**Weibo diplomacy
management, measurement and challenges**

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Weibo Diplomacy: Management, Measurement and Challenges

A Case Study of British Embassy Beijing's Weibo Account (2009-2018)

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Declaration

I, Yin Wang, declare that the thesis I submitted for the PhD degree of the King's College London and research results presented in it are original. I generated the thesis content as the result of my own primary research except for the quotations. I have given the source of any quotations from the works of others and acknowledged all main resources of interviews and information obtained from external help in the thesis.

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Abstract

There is increasing discussion around digital diplomacy and its impact on both the concept and practice of diplomacy in the most recent literatures. However, most of them rarely address the controversial issues in specific political, cultural and social background with a non-Western emphasis and contribute to the theoretical development in this new area. In addition, the evaluation method of the impact and performance of digital diplomacy are not explored enough to support digital diplomacy management and development in practice.

Therefore, this thesis takes the British Embassy China's Weibo (micro-blogging) as the case study objective to analyse the data retrieved from the preliminary research within a theoretical framework adapted from Bjerling's (2012) analytical model that illustrates the three dimensions of media personalisation, Farrell and Webb's (2002) operationalisation of the concept of professionalisation, Nye's (2011) soft power theory, and Grunig's (2004) Excellence theory in public relations to discuss Weibo diplomacy in the context of new public diplomacy. It uses the method of content and narrative analysis, interviews, focus group survey to collect research data between January 2011 and July 2018. Furthermore, this thesis uses the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) method to measure the performance and impact of the British Embassy China Weibo. The outcome answers the fundamental research question of this study: How did professionalisation and personalisation help to articulate the British Embassy Weibo content and whether Weibo enables two-way symmetrical diplomatic dialogue that makes real influence among Chinese public? This study adds a rarely examined case study of digital diplomacy practice in China where social media regulation and political system are completely different from those of the Western countries to address the research gaps mentioned above.

The thesis firstly discussed that the Weibo had been used as a new public diplomacy tool by diplomatic organisations and diplomats to communicate foreign policy issues and accomplish diplomatic goals. It also identified the presence of professionalisation of the new digital tool and staff who managing digital communication. Secondly, it argued that the Weibo becomes an alternative official diplomatic information resource narrated in personalised and informal content to engage target foreign audience with emotional links. Finally, it argued that the communication model of the British Embassy Weibo is two-way but unsymmetrical and measured the impact of the British Embassy Weibo among the target audience.

As concluded, the findings highlight the dilemmas that the foreign diplomatic institutions in China face up to when they conduct digital diplomatic practice. Digital diplomacy is finding its way to make impact between control and transparency. The conclusion suggests that using social media in diplomatic communication is a great step forward but not yet a revolutionary change as assumed by many scholars and diplomats. It has made a noticeable impact, but this impact is still limited due to China's unique state and non-state actors' intervene. Therefore, digital diplomacy is still on its way to achieve desired outcomes in different social and political contexts worldwide.

Acknowledgements

Glossary

FCO: Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which is a department of the UK government responsible for protecting and promoting British interests worldwide.

IR Studies: International Relation Studies

GREAT Campaign: Launched in 2012, a continuous national branding campaign initiated by the British government to showcase the best of what the UK has to offer and encourage more tourists, students, and partnership opportunities with the UK

Weibo: The Chinese name of microblog services in China

PSW: The work and residence permit of 24 months after graduation in the UK

Weibo Big V: Verified Weibo users who are celebrities or experts in their professional or academic fields.

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Chapter 1. Research Introduction

In the past decade, social media 2.0, a second-generation of Internet application comes around and enables users to collaborate, work, and share content online. The rapid development of information and communication technologies, such as the social media technology, has led to significant changes in cultural, social, economic and political aspects of modern society. More accessible online information contributes to the digitalised "soft power" (Nye, 1990) in the digital age and brings non-state actors, such as cultural exchange organisations and individual social media users, into the foreign policy decision-making process. In the words of the former British Foreign Secretary William Hague, British foreign policy is in a networked world (Hague, 2010). Besides facing up with expanding roles and challenges, modern diplomatic service arises from the multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary international arena and requests for extended outreach and accountability. In the recent ten years, social media has been increasingly researched in political debate and analysis as well as become "part of the style, content, form, and function of politics and public affairs" (Perlmutter, 2008, p. xv).

The development of social media communication technology enables unprecedented freedom and access for individual users to express their opinions and their concerns in cyberspace. It also opens a door for the public to participate in government policymaking by casting potential impact over policymakers. It gives the potential for the government to incorporate wider public opinions into its policy formulation process. Social media also provides a cost-effective tool to make the process of public engagement far more interactive than ever before and supports knowledge sharing as well as community building which are "two core aspects of digital-era policy-making." (Tapscott et al., 2008, p. 15). As Tapscott stated, "The promise is that digital-engagement technologies will support a policy-making process that integrates policy development and implementation into a seamless and flexible practice of continuous engagement, improvement and innovation" (Tapscott et al., 2008, p. 15).

Since 2009, social media has been increasingly used by government bodies and foreign services to reach strategical public groups. The most significant feature of social media platforms, such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, as well as Weibo and WeChat

in China, is their ability to interact in both directions between the users and the content generators in real-time on smart devices which people can use almost everywhere. The users can subscribe to social media channel they are interested in and receive live updates. They can also comment and repost the rich media content to share information with other users. Meanwhile, the content generators can respond to comments and share user-generated information. Social media enables two-way and even multi-way communication models. In order to accomplish the mission of making the UK a safer place to live and grow the UK economy stronger, the British foreign service and diplomats have to find new ways to communicate with the generation growing up with new media technology globally. When I worked at the British Council China between 2008 and 2011, I had the opportunity to take part in the development of the British Embassy Weibo and the British Council Weibo in 2009. The experience inspired this research on digital diplomacy with a focus on the British Embassy Weibo in China. This chapter introduces the thesis structure, the research design, the theoretical framework, as well as the research methodology of this study.

1.1 Thesis Structure and Research Significance

Thesis Structure

This research selected the British Embassy Weibo as the case to observe its content and measure its effectiveness in foreign policy communication and implementation. Firstly, this thesis analysed the concepts and operational mechanisms of digital diplomacy by using the theoretical framework that is built upon the concepts and theories from multidisciplinary fields within the context of digital diplomacy research. This study uses the theoretical framework tailored for this study to examine the interactions of social media and daily diplomatic practice in a foreign context with specific cultural understanding and political system.

This research is conducted with a combined methodology. It uses the content analysis method to study the British Embassy Weibo posts in detail and coded the data collected from the analysis. The narrative analysis method is also used to present findings in a thematic presentation. Meanwhile, the methods of interview and focus group discussion through face-to-face meetings, emails, and WeChat Messengers (an online

communication application provided by WeChat) is employed to provide first-hand information and inside knowledge to complement the findings from content analysis and narrative analysis. Four key persons directly involved in the British Embassy Weibo management were interviewed. Meanwhile, a focus group discussion with some of the British Embassy Weibo followers was conducted around the same time. Additionally, this study combines the AHP and Delphi methods to measure the British Embassy Weibo's influencing power and evolution of the British Embassy China's digital diplomacy process. The detail of this methodology is introduced in section 1.4.

This thesis has three parts. The first part includes chapter 1 and 2, which introduces the research background and reviews the existing literature. Chapter 1 lays the foundation for the argument and analysis in later chapters. Within chapter 1, section 1.1 introduces the thesis structure and research significance in brief. More detailed Contextual information of this study is given in chapter 2. Section 1.2 explains the theoretical framework of this study. Section 1.3 presents the hypothesis and explains how the research questions are located. Section 1.4 explains the methodology of this study. Chapter 2 reviews the current research of digital diplomacy and brings out the research gap addressed by this thesis.

The second part of this thesis includes chapter 3, 4, and 5, which provides the major data analysis and discussion in response to the research question. Chapter 3 reveals the level of professionalisation in the British Embassy's digital diplomatic communication process. Chapter 4 examines the level of personalisation. The main research methods in these two chapters are narrative research and interview, which focus on the style of content and the narrative of the posts on the British Embassy Weibo. Chapter 5 reviews how the British Embassy in Beijing uses Weibo to influence Chinese public with soft power, as well as critically examines its communication model. This chapter uses the Delphi and AHP methods to measure the influencing power of the British Embassy Weibo in China. The ending part of this thesis is the conclusion drawn in chapter 6, which summarises the findings, discusses all the dimensions related to the findings, and answers the fundamental research question of this study.

Research Significance

In order to address the research gap and limitation of the recent literature on digital diplomacy, this research takes the British Embassy's Weibo account in China as the case study object to measure its effectiveness in foreign policy communication and implementation by analysing its content and the interviews with insiders and Weibo followers. Therefore, it adds an in-depth analysis of a specific case to the current digital diplomacy research.

Theoretically, this study constructs a theoretical framework, which was not used in recent studies on digital diplomacy, to further develop our understanding of this subject. This study borrows two key concepts, which are professionalisation and personalisation from political communication theory and adapts them into the theoretical framework of this study. These two concepts are commonly studied in the context of political campaigns but not the context of digital diplomacy. The concept of professionalisation of political communication had been discussed mostly in domestic politician campaign management (Maarek, 2016; Murphy and et al., 2016; Holtz-Bacha 2002; Negrine & Lilleker, 2002; Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999). However, they are seldom discussed in the digital diplomacy field. In this research, the concept of professionalisation is employed in the analysis of diplomatic communication via social media and linked with the concept of personalisation which addresses the British Embassy Weibo editors and diplomats' attributes in shaping the Weibo content and country image through their personalities and emotions. Bjerling's analytical model of three dimensions of media personalisation explores the interaction between public message and private information (Bjerling, 2012). Therefore, this research paves a new way to understand digital diplomacy as a political communication process. Additionally, the theoretical framework of this research also draws theories from public diplomacy and public relations to form the theoretical base of the analysis. Soft power theory aims to take a further step in our understanding of digital diplomacy as an ideological tool (Nye, 2009). Excellence theory in communication management tests whether the British Embassy Weibo practice achieves two-way symmetric communication model (Grunig, 2004). Section 1.2 introduces the details of the theoretical framework.

Additionally, this study argues the abilities of social media to influence the Chinese

public within British foreign service's foreign policy agenda by analysing the concept, function, and implication of digital diplomacy. This study also critically analyses the potentials of social media to provide alternative stories of the British foreign policy, which may not be covered by mass media. Furthermore, since current discussions about using social media tool in diplomatic communication rarely focus on non-state actors such as online nationalistic resistance to foreign ideology and Social media operators' self-control on social media content, this study, therefore, addresses this research gap by exploring the constraints and challenges brought over by China's political, commercial, and cultural environment to digital diplomacy.

Therefore, in this thesis, the research gap and objective identified from the literature review are systematically analysed to construct the operationalisation of the theoretical framework of this research. This study advances the current discussion and understanding of political communication as well as public diplomacy in the age of rapid development of social media by adopting a theoretical framework derived from a complex of theories across many different disciplinary. This thesis also developed an evaluation method of the impact of digital diplomacy to fill the research gap, respectively.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

In this section, the key concepts and theories selected from the existing academic works are discussed and adapted to build up the theoretical framework for this research. Christina Archetti interviewed a few foreign diplomats based in London to explain the considerable variation in the way that new media technology not only has an impact on diplomatic practices but also is appropriated by diplomats to pursue their countries' information gathering and public outreach target. She pointed out that we need to combine different fields of study, such as political communication, international relations, communication and journalism studies to gain a full understanding of the impact of Web 2.0 technology on diplomatic practice (Archetti, 2012). Thus, the theoretical framework in this study draws theories and concepts from three major subjects: new public diplomacy, political communications, and public relations. This section aims to explain the reasons that the particular theories and concepts were derived to form the theoretical framework of this study. Academic research has only started to explore

digital diplomacy very recently. The majority of these discussions are mainly descriptive but not conceptualised with theory support. Therefore, this research contributes to the theoretical development of public diplomacy and political communication management in the age of digital media.

This study helps current debate of digital diplomacy to expand their vision to a new form of political communication in the context of public diplomacy. By combining the concepts of personalisation and professionalisation, soft power, as well as excellence theory in public relations, it forms an original theoretical framework to analyse social media usage in diplomatic practise in a specific country with tight media control policy. The concepts of professionalisation and personalisation are used to analyse the pros and cons in digital diplomatic communication and are useful to be considered in the context of new public diplomacy. Meanwhile, the concepts of soft/smart power help to understand the British Embassy Weibo as a vehicle to influence foreign public's mind. Additionally, the theory of excellence in public relation studies serves to examine the nature and impact of digital diplomacy. These concepts and theories are discussed separately in the context of digital diplomacy in the following chapters and connected in the conclusion chapter to link the findings back to the central research question: **How did professionalisation and personalisation help to articulate the British Embassy Weibo content and whether Weibo enables two-way symmetrical diplomatic dialogue that makes real influence among Chinese public?**

1.2.1 The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power 2.0

<u>Public Diplomacy</u>

Since the early 20th century, the focus of mainstream international relations (IR) theories of realism remains on power, interest, security, strategy, hegemony and order. Realism school emphasises that the state is the central and principal actor in international relations rather than non-state actors such as individuals or international non-governmental organisations (Goodin, 2010). The power of state is understood according to its military capability (Donnelly, 2008), while liberalism has its emphasis on democracy, civil rights, equality, free markets, as well as freedom of speech,

religions and press (Hashime, 2009). Later on, new contents such as economic interdependence, conflict and cooperation, national interests and global issues were added to neo-realism and neo-liberalism. Neo-realism is an IR theory that believes power is the primary factor in international relations (Waltz, 1979). Klein states that the three key policy pillars of neo-liberalism are "privatization of the public sphere, deregulation of the corporate sector, and the lowering of income and corporate taxes, paid for with cuts to public spending" (Klein, 2014, p. 72). However, none of these theories paid sufficient attention to the cultural factor in their researches. From the 1990s, the role of culture in international relations has been a much-talked-about topic among academics and government strategists. A well-known Constructivism scholar Alexander Wendt in his book *Social Theory of International Politics* (Wendt, 1999) recognises societies and the world are built through people's practices. Different culture constructs different kinds of anarchy. He noted that major powers have the strength and are less restrained by the existing standardised environment, so they have more ability to innovate culture. However, constructivism only laid a foundation and starting point for the research of culture role in international relations. Thus, a complete system for this research has not yet been fully established.

A country's culture, values, and policies need to be promoted by public diplomacy tools to affect other countries' attitude towards it and build its positive image internationally. The term of public diplomacy emerged in 1965 and was defined by Edmund A. Gullion as "Public diplomacy…deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. It encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is communication, as diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the process of intercultural communications" (Cull, 2016). While in the period of the Cold War, public diplomacy approach was used to confront Communism. After the 9/11, both the academic field and government bodies started to realise the new value and approaches of public diplomacy as a powerful tool to persuade the foreign public and win their trust. Nowadays, public diplomacy is often viewed as an instrument used by states, associations of states, and some sub-state and non-state actors to understand

cultures, attitudes and behaviour; to build and manage relationships; and to influence thoughts and mobilise actions to advance their interest and values (Gregory, 2011). Public diplomacy as a concept and strategy is crucial in this research because government bodies use digital media to communicate its foreign agenda to a foreign audience. As Wang points out, "...with a changing global political and economic landscape, the proliferation of media and communication technologies, the emergence of new players in global affairs…and most of all, the complex confluence of these facets, the credibility and effectiveness of standard communication practices in public diplomacy is increasingly under challenge." (Wang, 2006, p.92).

The emerging public diplomacy 2.0 in the era of globalisation and information technology development becomes a unique form of diplomatic practise (Brown, 2004; Melissen, 2005). Brown states that new public diplomacy is originated from "firstly, processes of political change that have pluralized global politics and secondly, the emergence of a global communications infrastructure" (Brown, 2004, p.16). If we keep the purpose of cultural diplomacy in mind, social media applications seem to fit the bill very well. They foster interaction, encourage direct dialogue, disseminate messages with reduced cost. Social media technology is viral, among which messages are forwarded, reposted, responded, and retweeted with just a mouse click. Therefore, "international communication, which since the dawn of the motion pictures has been premised on a one-to-many broadcasting model, is now moving ineluctably towards a web-enabled many-to-many format" (Potter, 2008, p.123). Through this new channel, diplomatic institutions can "listen, publish, engage and evaluate in new and interesting ways. Crucially, we can also widen our reach and communicate directly with civil society as well as governments and influential individuals" (FCO, 2012). Although the process of integrating digital media into diplomatic practice takes time and is often restrained by challenges from economic, cultural and political issues, developed countries in Western Europe and North America act enthusiastically to use social media as a new tool of diplomacy. Exciting new opportunities and impact of social media tools have transformed the objective of diplomacy "moves towards engaging with foreign audiences" in an innovative way (Melissen, 2006, p.13). As British Diplomat Robert Cooper addressed, "success in diplomacy" (Melissen, 2005, p.5) means openness and international cooperation across geography boundaries which "call for the active pursuit

of more collaborative diplomatic relations with various types of actors" (Melissen, 2005, p.5). The features of social media can facilitate such openness and cooperation in a better way. On the role of new media playing in cultural diplomacy, quite many researches have been conducted to explore the changes within the key agendas of diplomacy, which has been transformed in the digital age.

Kathy Fitzpatrick addressed that "The new public diplomacy is normative in the sense that it describes what are perceived to be 'ideal' approaches to modern public diplomacy rather than reflects how public diplomacy is widely practised" (Fitzpatrick, 2008, p.5). However, as a new form of public diplomacy, digital diplomacy is mainly discussed in a descriptive way without conceptualisation. Besides, since the research and current literature are mainly developed by diplomats and professionals, the majority of these discussions are lack of theoretical basis. As Brown pointed out, "there is little awareness of it in the theoretical heart of IR, but it can be found in the endless American studies on the reorganisation of the State Department, in the studies of the operation of NGOs, and in the comments of diplomats and foreign ministers" (Brown, 2004, p.14).

Aiming at "multilateral cooperation with a diverse range of international actors that is based on dialogue, understanding, and trust." (Institute of Cultural Diplomacy, 2010), foreign services, diplomats, scholars and other key stakeholders have been motivated to find new diplomatic approaches with more significant impact. The new public diplomacy has evolved from a kind of diplomatic advertising to a contemporary diplomatic function in the past decade. Digital media entered the politics functions as a new player. As a result, digital media experts and digital campaign PR firms are all entered the political decision-making process. Politicians and governments around the world have to adapt to the different environment to appeal to today's global citizens and change their way of engaging with them. Signitzer and Coombs published an article in 1992 to describe the shift from traditional diplomatic communication towards public diplomatic communication. In their opinion, public diplomacy is "the way in which both government and private individuals and groups influence directly or indirectly those public attitudes and opinions which bear directly on another governments foreign policy decisions" (Signitzer and Coombs, 1992, p. 138). Therefore, diplomatic communication is not only between governments but also between government and foreign public. This

shift is a result of digital media technology development which enables wider public participation in the diplomatic decision-making process. However, some researchers noted that little had been changed with the arrival of new media technology. Taking Brown's opinion in 2004 as an example, "while the scope and visibility of... the new public diplomacy is novel, the mechanisms that it employs are not. Persuasions, framing, and agenda setting are the basic tools of political influence" (Brown, 2004, p.16).

As a stream of public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy was described by the US political science scholar, Milton C. Cummings, as "the exchange of ideas, information, values, systems, traditions, beliefs, and other aspects of culture, with the intention of fostering mutual understanding" (Cummings, 2003). Although these crucial functions in international relations have been recognised for a long time and comprehensively practised during these years internationally, a group of new actors, such as social media, challenges the traditional foreign policy strategy but also provides new opportunities to enhance the functions of engagement with the foreign public. Some existing research projects have revealed that cultural diplomacy is changing intensively in the digital age (Bound, 2007). Cultural diplomacy 2.0 is "The ability to persuade through culture, values and ideas" is regarded as a more effective approach than "hard power" (Nye, 2004). Simon L. Mark states that traditional cultural diplomacy aims at conveying high culture to influence elite in the foreign society. Nowadays, with wider public's involvement in the political decision-making process, cultural diplomacy focuses more on popular culture and easier access to the high culture among the mass public (Mark, 2010). Social media enables diplomats to communicate with the mass public and disseminate information among much wider audience groups to achieve their cultural diplomacy goal. However, there are many new concerns regarding new cultural diplomacy raised by some researchers.

