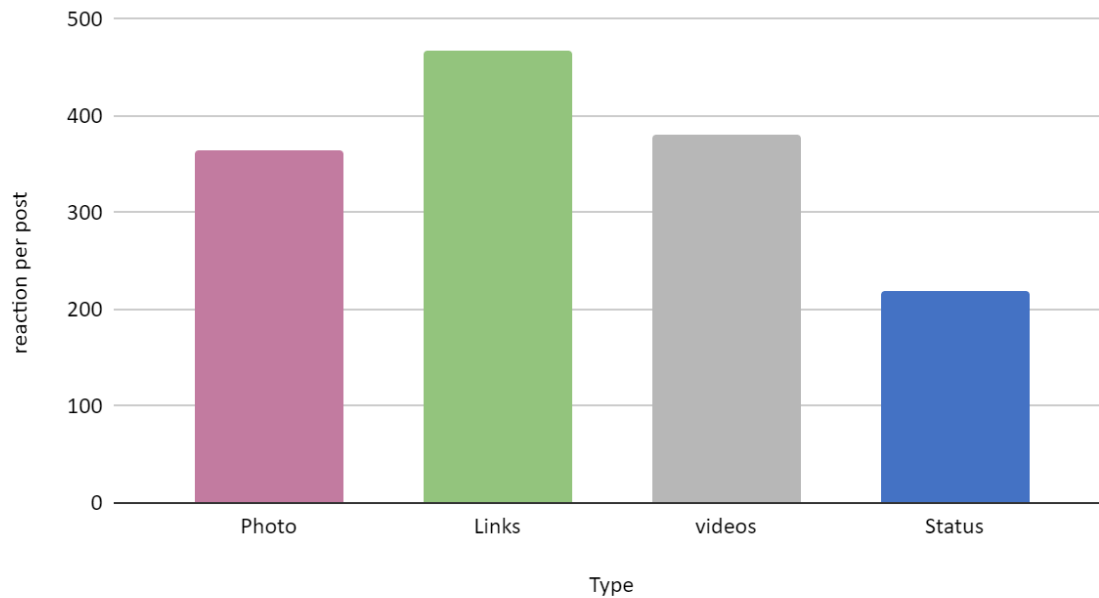


Figure 13 Average reaction per post type 3 years worth of posting Jan 2020- Dec 2022

This graph proves the previous points about SY MFA overusing photos in posts. It shows details over a three year period, links are the most successful type of posts as they attracted the most engagement per post while photos and videos scored approximately the same. Although this could be considered a minor point of consideration for the SY MFA, it is still worth mentioning in the grand scale of things.

Digital Diplomacy is not only about agenda setting and riding waves between online and offline events, but also consideration of digital consumption habits of your audience as well as the science behind the algorithm Facebook. It is important to understand the preferences of the algorithm and optimize the page content to be more likely promoted and less likely demoted by the algorithm. To be fair though, the Sy mfa page on Facebook has a big audience and still receives a healthy ratio of interaction from the Syrian diaspora and closer circle.

5. Discussion conclusion, and recommendations

1.23 Discussion analysis

The Czech Republic and Syria Arab Republic have different approaches to their digital diplomacy strategies on Facebook. The Czech Republic has a more developed and well organized approach to digital diplomacy, with a focus on effective digital communication strategies and successful management of their digital diplomacy efforts.

This has been assisted by a centralized strategy, heavy emphasis on documentation and leveraging offline and online events as well as closer diplomatic networks. All of this is reflected in the CZ MFA Facebook page's continuous success in spreading its content to other diplomatic pages and expanding their presence beyond their immediate audience.

The Czech Republic also puts a lot of emphasis on national branding and maintaining a positive image abroad, and this is reflected in the choice of content on their page. For example, during Czech national holidays the page's content was viral on other diplomatic pages, this includes leveraging offline events on social media like projecting the Czech flag on various locations in the world.

It can be seen as a two-layered strategy of attracting attention from audiences offline and online. This links back to using diplomatic personal connections as well as Czech cultural centers that are contributing to the Czech Digital Diplomacy.

Lastly, Czech Digital Diplomacy has demonstrated unique skill in managing its national brand through riding viral waves on social media. The first week of the war in Ukraine, Czech MFA was vocal about their stand on this subject and about their support of Ukraine. Making the CZ MFA page that week viral in their assistance and support to Ukraine, with detailed numbers and infographics.

On the other hand, the Syrian MFA focuses more on connecting with its diaspora abroad and prioritizing communication with the Arabic-speaking audience. The Syrian MFA in Arabic is called "Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs". The Syrian digital strategy seems to be less developed and less organized in comparison to the Czech one, due to lack of documentation. However, the Syrian MFA's approach is also effective in terms of mobilizing its audience and attracting attention, its limitations in terms of language and target audience are evident though.

The Syrian MFA only posts content in Arabic and is primarily targeted towards Syrians inside and outside the country. As a result, their efforts have a limited reach and impact on the wider international community.

It is fair to mention that SY MFA Facebook page has a huge audience size and maintaining an effective engaging relationship with them is rather impressive. Much of the page effort is being put on informing and engaging with diaspora as well as popularizing new positions of their diplomats and limited diplomatic events abroad.

The page as mentioned before suffers from two major limitations. Firstly, the diplomatic sanctions and lack of resources. This heavily affects the MFA ability to organize diplomatic events, and popularize its content through diplomatic networks, other diplomats are less keen to share SY MFA Facebook page content due to diplomatic sanctions.

Secondly, the linguistic limitation that is harmful to the page's ability to project soft power and expand its presence beyond its immediate audience. Here, it is mainly due to lack of resources, and training for the staff or maybe even MFA lack of identified goals and organizational structure. It is important to note that the SY MFA page has also demonstrated special skills in attracting attention and managing special events such as grieving for the previous Minister of Foreign affairs. During this period the page managed to attract an unprecedented number of engagements that is equal to a month of engagement that also contributed to the number of followers of the page. In short, the page was able to connect social media presence to a real-life event and gain much popularity and diplomatic credits from this week. This is evidence of successful and skilful Digital diplomacy professionals.

1.23.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, this master's thesis has examined and compared the digital diplomacy strategies of MFAs of the Czech Republic and Syria on Facebook, based on variables related to efficiency, popularity and image presentation. The analysis deployed quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative approach includes looking at audience size, engagement indicators, and posting strategy. The qualitative side of research includes content analysis of posts that are scoring very high on popularity and engagement, likes, shares and comments.

The study found that the Czech MFA has a well-structured and advanced digital diplomacy strategy, MFA documentation is an evidence of that, with a clear focus on national branding and promoting a positive image of the country abroad through leveraging

viral events, coordinating between different Czech institutes and benefiting from its diplomatic network. Their Facebook page is published both in Czech and English and makes use of both online and offline events to boost its engagement and promote its content.

On the other hand, the Syrian MFA provides no documentation on a coherent and comprehensive digital diplomacy strategy. However, while their page has a large following, the content is mostly in Arabic and targeted towards Syrians inside and outside the country. The Syrian side also faces limitations in terms of resources, staff shortages, and diplomatic sanctions, which have hindered their efforts to develop a more effective digital diplomacy strategy. It is however fair to mention, that the Syrian side is successful in maintaining a healthy relationship with their huge audience online, leverages from viral events, and relatively benefit from the very few embassy and diplomatic events the MFA can arrange, this includes being vocal about issues of their concern in the UN.

Despite these differences, both the Czech Republic and Syria have succeeded in digital diplomacy although the Syrian side has a bigger room of improvement. This table concludes and summarizes the results analyzing both MFA pages, popularity, efficiency and image presentation. This has included but not limited to content analysis, engagement indicators and so on.