Firstly, there are many discussions about the purpose of cultural diplomacy. Signitzer and Coombs's summary of distinctions between cultural communication and political communication points out that political communication is usually the work of foreign service ministries and embassies (Signitzer and Coombs, 1992). They illustrate their definition of public diplomacy in a table from their article shown in figure 1 (Signitzer

and Coombs, 1992, p.141). As shown in their table, public diplomacy comprises two streams. Tough-minded public diplomacy influences foreign minds through persuasion and propaganda, while tender-minded public diplomacy projects influence through cultural activities, which fits better for this analysis. In the middle layer of this figure, public diplomacy is divided into political information and cultural communication. However, many digital diplomacy accounts publish content contains both elements. For example, the British Embassy Weibo is managed by the British Embassy and complimented by a group of Weibo accounts of British cultural and tourism organisations such as the British Council and Visit Britain, which mainly focus on cultural exchange and tourism. However, the British Embassy Weibo also publishes a great number of posts of these topics besides political information. In fact, the majority of the British Embassy Weibo posts focus on British culture, education and tourism. Figure 1 differentiates cultural diplomacy from cultural relations from their functionalities. However, by using digital media, the line between them becomes blurred. The digital diplomacy content helps to convey a positive image of a country to facilitate cultural agreements as well as foster cultural cooperation and exchanges to achieve mutual understanding between nations. Therefore, this figure should be developed further on the relationship of cultural diplomacy and cultural relations to reflect the change brought over by digital media development.
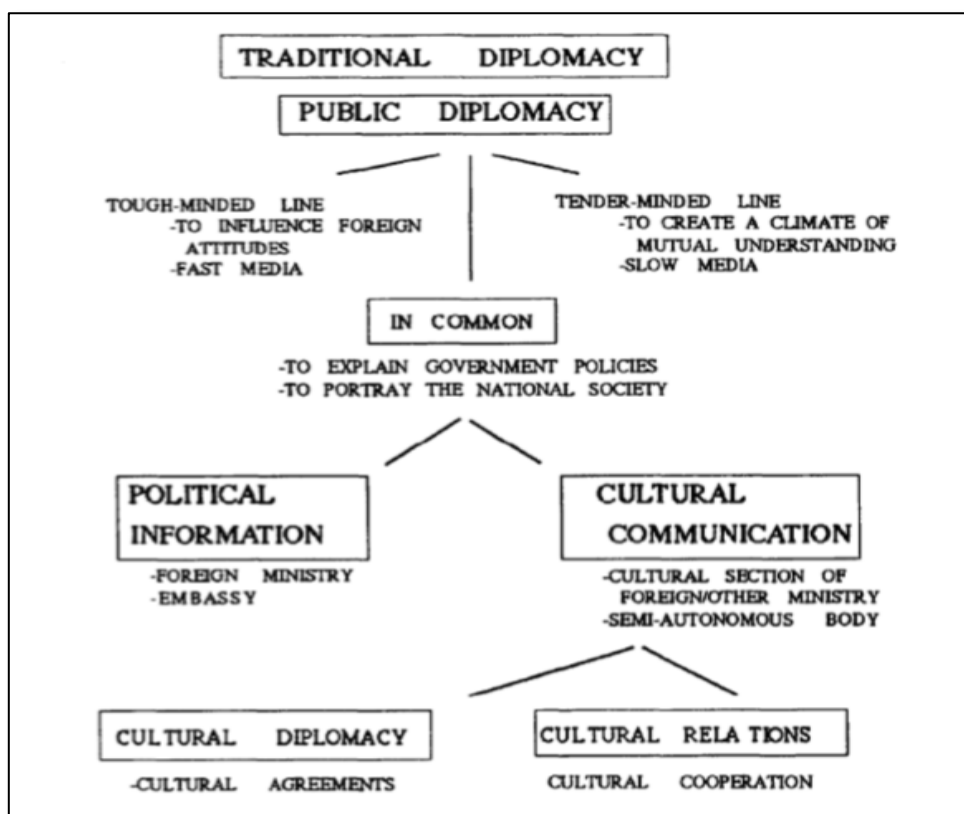
Figure 1: A Snapshot of the Figure of Conceptualisation of Public Diplomacy (Signitzer & Coombs, 1992, p.142)

Secondly, the concern is about the conductor of cultural diplomacy. Mitchell argues that cultural diplomacy mainly refers to an accumulation of bilateral or multilateral cultural exchange activities permitted and facilitated by the government to "impress, to present a favourable image" (Mitchell, 1986, p. 3). However, the arrival of new media technology has increased the complexity and reduced formal elements of these government conduct. Non-state actors and private new media services entered the process of cultural diplomacy and play increasingly essential roles in cross-cultural communication. The partnership between government and private sectors allows private sectors to contribute and influence diplomatic agendas.

Additionally, traditional foreign services relied mainly on mass media to send out messages to target public audiences. With the arrival of Web 2.0 technology, social media emerged with significant potential to outreach wider public and distribute information internationally without going through mass media. Manuel Castells's theory

of the network society has a distinguish contribution among those researches of information globalisation carried out by social scientists. His theory convincingly argues that the information capitalism has a global reach and a multinational network structure (Castells, 2010). It is beyond the limitation of national power and globalizing the information society. His theory emphasises on the revolution and transformation in international political communication brought over by the Web 2.0 technologies. The Internet enables government ministries, social communities and international organisation to have an impact on public diplomacy and link with target audience personally. In his book *Communication Power,* Castells suggests that social media is self-generated mass communication because it can potentially reach an international audience and has self-generated content (Castells, 2010). The development of new media technology challenges the traditional one-way process of cultural diplomacy to "understand, inform and influence people and private organizations, as well as governments" (Peterson et al. 2002, p.8). The Council of Foreign Relations (CFR) defined the contrast between conventional and new media technologies as "Increased customized, 'two-way' dialogue, as contrasted to conventional one-way 'pushdown' mass communication. … Adopt an "engagement" approach that involves listening, dialogue, debate and relationship-building and increases the amount and effectiveness of public-opinion research" (Peterson et al. 2002, p.8). The individual government can no longer fully control their diplomatic communication process since the public is no longer rely merely on mass media or official resources which are often associated with propaganda.

British Council produced the report of Cultural Diplomacy in 2007 states that the new digital media technology should become "innovative new working strategies" and social media "should reflect the full range of possible contributions to cultural diplomacy" (Bound et al. 2007, p.14).In addition, the report advises giving priority to address their recommendations aiming to make the UK "stay ahead of the pack on cultural diplomacy" (Bound et al. 2007, p.14). In order to integrate social media into diplomatic practise initiatives, new strategies are actively explored "for supporting the development of the online aspect of the work of cultural institutions." (Bound, 2007, p. 69). The information age has "democratised communication by providing freedom of access to information, the ability to voice opinions, and the opportunity to enter debate." Therefore, no foreign

policy can be successful without "a sustained, coordinated capability to understand, inform, and influence people and private organizations, as well as governments." (Peterson et al. 2002, p.8).

In summary, although there were some researches have been made to define public diplomacy (Fisher, 2008) and cultural diplomacy (Leadbeater, 2010) upon the arrival of social media tools, it is still not clear about the certain limits caused by the local political and social background which are often ignored in the rhetorical discourse of new media powers. In addition, recent debates and discussions suggest the new cultural diplomacy is at risk of placing the potential of new media technology to change the conduct of its activities ahead of empirical evidence.

The literature review of this study also finds that the discussion of public diplomacy still has disagreements on the differences between public diplomacy and propaganda (Brown, 2011). Some researchers argue that the two concepts have no difference between them (Holbrooke, 2001). Since the tools they use all aim to change and influence the target audience's opinion, the distinctions among them are blurred. Researchers such as Melissen points out that "Image cultivation, propaganda, and marketing-oriented activities" (Melissen, 2006, p.3) have been proved as old-fashioned diplomatic approaches in the digital age. Melissen also argues that public diplomacy 2.0 brought over by digital technology development does not necessarily have propagandistic elements (Melissen, 2005).

Although sometimes the same set of communication methods are used in both public diplomacy and propaganda which may confuse the differences between them, manipulation associated with propaganda seldom appears in the contemporary diplomatic communication nowadays world widely, except in certain countries such as China. John Brown notes, "it demonizes elements of the outside world and claims the nation it glorifies can do no wrong" (Brown, 2008, p.1). Furthermore, although both approaches have a common purpose of changing the mind of target groups, the distinction between propaganda and public diplomacy is that the latter one aims to fulfil foreign policy goal, engage with foreign audiences, and promote mutual understanding among the foreign public. Sometimes, the line between pushing messages and

persuading opinions is thin, but today social media helps to define this line more distinctively by enabling two-way communication between states and foreign public. If we consider traditional diplomacy as relationships between states, then public diplomacy encourages cooperation between states and citizens. Public diplomacy activities are mainly official information publication, which includes official statements, press releases, and such kind; educational exchanges such as school visits and education marketing activities; and cultural activities such as art exhibition and music festival. The communication model associated with propaganda is its one-way asymmetrical exchange of messages that always favours the institutions that utilise propaganda tools. Similar to propaganda, Public diplomacy has links to government and political power. However, it puts interaction with the target audience in the centre without manipulation. The target audiences can respond and persuade back to exchange information with public diplomacy conductors. Therefore, the two concepts are not interchangeable but only relatable. Public diplomacy allows the public to have dialogue and express their opinions even they are not favoured by public diplomacy conductors.

This study agrees with Melissen's view and establishes a central argument that is not about whether digital diplomacy is another type of propaganda, but how new media technology creates a new diplomatic content and communication channel, which makes a new resource of soft power. In this study, the British Embassy Weibo is positioned as a new public diplomacy tool with great potential of enabling respectful two-way dialogue since it "aims to promote mutual understanding among the foreign public" (Liu,2013). This thesis attempts to address Weibo as a new public diplomacy tool, which could be studied from multiple perspectives within the framework of public diplomacy. However, since there is an absence of a commonly agreed definition of public diplomacy, the adaption of the concept of public diplomacy in this study's theoretical framework is guided by Robin Brown's explanation of public diplomacy 2.0, which says, "Firstly, we are seeing diplomacy—understood in the broad sense as the conduct of international relations— taking place in public and involving the public. Secondly, the central instrument of this new diplomacy is actually public diplomacy— that is communication" (Brown, 2004, p. 15). The focus of this study is on the common agreement of the increasingly important role that digital media plays in public diplomacy.

From figure 1, we can see that public diplomacy mainly promotes engagement between states and foreign citizens, which is different from the state-to-state relationship fostered by traditional diplomacy. In this study, since "UK's primary foreign policy goal in China from 2012 mainly focuses on economic, financial, trade and cultural cooperation" (Interview 1), tender-minded public diplomacy fits better for the analysis of the British Embassy Weibo. As Nye puts it as "politics in an information age is not only about whose military wins but whose story wins" (Nye, 2011). This study, therefore, locates the use of the British Embassy Weibo within the focused scope of cultural diplomacy and political communication. It argues that using social media, such as Sina Weibo, as a cultural space and source of soft power, is a new public diplomacy approach to tell the stories among the foreign public.

Soft Power

What is soft power? There are various schools of IR theory that describe different forms of power. Liberalist school dominated the IR study filed until the post-war period when Realist school emerged. Liberalism identified a main problem in international relationship: war and proposed three solutions to solve international political conflicts. As one of the solutions, International institution strengthen cooperation between nations and avoid war. Realist school argues that the power is the key determinant in international relations and important factor to understand the dynamics of the relationship among governments. The role of power is the base of realist school's research of international relations (Schmit, 2005). Realists tend to associate power with military force which has been regarded as the center of state power. After 1970s, Neoliberals developed the notion of complex interdependence, which means "a world in which security and force matter less and countries are connected by multiple social and political relationships" (Keohane and Nye, 1998, p. 83). Huntington's theory of 'Clash of Civilizations' (1996) suggested that post-Cold War conflict would most frequently and violently occur because of cultural rather than ideological differences. Following Huntington's book, many scholars wrote books about culture and international relations.

Joseph Nye is famous for his theory of Soft Power. He introduced the term "soft power"

which refers to the ability of a country to persuade others to do what it wants without force or coercion – "an attraction to shared values and justness and duty of contributing to the achievement of those values" (Nye, 2004, p.7). Nye puts soft power as the "power of attraction that is associated with ideas, cultures, and policies" (Nye, 2002, p. 60). Nye differentiates hard power from soft power as "the ability to get others to act in ways that are contrary to their initial preferences and strategies" (Nye, 2011, p. 11) through threats and inducements. It is relevant to Liberalism's three solutions to solve the war. Among the three solutions, economic interdependence might make nations to work with others through coercion, which is closer to hard power. Nye agrees that a state with strong economy is more likely to change the behaviour of other states with weaker economy. However, he also pointed out that "economic resources can also produce soft as well as hard power" (Nye, 2011, p.85). Another Liberal solution to solve the problem of international conflicts is international institutions, which foster harmonious relations among states through cooperation. Nye points out that international institutions help to enhance soft power (Nye, 2005) and benefit each side (Nye, 2011). Therefore, Nye's argument of soft power adopts the theory of Neoliberal institutionalism and disagrees the Realist's view that security is the only objective sought after by states.

In Nye's view, a country's soft power consists of three major elements: culture (when it is pleasing to others), values (when they are attractive and consistently practiced), and policies (when they are regarded as inclusive and legitimate) (Nye, 2011). Nye's framework of soft power is originated from three primary sources within a country. This framework could be used for the narrative analysis. Nye stated, "its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values such as democracy and human rights (when it lives up to them), and its policies (when they are seen as legitimate because they are framed with some humility and awareness of others' interests)" (Nye, 2004, p. 126). Nye explains it further that soft power is the ability to and power to attract people which leads to acquiescence (Nye, 2004). He argues that a country's soft power is closely associated with its international image and reputation (Nye, 2004). Therefore, influencing foreign public with soft power is building a positive image and reputation of a country overseas. Nye especially pointed out that cultural factor plays an increasingly important role in international relations and cultural diplomacy (Nye, 2010). He even

emphasises that "cultural diplomacy is an important soft power tool" (Nye, 2010). Cultural diplomacy, as a stream of public diplomacy, has been increasingly and extensively discussed in the field of IR studies since the concept of soft power is defined by Nye (Arndt, 2005).

However, the concept draws much criticism and concerns from many international relations scholars for its vagueness of covering anything outside military and economic power. Gilboa denied soft power and hard power are independent of each other. He suggests that soft power can only be influential when hard power supports are in place (Gilboa, 2008). American films and music are classified as elements of American soft power by Nye (2002). However, they simply would not stop anti-U.S activities in certain countries such as China, when the national interests are conflicting between the United States and those foreign countries. Therefore, the result of diplomatic communication may depend on the target audience, communication tools and foreign policy agenda. Soft power alone may not have much influence on the foreign policy agenda. Brown argues its theoretical limitation as the concept of soft power "is incoherent as it combines several separable mechanisms that need to be treated separately" (Brown, 2004, p. 22). Parc and Moon pointed out that culture can not be replaced by soft power. Soft power is just a subset of "accumulable culture" (Parc and Moon, 2019, p. 429).

Nye attempted to address those criticisms of his original concept by introducing a new concept of "smart power" (Nye, 2009), which is a combination of both hard power and soft power, to overcome the limitation of his definition of soft power. He argues that "the military can sometimes play an important role in generation of soft power" (Nye, 2008a, p. 106). Although he admits that military can be important, in a longer period, soft power is still more important than hard power. The former U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton said, "America cannot solve the most pressing problems on our own, and the world cannot solve them without America. . .. We must use what has been called 'smart power,' the full range of tools at our disposal" (Nye, 2011). Under Nye's advice, smart power also became a core principle of Obama's foreign policy strategy. Furthermore, during Hilary Clinton's Senate confirmation hearing on January 13, 2009, for the position of Secretary of State, Hilary said, "We must use what has been called smart power---the full range of tools at our disposal---diplomatic, economic, military, political,

legal, and cultural---picking the right tool, or combination of tools, for each situation. With smart power, diplomacy will be the vanguard of foreign policy" (Clinton, 2009). Since then, the term "smart power" is all over the foreign policy debate. Another major criticism of Nye's soft power argument is on his focus on U.S's power. The American-centric context limits the development of the concept of soft power. Even Nye himself addressed this limitation as "Others, both countries and nonstate actors, also possess soft power" (Nye, 2005, p. 73). Thus, there is a need to fill in the gap with more up-to-date case studies of other countries to examine and develop his argument.

Being different from another newly emerged concept – sharp power (Walker and Ludwig, 2017), soft power is using attractive policies and approaches to promote a positive image and better understanding among the foreign public, ultimately to persuade and influence foreign government's decisions. Sharp power was firstly mentioned in an article of *Foreign Affairs* magazine to refer to a manipulative and aggressive diplomatic policy and approach to influence a target foreign government's decision by projecting state power in target country (Walker and Ludwig, 2017). This article mentioned China's Confucius Institute as an example of sharp power which is "not necessarily seeking to 'win hearts and minds', the common frame of reference for soft power efforts, but they are undoubtedly seeking to manipulate their target audiences by distorting the information that reaches them" (Walker and Ludwig, 2017). Nye also published an article on *Foreign Affairs* magazine to emphasise that inspiring values attract a longer term of voluntary persuasion than control and restrictions, which degrade soft power into sharp power (Nye, 2018). However, some scholars pointed out that this article expresses the Western countries' worry about China's economic success and its development strategy. Confucius Institute is supported by most of its partners and promoting a positive relationship between China and foreign countries (Nie, 2018). Therefore, simply defining sharp power as manipulating diplomatic policy can not adequately describe its features. Foreign service should not only be precautious about China's increasing global influence but also improve understanding of this country and promote more cultural exchanges through effective communication channels. It is also important for diplomats to realize the contradiction between Chinese people's increasing digital consumption and strict government control over social media content. This study explores this contradiction to provide a useful insight into future

digital diplomatic practices.

Although the limitations and issues of the concept of soft power are still not adequately addressed and resolved, being aware of the limitations and issues of this concept helps this study to use this concept analytically to inform the construction of the theoretical framework of this thesis and revisit these issues through the result of the analysis of this study to bring new visions to the concept. This study adopts Gilboa's criticism of soft power and recognises that hard power and soft power are complementary to each other. The importance of hard power should not be ignored when analysing soft power in digital diplomacy. Since the UK has the leading international position in military, economics and politics, its soft power has higher appeal among the foreign public. Meanwhile, this study also recognises that soft power plays an important role in promoting a favourable environment within which a county's national interests and foreign policies could be understood by the foreign public without always resorting to hard power. Public diplomacy establishes its legitimacy as an institution and field of diplomatic practice relevant to the larger burdens of statecraft (Hayden, 2011b). The rationale of cultural diplomacy is that the more the foreign public or government understand a country's value, custom, and culture, the more likely they understand its policies.

However, it is also worthy to note that sometimes the foreign audiences may not agree with the policies of a country even they enjoy its culture. Therefore, in this study, Weibo is regarded as a digital public diplomacy tool utilised by foreign embassies in China to promote cultural understanding through soft power and cultivate a favourable environment to fulfil foreign policy goal. The concept of soft power helps to frame the analysis of how social media content and conversation are used by diplomatic service to exhibit soft power among the foreign public in the diplomatic communication context. Despite its limitations, the concept of soft power informs various state and non-state actors in public diplomacy strategy formulations. It serves to examine how a country's ideology and culture are translated into the practice of public diplomacy digitally. This thesis proposes a theoretical framework within which the concept of soft power is adapted in the context of public diplomacy with the critical perspectives on this concept to understand how it explains public diplomacy behaviour through social media

channels in particular social and cultural contexts.

In Joseph Nye's definition of the sources of soft power, political values such as democracy and human rights, determine if a country's soft power through political credibility could be wielded more effectively (Nye, 2000). Therefore, this research identifies whether the political values are presented in the British Embassy's Weibo and to what extent British political value and national values were presented in their Weibo narratives. For policies to wield soft power, Nye (2004) suggests framing it with the awareness of others' interests. By considering Weibo as a digital public diplomacy tool within the framework of soft power, this research's emphasis is on how the British Embassy Weibo content creates a British cultural or even ideological appeal among the Chinese public. Weibo facilitates a cultural communication space across national boundaries. In order to operationalise the concept of soft power in the theoretical framework, this thesis applies the concept of soft power (Nye, 2004) to capture the ideological references in the content of the British Embassy's Weibo and guide the coding system of this study to find presence of the British values in its online foreign policy communication.

However, the adaptation from traditional diplomacy to digital diplomacy and all the relevant activities that occurred in this process should not be studied in a vacuum. As William Hague, the former British Foreign Secretary, described in his speech about the Britain's foreign policy in a networked world, "There is now a mass of connections between individuals, civil society, businesses, pressure groups and charitable organisations which are also part of the relations between nations and which are being rapidly accelerated by the Internet" (FCO, 2012, p.3). He sets out Britain's intention to pursue a Foreign Policy that "makes the most of the opportunities of the 21st century" (FCO, 2012, p. 3). Weibo became a British digital diplomacy channel in China since the former British Prime Minister David Cameron's first official visit to China. He brought over 100 government officials and business leaders to seek more opportunities to cooperate with China in education, business, and tourism, which aimed to encourage the growth of the UK economy after the recession. Since there are no major political, military and economic conflicts between the two countries in the latest 20 years, soft power seems the best approach to influence the Chinese public and advance the UK's

national interests in China. Since "foreign policy is often about persuasion, influence and soft power" (FCO, 2012b, p. 7), social media has apparent advantages to become a source of soft power and digital diplomacy tool in this context and "make an impact in a more efficient and cost-effective way" (Liu, 2013). In summary, the concept of soft power advances our understanding of social media as a new public diplomacy tool that projects soft power among the foreign public in the digital age. By applying the concept of soft power, the content of the British Embassy Weibo is analysed with an aim to examine to what extent that the Weibo is used as a source of soft power to fulfil the FCO's public diplomacy goal. The concept is operationalised in the coding system of this study to count items that related to soft power in the Weibo narratives.

1.2.2 Personalisation and Professionalisation in Political Communication

The concepts of professionalisation and personalisation (Farrell and Webb, 2002; Downey & Satnyer, 2010; Mancini, 1999; McAllister, 2005; Bjerling, 2012) derived from the political communication and blog genre literature serve as the firm ground for the analysis of the evolution in the form and content of diplomatic communication and public diplomacy 2.0 with the arrival of social media. Personalisation and professionalisation are operationalised within an analytical framework tailored for this research, which is introduced in chapter 1.3. Technical interactivity is mainly a measurable of the types of links on digital diplomacy platforms. While social interactivity pays attention to the level of participation, and the government's online engagement with its public through feedbacks and comments. Personalisation in this research addresses the role of Weibo content creator's personality and behaviour in shaping the content of the British Embassy China Weibo, which is linked to the professionalisation of digital diplomacy.

Personalisation

The concept of personalisation is borrowed from the literature of political campaign. It is coined as the "focus on the personality of individual politicians that can be contrasted by alternative forms of communication centred on political institutions, issues,

ideologies" (Mayerhöffer and Esmark, 2011, p.3). However, the research of personalisation in political campaigns only be conducted from domestic political communication field. In this research, personalisation refers to the narrative style of the content on digital diplomacy platforms that shape the content from a personal angle. It adds a new dimension to the political campaign as well as digital diplomacy literature in the context of digital diplomatic communication. Because the government organisations today are living in an age of "mediatisation of politics" (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999), being able to articulate issues to the media and public that meet both journalistic criteria and government's standards becomes a desired quality of politicians. Meanwhile, social media content is mainly created by individuals to tell their personal experiences. Putting on a human face and share personal life on digital diplomatic communication channels helps foreign service and diplomats to communicate effectively with the foreign public on social media.