	Sy MFA Facebook page	Cz MFA Facebook page
Efficiency	<p>Spreading content in Arabic to millions of Arabic speakers.</p> <p>Coordinate offline online events to spread its agenda online, example promoting embassy events, and new ambassadors online.</p> <p>Being able to ride waves online to spread their agenda: The death of the previous MFA brought a lot of international attention.</p>	<p>Making use of both Czech and English languages to spread their message online</p> <p>Coordinate offline online events to spread its agenda online, example the cooperation between Czech institutes for diplomacy and partners organization and embassies to spread the word for Czech diplomacy day</p> <p>Being able to ride waves online to spread their agenda: Czech humanitarian and financial aid to Ukraine during the first week of the war.</p>

popularity	<p>Big number of audiences, both Arabs living abroad and Syrian Diaspora (over 112K followers)</p> <p>Maintaining a healthy relationship with their big audience. Healthy engagement rates (Post Interaction 0.19%)</p>	<p>Audience is big for the size of the country, the audience consists of Czech speakers as well as international diplomats following content in English (over 11K followers)</p> <p>Healthy relationships with their audience healthy engagement rates. (Post Interaction 0.22%)</p>
Image representation (agenda setting)	<p>Standing with Palestinian cause</p> <p>Promoting Sy diplomatic connection with the limited number of countries that Sy MFA can still reach out to like Venezuela, Iran and Belarus.</p>	<p>Standing with Ukraine</p> <p>Promoting Cz diplomacy network with other countries, positive image projections with a multitude of countries in the world</p>
Advantages & disadvantages	<p>Limited by sanctions and narrow diplomatic ties, rare opportunities to be on international forums.</p> <p>Lack of documentation, and clear strategy.</p>	<p>Benefiting from Cz position in the EU, major opportunities to be on international forums, normalized diplomatic relations.</p> <p>Very well documented and clear strategy, lack of centralization many different contributors to the MFA message</p>

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on digital diplomacy, providing insights into the strategies and approaches of two countries with different levels of resources and capabilities. By examining the strengths and weaknesses of these strategies, the study offers recommendations for improving digital diplomacy efforts and enhancing national branding and reputation management through social media.

1.23.2 Policy recommendations/major takeaways

- Documentation is so important because it allows the country to set goals for Digital diplomacy and constantly evaluate the performance of its social media pages, and partner institutes that are also involved in this.

- Taking advantage of viral events, war in Ukraine, UN meetings, death of famous figures.

- Online/offline coordinating activities, such as embassy events, diplomatic meetings and events such as appointments of ambassadors, nominated to EU presidency, national holidays and so on.

- Taking advantage of language benefits or diplomatic network (Million of Arabic speakers online for the Sy MFA, or very connected diplomatically Cz MFA though EU and other international organizations.

- Maintaining healthy relationship with the channels audience (consistency and frequency in content)

Both countries did a marvelous job in projecting their soft power in different degrees of success benefiting from their natural advantages (big audience online for the Syrian side, or diplomatic networks for the Czech side). Eventually the policy recommendations for the Syria side are related to documentation and using English to raise its voice beyond just the Arabic speakers online. Documentation will help in providing the possibility to coordinate efforts between the different bodies of government contributing to Digital Diplomacy. Using English will help in expanding the page's ability to project its soft power and narrative of international events beyond the immediate Syrian and Arabic speaking audiences.

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2) Ministry of Foreign affairs Czech Republic. Facebook page. Oct. 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/276252458286/posts/10159268465598287>

3) Ministry of Foreign affairs Czech Republic. Facebook page. Oct. 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/276252458286/posts/10159268620658287>

4) Ministry of Foreign affairs Czech Republic. Facebook page. Feb. 2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/276252458286/posts/10160308802683287/>

5) Ministry of Foreign affairs Syrian Arab Republic. Facebook page. Dec. 2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/2139426746344441/posts/3428240630796373/>

6) Ministry of Foreign affairs Syrian Arab Republic. Facebook page. Dec. 2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/2139426746344441/posts/3427364380883998/>

7) Ministry of Foreign affairs Syrian Arab Republic. Facebook page. Dec. 2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/2139426746344441/posts/3429297367357366/>

8) Ministry of Foreign affairs Syrian Arab Republic. Facebook page. Dec. 2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/2139426746344441/posts/3423915741228862/>

9) Ministry of Foreign affairs Syrian Arab Republic. Facebook page. Dec. 2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/2139426746344441/posts/3411905342429902/>

10) Ministry of Foreign affairs Syrian Arab Republic. Facebook page. Dec. 2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/2139426746344441/posts/3429297367357366/>