Bjerling (2012) presents an analytical model that illustrates the three dimensions of media personalisation, which captures the multidimensionality and dynamics of the concept (see figure 2). By adopting Bjerling's (2012) breakdown of personalisation below, this study explores the multi-facets of personalisation on diplomatic social media channels through content analysis. The first section, personified, explores how the British foreign policy is embodied through personalisation of the content, which frequently appears in the British Embassy Weibo content, as well as authorship of the Weibo posts. The second section, orientation towards persona, analyses to what extent the Weibo content creators share their personal experience in the British Embassy Weibo posts, as well as whether the Weibo content creators reference their personal life and emotions in the British Embassy Weibo posts. The third section, intimization, describes the type of private information that the British Embassy Weibo content creators provide to the foreign public, including references to daily life. This study's focus of personalisation is on topic, personality and the way to shape the angle of each Weibo post from a personal perspective of the British Embassy Weibo post creators.

Media personalisation

Personified   Intimization   Orientation Towards Persona
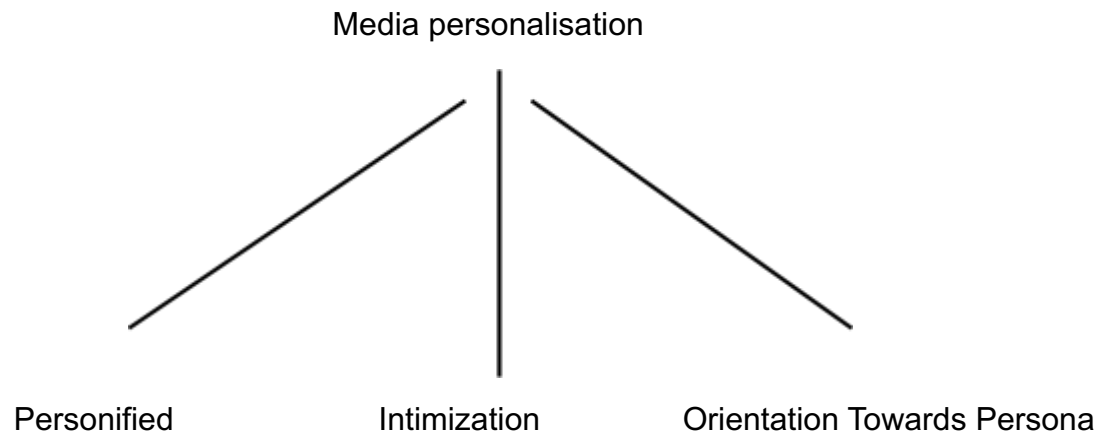
Figure 2: A Conceptual Model - Three Dimensions of Media Personalisation (Bjerling, 2012)

Professionalisation

A growing number of professionals in the government now are able to tailor messages to attract media attention and draw positive feedback from the public. Nowadays, diplomatic communication is increasingly conducted through social media. An increasing number of social media skill training opportunities for diplomats and communications professionals offered by government bodies is a clear indication that the political sphere is increasingly mediatised and bypassing press. As Hugh Elliott, Director of Communication at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, claimed, "…at our best, we have the mindset of a multi-media, engaged broadcaster and are gradually developing the skills to match… We engage with our audiences. We take ownership of our digital channels, we produce content that is attractive and authoritative and unlike this blog, overwhelmingly visual" (FCO, 2017). The FCO's digital transformation unit was set up in February 2014. It shows the FCO is keen to bring the whole organisation into the digital age. They recruit digital specialists into their core digital team and the embassies around the world and ensure the staffs have training opportunities to increase their digital capability to fit in the new digital role. *Digital Diplomacy Review 2016* ranked the UK foreign service on the top of the list. The UK government is leading the process of professionalisation of digital diplomacy around the globe.

Therefore, the level of professionalisation of digital diplomacy is indicated by the level of diplomatic service's skills in managing digital content. Many scholars have tried to define the concept of professionalisation in the context of political communication. Esser and Spanier define professionalisation early as "increased specialization and use of experts to manage the greater centralization of communication activities" (Esser and Spanier, 2005, p. 41). However, there is still no precise definition of this concept. The term professionalisation was studied in many different contexts in political communication literature. Sometimes it refers to the process of professional development of political campaigns. However, in some other literature, it refers to the political campaign professions (Lilleker and Negrine, 2002). In addition, all the latest debates of professionalisation in current literature are confined in the context of domestic political campaigns (Blumler and Gurevitich, 2001; Brants and Van Praag, 2006; Esser and Spanier, 2002; Lilleker and Negrine, 2002; Mancini, 1999). Thus, those discussions left a space for confusions as well as research opportunities.

Since digital media now plays a vital role in the political communication process, in this study, the concept of professionalisation is narrowed and defined as skill specialisation and use of experts in diplomatic communication process through social media with new technical and technological aspects, developing from Esser and Spanier's (2002) definition. It adds a new dimension to the debate of the concept of professionalisation in the context of digital diplomacy. As Esser and Spanier state, "strategic political communication is an inherent part of the political story—not only in the context of election campaigns...but in all areas of professional public relations" (Esser and Spanier, 2002, p. 41). Signitzer and Coombs also identified convergences in the concepts of public diplomacy and public relations (Signitzer and Coombs, 1992). Therefore, public relations in political communication became an important element, making the literature of professionalisation in political campaign field applicable to this study. The concept of professionalisation, therefore, serves as a part of the theoretical framework of this study. The limitation of the concept of professionalisation is examined by content analysis and revisited in the conclusion chapter.

Farrell and Webb (2002) present an inspiring operationalisation of the concept of professionalisation which helps this study to understand the British Embassy Weibo as an on-going public diplomacy campaign using social media channel. This

operationalisation framework inspires this study to analyse the development of diplomatic communication in the context of digital diplomacy by adapting it to the case study of the British Embassy Weibo. Farrell and Webb (2002) broke down the analysis of professionalisation of election campaign into three aspects: technical, resources and thematic developments. Each aspect has three stages of the development process. The third stage is coincided by the development of new telecommunications technology, including the Internet (Farrell and Webb, 2002). Therefore, the analysis located in this stage is the permanent campaign. The mode of communication in this stage is more direct than those in the first two stages. Because the campaign needs to employ professionals, it leads to the sub-research question of who is managing the British Embassy Weibo and developing its content. There is also a greater use of interactive communication and tailored message to its target audience. By adopting the three aspects of the development of professionalisation in political campaign management, the analysis objects are identified to address each aspect in the context of digital diplomatic communication management, which are:

- The communication methods and Weibo post topics that related to technical development.
- Who manages the British Embassy Weibo and supervises the conversation over it?
- Interactivity level and responsive speed that relate to resource development.
- The role of the British Embassy Weibo in communicating foreign policy information, control over Weibo content, and political PR and marketing elements are related to thematic developments.

1.2.3 Excellence Theory in Public Relations

The dissemination of message requires medium to provide channels to get it through to the target audience. Traditionally, the public receives diplomatic news and information through mass media. In 1943, American sociology scholar Kurt Lewin founded the theory of gatekeeping, which pointed out that information is filtered by gatekeepers before it is disseminated through mass media with its one-way communication model (Lewin, 1943). However, now the theory can also be used to

address interpersonal communication and two-way communications model on the Internet. In Lewin's theory, gatekeepers, such as editors, media regulators, media owners or media sponsors, will decide what information can be disseminated. Today, social media users can act as individual gatekeepers to decide what information they want to include in their social media accounts. In China, Weibo users can play a vital role in creating and distributing content through Weibo and other social media channels. Shoemaker and Vos (2011) defined this process as "audience gatekeeping".

Chinese media regulators and government have strict controls and limits on the content presented in mass media. They filter the message and judge the content with complex criteria. Therefore, Chinese people have limited media resource to find information about foreign embassies. However, the arrival of foreign embassy Weibo provides a direct media platform for Chinese people to find information about foreign countries and communicate with foreign embassy directly. Weibo users are also empowered by the Web 2.0 technology to share the message through their own social network. The foreign embassy Weibo creates a new opportunity for diplomatic communication to break through geopolitics barriers and establish a direct dialogue with the target country's general public. However, it also brings challenges to the foreign embassies who act as gatekeepers of their Weibo platforms as never before. Since those foreign embassies would like to tailor the content in order to shape the foreign public's knowledge of their countries, they have their own set of criteria on what posts are suitable to be presented on their Weibo platforms. Their criteria may have contradictions to China's local media regulation. This thesis analyses this unique process and reveals the dynamics among the British Embassy Weibo, the Chinese media regulators, and the Weibo users in section 3.2.

If our understanding of the goal of digital diplomacy is a process of mutual influence whereby a state facilitates engagement between publics or adjust its own policies upon foreign public opinions, then we must focus on the individual users of digital diplomacy communication channels as the unit of research by observing their online activities and feedbacks they received from these channels. The communication model on digital diplomacy communication channels is examined by adapting the excellence theory in public relations study in this analysis. Excellence theory in public relations study was

founded by Grunig, Grunig and Dozier in their study during the 1980s. A key finding of the study was that public relation is a "unique management function that helps an organisation interact with the social and political components of its environment" (Grunig et al. in Sison in Chia and Synott, 2009, p.71). More importantly, the study found that symmetrical communication results in more effective communication (Sison in Chia and Synott, 2009, p.72). The four-model typology (Grunig J. & Hunt, 1984): press agency/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical, has been regarded as the first comprehensive conceptual and measurement framework in public relations research that was evolved later as a key component of excellence study in public relation research. Among the four models, communication direction and purpose were constructed as two major variables, along with four sub-categorised variables. The direction refers to one-way or two-way communication. One-way means disseminating information from the top, and two-way means exchanging information and interactions. The purpose this model is to find out whether communication results are balanced or not.

A 2009 study on the relationship between public relation and social media found "the ability of blogs to facilitate two-way symmetrical communication offers tremendous possibilities for the enhancement of excellence theory" (Wright and Hinson, 2009, p.7). Grunig argued in his 2010 speech at the PRSA Conference that social media might "make it more possible than ever to achieve our goals in terms of relationships with stakeholders" (Waddington, 2013, p.4). According to Waddington, social media makes an organisation neither has to create content, nor own the "conversation around its products or services" (Waddington, 2013, p.6), and the messages will spread widely and speedy. On Social media, the users actively engage in a conversation and share information of an organisation. Grunig also stated in his earlier work that public diplomacy is applying public relations theory and strategies in its communication process with the foreign public (Grunig, 1993). Therefore, the Excellence Theory, as one of the most successful major public relations theories, could also be applied to digital diplomacy due to the similarities between public diplomacy and public relations.

Indeed, Social media provide access for direct public participation and engagement that fosters symmetrical communication. Feedbacks from the public can be given

almost instantaneously, and much more accessible. Within this study, the level of participation and engagement on the British Embassy Weibo is also an important aspect studied in this research. The analysis is operationalised through analyzing the comments received and published on the Weibo because "...comments are largely ignored in current studies of large amounts of weblog data, typically because extracting and processing their content is somewhat more complex than extracting the content of the posts themselves." (Mishne & Glance, 2006, p. 1).

Digital diplomacy in the context of social media involves both listening and engaging. This research reveals whether the British digital diplomacy succeeds in engaging with its target audience more efficiently than traditional diplomatic communication methods. Social media has the potential to bring to fruition some of the core principles of Excellence Theory, in a way that has never previously been possible. Social media, such as Weibo, allows diplomats to respond to negative feedback in an exceptionally timely manner, which helps them to prevent negative messages from going viral, as well as having the potential to damage reputation irreparably. It facilitates everyday interaction between individual and organisation with a participative culture, and organic rather than mechanical structures. This study examines how useful social media facilitated communication really can be, both in everyday diplomatic communication practice as well as at times of crisis.

1.3 Variables, Hypothesis, and Research Questions

This section explains the analytical framework of this thesis, as well as the variables derived from the theoretical framework and preliminary research. The outcome of this analysis answers the central research questions of this study: how do professionalisation and personalisation help to articulate the British Embassy Weibo content and whether Weibo enables direct dialogue and makes real influence among the Chinese public? The central hypothesis in this study is that the British Embassy Weibo, as a digital diplomacy tool, is making revolutionary change to the traditional diplomatic communication model and influencing the Chinese public effectively through content articulated by professionalisation and personalisation. Therefore, this study aims to prove or disprove the hypothesis by systemically analysing the variables related

to digital diplomacy. Besides, the impact and influencing power of digital diplomacy is also assessed and evaluated to provide evidence and validate the conclusion towards the hypothesis.

This research takes the British Embassy Weibo as the research unit. The variables of this research are operationalised in this analytical framework to directly inform the analysis which aims to find out the organisational settings of the British Embassy Weibo to advance our academic understanding of digital diplomatic communication and new public diplomacy. As Mahler and Regan pointed out, "the organizational setting in which the communication occurs is critical to understanding communication patterns and practices" (Mahler and Regan, 2009, p. 3).

1.3.1 Dependent and Independent Variables

In order to operationalise the theoretical framework and answer the research question, this study identified and investigated a set of variables. In the theoretical framework of this study, the excellence theory is borrowed to conceptualise the two focal points that are not addressed in depth in existing digital diplomacy research: digital diplomacy behaviour and excellence in digital diplomatic communication management. The excellence study has been carried out in broad cultural and political backgrounds (Vercic, J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1996; Rhee, 2002; Wakefiled, 2000). In 1998, Grunig and Jaatinen studied Norwegian government's communication management to apply the excellence theory to governmental communication research with empirical evidence (J. Grunig & Jaatinen, 1998). The communication technology and the government communication process have developed dramatically since 1998. However, the discussion around these two aspects in digital diplomatic communication did not catch up with the changes. Therefore, the two underexplored focal points in digital diplomacy studies are identified as the dependent variables in this research.

After the dependent variables are identified, a set of independent variables are also derived in this study. Since one country's diplomatic communication is a highly specialised practise that is best carried out by communication professionals who have a clear understanding of foreign policy issues, policies, and target audiences of a

particular diplomatic communication campaign, digital diplomacy is a new stream of this process and also a part of general diplomatic behaviour. Digital diplomacy study must consider a variety of variables, both internal and external. Diplomacy does not occur in a vacuum, and even the best strategy may prove ineffective without appropriate policy and action to reinforce it. The success and failure of this cross-state diplomatic communication are determined by many factors. Rosenau (1966) presents a schema that divides all possible independent variables into five categories:

- Idiosyncratic (political leaders' personal characteristics);
- Role ("the external behaviour of officials that is generated by the roles they occupy");
- Governmental ("those aspects of a government's structure that limit or enhance the foreign policy choices made by decision-makers");
- Societal ("those non-governmental aspects of a society which influence its external behaviour");
- Systemic ("any actions occurring abroad that condition or otherwise influence the choices made by its officials")

Rosenau's (1966) study also explains diverse diplomatic behaviours across different countries. He developed a middle-range theory that mediated between general principles and the complexity in a real situation (Hudson and Vore, 1995) Some studies argue that although societal culture, the political system, and the interest group system have overlapped, they are also unique and could be significantly different from each other (e.g., Lane & Ersson, 2002). Although some countries have similar cultural backgrounds, they may have different political systems.

Meanwhile, certain countries may be more or less democratic because of their distinct historical and social contexts. Rosenau (1966) proposed three structural factors that classify the countries and address the complexities of diplomatic behaviours across countries. Those factors are the size of magnitude, degree of political accountability, and level of economic development (Rosenau, 1966). These factors add insight into the interaction among the five sets of independent variables. Another noticeable feature of Rosenau's independent variables is that four out of five sets of them are domestic

sources of diplomatic behaviour, which is much heavier emphasis than that on external ones (Maoz, 1990). However, Rosenau neglected the foreign policy-making process and its nature (Mao, 1990). Even though Rosenau's framework of five sets of independent variables still can be regarded as one of the most influential contributions in empirical foreign policy research.

Rosenau and Hoggard (1974) found that in the real situation, larger or developed countries are more likely conflict-prone but also more cooperation-prone than smaller or less developed countries (Maoz, 1990). Based on Rosenau's explanation of the independent variables, Wilkenfeld et al. divided determining factors of diplomatic behaviour into five streams: psychological, political, societal, interstate dependence, as well as global polarity, alliances, and power status (Wilkenfeld et al., 1980). They divided the systemic variable into interstate and global components and developed a more empirically based classification of diplomatic behaviours (Maoz, 1990). Their study gives a more sophisticated explanation and full credit to interstate factor. The researches based on Rosenau's framework are quantitative and cross-national (Rosenau, 1968; Rosenau and Hoggard, 1974; Rosenau and Ramsey, 1975). Therefore, this study employs and selects the sets of independent variables from their frameworks to find out the interactions between them and the dependent variable. This section explains every individual variable within the chosen variable's framework and specifies their relative potency.

This study chose one of the most influential British foreign service's digital diplomacy channels in China as the study case. The UK and China both have long existing and continuous culture. However, the two countries have distinctively different political systems and social media environments. According to these characters of the UK-China relationship, this study chose societal culture, political system, interest group, and interstate dependence as independent variables, which are originating from Rosenau (1966) and Wilkenfeld et al. (1980)'s approach of classifying independent variables in international relations study, to investigate the empirical linkages between these variables and digital diplomacy content and management. These variables are most relevant and influential to the dependent variables, the two under-explored focal points in digital diplomacy studies. The digital diplomacy events and behaviours studied

in this thesis are systematically coded and analysed to specify relationships between dependent and independent variables.

Investigating societal culture aims to explore the social background in which digital diplomatic practice is conditioned. Analysis of the political system and interest group provides a more specific explanation of the big picture of social background. The interest group is analysed also because of its theoretical brilliance for analysing foreign policy decision-making process, which must consider its interest groups from both domestic area and target country. Besides, interstate dependence is considered to reflect how the dynamic of UK-China relationship affect the UK's digital diplomacy behaviour and effectiveness in China.

This study evaluated the outcomes of the UK's digital diplomacy practice in China by examining several different variables including the UK government's digital diplomacy strategy, tactics, and objectives; the UK government's goal and motivation to engage with China; social, political and cultural differences between the UK and China; Chinese social media users profile, as well as interactions between individuals and Chinese regulation of online communications. Among all the variables, the key independent variable components leading to the shifts of the dependent variables are about daily content development and communication management of the British Embassy Weibo. Each variable in this study is discussed in the next two sections for its logic and applicability in responding to the research questions.

1.3.2 Institutional Variables

Mahler and Regan found that political and institutional influences are vital for the content on government websites (Mahler and Regan, 2006). However, Chadwick pointed out that there is very little research investigating the internal institutional variables in the study of e-government (Chadwick, 2011). In this section, a set of institutional variables and the hypothesis linked to each variable are explained in detail.

Editorial Control

Editorial control over digital diplomacy content is an important variable in digital

diplomacy study. This study investigates its importance in the context of the British Embassy Weibo, which is operated under the British government's media regulations as well as the Chinese government's regulation on Internet editorial standard to highlight the tension between these two different media regulations. As Mahler and Regan state, "the organizational setting in which the communication occurs is critical to understanding communication patterns and practices" (Mahler and Regan, 2009, p. 3). On the one hand, the British Embassy Weibo is an official diplomatic communication channel; however, on the other hand, it also allows informal communication that is not permitted in official communication channels.

The hypothesis linked to this variable is that the contradiction between editorial independence and control increases over time despite the goal to establish a direct dialogue with the foreign public through social media. This hypothesis falls in the concept of professionalisation of foreign policy communication. The conceptualisation of professionalisation is highly related to the literature of public diplomacy in the digital age. Public diplomacy concepts, such as soft power, seek to further develop the understanding of digital diplomatic communication channel as an ideological tool.

The British Embassy Weibo has demonstrated a form of online democracy and liberty to Chinese public through providing a direct communication channel to critiques, though within the boundaries set by China's media and political control, editorial control from the British Embassy and Foreign Office, as well as the Weibo followers' opinions and even nationalistic sentiment. The hypothesis is created to examine the logic that if digital diplomacy content becomes more professionalised and focused on the persona of foreign service, the less it is about personal experiences of content creators and less public conversation it engages over time.

In order to investigate this variable, this study interviewed the people whom are directly involved in the management and practise of the British Embassy Weibo content. This study also conducted a content analysis to examine each sampled post from the British Embassy Weibo to understand how effectively the British foreign service positions its objectives of engaging with the foreign public in practice and what is allowed or controlled on its social media channels.

Events

The content regarding temporal events on the British Embassy Weibo is an important variable in answering the research question. This variable helps to examine whether the use of social media, as a new public diplomacy tool, is effective in disseminating messages and solve problems through soft power. Nye's conceptual framework of soft power states that the three primary sources and currencies of soft power are culture, political values, and foreign policies (Nye, 2011). His framework helps with the understanding of the concepts of the effectiveness of using digital diplomacy as a tool to engage the foreign public and communicate a country's foreign policy agenda over particular events and crisis.

The hypothesis linked to this variable is that the evolution of the web 2.0 technologies improves a country's communication with its foreign public around major events and helps to establish the interest groups over time. In this study, the publication of Weibo posts over important events and diplomatic crisis help to identify the differences in content between temporal events and daily communication.

This study conducted content analysis to examine this variable. The date of each sampled Weibo post was coded. The frequency of the posts over timeline/events helps to determine any differences that social media made to the British diplomatic services and communications in China. It helps to reveal the evolution of the British Embassy Weibo platform over time and development of social media mediated genres for diplomacy purpose. It measures to what extent social media is challenging the traditional diplomatic communication channels during a critical time. The posts that attracted a large number of comments and even mass media attention are analysed in depth in this research.

Political sensitivity

In this research, political sensitivity especially refers to the degree of sensitivity that the content or agenda on digital diplomacy platform. The Chief news editor of CCTV.com (the online news service of China Central Television) told all the newly employed news editors (including myself) in their training workshop that the degree of the online media content sensitivity can be divided into three levels. The first level is "high sensitive

agenda" that refers to the content contains implications that openly challenge the fundamental Chinese political system, attempt to topple the ruling party, seek a reinterpretation of political taboos, such as the Tiananmen Square Protest of 1989, Tibetan or Uyghur ethnic split, human rights issues, and dissidents. "Low sensitive agenda" comes next, which mainly covers hot topics that have the possibility of spurring mass movements. "Low sensitive agenda" in this research means the degree of sensitivity that the political or government-related agenda hotly discussed by netizens on Weibo. It is generally assumed those topics that directly involve the core ideological tenets and constitutional institutions of the current political regime. The third level, "non-sensitive agenda" refers to the content, which does not correlate with any political or public affairs.

The hypothesis linked to this variable is that under prevailing institutional constraints, local political sensitivity indeed has a critical influence on the diplomatic social media interactions with the foreign public and is decisive in the outcome of the communications agenda.

Commercialisation of Social Media Service Provider

China's home-grown Weibo platforms are run by three types of operators: independent Weibo service provider, commercial portal websites, and traditional media (TV stations, newspapers and magazines). Commercial portal websites have to voluntarily self-censor to please the government and obtain more policy support when they rush to occupy the market and attract more users by whatever means possible. Thus, the public space on Weibo is still constrained by both governmental and market forces. Then the question that whether to censor or to promote comes after the government's response to public demand, and subsequently influences the Internet companies' decision of whether to increase investment to tighten information control or in commercialisation process, and this, to a large extent, then influences their user base and even their profits, which eventually affects public attention and fulfilment of public demand on Weibo.

The hypothesis linked to this variable is that in certain countries, digital public space is constrained by both government and market forces. Diplomatic social media platform

could hardly influence and challenge the foundation of the current political regime in a short period.

1.3.3   Diplomatic Weibo and Followers

In this section, the discussion around the Weibo genre as the variables of this study helps to further the understanding of how format enables dialogue and empowers content. The main purpose of the genre is using a particular type of rhetoric to persuade the information receiver to respond to the viewpoints conveyed in the message. Digital diplomacy genre indicates the degree of digital diplomacy practitioner's professional level and interactivity level with target public enabled by the content. As a high context symbolic language system, Chinese language characters affect the choice of wording and content rhetoric. Therefore, digital diplomacy in China has significant uniqueness in terms of linguistic feature which differentiates it from other English written digital diplomatic formats.

Personalisation: content style
Bjerling (2012) provides an analytical model that distinguishes the three dimensions of media personalisation, thereby captures the multidimensionality of the concept (see figure 2). Following Bjerling's breakdown shown in figure 2, this thesis conducted discourse and content analysis to identify the facets of personalisation on the British Embassy Weibo. In the context of digital diplomatic media, personalisation is regarded as a narrative or a "writing style characterized by personalisation" (Wall, 2005, p. 153) and defined by the style and nature of Weibo post content.

In addition to measuring whether the post contains information of personal experience, the percentage of Weibo posts with personal experience reference aims to measure the degree of personalisation and indicates to what extent foreign service is impersonated by digital diplomacy platform with personalised narratives. The focus of this variable was not necessarily about Weibo post author's personal experience but its personalised narrative style. The level of emotion expressed is another variable measured in this study. Finally, the level of references to everyday life was also measured. Firstly, personified explores how the British foreign service is embodied

through personalisation of the Weibo content and the diversity of authorship. It is important to note that humanisation on the British Embassy Weibo, is used alternately with personified in this study. Secondly, orientation towards persona, analyses what personal contributions from the British Embassy diplomats and Weibo editors, including references to personal life and emotions, are embedded in the Weibo content. Thirdly, intimization is explored to describe the type of personal information, including references to everyday life that the British Embassy Weibo content authors convey to the Chinese public.

The hypothesis linked to this variable is that the personalisation of digital diplomatic communication creates a personalised experience of foreign policy communication, increases the level of engagement with the foreign public, as well as shifts the traditional institutional persuasion to the individual conversation.

Topic selection

This variable aims for the identification of the issues and topics selected by the British Embassy Weibo. The analysis relates to this variable enables a measure of whether the issues and topics fell in the main priorities of the British foreign service's strategy and policy in China. In response to the research question, this variable is investigated to find out whether the digital diplomacy content focuses on foreign policy priorities, or on specific topics that are important depending on the demands from the target audience. Framing research is usually employed to analyse media texts, press coverage and has been theorised by many scholars (Entman, 2007; Wolfsfeld, 2003). However, for this research, it aims to define the selection of topics as the means of framing British foreign policy in China. The hypothesis linked to the variable is that social media "are promising vehicles for government agency members to address issues that may not be part of the official policy agenda, to raise complaints that cannot be delivered in person, and to collaborate across organizational or geographic boundaries" (Mahler and Regan, 2009, p. 2).

Weibo post topic is also a key indicator of the level of professionalisation in diplomatic communication because it moulds the way that social media is used as a diplomatic communication tool. Adapted from Mahler and Regan's study on government blogs

(Mahler and Regan, 2009), the range of topics of the British Embassy Weibo posts could be categorised as public relations content, foreign policy, and others. Posts telling a public relations story indicates a higher level of professionalisation. Public relations content on the British Embassy Weibo is coded as any other Weibo content that features embassy event, initiative, conference or program. This study derived the post topic categories including "UK festivals and events", "ambassador and senior embassy offices' speeches/live Weibo interview", "political issues", "economics issues", "culture and education", "public Information", "UK ministerial visit", "prize draw and games" and "post from other UK related resources". Each selected sample post is analysed to examine the hypothesis that social media is a new platform for traditional foreign service information, and it enables a new type of content that foreign service never produced before. The purpose of each sampled post explains how social media is used as a communication tool by the diplomatic compound.

Expansive Interactivity: External Links

This variable shows whose content the British Embassy Weibo echoes by including their links in the Weibo posts. That includes links to UK government online resources, such as official statement, policy issues, press releases, and speeches on their website. It also includes links to mainstream media in China and the UK, links to influential Weibo accounts, and links to other online resources that relevant to the British Embassy Weibo. As Criado addressed, "Governmental blogging may look for the expansion of these relations into networks of knowledge supporting the core functions of the agency/bureaucrat involved…Through the use of these digital instruments, the blogger can readily show media leanings and vinculums with social and political organizations, movements, groups, etc" (Criado, 2009, p. 5).

Some scholars also point out, "in terms of patterns of use, the prototypical blog is focused around links to other sites of interest (or other blogs) on the Web" (Herring et al., 2005, p. 145). Identifying which links are from which sources helps to position diplomatic social media platform in the context with wider institutional and public sphere. Reviewing the original resources of these links helps to understand how the British Embassy Weibo is used as a resource to connect other resources and direct visitors to those sources, as well as the level of personalisation (links to personal Weibo account)

and professionalisation on the British Embassy Weibo. This study counts the quantity, type and nature of external links to identify the interactions and dynamics between the British Embassy Weibo posts and those links. The quantity of external links measures the frequency of this kind of interactivity over time, and the nature of external links shows which resource is mostly linked. The hypothesis linked to this variable is that using social media allows diplomatic service to connect the foreign public to other sources and therefore widen the scale of diplomatic engagement.

Weibo Content Author Characteristics

The characteristic of digital diplomacy content author is an important variable since it defines the origins of the digital diplomacy content and the presence of personalisation as well as professionalisation in diplomatic Weibo management. The analysis of Weibo content authors helps this study to quantify the sources of content over time to differentiates between elite sources and personnel sources. This variable examines whether the Weibo is a platform for sharing diplomatic information among a wider audience, or another official information resources that is not much different from other traditional diplomatic communication channels.

Bjerling's explanation of personalisation found differentiation between personified, orientation towards persona, and intimization. Respectively, personified is defined as "a person embodies something that he or she literally is not (be it an idea, principle or entity)" (Bjerling, 2011). The orientation towards persona refers to personal attributes and manners (Bjerling, 2011). Callaghan and Schnell contend, "when skilful media manipulators [in the government] impose their dominant issue frames and symbols on the media, the 'outputs' (issue coverage) may not deviate in any significant way from the 'inputs'" (Callaghan and Schnelp, 2001, p.188). Esser and Spanier define professionalisation as "increased specialization and use of experts to manage the greater centralization of communication activities" (Esser and Spanier, 2005, p. 41).

The hypothesis linked to this variable is that if the content created by diplomats dominates the digital diplomacy content, the digital diplomacy channel can be best understood as a platform for sharing digital diplomacy content creator's personal experiences among foreign audiences rather than a formal mouthpiece of foreign

service. Therefore, it is vital to find out the perspective of each sampled post over a selected time to get a valid measurement of dominating agenda on the British Embassy Weibo. This study interviewed the former Weibo editor in the British Embassy and conducted a content analysis to examine this variable. The objective is to determine the angle or perspective of each post to get an overall measure of the agenda dominates the British Embassy Weibo.

Comment: Two-way Symmetrical Communication

Comment is an important variable for assessing the level of communication on diplomatic social media platform. The most important features of public diplomacy in the context of digital media are listening and engaging the foreign public in diplomatic conversations. Social media enables real time conversation and interactive engagement through comments and feedbacks. The existing literature on social media engagement states that "comments are largely ignored in current studies of large amounts of weblog data, typically because extracting and processing their content is somewhat more complex than extracting the content of the posts themselves" (Mishne & Glance, 2006, p.1). The British Embassy's Weibo is allowed to show most of the public comments both positive and negative. The content analysis is used to record the number of comments of each sampled Weibo post, as well as the numbers of positive, negative, neutral and irrelevant comments. Comments were analysed in this research to find out the quantity and nature of interactivity of the British Embassy Weibo. Therefore, analysis of public comments reveals the magnitude of the public involvement in digital diplomacy communication process and whether foreign services achieve desired result in engaging with its target foreign public.

The hypothesis linked to this variable and the next variable as shown below (response rate) is that social media enhances the responsiveness and transparency of diplomatic communication. It allows diplomatic service to formulate policy more openly and enhance digital monitoring, particularly in a crisis. Digital diplomacy involves both listening and engaging.

Response rate

The response rate of the British Embassy Weibo editors measures the level of

engagement through interaction with the foreign public. It can be regarded as one of the indicators of the degree of interactivity on foreign service's social media platform. In this research, it is observed to find out whether the British Embassy Weibo editors always give feedbacks to public comments. It indicates the level of engagement taking place on the British Embassy Weibo. The hypothesis linked to this variable is that a higher number of responses from digital diplomacy content editors indicates a higher level of interactivity than traditional diplomatic communication methods.

<u>Immediacy</u>

Unlike any traditional diplomatic communication channels, social media offers capacity for immediate updating of content. In the related literature, it is called 'synchronicity' (Johnson, Bruner, & Kumar, 2006). Thus, immediacy is also an indicator of the degree of interactivity. In the context of digital diplomacy study, it is used to measure to which extent the British Embassy Weibo responds to diplomatic events and unexpected incidents. This variable was measured by the publishing time of Weibo posts in response to relevant events. Did digital diplomacy content editors respond immediately, delay their reaction, or just keep silence? The hypothesis linked to this variable is that social media provide an instant response platform for foreign service to response to events or urgent issues immediately.

1.4 Research Methodology

This section introduces the research methodology used in this study and describes the sampling/coding system designed for this research (Appendix A). The original data were selected between October 2009 and December 2018 from the British Embassy Weibo posts. A series of variables explained in the last section were derived from the preliminary research and the theoretical framework. The analysis of these variables helps to prove or disapprove the hypothesis. The main research units of this study are the Weibo posts, comments, and feedbacks because the central research questions are all about how content is shaped for the British Embassy Weibo and if it enables the two-way symmetrical communication. The theoretical framework of this thesis is formed to measure the level of professionalisation and personalisation presented in the British Embassy Weibo management and content. Although the British foreign service has

many social media accounts around the world, it is useful to further our understanding of digital diplomacy from analysing how social media is employed by the British foreign service in a specific country with strict media censorship and active social media market. This study specifically selects the British Embassy Weibo account in China as the research subject. It provides an in-depth discussion of the conflicts and complication involved in the process of diplomatic communication on social media.

This case study of the British Embassy Weibo in this research is conducted by applying a complex of research methods. The methodology of this study aims to analyse the data and explain the result as objectively as possible. Therefore, this study combined the methods of content analysis, interview, focus group interview, narrative analysis, Analytical Hierarchy Process, and Delphi Method to prevent bias and verify the findings by triangulating the data. A survey with the British Embassy Weibo followers as well as the Interviews with the British Embassy China Weibo team and Sina Weibo staff were conducted, transcribed, and then analysed with the methods of narrative analysis. Additionally, content analysis was also conducted by sampling the Weibo posts within a few selected periods covering both important events and quieter times to analyse the theme and messages carried in the Weibo content. The content analysis is complemented by the narrative analysis and supported by some external and internal documents from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the British Council. The interviews with the British Embassy Weibo team provides the inside knowledge of the British digital diplomacy strategy in China at both organisational and practical levels.

1.4.1 Case Study

The approach of this study draws on the insights in comparative public diplomacy studies. Rawnsley suggests that it is vital to analyse the concept's "use and the discourse within particular social and cultural contexts" (Rawnsley, 2012, p. 125). Because FCO's digital diplomacy platforms cannot all be analysed in depth individually in this thesis, this research uses case study method that is "unparalleled for its ability to consider a single or complex research question within an environment rich with contextual variables" (Morgan & Smircich, 1980, p. 5). By focusing research on a particular case enables the researcher to develop an in-depth understanding of the

subject. The method of case study is a research methodology that is often used in social sciences research to bring out the hidden complexities in a specific phenomenon. (Hamel et al., 1993; Yin, 2003; Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991). It is also an efficient and flexible way when the time frame for research is limited, and the database is too large to gather.

The British Embassy Weibo is the first diplomatic social media platform introduced in China. The two countries have different social and political systems, which made the case study a very suitable one for this research. In addition, China's social media providers operate under strict media censorship but at the same time also pursue huge commercial profit. China's Internet user numbers and new media companies' profits both have top ranks globally. As a result, there are various conflicts and rich dynamics in the process of practising digital diplomacy in China. Therefore, this study chose this case to be analysed in-depth to further our understanding of digital diplomacy's impact and outcome. The data and analysis result add a valuable case to the digital diplomacy study and helps to advance the understanding and development of digital diplomacy theory.

Although this case study has a particular focus on digital diplomacy in China, the research outcome indicates whether social media is a revolutionary diplomatic communication channel with ability to achieve two-way symmetrical communication despite differences of cultural, social and political background between two countries. It also provides a generalisable method to measure the impact of digital diplomacy among the foreign public. This case study intends to provoke more thoughts and research methods to add more cases to digital diplomacy study.

1.4.2 Interviews

The use of interviews as a field research method for gathering data is particularly suitable because of the political and communicative nature of this research project. As Tansey pointed out, "Interviews contribute towards the research goal of triangulation where collected data is cross-checked through multiple sources to increase the robustness of the findings" (Tansey, 2006, p. 4). In addition, "As opposed to surveys,

interviewing allows researchers to ask open-ended questions and enables the respondent to talk freely, without the constraint of having to answer according to fixed categories" (Tansey, 2006, p. 5). Therefore, interviewing staff whom participate in the management and operation of the digital diplomacy project and platforms enabled this study to obtain an in-depth insight into the management dynamics and to complement the outcome from the content analysis. As a research method, interview offers many benefits to the research. Interview is a tool to find out how and what people think and believe in a particular context. It also provides an opportunity to the researchers to collect original information.

Besides the advantages of interviews, the major limitation of the interview method is the concern of reliability about answers. They might only be able to answer limited questions or give answers not reflecting the whole truth. This limitation especially exists in interviews with elite interviewees. As Delaney states, "Problems of control arise more frequently in elite interviewing than in other types of interviewing because when you interview elites, there can be many clear markers that you are, in fact, the 'status subordinate'" (Delaney, 2007, p. 215). Although this study cannot avoid those challenges completely, there are still ways to solve the problem. Tansey provides the following criteria which have to be bear in mind to judge the reliability of interviews, "That the information obtained should be from a first-hand witness, and not based on hearsay…That the level of access of the interviewee to the events in question should be known, with senior level elites to be viewed as more reliable…And that, if possible, the interviewee's track record of reliability should be established, with a proven record of reliability ideally established before recollections are taken at face value." (Tansey, 2006, p. 7).

Based on the analytical framework and the research question of this study, the interview plan was designed to address the professionalisation of diplomatic communication. The Weibo editor in the British Embassy digital team was asked questions in the following aspects: her role in the management of the British Embassy Weibo, media exposure of the British Embassy Weibo, her perception of digital diplomacy and participation in the process, her view of Weibo 's interaction with the followers, challenges the digital team faced up to, the editorial independence of the Weibo content, and their feedback on

comments from the followers. The interview question list can be found on appendix F. The interview questions were selected from this list to suit the interviewee's background. In order to test the interview agenda and question design, a pilot interview was given to the Weibo editor in the British Embassy China's digital team, and the questionnaire was amended according to her feedback and suggestions to ensure its relevance and accuracy.

Putting together a list of interviewees for this research project requires a closer look into the British Embassy Weibo to justify who could provide useful information. The sample size for the interviews is not a vast one but includes the key persons directly involved in the British Embassy Weibo management and daily running. Their consents were requested to release their job title and personal details before interviewing them. Some of the interviewees prefer to keep anonymous, so I only site his/her working place. Below is the interviewee list of this study. They are quoted as Interviewee 1-4 in this thesis. They were interviewed through Wechat, email and face-to-face meetings. Since most of the interviewees were my ex-colleagues and work contacts, their accesses were gained directly by personal contact except the access of the former operational director of Sina Weibo. He was approached through a contact in Sina.com.

Interviewee 1: Ping Liu, the former managing Editor of the British Embassy Weibo (interview No.1);
Interviewee 2: John Gallagher, the former First Secretary (Press) of the British Embassy China (interview No.2);
Interviewee 3: the former Operational Director of Sina Weibo, Sina.com, (Interviewee prefers his name not being released), (interview No.3);
Interviewee 4: a member of Sina Weibo staff responsible for the British Embassy Weibo account, Sina.com (Interviewee prefers his name not being released), (interview No.4).

As shown above, most of the interviewees in this study are diplomatic officers or senior staff of Sina Weibo. The characteristics of elite interviews differentiate them from interviews to ordinary individuals. In an elite interview, "the investigator is willing, and often eager to let the interviewee teach him what the problem, the question, the

situation, is—to the limits, of course, of the interviewer's ability to perceive relationships to his basic problems, whatever these may be"(Dexter, 1970, p. 5-6). Therefore, the semi-structured interviews were conducted based on the content research to understand public reactions on the issues of digital diplomacy. After transcribing the information collected from interviews, this research applied the thematic analysis to analyse the Weibo posts in order to link the information from interviews with the content analysis. Themes in Weibo posts include "conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk sayings and proverbs" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1989, p.131). The themes emerge from the analysis ensure the coherence of the content analysis data.

1.4.3 Online Focus Group Survey

As a quantitative approach, the use of survey complements the answer of the in-depth interview. It is a more efficient way to collect information from a focus group for this research. The survey was designed to further examine the issues presented in the interview on a larger scale and also reflect the validity of the data collection. However, "As opposed to surveys, interviewing allows researchers to ask open-ended questions and enables the respondent to talk freely, without the constraint of having to answer according to fixed categories" (Tansey, 2006, p. 5). Therefore, the answers from the interviews help this study to design a more valid survey and ask the more relevant questions.

Appendix G is the survey for a group of 20 randomly selected followers of the British Embassy Weibo. An ex-colleague who works in the British Embassy digital team helped to send it out through private Weibo message in June 2015. All 20 followers returned their survey within a month. In return for the support of the British Embassy Weibo team, the survey feedback and research outcome of this study were shared with them.

1.4.4 Content Analysis

During the past a few years, "research has examined blogs as a new communication genre, using content analysis … rhetorical analysis … and ethnographic interviews…to

characterize the forms, functions and audiences of blogs as well as people's motivations for blogging" (Herring et al., 2007, p. 3). In the past researches, content analysis was successfully used in the study of blogs to reveal and quantify content structure and functions (Herring et al., 2007; Scott, 2007). A diplomatic Micro-blog such as the British Embassy China's Weibo could be categorised as a "high-profile blog" (Herring et al., 2007). Therefore, in order to address the particular research questions of this research, content analysis is selected to analyse the structure, purpose, and themes of the British Embassy Weibo in China.

There are many research works have been done on genres of online communication (e.g., Erickson, 2000; Yates & Sumner, 1997) and analyses of digital genres such as blogs (e.g., Herring et al., 2005; Miller & Shepherd, 2004;). The advantages of the social media channels such as Weibo, especially its ability to generate spontaneous public feedback through online comments, provide a great opportunity to create public participation in the policy-making process. These features have many elements to differentiate itself as a new communicative genre from other media genres. Some scholars consider web blogs (the more extended version of Microblog) as a subgenre of political campaign/marketing (Sanz, 2007). Woodly addressed that the political communication is changing with the utilisation of weblogs, "they [blogs] are an immediate, horizontally linked dialogical space, which has the effect of expanding the scope of public space and providing a structure that is closer to conversation than any traditional news medium" (Woodly, 2008, p. 110). The essential Weibo features, such as the author's professionalism, interactivity, and engagement through feedbacks, are measured.

Because of China's Internet regulations and censorship, most Chinese Internet users have no access to a few overseas social media channels, such as Twitter or Facebook. Many Chinese domestic online service providers launched local social media channels, such as Sina Weibo, which attracts millions of Chinese users and even some overseas celebrities to create their accounts on it. Sina Weibo is a microblogging and social-networking service platform launched and operated by Sina.com, one of China's most successful commercial Internet company. Zheng describes Microblogging/Weibo as "a social networking and information-sharing service platform for Internet users to update

and share information, through which netizens can post, comment, and forward short texts, images, links, audio and video clips via computers, mobile phones, or other instant-messaging tools as long as they have microblogging accounts. "(Zheng, 2010)

Whether being a follower or followed by others, individual users on Weibo, become important sources of information diffusion. As a type of social media, Weibo is based on interpersonal communication and interactivity. This study analyses Weibo as a communicative genre under the framework of genre studies. It is useful to do so for two main reasons. Firstly, it provides Weibo with a definitional framework that guides the research on how different social media content is differentiated from other communicative texts by their characteristics within the context of diplomatic communication. The concept of genre is adaptable for describing the ever-changing forms of online communication. Secondly, the genre study observes social media content above media technology with a focus on the daily communicative practices through which different social media users have their own communication objectives. Therefore, genre theory provides an analytical framework for the research on the level of social media communicative practice and explains how users explore the dynamic social media environments.

Weibo users can post different formats of content, including words, photos and videos as their status updates. Meanwhile, they can also reply to and repost other users' content. Additionally, the users can also share movies on Weibo. Some users even create moving GIF files and upload them on Weibo. These are the unique ways that people communicate and interact with others on Weibo. Because the communication within Weibo has so many distinct patterns and textual features, it can be regarded as a discourse community. For example, the use of Chinese slangs, special terms and grammars or even local dialects, which only the users of Weibo can understand. They all share a unique set of communicative style when they update their status. However, because the Weibo users quite often use many words and terms invented by themselves to update their status, the new users and non-native Chinese speakers may have difficulties in Weibo communicating. They have to learn these unique textual features so that they can develop a concept and understanding of Weibo genre. Therefore, due to the special textual features and terminology of Weibo, a distinct

genre and unique discourse community in the society are created.

The research question in this project attempts to explore the level of professionalisation and personalisation in digital diplomacy content. Several variables were examined to answer the research questions and identify the presence or absence of professionalisation and personalisation in each sampled Weibo post. First, the variables in this research were coded in the sampled posts and then categorised to generate varied patterns of purpose. Through this methodological approach, it is possible to reflect the key characteristics from the Weibo content. As Bauer stated, "the systematic classification and counting of text units distils a large amount of material into a short description of some of its features" (Bauer, 2003, p. 133).

All the published Weibo posts on the British Embassy Weibo account are accessible for the general public. This study selected Weibo posts dated between November 2009 and April 2018 to be the content analysis database to observe the changes in content over the years since it was launched. Among these posts, all the Weibo posts during the first six months of 2015 were analysed in detail because that year marked the start of the Golden Age of UK-China bilateral relationship declared by the leaders of both countries earlier in 2015. The Weibo content during this period provides richer information and more active interactions between the British Embassy Weibo and its followers. In this research, all the posts within the focused time frame were measured according to every variable explained in the theoretical framework chapter. The Weibo posts from the sample were coded and analysed in-depth to obtain an advanced understanding of the content and structure. The coding system is introduced in Appendix A. This approach not only describes but also analyses the content on the British Embassy Weibo. The categories in this coding system were created according to the research question and their specific contribution in this study.

However, any research method has its limitations. The main aspects of the content analysis's weaknesses are around issues of data validity and the objective interpretation of meaning. "It does not analyse everything there is to analyse in a text (no method could, nor would there be any purpose in trying) – instead the content analysts starts by delineating certain dimensions or aspects of text for analysis, and in

doing so, he or she is of course also making a choice – subjective, albeit generally informed by the theoretical framework and ideas which circumscribes his or her research – and indicating that the dimensions chosen for analysis are important or significant aspects to look at" (Hansen et al., 1998, p. 95). Therefore, in order to complement the content analysis of Weibo posts and comments, interviews and narrative analysis were carried out to provide deeper insights and quantitative data. Narratives are interpretive devices, and social media is regarded as a form of storytelling whereby diplomatic officers interpret events and present their versions of those events on Weibo content.

1.4.5 Narrative Analysis

In order to further verify the content analysis of Weibo posts and comments, this study uses narrative analysis as well for textual analysis. The narrative on the British Embassy Weibo is shaped by British foreign policy. It is thus related to wider social, political, and cultural contexts. If Weibo is conceived as a storytelling format through which diplomats provide their version of stories, the narrative is, therefore, its interpretive tool. The Weibo in the context of diplomatic communication constructs the identity of the British foreign service among Weibo users.

Narrative analysis fits specifically for understanding the role played by ideology in the decision-making process of digital diplomacy content. The British national values are expressed through particular linguistic characters. To evaluate the level and the way of engagement between the British Embassy Weibo and its followers, the comments of sampled Weibo posts were contextualised by the method of narrative analysis to discover the linguistic characters, which reflects the ideology behind the content.

1.4.6 Analytical Hierarchy Process and Delphi Method

Digital diplomacy tools, such as the British Embassy Weibo, have arrived a decade ago. However, there are only very few explorations on the measurement method of the effectiveness and impact of these tools. Twitalyzer is an effective application that was developed by Web Analytics Demystified to measure and evaluate Twitter users'

activities. In China, some Weibo operators use the number of Weibo followers as the measurable for Weibo influencing power ranking. However, this single indicator is not enough to truly and fully measure the Weibo influencing power. Chinese researchers Zhao Hongyan and He Miao published an article in 2013 featuring an evaluation report of foreign diplomatic Weibo. The method they used is sending out questions to random Weibo users and evaluating the effectiveness and influence of foreign embassy Weibo based on those Weibo users' responses to the questions. (Zhao and He, 2013). However, this method could not depict a full picture of foreign diplomatic Weibo's influencing power. First, the followers and target audiences of foreign diplomatic Weibo are from specific groups, including students, young urban professionals, and overseas Chinese. Random selection of sample groups can not reflect the distinctive characters of foreign diplomatic Weibo followers. Secondly, the valid response to the questionnaire only accounts for 41.8% that is not enough to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research object in Zhao and He's research. Thirdly, this method is purely relying on subjective factors that is the responses from Weibo users, to evaluate the influencing power of foreign diplomatic Weibo. It lacks consideration of objective factors, which provides necessary and multi-angle dimensions to understand the subject.

There are many more factors that should be considered during this evaluation process. Therefore, a set of more complex and specific metrics should be designed to evaluate foreign embassy Weibo's influencing power. After weighing all the relevant factors, this research chose the ones related to Weibo development, foreign embassies' public diplomacy goal, and Weibo users' demand to indicate the foreign embassies' influencing power from multiple dimensions. The British Embassy Weibo influencing power is evaluated in two steps by combining both the Delphi method and Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP).

The Delphi method is a structured research method that relies on collecting opinions from a panel of experts (Harold A. and Murray, 1975). The principle of this method is that the opinions from expert panels are more accurate and reliable than those from other groups of unstructured individuals (Rowe and Wright, 2001). The experts are usually given a questionnaire to give their answers and opinions since they have good knowledge of their specialised research area. Delphi method has some key features to

separate it from other methodologies. Firstly, all experts usually remain anonymous to prevent their reputation or authority from influencing or dominating other experts in the panel and allow freedom to express their opinions and critiques. Secondly, experts' answers are collected individually to avoid argument during panel discussions. The Analytic Hierarchy Process is a structured research method developed by Thomas L. Saaty that is usually used to analyse complex issues. This method offers a rational system to structure research, quantify elements, and relate each element to the overall research question. (Saaty and Peniwati, 2008). Researchers decompose the research question into a hierarchy structure formed by sub-elements which can be analysed individually. Then researchers evaluate and compare all elements to each other in pairs with an awareness of their influence on elements in above hierarchies (Bhushan and Kanwal, 2004). Table 1 shows the 1-9 Saaty scale accordant to Saaty's thoughts of ratio scales in the AHP method.

In this research, the experts in the panel used Saaty scale to compare the indicators in all three hierarchies in table 10 and table 1 in pairs and give scores of the importance to each pair to evaluate the British Embassy Weibo's performance and influencing power. After calculation, a numerical value of each indicator's importance is derived. After identifying all the hierarchical indicators that reflect the level of the British Embassy Weibo's influencing power and categorising them into three hierarchies, all the experts were invited to conduct pairwise comparisons of the criterion weight between any two 3rd hierarchical indicators and then give scores according to the Saaty scale showing in table 1. The expert scoring sheet sample is shown in appendix B. At the end of the process, all experts returned their scores, which were then calculated by an AHP software (MakeItRational) to get the result and therefore form a judgment matrix showing the dominance of each indicator with respect to the other ones.

Finally, the rank of the British Embassy Weibo's influencing power was worked out by comparing the scoring result of all five foreign embassy Weibo accounts. Since different indicators have different measurement unit, Min-max method is used in this research to turn the original values of all elements in table 10 into standardised values between 0 to 10 for easier comparison and calculation. The following formula is employed in the calculation process. In this formula, Z is the standardised value of the observed original

value x. Min and max are the minimal and maximal values in x.

$$z = \frac{x - min\ (x)}{max\ (x) - min\ (x)}$$

Score of Importance	Definition	Explanation
1	Equal importance	Two activities contribute equally to the objective when compare indicator i with j
3	Weak importance of one over another	Experience and judgement slightly favour indicator i over j when compare i with j
5	Essential or strong importance	Experience and judgement strongly favour indicator i over j when compare i with j
7	Demonstrated importance	Indicator i is strongly favoured, and its dominance demonstrated in practice when compare i with j
9	Absolute importance	The evidence favouring indicator i over j is of the highest possible order of affirmation
Reciprocals	Opposites	Used for inverse comparisons when compare indicator j with i. The score value formula is a(ji) = 1/a (ij)

Table 1: Saaty Scale (Stojanov et al., 2013).

1.4.7 Summary

The methodology of this case study of the British Embassy Weibo is formed with several research methods, which triangulate with each other in the entire analysis. Content analysis was conducted on all the British Embassy Weibo posts within the selected periods and complemented by narrative analysis. Interviews and focus group

were conducted and analysed in narrative analysis. They also offered the views from both organisational and individual level, which enabled this study to explore the subject from a multi-dimensional angle. AHP and Delphi methods provided calculated statics to validate and prove the result of content and narrative analysis.

Chapter 2: Research Development of Digital Diplomacy

This research provides a useful analysis of the evolution of social media usage in diplomatic communication and critical evaluation of the British Embassy Weibo on its capacity to engage with the Chinese public. Based on the content analysis of British Embassy Weibo posts as well as a range of interviews, this study adds a rarely examined case study of digital diplomacy in China where social media regulation and political system are completely different from those of the Western countries to address the research gap. This research aims to conduct an in-depth study of a British diplomatic social media platform in China by drawing together a theoretical framework to analyse digital diplomacy and experiment on a measurement method of the influencing power of digital diplomacy practise. The research outcome reveals the effectiveness of social media as a new tool for public diplomacy, identifies new digital approaches that diplomats use to communicate foreign policy agenda to the foreign public, and finds out how foreign policy and soft power are implanted into social media content through personalisation and professionalisation.

It is necessary to review the existing literature and research background in this stand-alone chapter to provide a literary background and social context for this study. Digital diplomacy, as a new research topic, draws increasing attention and interest from researchers to study this new form of diplomatic tool and approach. However, the majority of the published studies tend to focus on the U.S. government's digital diplomacy practise (Cull, 2013; Dale, 2010; Du and Hou, 2013). Therefore, the existing digital diplomacy research lacks variations across different contexts of a more extensive choice of countries. The actual uses of social media in diplomatic practice in different countries are extremely different. The U.S. digital diplomacy strategy would not be necessarily effective for another country. The people living in different countries also have substantial cultural and political differences. If those variations were not taken into account, would those analyses of digital diplomacy have any relevance to different countries? Therefore, how to use social media to develop meaningful interaction with the foreign public through different cultural and political context must be assessed from who is this digital diplomatic communication for and what purpose it serves. In order to address this research gap, there is a number of latest researches studying digital

diplomacy in a wider cultural and social context outside U.S (Grincheva, 2012; Strauß, et al., 2015; Bjola and Manor, 2018).

According to the first micro-blog research report put together by the world leading PR agency, Burson-Marsteller, in 2012, there are more than 120 countries and 264 national leaders having a Twitter account (Burson-Marsteller, 2012). However, it is questionable that whether this new form of online communication enabled by social media still plays the traditional roles of diplomatic communication, which are supporting citizens overseas, gathering and analysing information, as well as promoting a country's foreign policy and maximise its benefit through observing and interacting with the foreign public. Dejevsky (2013) asked that should modern communication technology be regarded as a new power to strengthen the traditional foreign service or a more effective new channel to exert influence than the old-style diplomatic service. Hocking (2015) concludes that digital technology is used by diplomats to meet the diplomatic goals, which requires new adaptation of diplomatic communication skills and content. However, the purposes of digital diplomacy still remain traditional. Manor (2015) also pointed out that although diplomats are using social media to communicate with foreign public, they still have not fully adapted their old patterns of diplomatic communication to the new format of communication which has potential to engage with massive audience rather than merely broadcast traditional diplomatic content.

However, most of the researches reviewed in this chapter merely discuss the general features and practises without concrete theory support and rarely tempt to theorise and conceptualise this new form of diplomatic practise to bring the discussion to a deeper level (Archetti, 2012; Bjola and Jiang, 2015; Harris, 2013; Hocking, 2015; Manor, 2019; Renken, 2014; Su and Xu, 2015; Ying, 2012; You, 2013; Zhang, 2014). Besides, the literature on digital diplomacy are mostly descriptive on the new phenomenon but less adventurous on developing theoretical understanding and exploring larger implications of using social media in diplomatic communication process. This study, therefore, addresses this research gap by adding a case study of British digital diplomacy practice in China and constructing a theoretical framework to analysing this practice.

In addition, most of the existing discussions and researches examined in this research tend to explain the story from one-side that is how this new tool constrains and enables

new practise but not generate more comprehensive discussions on how individual social media users, as well as specific state and non-state actors interact with the new tool and diplomats. Some researches even state that it is not necessary to take the general public into account in foreign policy decisions due to their little influence on the process. Lawrence Jacobs and Benjamin Page conducted a study on actors influencing U.S. foreign policy, which revealed that the general public only has little influence in foreign policy decision-making process (Jacobs and Page, 2005). Christopher Layne also pointed out that it is the state's central decision-makers but not the public opinion makes foreign policy (Layne, 2010). He argues that it is difficult to establish a "causal connection between public opinion and foreign policy outcomes" that Joseph Nye puts forward in his soft power theory (Nye, 2004). However, just a short time after their study, the arrival and wide use of social media brought the general public into foreign policy communication process. Individuals are given direct access to have a dialogue with diplomats and foreign service. Engaging and influencing general foreign public become increasingly important in foreign policy decision-making process.

Meanwhile, public opinions are expressed directly to foreign embassies, which may potentially influence foreign ministries' decision-making process on policy level. The second emperor in China's Tang Dynasty said 1,500 years ago, "While the water can bear the boat, it can also swallow it." Water refers to public and boat refers to state and country leader. Social media technology enables individual citizen to be directly involved in the foreign policy decision-making process and make public attitude increasingly important to foreign policy decision makers. Unlike many other countries such as the UK, social media in China seems to have contributed little to promoting radical social revolutionaries or political changes, despite the immense freedom of speech created by Weibo and the rising trend of social protests. The game between the Chinese government and Internet users turns out to be even more sophisticated when it comes to using social networking. However, the relationship of foreign embassies, the Chinese government, China's social media companies, and social media users has not been studied in-depth in existing literature. Checks and balances of these three actors can be reflected via the daily operation and, at the same time, mutually influence each other. This project takes the British Embassy Weibo in China as a study object to reveal this complexity in depth. The existing literature does

illuminate the complicated relationship between new media and political processes in the context of instantaneous global communication. However, it does not explain the contingent change that is how technology affects the diplomatic practices of specific countries in specific political, social and media environments.

2.1 Research Background and Context

Before reviewing the literature, it is useful to provide the background information of this research, such as China's social media development, China's online media regulation, and the British Embassy's Weibo's development, to locate this study in its social and political context. This section aims to set the background and context for the study with figures and facts.

2.1.1 Digital Diplomacy and the British Embassy Weibo

The web 2.0 technology has brought profound changes in the way that foreign affairs are conducted. Among all the digital channels used in digital diplomacy, Twitter has been used widely by international foreign service institutions to communicate with local people online. The term Twitplomacy was firstly proposed by Yaron Gamburg, the media consultant and press officer at the Israeli Embassy in France in June 2010 (Govloop, n.d.). It is one aspect of the growing trend of digital diplomacy. Many terms, such as *Twiplomacy* (KAS Media Programme Asia, 2017) and *digital diplomacy* (Hanson, 2012) have been widely used in media coverage and research papers to describe this revolutionary phenomenon since then. In China, Sina.com becomes the main platform for foreign embassies' social media diplomacy practice. This phenomenon was called by China's party newspaper *People's Daily* as *Weibo diplomacy* in a news report (Zi and Hu, 2010).

Although the current UK government has made significant achievements in education, medical care, welfare, and financial services, the economic growth is still heavily affected after the 2008 global financial crisis (Bruce, 2018). Outside the UK, the EU debt crisis affected the EU's contribution to the UK economy (BBC Online, 2011). The Brexit, which is the UK's planned withdrawal from the EU, also poses uncertainty to the

UK economy and society. In this context, China becomes more strategically important to provide support and partnership for the UK economy in the next few years. Meanwhile, China has started making London a major offshore centre for trading its currency, the Renminbi. Therefore, a healthy UK-China relation is incredibly crucial to both countries.

In order to promote UK's positive image in a wider scale by engaging with Chinese public on individual level, the British Embassy in China became very active on China's popular social media platforms, such as Sina Weibo, which is the most popular microblog platform among Chinese social media users since it was launched in 2009. According to the 2010 Annual Report on China's Microblog released by Shanghai Jiao Tong University, 11 out of the top 50 major public events in China were first covered on Weibo (Pang, 2011). According to Ping Liu, the former managing editor of the British Embassy Weibo, "Besides relevant topics about our country objectives – foreign policy, economics, trade, climate change and the GREAT campaigns (launched in 2012, a continuous national branding campaign initiated by the British government to showcase the best of what the UK has to offer and encourage more tourists, students, and partnership opportunities with the UK in all areas) – from time to time we also introduce British culture to our local Chinese followers on our digital platforms. It's always easier for people to accept your views and to advance the UK's interests when they are interested in and familiar with you" (Liu, 2013).

There is an example shows the potential of social media to serve as a public relations tool to manage diplomatic crisis. In November 2010, when the British Prime Minister David Cameron visited Beijing, he wore a poppy to pay tribute to the British war veterans when he appears in public and media, which however deeply upset the Chinese public. In China, poppy associates with opium and the war between China and the UK in the Qing Dynasty. Chinese people, mainly students and young professionals, the most vocal groups in China, considered it indicates an insult from the UK and published many pages of negative comments about the UK on the internet. In the event, the British Embassy Weibo team responded quickly by publishing several posts to explain the background of the poppy-wearing tradition and replied to the questions from those angry Weibo users. Their efforts made through social media tool successfully

calmed down the situation. From this particular event, we may find that the social media technology has brought over a new way for foreign service to communicate with foreign public, as well as creates impact on the way government works as it has on business or politics, and consequently on the way governments relate to each other in the international sphere. More profoundly, it has also affected the number of actors engaged in international relations. However, social media's influence on foreign policy and diplomatic communication is under-explored from the cultural perspective in transnational terms.

The UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) sets out a digital diplomacy strategy in December 2012. It is the first comprehensive digital strategy guideline that laid out the rationale behind the digital transition of the British government bodies to the new website *gov.uk* in 2013. In this guideline, social media is regarded as the new communications platform to enhance foreign policy delivery and enrich the source of information of diplomatic practice. The strategy encourages FCO staff to use digital platforms more ambitiously to achieve key foreign policy goals at the top level. New media is recognised as an integrated diplomatic communications tool for (FCO, 2012b):

- Following and predicting developments,
- Formulating foreign policy,
- Implementing foreign policy
- Influencing and identifying whom to influence, and
- Communicating and engaging in foreign policy

This strategy also refers to the impact that new media technology brought over to diplomatic conducts and argues that "what started as a communications tool is now playing a more important part in achieving key foreign policy outcomes" and "given foreign policy is often about persuasion, influence and soft power, it is no surprise that in today's networked world digital and policy implementation are intertwined" (FCO, 2012b, p. 7). Those changes show that new media platforms have changed the way of the FCO's work. FCO's digital transition attempts to build new media technology into diplomatic campaigns and integrate the new media platforms into the overall diplomatic communications in order to achieve foreign policy outcomes. However, there are not many in-depth pieces of research on the outcome and effectiveness of those attempts.

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This research examines the influence of social media tool on foreign policy and diplomatic practices with a particular interest in investigating the management of digital diplomacy when there is a conflict of interest in politics, culture and media policy between China and the UK.

2.1.2 Social and Political Context of Weibo Diplomacy

The objective of this section is to introduce the social and political background in which the British Embassy Weibo is operating. The discussion and information in this chapter provide details and further explanations of China's social media landscape and bring out the question this study examines. This chapter also lays the foundation for the argument and analysis in later chapters. The background briefing in this chapter includes China's social media and digital diplomacy, China's social media control and dynamics among foreign embassy, Weibo operators and the Chinese government, as well as China's online nationalistic emotion and activities.

In order to keep up with the development of information technology, global governmental institutions have to adapt to these changes. The foreign policy decision-making process is taking public opinions and social media into account in today's media environment. The United States is the first country in the world that introduced social media to diplomatic service. Since 2006, the U.S government started to promote their national image and value around the globe by creating digital content carrying key diplomatic messages on Facebook, Twitter, and other mainstream social media platforms. Many countries followed the United States' steps to use social media in their diplomatic practice. This new form of diplomatic practice was named Twitplomacy by Yaron Gamburg in June 2010 (Govloop, n.d.). In China, because most of the foreign embassies use Weibo as their main social media platform, Chinese media gave it a name called *Weibo Diplomacy* (Baidu Baike, n.d.).

Today, in academic literature and news coverage, Weibo has mainly been described as an effective social media tool providing a more transparent and liberal public sphere for Chinese people to engage in large-scale open discussion. However, the focus was never put on the Weibo operators who play an important role between government and

Weibo users. They link the top-level regulators and grass-root Weibo users by providing social media platform to generate commercial profit and influence Chinese people and society at the same time. Under the current political and governance system, China's IT service market development model can never be separated from the state and government. The Chinese government acts as a regulator, supervisor, as well as a partner in their business operation. Chinese scholar Zhu Xueqin describes the government as the "visible feet" stepping on the "invisible hands" which refers to the marketplace (Zhu, 1999, p. 28).

The Internet, unlike any other state-owned traditional media, emerged as a product of the IT industry in China. Upon its arrival, the Chinese government introduced a set of policies and regulations to support its development in order to stand in a leading position in information technology development along with those developed countries. China's telecommunication industry started a business revolution since the 1990s. Xiao, a Chinese scholar, reviewed the development of China's telecommunication since the 1990s in her article about China's telecommunication market. According to her review, in 1994, Unicom, the biggest private Chinese telecommunication company, was established and joined in the competition with state-owned telecommunication companies. During that time, most of the telecommunication companies were operated by the state. In 1998, China's post and telecommunication services separated from each other. Meanwhile, the government also allowed private sectors to run telecommunication firms and believed that market competition is a positive way to develop the information technology industry. Since then, a great number of private Internet companies emerged in China. After 20 years of development, China's Internet industry achieved a huge success (Xiao, 2010). From 2010, China's Internet companies stopped simply copying the model of American Internet companies. After a new round of investment, China's Internet companies converged with mobile communication service and online game companies to provide value-added service to the fast growing Internet users in the recent ten years (Xiao, 2010).

Since 2008, social media has been regarded as a new media business power. In China, Sina Weibo has become one of the pioneers in promoting Web 2.0 technology among all the commercial and non-commercial social media service providers. However, like

Sina, the top Internet companies in China attract great attention from the Chinese government and interact with the state power by practising self-censorship to win political support from the higher level of the government. They have a strong willingness and take the initiative to cooperate with the Chinese government. The state control and censorship of social media is an important part of their operation on a daily basis (Interview No.3). China's media regulator outlines official measurements including moderation of Weibo content before it is published, blacklisting users, deletion of content regarded as illegal or harmful, supplying user data to police and even blocking or closing Weibo accounts (Interview No.4). Social media service providers, such as Sina Weibo, can not afford to upset the Chinese government but also need a lively online environment to maintain users' interests in their service. Therefore, they have to compromise on their editorial freedom to exchange for policy support from the Chinese government to make greater profit (Interview No.3).

Meanwhile, the Chinese government is also aware that those Internet firms can contribute a large amount of financial support to the state. Therefore, the government is also willing to promote those companies' development and giving them priorities on policy level when they compete with other foreign Internet companies (Xiao, 2010). For example, *Google* claimed to exit the mainland China market in 2010 over censorship disagreement with the Chinese government. *Baidu,* the Chinese biggest search engine and a major competitor to *Google*, benefited from this and became the dominant search engine in China. After the government closed many independent microblogging websites and blocked access to a few major foreign social media networks, Sina Weibo became the first online portal that was permitted to launch Weibo service and became the largest Weibo service platform in China (Interview No.3). Comparing with their foreign counterparts, such as *Google and Facebook*, Chinese Internet firms are more obedient to the state control power and compromise on information free flow to seek low-risk business environment and greater profit through government support (Xiao, 2010). This is very different from what is happening in the UK's telecommunication and Internet market.

As a strong player of economy, China invests a huge amount of money in new media facilities and cultural institutes. In China, although YouTube, Facebook and Twitter have

not gained government's approval to operate, their local equivalent versions, such as YouKu, WeChat, and Weibo, are used by a vast number of Chinese users as well as foreign users including many foreign political figures and celebrities. Chinese people are more often communicating and gaining information through Weibo， WeChat and some other popular social media channels. In China, the majority of the social media users are residents aged from 16-40 years old, among which the Weibo users are mainly young professionals with a higher education degree and a monthly income of over 5000 Yuan in Tier 1 cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai. (CNNIC, 2016). In December 2016, 0.66 billion Social media users take up 91.1% of the total number of Internet users in China (CNNIC, 2017).

Weibo (Chinese translation of microblog) is a social network platform for information sharing, posting, and communicating among Internet users whom can build their own personal online community through updating and sharing information with 140 characters (including punctuation) via social media applications (such as Sina Weibo) on computers, mobile phones and tablets. The instant information format can be short texts, images, links, audio and video clips which can be viewed and responded by any Weibo users. Users can follow other users' Weibo account or be followed by others to become instant information diffuser. Sina, the most influential searching engine and information website in China, launched Weibo in August 2009 and became the top microblog service provider since 2014 when other Weibo service providers reduced their investment on Weibo. The Weibo users are mainly young professionals from Tier 1 cities with a higher education degree. 72% of them are aged from 20 to 29 years old (CNNIC, 2015). Among those users, 47.5% of them use Weibo every day. 77.2% of these users use Weibo two to three times every week. There are 23.4% of the users use Weibo for over 1 hour each day. 88.8% of them access Weibo on their smartphones on a daily basis (CNNIC, 2016). Therefore, smartphone and Weibo has become an important part of Chinese people's daily life. As a social media platform, Weibo also improved the functions in many aspects to tailor itself for Chinese users. For example, Weibo allows posts longer than 140 characters, in which richer information can be published and shared on Weibo. In general, Weibo has three major features, which distinguish it from conventional media and older internet communication tools:

Real-Time Sharing through Mobile Applications: Weibo integrates desktop and mobile communication tools such as mobile phone and tablets to enable real-time information sharing without geographical limitation. This break-through feature significantly accelerates the frequency and quantity of information exchanging, updating, diffusion and dissemination. The Weibo platform becomes a live broadcasting service with a vast number of user-generated content. As a result, the influence of the conventional media on public opinion has been considerately weakened.

Real-Time Interactivity: Comparing with conventional media and older online media tools, Weibo enables real-time interactivity among users who can communicate with each other directly. Weibo posts could be responded, tagged, forwarded, and shared by a vast number of users, therefore generate huge public attention. A popular Weibo account might be more influential than a national TV network.

Self-media: Weibo weakens the information monopoly of conventional media and authorities to a further level by providing a platform of user-generated content. Everyone can attract a certain group of audiences that share similar interests and become a center of discussion of certain topics. The Weibo users who are multi-tasked as information disseminator, receiver, and commentator break the barrier of media professionalism. Bowman and Willis proposed the concept of "We Media" 12 years ago (Bowman and Willis, 2003). The new Web 2.0 technology empowered ordinary audience to generate and share their own content and become a self-media that "connect knowledge throughout the globe, are contributing to and participating in their own truths, their own kind of news." (Bowman and Willis, 2003).

Following the launch of the official Weibo of the British Embassy and Consulate in China, the first foreign embassy Weibo account in 2009, U.S. Embassy and many other foreign embassies also launched their Weibo accounts in China. Until 2015, there are 30 countries launched their embassy Weibo accounts in China. Most of those countries have close economic links with China. Many of these countries even have more than one official Weibo accounts, such as the Weibo of the Cultural and Education Section of the British Embassy and Weibo of Visit Britain (the official British tourism promotion organisation). Those Weibo accounts have clearly defined function and target users

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and enriched the content of the main British Embassy Weibo account to establish the UK's national image from multiple angles.

In China, Weibo has over 462 million active users (about 1/3 of the Chinese population) in 2019, with 1,465,133 of them are following the British Embassy Weibo account according to the latest record. The Managing Editor of the British Embassy Weibo and her team publishes at least 2 Weibo posts on a daily basis. The content covers a wide variety of topics such as culture, travel, visa, event, etc. According to Liu, the former managing editor of the British Embassy Weibo, said, "I mostly use soft content to attract those followers who care about policy" (Interview No. 1). This is obviously an effective way to attract more followers to a diplomatic Weibo. As a good example to address this, the British Embassy Weibo provided a prize draw of the Royal Mint during the live Weibo Cast of the Royal Wedding in April 2012, which attracted a large number of participants and new followers (Liu, 2014).

This study specifically analyses the impact of social media on diplomatic communication management within China's social and political context. Firstly, it is important to explore the British Foreign Office's motivations for entering the social media sphere. The former British Foreign Secretary William Hague described that trend in his speech titled *Britain's Foreign Policy in a Networked World* in July 2010. He described a world in which, "There is now a mass of connections between individuals, civil society, businesses, pressure groups and charitable organisations which are also part of the relations between nations and which are being rapidly accelerated by the Internet." He sets out Britain's intention to pursue a Foreign Policy that "makes the most of the abundant opportunities of the 21st century" (British Council, 2010).

After the 911 terrorist attack, the UK government sent troops to Iraq without approval from the United Nation. This action affected the British national image negatively world widely. As a result, most of the public diplomacy initiatives conducted by the UK government from 2003 focused mainly on building up mutual trust among foreign countries and international audiences (Leonard, Small and Rose, 2005), especially those emerging powers, such as China. Since David Cameron, the former British prime minister, visited China in 2010 with a group of British industry and business leaders,

the business and industrial links between China and the UK are further strengthened. The year of 2014 marks the 10th year since the official launch of the China-Britain comprehensive strategic partnership. The main achievements of Chinese Premier Li Keqiang's visit to the UK in June 2014 include cooperation in nuclear power and high-speed train networks, the establishment of London's first Chinese currency clearing bank, the direct trading between the two countries' currencies, and the simplification of the UK visa application process for Chinese visitors. UK became the second biggest trade partner with China within the EU (Cameron, 2014).

In March 2015, Prince William made the first British royal visit to China in 30 years to officially unveil the GREAT Festival of Creativity in Shanghai, an event which aims to provide an opportunity for more than 500 British businesses to get in touch with potential Chinese partners. "The Duke will also undertake engagements in Beijing and elsewhere to promote UK-China relations, people-to-people links, and in support of his work to combat the illegal wildlife trade and support wildlife conservation" (Royal Family, 2014), the Buckingham Palace said in a statement. The news generated lots of positive responses on Sina Weibo. Tian Dewen, a European studies scholar at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, commented that the prince's visit would strengthen the China-UK relations. "Royal visits are an important part of the UK's diplomatic effort to build its global image. Prince William's visit at this point shows the UK's willingness to improve its ties with China" (Chen and Zhang, 2015).

Those positive developments in the relationship between the UK and China provide both opportunity and challenge to the British foreign service. UK government and some other institutions, such as universities, started to realise the importance to form effective policies to maintain the relationship between the two countries and changed their strategy in dealing and communicating with China from governmental level to individual level. The change happens more frequently in the fields of business, tourism, education and culture through various channels, including social media, which enables direct conversation among individuals beyond national boundaries. Digital media power has since become an important element in the era of globalisation. Since Twitter was launched in 2006 and 1st iPhone was introduced in 2008, social media tools and mobile applications are increasingly used in political communication and believed with ability to encourage deeper political dialogue and participation (Stieglitz and Linh, 2014).

In China, Weibo enables foreign embassies to "generate buzz and interest, encourage repeat visits to the blog and associated websites, and increase page ranks with the major search engines" (Wyld, 2007, p. 69). This gives them an opportunity to cast their influence in the online environment by generating conversation with the foreign public directly. As the British Embassy China Weibo Editor commented, "If you want local people to buy in your opinions and to advance UK interests, you should make yourself interesting and attractive. And if you are in a country where international tools like Youtube, Facebook and Twitter are not accessible (like China), you need to consider local tools. Go to places where your audience is, use the language your audience is using, listen to them, and communicate" (Liu, 2013).

Along with other communication channels, such as press conference and official websites, which are still in use, the British Embassy Weibo provides an alternative version of the story about diplomatic events and messages that is completely different from the news coverages by mass media. This version of the story is not narrated as traditional foreign policy content that is produced for official communication and mass media. Examples of content about diplomatic events on the Weibo account of the British Embassy show how the British foreign service adapts content for different communication channels are given in chapter 4. Mainstream media in China may not always have the capacity or interest in publishing stories about the UK. They also could be very critical, especially when there is a freeze on the UK-China relations. Meanwhile, foreign service can reach the younger generation through social media which is popular among them. The number of technology-savvy youth is increasing in both developed and developing countries. The generation of people ages 35 and younger are very active in sharing information in the online community (CNNIC, 2015).

It is necessary to have an overview of the statistical data of the British Embassy Weibo during the research period. The observing period of this research is between 2nd November 2009 and 31st December 2018.

- Quantity of Weibo posts
  Between its official launch on 23rd November of 2009 and 31st December 2018,

the British Embassy Weibo published almost 7,000 posts in total with an updating rate of 2 to 3 new posts each day. 76% of those posts contain original content generated by the digital team at the British Embassy China. Comparing with another popular diplomatic Weibo account, the U.S. Embassy Weibo, the British Embassy Weibo updates fewer posts but generates more original content. The British Embassy Weibo normally update posts at 11 am, 2 pm, 4 pm, 6 pm, and 8 pm. 66% of the posts are published at 8pm when most of the users finish their daytime work. It shows that the British Embassy Weibo intends to have better interaction with its followers when they have free time. The main types of posts can be classified into two categories. One of them is the British Embassy's daily activity, which includes diplomatic events, daily routine works, UK political information, UK and China's leaders' visits, UK visa and immigration information. The other category includes more soft content such as science and technology, film and theatre, fashion trends, environment protection, UK education, British culture, and wild animal protection.

- Who Follow British Embassy Weibo

By the end of 2018, the British Embassy Weibo attracted 1.26 million followers. 9,572 of them are verified Sina Weibo users (Big V) who are either well-known public figures or experts in their own fields. Around 360,000 of these followers have up to 500 followers of their personal Weibo accounts. Additionally, there are around 43,209 followers of the British Embassy Weibo have over 50,000 followers of their personal Weibo accounts. Those British Embassy Weibo followers are mainly influential figures, celebrities, public organisations or well-known media outlets that becomes mass information dissemination channels for the British Embassy Weibo (interview No. 4). If they repost the content from the British Embassy Weibo, a vast number of Weibo users will potentially read the content. According to the data from Sina Weibo Ranking System, the number of followers of the British Embassy Weibo ranked the fourth place among all the foreign embassy Weibo accounts. 90% of the followers of the British Embassy Weibo are from Beijing, Shanghai, Zhejiang Province and Guangdong Province, where have stronger economy and closer links in business and culture fields with the UK. Most of them are within the age range of 16 to 40 and educated to

degree levels (Interview No.4). They are also within the age range of the most active social media users in China (Ruan, 2016).

According to a report published by China Internet Network Information Center in 2015, 70.8% of the Sina Weibo users received higher education (CNNIC, 2015). The British Embassy Weibo tailors its content to attract more target followers and generate their responses both online and offline in order to establish UK's positive image among Chinese public, especially the ones received higher education who are actively engaged in forming public opinions. Meanwhile, the contradiction between the tight control of China's political system and freedom on the economic development is more and more accepted by the younger generation of Chinese people who are the most active and vocal group on social media (Ruan, 2016).

Table 2 shows the most popular activities on social media summarised in the CNNIC report 2015 (CNNIC, 2015). Weibo has the ability to provide a platform for all of these popular online activities. The followers of the foreign embassy Weibo can find the content of their interests, leave their comments and ask questions, participate the discussion of topics set up by the foreign embassy, and repost the content to disseminate information through their Weibo network. It provides the opportunity for the foreign service to achieve their target of influencing foreign audiences and public opinions on a larger scale and deeper level.

Social Media Activities	User Percentage
Read short news bulletins	74.1%
Read reposted content from other users	35.7%
Leave comments	25.4%
Post content from the online resource	22.5%

Table 2: User Percentages of the Chinese Social Media Activities in 2015 (CNNIC, 2015)

- Whom the British Embassy Weibo Follows

  According to the information available on the British Embassy Weibo account, the British Embassy Weibo follows 1,144 Sina Weibo users including many UK organisations, other foreign embassies, scholars, media experts, celebrities, Chinese organsations across different fields, as well as business leaders and opinion leaders. 23.5% of them have 10,000 to 100,000 followers. 21.7% of these accounts have 100,000 to 1,000,000 followers. Most of them also follow the British Embassy Weibo account. Those 'elite' Weibo accounts help the British Embassy Weibo to attract and reach more Chinese social media users by reposting the British Embassy Weibo posts and providing links to the British Embassy Weibo content. In return, the British Embassy Weibo does the same. In this way, they promote each other through links and interactions. This research chose 30 users randomly from the Weibo users followed by the Embassy Weibo to analysis the characters of the Weibo users followed by the British Embassy Weibo. Among these 30 users, 12 of them are closely linked with the UK. Nine of them are normal Weibo users, who are Chinese living in the UK, Chinese students studying in the UK and people having an interest in British society and culture. Their Weibo posts are also mainly about UK China relations, as well as British culture and society. 43.3% of these Weibo users have over 20,000 followers of their own Weibo accounts. One of these 30 users is a popular writer who even has over 7,000,000 followers. They have great influence and wider information dissemination scope in the Weibo sphere.

Therefore, Weibo is becoming increasingly important and influential among Chinese Internet users. Diplomatic services around the world have realised the new possibilities to engage with the foreign public brought over by social media, such as Weibo.

2.2 Modern Diplomacy Study Development

Before looking at the literature around digital diplomacy, it is necessary to review the development of modern diplomatic study's theory to locate the discussion of this research in the wider international relations studies field. According to Martin Wight, one of the foremost British scholars of International Relations (IR) studies, pointed out

that diplomatic theory has been ignored in the field of diplomatic studies (Wight, 1966). Iver Neumann argued that diplomat is never a hero in IR theory, and diplomats are often described as an assisting or supporting role in international politics (Neumann, 2012). Therefore, diplomacy has been distanced from mainstream traditional IR studies and traditional political communications. What made this distance further is that the research on diplomacy was mainly carried out by researchers with a diplomatic background (Jönsson and Hall, 2005). Jönsson and Hall pointed out that diplomatic practitioners and diplomacy historians have different perspectives and especially practice-oriented views on diplomacy (Jönsson and Hall, 2005). Although their contribution is a real strength to the development of IR study, IR scholars, who are mainly theory-oriented, rarely analyse diplomatic practices that resulted in a relatively obvious distinction between the IR theory and diplomatic practice (Bjola, 2013). It is hard to find "a substantial theoretical work on the subject in the contemporary literature of international relations" (Derian, 1987, p.5). Meanwhile, IR researchers tend to miss out the real experience of diplomats in different countries.

While another reason for the paucity of the diplomatic theory is that in the past, there was only one actor, state, dominating the field of diplomacy. However, today there are lots of non-state actors, such as NGOs, the UN, and newly arrived digital diplomatic communication tools, which are existing along with the state actor. The weaknesses of the diplomatic theory become apparent due to this complexity in diplomacy. Furthermore, there is an increasing recognition of diplomat's contribution to IR studies and respect for their role in international politics. Practice theory emerged to connect the IR theory and diplomatic practice research. Der Derian brought in different methodology to theorising diplomacy. In his 1987 publication, he introduces six interpenetrating paradigms to classify the transformation of diplomacy from Mytho-diplomacy to Techno-diplomacy (Derian, 1987). Although his study depends heavily on alienation theory, which indicates that Derian's attempt to redefine the core of new diplomatic theory mixes diplomatic theory with philosophy, it still brought new insight into diplomatic studies and theory development. Moreover, in today's world, both state and non-state actors compose the modern diplomatic environment. There is a need to study diplomacy in the modern era we live in now to reflect the complex nature of modern IR environment "which certainly poses a far more complex image of

international interaction than does the traditional intergovernmental perspective" (Hocking, 2004).

Among all the new features of modern IR environment, the fast development of Information and Communications Technology offers new diplomatic communications tools and requests new diplomatic communication processes to change the existing pattern of diplomatic practice. The arrival of "social media offered us a way to do that in real time with a much broader reach than we could ever hope for "(Hanson 2012b, p.17) with traditional public diplomacy tools. U.S. government started reaching out by using new media since the early 1990s when the Internet gradually became popular among the general public. In the last ten years, social media has become an everyday communication tool and been widely used by government bodies around the globe as a new tool of diplomatic communication. Former U.S president Obama came to power with a team of media professionals who are rebuilt the relation between media and state. His administration had a large-scale adoption of social media. Helle C. Dale, Senior Fellow for Public Diplomacy at the Heritage Foundation wrote many articles about US Government's public diplomacy 2.0 and studied many cases. She pointed out that Web 2.0 technology is a low-cost tool to outreach the large-scale public, a national communication strategy, and a corporation for foreign opinion. Academic analysis should be established by the government to monitor its effectiveness as well as risks (Dale, 2009).

The information technology revolution enables social media to be a mean to establish influencing power and connectivity among foreign public. It also pushes the alternative political agenda generated by non-state actors such as general public and NGOs, which is not usually addressed by traditional diplomatic service, to the centre of international relations. The content and practice of diplomatic communications have been deeply changed by using digital media. The general public is offered a direct access to diplomatic information and diplomats. The boundaries between domestic and international communication, local and global governance, personal and official interactions are vanishing. The most significant feature of social media is its interactivity, which engages the public by collecting their comments and responding to them. Ha and James examines and suggests that interactivity provides five key dimensions as

follows: 1) playfulness, 2) choice, 3) connectedness, 4) information collection, and 5) reciprocal communication (Ha & James, 1998). Those dimensions of interactivity are all presented in social media, which encourages a high level of participation among users (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010).

As a newly emerged narrow stream of diplomacy, digital diplomacy became a new research field of IR study. Armitage and Nye pointed out that digital diplomacy is one of the variables that strives on diplomacy excellence (Armitage and Nye, 2007). Jan Melissen commented, "cyber-diplomacy links the impact of innovations in communication and information technology to diplomacy" (Melissen, 2005, p. 4). He points out that new public diplomacy "recognizes that new communication technologies offer new opportunities to interact with a wider public by adopting a network approach and making the most of an increasingly multicentric global, interdependent system" (Melissen, 2005, p. 4). Christina Archetti, Professor at the University of Oslo and an expert in digital diplomacy, points out that social networking media offered an opportunity to connect government to worldwide audiences without using mainstream media. As a result, the distinction between diplomacy (an official level negotiation) and public diplomacy (a communication between government and public) is blurred (Archetti, 2012). Jan Melissen refers this change to "new public diplomacy" (Melissen, 2006, p. 5) and Helle C. Dale calls it "public diplomacy 2.0" (Dale, 2009, p. 1).

Therefore, it is undoubted that social media enables more informal dialogue between the government and foreign public and wider scope of diplomatic service, which focuses mainly on military, politics and economy. Social media now becomes the keyword of new public diplomacy. Hua Zheng conceptualises new public diplomacy as "A diplomatic practise operated by government and joined by NGOs and private sectors aims at establishing a nation's positive image among foreign countries by running cultural exchange programmes and targeting at elite class." (Zheng, 2011, p.143). She points out that the word "new" in new public diplomacy refers particularly to the challenge and opportunity brought over by Web 2.0 technology (Zheng, 2011). Therefore, the term *digital diplomacy* emerged to refer to such kind of new public diplomacy in worldwide academic and professional discussions that tried to find out the impact of social media on diplomacy and define this new diplomatic approach (Hanson,

2012; Ross, 2010).

Three Schools of Modern Diplomacy Studies

This section reviews three distinct schools of modern diplomacy study works on the impact of information technology development on diplomacy. These three schools are traditional school, nascent school and innovative school. By critically reviewing the views from their works, this study laid the research foundation to analyse the impact of the British foreign service's Weibo practice in China. Among scholars of these three schools, some scholars such as Nick Cull, hold positive expectation and believe that social media enables "people around the world to obtain ever more information through horizontal peer-to-peer networks rather than through the old vertical process by which information flowed down from the traditional sources of media authority" (Cull 2013, p.136). Krutskikh and Kramarenko believe information technology's "economic and technical affordability to the users and its mass employment on a mass scale which, for its part, influences the shaping of social and political processes and the making of political decisions" (Krutskikh and Kramarenko, 2003, p. 116). A study by He and Murphy (2007) highlights the use of the Internet by NGOs in bringing global social contracts concept to the international negotiation process. In their case study, the NGOs shows their capability of using the features of the Internet, such as Google search and their official websites, to target and interact with interest groups as well as give pressures to state actors in the process of negotiating WTO agreements. Those scholars hold a positive attitude towards digital diplomacy and believe that foreign public is offered a platform by digital media to actively engage themselves in international relations agenda communication and foreign policy decision-making process. Meanwhile, they believe that digital media enables softer issues and informal messages being used by foreign service to engage the foreign public on a new level, which is different from the time when hard power and formal statements dominated the foreign policy communication and decision-making process. Digital media has brought state and non-state actors closer to reflect both the hard and soft sides of foreign policy.

There were also many more studies on digital diplomacy have shown that the digital technology development enables wider actors to be involved in international relations process (Christodoulides, 2005; Soloman, 2007; Wihlborg and Norstedt, 2017). Their

research devotes in taking account of non-state actors into the research of modern diplomatic communication studies. Not only scholars held these viewpoints about digital diplomacy, but Many diplomatic practitioners also identified this change in their works. Richard Grant, a diplomat of New Zealand, found that "The technology allows more people to play, increases the size of the playing field by an almost exponential amount, and it changes the rules every day" (Grant, 2004). He argues, "Diplomacy has become democratized" (Grant, 2004). British diplomat Tom Fletcher also identified the increased influence of non-state actors as one of the trends transforming the diplomatic environment (Fletcher, 2017). However, their observations on digital media's influence on diplomacy missed out many wider participants brought over into the foreign policy process by digital media. Newly emerged non-state actors are the extra players brought into this game by social media. Social media companies, political restrictions and systems, media regulations, nationalistic activists, hacktivists and many more unnamed actors also joined in this process to change the dynamic and balance created by traditional foreign policy. Therefore, this research is going to address some missing actors, such as social media companies, China's political and media restrictions, as well as the rising of China's online nationalistic activities, to expand the scope and samples of existing research and discussions of digital diplomacy.

- Traditional School

The traditional school of diplomatic studies emphasises the importance of state and official foreign service institutions and classical characteristics of diplomatic service. The traditionalist scholars believe the state and diplomatic institutions are the most important actors in international relations (Fry, Goldstein, and Langhorne, 2002; Kissinger, 1994;). Their research focuses mainly on high-level political issues and pays little attention to other non-state or alternative actors in diplomacy. They consider the opportunity and challenge put forward by information technology development do not necessarily "affect the core of the organisation of political power; the central role of territorially defined states' (Coolsaet, 1998). Traditionalist literature suggests that information technology does not equal knowledge and more effective diplomacy (Burt and Robinson, 1998; Kohler, 1998). They argue that the quality of the information matters but not the quantity. Diplomats should demonstrate their professionalism through filtering quality information desired by foreign service institutions and

government bodies.

Traditionalist scholars concern that although the information technology is used by foreign service to "increase understanding, foster tolerance and ultimately promote world-wide peace" (Burt and Robinson, 1998), traditional foreign service is struggling to acquire "different skills, techniques and attitudes than those found in traditional diplomacy" (Burt and Robinson, 1998) due to its bureaucratic structure and unresponsiveness to changes. 20 Years after Burt and Robinson pointed out this problem, the UK diplomat Tom Fletcher identified the skillset gap that needs to be filled up to embrace the changes brought by digital diplomacy. He called for "an army of diplomats using new digital tools in an authentic, engaging and purposeful way" (Fletcher, 2017, p. 10) and pointed out that "more senior diplomatic staff at post should build their social media profiles" (Fletcher, 2017, p. 10). It seems foreign service has not quite kept up with the fast-changing digital technology to make the best use of it in diplomatic strategy and practise. However, traditionalist researchers also argue that diplomats are not digital media professionals. They should concentrate on their role as a diplomat and contact with societies in their post countries but not spend all their time to answer emails (Burt and Robinson, 1998; Kohler, 1998). These scholars criticise that using digital media simply to gather and disseminate information would not necessarily improve relationships between the two countries. New media technology should be used to enable human interaction. The greatest challenge for diplomats when they conduct digital diplomacy practice is maintaining the balance between face-to-face human interaction and digital communication (Burt and Robinson, 1998). Kohler stress that technology can not replace diplomat's human contacts and judgements of foreign relations and substitute people's personal experience of foreign culture and society (Kohler, 1998). Subsequently, their observations generated caution of fully embracing new media technology and implementing it into diplomatic practice. However, this caution does not mean Traditionalist school's view is dated because the political sensitivity of diplomatic information requires careful protection to prevent threats to national and international security.

Although traditionalist theorists focus more on practice than on theory, their views are valuable for digital diplomacy research and provide the empirical support for current

and future analyse. Thus, the new media technology provides a more direct access of diplomatic information to the foreign public, but also puts forward challenges to foreign services and diplomats' scope of profession. In respond to this point, this thesis examines the level of professionalisation demonstrated in the British Embassy Weibo management and influence brought over by China's political system and its online media regulations.

- Innovative School

In contrast to traditionalist scholars' conclusion about foreign services are reluctant or unable to adapt their diplomatic practice to digital technology development, innovative diplomatic scholars, whom were first introduced as "innovators" by Jan Melissen in 1999 (Melissen, 1999), disagree that foreign service institutions are suffering during the process of digital diplomacy. They believe exchanges of expertise could happen in a wider modern diplomatic environment (Kramarenko and Krutskikh, 2003). According to innovative scholars, new media technology would not create any crisis for traditional foreign service institutions. Diplomats would not be replaced by computers in the near future (Kennan, 1997). They believe more communication enabled by digital media in the diplomatic environment helps to improve the interactions between traditionally separated parties, such as state government bodies, NGOs, and individuals. The information technology can be regarded as "a high-tech add-on to traditional communication systems" (Riordan, 2003). According to them, arguments about the replacement of diplomat's human contact might lead to the panic of diplomatic institution's decline in the new media age. Therefore, the discussion and research of digital diplomacy should move away from traditionalist's fear of crisis that digital technology creates on diplomacy. The innovative scholars would like to achieve a more balanced and objective understanding of the influence of digital technology in diplomatic communication. Meanwhile, their balanced interpretation of state and non-state actors notes the term of diplomacy is not only applicable to state but also non-state actors in modern IR system (Sharp, 2003).

State and non-state actors take different roles in the diplomatic process. Information technology does not divide the state and non-state actors but wires them up since modern diplomacy should reflect both the hard and soft sides of foreign policy agenda.

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The innovative research's value on digital diplomacy debate is their belief that is empirical findings can be applied in theory development (Hocking, 2004). Thus, their research approach focuses more on practice than traditionalists do. Besides, the innovative theory gives equal weighting to the discussions of state and non-state actors and highlights the symbiotic relationship between the two forms of actors in diplomacy to achieve a balanced view. It inspired this thesis to analyse the relationship among the British foreign service, the Chinese government, Sina Weibo operators, the British Embassy Weibo followers, as well as China's rising online nationalists.

- Nascent School

The third form of diplomatic theory is the nascent school, which came into its form in the early 20th century when non-state actors started to have an impact on diplomacy. The nascent theory is about non-state and unofficial diplomacy. Unlike traditional diplomacy theory which emphasises the central role of states in international relations, and innovative theory which gives equal weighting to state and non-state actors, Nascent theory recognises the non-state actors' significant role in diplomacy. The nascent scholars promote the non-violent and humane aspects of non-state actors' capabilities in resolving international conflicts and engaging with foreign countries (Risse-Kappen, 1995; Hoffman, 2003; Langhorne, 1998a; Bruter, 1999). The nascent scholars consider that the central decision and agenda making function of traditional foreign service will be dispersed among state government, non-state organisations, and private groups as "governance becomes complex and fragmented across various domains" (Jayasuriya, 2004, p.6). For them, diplomacy is "replaced by global governance structure" (Sharp, 1997, p.631) and diplomat could be replaced by professionals with skills of negotiation, commerce, and etc. as we enter an age of "diplomacy without the diplomats" (Kennan, 1997, p.198). Therefore, in nascent scholars' opinion, state and foreign service institutions are not essential to diplomacy. With regard of new media technology development, nascent scholars argue that the information technology has liberated information from state control which is described by them as reluctant to change the way of diplomatic information management process (Riordan, 2003).

Meanwhile, the development of online media has provided real-time information

resource to governments (Berridge, 2002). Moreover, the technology enables private sectors and individuals, as well as alternative and non-state actors, to enter official diplomatic process (Holsti, 2004). According to nascent scholars, the state government does not welcome this dramatic change. Burt and Robison pointed out three consequences resulted by state government's reluctance and inability to embrace the information technology development (Burt and Robinson, 1998). Firstly, diplomatic practice becomes inefficient without using information technology; Secondly, state government denies that the capability of information processing is needed for foreign policy formulation process. At last, increased connectivity among international citizens and economy enabled by new information technology is changing the dynamics of international relations. However, those traditional scholars still see those changes in an abstract way without considering them in their daily diplomatic practice, which "will surely become an anachronism" (Burt and Robinson, 1998, p.42). The second concern of the nascent theory school is the capability of digital technology to transform the traditional diplomatic agenda. The nascent scholars argue that non-state actors have driven new international relations agenda and suggest that traditional foreign service institutions will lose control of command power if they do not master the new techniques of control information (Brown and Studemeister, 2001). They suggest that the increasing number of global citizens with digital literacy help to change "conventional ideas and approaches that used to be part and parcel of world politics and practices" (Kramarenko and Krutskikh, 2003). Thus, the digital media technology has enabled more general public members to engage with international agenda. Politics and military issues are no longer the only international relations agenda.

In summary, the nascent school concludes that the information technology revolution has made traditional diplomacy lose its power. The main strength of the nascent theory inspires the IR research to explore and highlight the influence of non-state actors to foreign policy agenda setting by considering the arrival of the information technology revolution. Its benefit lies in the reflection of multi-actor involved in the 21st century's diplomatic environment. However, since nascent theory exclusively focuses on non-state actors, the importance of state actors is ignored and even denied. Furthermore, nascent theory's claim of government's unresponsiveness to digital media development and the modern diplomatic environment has been proved short-sighted by the

increasing number of embassies which incorporate digital diplomacy into their foreign service strategy and practice in the recent ten years. Therefore, it weakened the nascent theory's argument on the role of non-state actors in modern diplomacy. This thesis locates its research angle in the middle ground between traditional diplomacy research and nascent diplomacy research by finding empirical evidence of influence from both state and non-state actors on modern diplomacy. After locating this research's angle by reviewing the three schools' position on new media technology's impact of on diplomacy, it is necessary to go through some of the recent research outcomes of digital diplomacy to identify research gaps need to be filled in and fit this research in the needs.

2.3 Reviews and Critics on Digital Diplomacy Literature

The following works reviewed in this study addressed opportunities and risks of conducting digital diplomacy. American scholar Helle C. Dale explored US Twiplomacy from analysing the strategy, history, tool and format of new media public diplomacy. She argues that although new media can create and engage political forces from a U.S. point of view and connect with the previously unreached audience but its limitation and risk must also be appropriately understood and a government communications strategy needs to be in place urgently to make social media a valuable tool to public diplomacy (Dale, 2009). Helle stated that the significant risk of using social-networking technologies is its security. Social media is still vulnerable to cyber-attacks and fake official accounts. Wanjiru (2014) points out that the target groups of social media communication of digital diplomacy are mainly youth, students and business world. The study also reveals the challenges of using social media to conduct diplomacy practice due to its vulnerability to be hacked and attacked by cyberbullying (Wanjiru, 2014).

Similar to Wanjiru's worrying about the challenges that social media puts forward, not all researchers have the optimism expectation to the newly emerged digital diplomacy approach, "so many governments manipulate the internet to their advantage-all the while still practising old-fashioned tactics like throwing bloggers in jail-suggests that those who hoped to cyberspace to promote democracy and American ideals on the cheap may be in for a tough fight" (Morozov, 2010, p.12). Clifton Martin and Laura Jagla

from Aspen Institute published a report about social media and diplomacy and points out that social media enables the shifting of power and diplomatic information access from decision makers to private citizens around the world. However, they also warned that the use of social media tool in diplomatic practise does not necessarily "create wise people, sound policies or open and tolerant societies" (Martin and Jagla, 2013, p.23) and also challenges policymakers in balancing information sharing and sensitive information protecting (Martin and Jagla, 2013). These concerns provoked the new research angles of digital diplomacy. Thus, this study addressed the challenges that diplomatic services are facing up to when they are trying to share more information on digital communication channels.

Furthermore, some scholars such as Ellen Hallams advanced the argument that an effective digital diplomacy strategy must be backed up by a much broader shift in foreign policy. She gave an example about Al-Qaeda using social media tool to create a virtual warzone which forced U.S government to adjust their foreign policy to emphasise more on digital diplomacy to promote American values in a virtual battlefield (Hallams, 2010). She concluded that digital media technology has an important role in diplomacy, but it would not fundamentally change everything. For example, digital diplomacy could not eliminate anti-Americanism but provide a credible alternative story to discredit extremists' message online (Hallams, 2010). Hallams's balanced view provides an objective opinion that does not overestimate the impact of new media technology on diplomacy. Inspired by Hallams's view, this study examines China's online nationalistic activities on the British Embassy Weibo to find out the dynamics between digital diplomacy efforts and China's nationalism.

Foreign embassy Weibo became popular among the Chinese public in 2012 and attracted attention from researchers. Many scholars wrote articles to explain and analyse this new diplomatic communication tool. However, there are barely any in-depth studies on this subject. The majority of these articles only describe one or two aspects of Weibo diplomacy and fail to develop their discussions to a deeper level. Their research also lacks strong theoretical support. Besides, most of the researches about foreign embassy Weibo focus mainly on the U.S. Embassy Weibo account and fail to analyse China's social and political contexts in their studies.

Zhihong Du and Yue Hou introduced the U.S Embassy's Weibo diplomacy practice in China by conducting a qualitative analysis of its content, followers and operational style (Du and Hou, 2013). Xuelin Bao and Xu Liu briefly introduced the features of the Weibo accounts of the U.S. Embassy, the British Embassy and the French Embassy to inspire China's public diplomacy development (Bao and Liu, 2012). Xia Huang studied three Weibo accounts of the U.S. Embassy and the U.S National Public Radio (Huang, 2013). Based on their studies, the diplomatic Weibo accounts featured are found acting as very important information exchange platforms in the U.S public diplomacy practice and strengthening the dialogue between the general public of U.S and China. Xin Zhong and Jiayi Lu explored the practice of the U.S public diplomacy 2.0 strategies in China and analysed the impact of Web 2.0 technology on public diplomatic communication's practitioner, audience, and communication model. They argue that Web 2.0 technology breaks down the restriction of time and space on public diplomacy practise and integrated public diplomacy resources on a virtual platform with low cost and flexibility. (Zhong and Lu, 2011). Chen Cheng conducted comparative research on China and the U.S's Weibo diplomacy practises from the angle of political communication (Cheng, 2014). Li Liu studied Germany Embassy Weibo by using data and content analysis to observe its content, format and effectiveness. She suggests that public diplomacy is an important way to build on a nation's soft power. Weibo became the popular platform for public diplomacy because of its openness, real-time response, interaction, and massive information dissemination (Liu, 2013). These researches added some empirical cases to Weibo diplomacy analysis. However, they failed to provide a balanced and critical view with more in-depth discussion on both opportunities and challenges.

Some researchers summarised the excellent practices of foreign embassy Weibo to provide advice for China's digital diplomacy development. Weiwei Zhang's article on Chinese Social Science Academic Paper mentioned that new media such as Weibo shorten the distance between citizen and government, as well as citizen and state. By using the social media tool, citizens gain access to diplomatic information and rights to take part in political conversation directly (Zhang, 2014). Xin Zhong and Chao Huang studied how foreign embassies actively speak for themselves in China's Internet space and build a positive image of their countries by following up China's social agenda, focusing on local news and using cultural elements through social media dialogue. He

concluded that direct daily communication, strategic communication with strengthened key message, and interpersonal communication with key influencers are the three most important strategies for international organisations to build influence on Weibo. He found that international organisations are adapting to China's Internet environment by using the Chinese language as the information carrier and at the same time building influence by promoting their cultural elements on China's social media platforms (Zhong and Huang, 2014). Qing Lin and Tengfei Yang used content analysis to study some foreign countries' Weibo communication practices in China and suggested China should learn from their experience and actively use social media platform to promote China's national image world widely (Lin and Yang, 2014). Guolin Xue specifically paid attention to foreign countries' Weibo management and concluded that despite different ways of operation, they all follow same management strategy that combines active government involvement and legal supervision to promote its safe and healthy development (Xue, 2012). However, since the Chinese government has very tight media censorship and control of politically sensitive issues in the academic research field, their discussions can not address how China's media censorship affect foreign embassies' Weibo interaction with the Chinese public. Therefore, their research cannot fully reflect the dynamics of Weibo diplomacy in China's media and political environment.

There are also some studies about Weibo diplomacy from the angle of public diplomacy to argue the impact of using social media in public diplomacy practice. They argue that digital diplomacy, as a new stream of public diplomacy, accelerates the revolution of modern diplomacy's value principle, operational system and organisational system. Baowei Zheng believes that Weibo diplomacy creates a new area of diplomacy. Weibo has become an essential platform for diplomats to have direct dialogue with the public (Zheng, 2011). Tong Li reviewed the development of Weibo diplomacy and summarised the concept and features of this new diplomacy practise format (Li, 2012). Kaizhou Miao pointed out that Weibo diplomacy is different from traditional diplomacy. It involves wider public to take part in diplomatic activities and provides a new information exchange platform with easy access, fast information dissemination, and real-time interaction (Miao, 2011). Zhihong Du and Yue Hou think Weibo diplomacy is a new diplomatic format that can reach the target public directly without any medium in

between (Du and Hou, 2013). In Jian Ying's study, he tries to discuss the effectiveness of Weibo diplomacy in public diplomacy and political communications. He argues that Weibo diplomacy strengthens foreign services and NGOs' public diplomacy skills and opens up wider scope for public diplomacy development. Weibo enables much better interaction in political communications, and at the same time, diplomatic practice is monitored by all social media users and the wider public (Ying, 2012). Xing Xu mentioned that conducting diplomatic activities on social media platform is not only a growing trend but also a new development of Internet technology usage in political communication (Xu, 2014). These researchers have provided meaningful discussions from different angles of digital diplomacy. However, their discussions are highly descriptive without in-depth analysis and theoretical support.

Furthermore, evaluation and assessment methods of the impact of digital diplomacy are rarely explored deeply by current literature. It might because "there are three inherent difficulties in measuring public diplomacy: its frequently long-term ambition; the challenge of measuring concepts that may be intangible; and the problem of attributing observable changes to one's own activities" (Vinter and Knox, 2008, p.111). Mark Xu discussed that Twiplomacy had become a new brand of public diplomacy, which has a massive impact on diplomatic policy and international relations. However, it is difficult to measure the influence quantitatively (Su and Xu, 2014). Therefore, it is not easy to evaluate digital diplomacy success because it is "messy" (Haider, 2011, p.5). He pointed out that most foreign government bodies maintain dozens of social media accounts representing embassies, public programmes or even on behalf of individuals (Haider, 2011). The research of Kinyanjui Judy Wanjiru (2012) studied social media platforms of U.S. Embassy in Nairobi as a specific case and found that on the commonly used social media platforms of the embassy, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, the number counts of comments, retweets, replies, favourites and linked content are measurement units of digital diplomacy's influence. However, these units should not be considered equally important. Therefore, this study used Satty Scale and invited social media experts to rank the importance of all the evaluation units.

In China, some Weibo service providers use Weibo follower number as the base for Weibo influencing power ranking. However, this single indicator is not enough to truly

and fully reveal the Weibo influencing power. Corneliu Bjola and Lu Jiang also tried to measure how social media helps with achieving foreign policy goals through three key aspects of public diplomatic engagement: agenda setting, presence expansion and conversation generating (Bjola and Jiang, 2015). They used empirical data to analyse the effectiveness of Weibo diplomacy by sampling posts and interactions on the Weibo accounts of the European Union's delegation as well as the embassies of Japan and the United States in Beijing. Empirically, their research provided a wider scenario of digital diplomacy practise and a valuable tempt on measuring the impact of digital diplomacy. However, their research lacks theoretical framework support and detailed content analysis of Weibo post over a more extended period to reveal the processes of development and management of digital diplomacy content under strict media censorship.

Chinese researchers Zhao Hongyan and He Miao published an article in 2013 featuring an evaluation report of foreign diplomatic Weibo. The method they used is sending out questionnaire to random Weibo users and evaluating the effectiveness and influence of foreign embassy Weibo based on those Weibo users' responses to the questions (Zhao and He, 2013). Their research analyses Weibo users' response to evaluate the outcome of Weibo diplomacy. However, the weakness of this method is obvious. First, foreign embassy Weibo accounts mainly have direct influence among its followers. Random selection of any Weibo users as focus group members cannot reflect the real influencing power of foreign embassy Weibo. Secondly, merely calculating the response rate is not sufficient to have a comprehensive evaluation of the research. Thirdly, this method is purely relying on subjective indicators, which is the response rate from Weibo users, to evaluate the influencing power of foreign diplomatic Weibo. It lacks consideration of objective indicators, such as Weibo following rate, topic types, and number of Weibo follower's comment, which provide necessary and multi-angle dimensions to understand the subject. Therefore, a more complex and specific metrics should be designed to evaluate foreign embassy Weibo's influencing power. In order to address this problem, this study tailored a methodology combining Delphi method and AHP (Analytical Hierarchy Process) method to measure the British Embassy Weibo's influencing power with consideration of both Britain and China's social backgrounds.

2.4 Summary of limitations

In this chapter, the literature review shows that the major limitation of the existing literature is about their inability to explain the nature of digital transformation under a strong theoretical framework and address the measurement of digital diplomacy practice. The literature indeed highlights the complicated relationship between digital media and political/diplomatic processes in the context of global digital communication. However, they rarely explain the contingent changes, such as how digital technology affects specific countries' diplomatic practices in target countries' specific political and social backgrounds as well as media environments. The current literature mostly analysed digital diplomacy from a limited angle without reaching out to other disciplinarians such as narrative research in communication studies, as well as communication management in public relations study. In addition, the existing studies tend not to address the impact of communication technologies on the everyday practice and content management of diplomatic communication. The first-hand experience of digital diplomacy practitioners was not considered enough during the research process. It might because the researchers have limited access to them. This research has the advantage of direct access to the British Embassy diplomats and its Weibo editor to collect first-hand experience and data. Moreover, the existing literature tends to generalise the issue without providing enough samples and evidence from a different cultural and political background. Most importantly, researchers rarely explore the theoretical framework of digital diplomacy study. Therefore, this thesis tries to address the issues identified from the literature review by adapting the concepts of professionalisation, personalisation, soft power, and excellence in communication management in the context of foreign policy communication through a study of the British Embassy Weibo's content and management. It explores the how a country's ideology and value are presented through social media communication to influence foreign minds. This specific theoretical framework helps build the argument of the use of social media as the resource of soft power in new public diplomacy.

Chapter 3: New Diplomatic Skillset: Professionalisation in the British Embassy Weibo

This chapter analyses the level of professionalisation presenting in the British Embassy Weibo to answer part of the research question of this study, that is: How does professionalisation help to articulate the British Embassy Weibo content? The concept adapted in the theoretical framework for the analysis in this chapter is professionalisation (Farrell and Webb, 2002). It helps to identify the analysis units which are Weibo management, Weibo topics, and interactivity level, to examine the level of professionalisation presented. There are four subsections in this chapter. The first section looks at the management and resource of the British Embassy Weibo by explaining its personnel structure. The interview with the former managing editor of the British Embassy Weibo provides in-depth insights into how the British Embassy Weibo is managed and fitted in the overall FCO diplomatic communication. The second section discusses the interactions between foreign embassy Weibo, the Chinese online media regulator, and Weibo service provider, which are rarely studied by existing research of digital diplomacy. The third section summarises the Weibo post types by using content analysis methods to examine to what extent the British Embassy Weibo has acted as an effective channel to get the messages out to reach the foreign public. Finally, the last section assesses the pros and cons of interactivity and immediacy in diplomatic Weibo. It helps us to understand to what extent Weibo can be regarded as a new diplomatic communications tool.

3.1 Managing the British Embassy Weibo

It is essential to find out the management system and staffing structure of the British Embassy Weibo and locate it within the wider communication function within the FCO. Media and digital operations section is one of the central departments in the FCO that delivers campaigns, internal communication and public diplomacy as well as communication with media and public. The members of the digital team are largely led by the communication professionals. The communications director, Helen Bower-Easton, has abundance of experience in media and government communications. In 2012, the FCO has a small central team of 9 people overseeing digital content and

campaigns, and a smaller team of 3 people overseeing its web platform and overseas digital operations. "Across the FCO's international network, there are four digital hubs in Mumbai, Singapore, Washington and Madrid with 12 staff in total, which oversee digital content production" (FCO, 2012b, p. 12). These digital hubs are staffed by locally employed staff but managed centrally from London. "There is usually one person whose role, among other things, includes updating digital channels. There is less central resource when it comes to broadening digital work into mainstream policy. One officer looks at digital policy issues, among other things. And one officer has been temporarily providing oversight of work on digital across policy, services and communications for the purposes of this strategy and the gov.uk transition" (FCO, 2012b, p.12). The FCO is the first foreign affairs ministry uses Twitter and Facebook Live to update travel advice (FCO, 2012b, p.12). The British Ambassadors are allowed to experiment innovative way to use social media to communicate with the target foreign public. The network of FCO's digital diplomacy consists of 268 Embassies, High Commissions, and Consulates in 168 Countries is all very active in digital diplomacy. FCO has a clear social media use guidance for the global staff to follow in their daily work.

According to Ping Liu, the former managing editor of the British Embassy Weibo, in 2013, the British Embassy's China digital team has a mix of 15 British and non-British digital media officers across China that is led by the head of press of the British Embassy in China, who directly reports to the FCO's director of communications and advise the senior diplomats inside the embassy on their daily work related to media and external communications. The digital team at the British Embassy China works along with the digital hub in Singapore to make sure all the key messages on their digital channels are consistent with the communications plan in Asia Pacific area and overall FCO communications strategy. There are three full-time staff and one part-time staff based in Beijing. They are the head of digital media, two digital media content editors and a digital media team assistant. They are the main content authors and editors of the British Embassy Weibo accounts (Interview No.1). Ping Liu worked as the communications officer at the British Council Beijing and press officer at the British Embassy Beijing before she took on the responsibility of managing the British Embassy Weibo. The rest of her team members were either working in mass media or private

sectors before joining the team. They transferred their knowledge and skills to the field of government and political communication. However, in terms of new media and digital diplomacy, not many of them have intensive experience in the area before working for the British Embassy Weibo. Senior British Embassy officers also create Weibo content occasionally under the guidance and help of the Beijing digital team staff. It shows that the staff managing the British Embassy Weibo are not typical foreign affairs specialist, but rather media-orientated professionals, who brought their experience and expertise from workplaces outside the diplomacy into digital foreign policy communication. The British Embassy China does not outsource any specialists or experts in the area of political communication and social media to create or manage digital content (Interview No.1). Therefore, these facts show that the British Embassy Weibo is managed mainly by staff without typical diplomatic communication background.

In 2015, the FCO made a major restructuring of the Communication Directorate to support digital diplomacy work. After that, the directorate mainly consists of three sub-departments. They are media, campaigns and engagement, and digital transformation. One of the most important functions of the digital transformation department is working on digital communications. Besides digital work, this department also works on policy transformation, which overlaps with the work of the Policy Unit. However, this arrangement aims to improve the use of new media in policy work (Interview No.1).
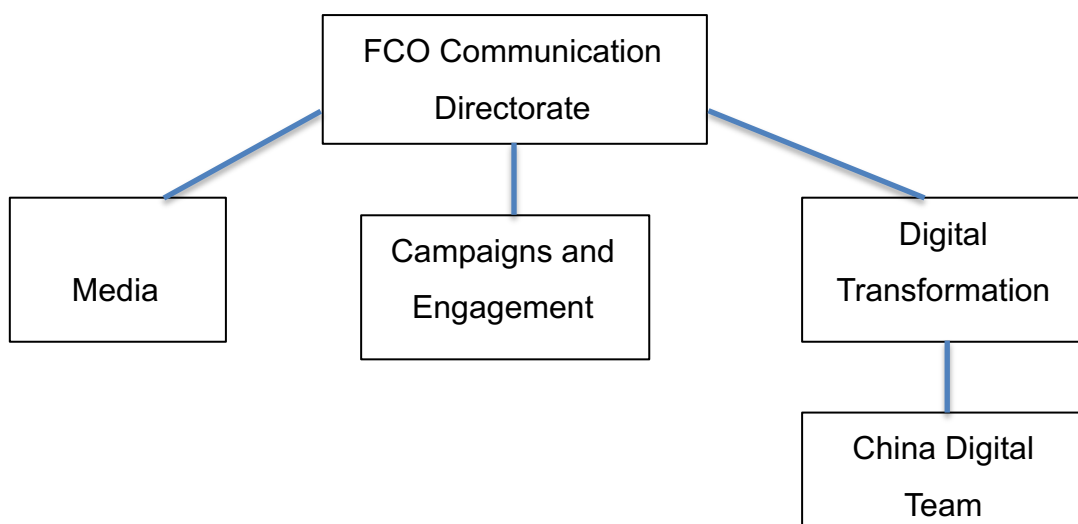
Figure 3: Organisation Structure of the FCO Communication Directorate

The function of the British Embassy Weibo is different from the other communication channels such as press release and audio-visual footage for the use of TV and radio. The British Embassy Weibo enables the Chinese general public to engage directly with the British Embassy and take part in the diplomatic communication directly. Therefore, the new way of engagement puts forward a great challenge to the FCO's communication management. In his article *"Digital Diplomacy: are we the champions?"* published on FCO's blog about digital diplomacy, Hugh Elliott, former Director of Communication at FCO, pointed out the tensions in the process of digital diplomacy development as below (Elliot, 2017).

Control and creativity: Elliot pointed out that governments control the message to make sure the content is consistent and accurate, which are vital in any political communication. However, digital technology enables spontaneity and creativity. Therefore, it takes time and effort to achieve a balance between control and creativity in digital diplomacy to make it effective. Although social media enables more transparent communication than traditional media, secrecy still exists in diplomatic conversation. The British Council, known as the Cultural and Education Section of the British Embassy in China, launched its Weibo account just before the visit of David Cameron in 2010. One of its Weibo editors sent out a Weibo post about the possible merge of the world's leading spirits and beer producer *Diageo* and a Chinese top spirit producer *Shuijingfang* without seeking authorisation from the higher level of management. Diageo was one of the visitors within David Cameron's group during his visit to China in 2010. The editor believes this post would attract significant public attention to the newly launched Weibo accounts. However, since this merge was still not announced officially, Diageo was deeply annoyed by the early announcement of this news through the official Weibo account of the British Embassy family, which was regarded as one of the official communication channel and information resource of the British government. This Weibo message even affected the share price of both companies involved in this merge. The editor who sent out this post and the senior management teams of the British Council China office and the British Embassy China had to address their formal apology to Diageo.

This example shows that immediacy and large-scale information dissemination on

social media sometimes can cause problems and create risks to diplomacy if an effective content management system is not in place. Meanwhile, the knowledge of digital diplomacy and awareness of diplomatic risks are also essential skills of a digital diplomacy practitioner. FCO and the British Embassy China are taking further actions to enhance its digital diplomacy policy and the practitioner's skills after learning those lessons. According to the FCO digital diplomacy website, there are regular training and workshops available to develop diplomats and digital communication staff's skill all around the year.

Risk and reward: As social media have only been employed by foreign services since 2010, digital diplomacy practitioners are still experimenting and taking risks on digital content on a daily basis. Political risks are especially challenging for foreign embassies in China when they conduct digital diplomatic communication.

The roles of civil servants and politicians: Elliot defined the old role of diplomats was "discreet, impersonal, behind the scenes, policy implementers not campaigners" (Elliot, 2017). However, personal presence and the human face are vital for influence in social media. Diplomats have to adapt their role to active campaigner in the fast-changing international communication landscape.

Personal and professional: In the past, diplomat's personal life and emotion are private. However, personal experience and emotion are often exposed to social media. Diplomats can use their personal life and show emotion to establish personal links and emotional resonance with the foreign public as part of their professional skills.

Activity and impact: Elliot emphasised that foreign service should observe closely on what impact can digital diplomacy activities make but not only look at the figures and numbers on the reports.

Facts and fictions: The most crucial thing in digital diplomacy is not just being creative, but also being reliable and trustable.

Although the whole process of the digital transition and restructuring bring challenges

to the FCO digital team on managing the social media content and platform, the existing skills and experience of diplomats continue to be valuable to their daily work. It is because the core of Digital diplomacy is nothing newer than engaging public into conversations, providing information, as well as listening to public views. Besides, training and guidelines have also been provided and updated to support the digital transition. The FCO staff have all been briefed that social media is "a core part of a modern diplomat" (FCO, 2015). Therefore, the British foreign service is embracing the change and opportunity brought over by social media technology, as well as different social and political contexts around the world, to diplomatic communication. The next section discusses the challenges brought over by the Chinese media regulation and China's social media environment to the operation of the British Embassy Weibo.

3.2 Interactions Among Foreign Embassy Weibo, Chinese Online Media Censorship and Commercialised Chinese Social Media Operators

Traditional diplomatic activities mainly involve only state-level communication and government relationship. The diplomats work closely with government officials and political figures. On the contrary, social media enables wider participation from the foreign public and brings new opportunities for diplomats to interact with the foreign public and government bodies directly. Sina Weibo (microblog) is the first platform used by foreign embassies in China to conduct digital diplomacy in China. However, China's media censorship also applies to foreign embassy Weibo accounts. In addition, China's Weibo service providers are highly commercialised to seek maximal profit by securing popular Weibo accounts and government support. Those factors bring new challenges to diplomats and embassy staff in their daily work. This section aims to describe the interactions among these three actors and sets the research in this context.

Optimistic new media researchers and scholars believe that the new media encourages and enable public participation in political issues and policymaking process (Gil de Zuniga, et al., 2010; Duggan and Smith, 2016). They believe the new media has played a positive role in promoting political transparency in China. Zheng Yongnian points out that the Internet affects government's decision-making process on pressing social, political and diplomatic issues by enabling general public discussing those issues

online (Zheng, 2007). Indeed, Web 2.0 technology enables people to access government information and participate in political discussions like never before. It helps the government to understand public attitudes and engage citizens directly. However, many other critical views show their concern because the Chinese government does not always welcome the freedom brought over by the Internet (Smith, 2013; Yang, 2009; MacKinnon, 2011). Those researchers are cautious about the role that the Internet plays in the process of promoting civic engagement. They argue that Internet freedom performs differently under the Chinese media control policy. In China, the government mainly enforces online media control by controlling or blocking the URL and IP address of websites or individual users to rule out any illegal or politically sensitive content. Therefore, any content contains anti-government or anti-Communist Party information is filtered before being published publicly or deleted immediately after being published online.

Because of the media censorship in China, Twitter is blocked from the Chinese Internet users. Instead, Sina Weibo, the leading Chinese microblog service that tolerated by the Chinese government is developed to match the needs of the Chinese local market, had around 150 million users in August 2011. The number of Sina Weibo users is growing at a rate of almost 10 million per month (Bishop, 2011). The number of monthly active Weibo users surged significantly from 0.05 billion in 2010 (CNNIC, 2012) to 0.462 billion in 2018 (CNNIC, 2018). Sina Weibo has developed into an information resource and public space of tabloid press, raising scandals, mobilising capricious online public opinion (Epstein, 2011). The enormous numbers of Chinese social media users and the low public confidence in China's official information sources have helped Weibo become a contested new force in Chinese politics. What unites Weibo users in China is their desire to freely discuss the issues they care about, which are frequently about politics and pro-democracy. Michel Bonnin, a scholar based in Beijing, said, "Weibo plays a much more important role in China than Twitter in the west, because of the heavy censorship imposed by the regime on the other media" (Branigan, 2012). He added, "Weibo is also censored and cannot be considered a free public sphere but it is still the place where exchange of information is the most developed in China, and even traditional and official media are forced to go through it to have a real impact on the public. It is also the only place where the receptors of information can react and

influence the circulation of information" (Branigan, 2012).

In China, the authority adopts two major strategies to control the use of new media. First one is to supervise the URL and IP addresses by using technical tools. The second one is to investigate content containing messages of anti-government/anti-Communist Party, and unhealthy/illegal information such as violence and terrorism. Morozov calls these two strategies as "technological dimension" and "socio-political dimension" (Morozov, 2011). Technically, the Internet supervision bodies will filter sensitive or illegal content and block websites if necessary. They also instruct media organisations to screen keywords defined by the media regulators before and after the content is published or broadcasted. However, the Chinese government is not merely restricting but also encouraging Internet usage by the public. The Chinese government welcomes the economic development created by the flourish of new media. However, at the same time, the government also concerns any political threatens put forward by the new media. Therefore, the Chinese government closely supervises individual and organisations' activities online to deter any possible risks of political security. The government controls online media by using a series of tactics, including content deletions, real-name registrations, website and personal account suspension, and even detention of users in some extreme cases. Thus, making the balance between media freedom and China' local media regulation challenges many foreign embassies in China when they use social media to communicate directly with the Chinese public.

Weibo service is mainly run by three types of operators: independent websites, commercial online portals, and traditional media (TV stations, newspapers and magazines). The conflicts and interactions between various forces and actors on Sina Weibo are the fiercest compared with other Weibo sites since it has the largest number of registered users and accounts (CNNIC, 2015). China's Weibo service providers have to voluntarily self-censor to get rid of the unfavourable contents that offend the Chinese government or trigger political risks to please the government and obtain more policy support. Sina Weibo has a team of hundreds of staff responsible for checking the Weibo content round the clock every day. Weibo Secretary, a Weibo registration tool, will send a message when each Weibo user signs up an account to remind them not to discuss inappropriate topics in order to maintain a healthy environment of Weibo. The Weibo

supervision system mainly uses Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology as well as real people to censor Weibo content. One of the interviewees of this research project said that AI technology is filtering sensitive keywords based on a database established by the Sina content subversion team. Sina also groups its users into several categories including normal, junior, sensitive, senior, green, blacklist, dangerous, freeze, prohibited from using private messages (the users under this category can not communicate privately with other users on Weibo), prohibited from any Weibo activities, prohibited from uploading images, Beijing government official Weibo, media, and many other categories that can be quickly monitored by clicking the button of each category on the computer screen (Interview No.4).

In terms of the content management system, each staff is responsible for the verified users developed by him/herself. The verified users are classified into three tiers. Tier one is senior-level government organisations or national and provisional media, as well as celebrities and well-known figures. Tier two and tier three do not have a clear definition. Staff can decide it themselves case by case. If there is any inappropriate content being identified, staff from Sina supervision team will inform the Weibo account holder whom publishes the content that their content will be dealt with according to the regulation. In addition to keywords and self-judgment, Beijing Internet Management Office and Internet Control Department of Beijing Police Office also send Sina orders to deal with certain inappropriate content. They organise regular meetings for major Internet companies to update the latest censorship guidance. Once urgencies occur, they will send an instant message to Sina managers to pass on the order (Interview No.4).

Sina Weibo also has third party supervision when urgencies occur. Staff from different departments will be asked to take part in the supervision and required to provide result report within a fixed timescale (Interview No. 4). According to the latest Sina Weibo regulations that took effect from May 2012, any Weibo account that publishes more than five posts with sensitive issues that violate Chinese laws, spread rumours, or leak national confidential information will be asked to remove the posts and banned from posting on Weibo for at least 48 hours. The Weibo accounts of those who maliciously publish sensitive information on Weibo will be suspended forever (Bandurski, 2013). In

2013, the Chinese government introduced "seven baselines" as the official online codes of conduct for all new media operators in China. This is the new initiative of the Chinese government to assert stronger control over online activities. Any online activities are not allowed to violate these seven baselines. It covers seven areas below:

1   Laws and regulations
2   Socialist system
3   National interests
4   Citizen's legal rights
5   Social and public order
6   Morality
7   Accuracy of information (Bandurski, 2013)

It is noticeable that the 2nd and 3rd baselines clearly give priority to the Chinese government's leadership and the socialist system. Under this circumstance, how to maintain the balance between foreign policy goal and Chinese censorship regulation to make the digital diplomacy content acceptable to both sides becomes the greatest challenge to the British Embassy China.

The social media companies also have to take the challenge of losing Weibo users and customers, which could put threats on their profits. Thus, it can be seen that the public space on Weibo is still constrained by a quandary consists of Internet companies, government censorship, and market forces. The Chinese government's attitude subsequently influences the Weibo companies' decision of whether to increase investment in tightening information control or further commercialisation, and this, to a large extent, influences their user base, market share, and even their profits. Eventually, their decision affects the ability to attract more users and fulfilment of public demand on the social media platform.

Therefore, Weibo operator is also an important factor whose behaviour significantly influences the interaction between the Chinese government and foreign diplomatic Weibo accounts. The Weibo service operators have to comply with China's media regulation and local laws to supervise the foreign embassy Weibo content. At the same

time, foreign services also have their communication goals, editorial standard and regulation on social media content. In this process, the Chinese government, the Weibo service providers, and foreign governments are all trying to gain their benefits and avoid political risks. In the process, the boundaries among all the actors are constantly redrawn.

The interactions and battles among the three actors mainly focus on sensitive topics that are published or discussed on foreign embassy's Weibo such as human rights issues, China's pollution, and legal system. This section analyses the tactics used by the British Embassy Weibo to treat sensitive content and how the three parties – the Chinese government, Sina Weibo service operator, and the British Embassy Weibo interact with each other around those sensitive topics. It also brings out the mechanism of their interactions.

Since the major measurement of sensitive topics in China would be the levels of censorship on different content and issues, which enforces Weibo service operators to self-regulate themselves and censor Weibo content. At the same time, the diplomatic Weibo accounts also have their standard of sensitive issues. However, they do not wish to push the boundary too much, which may lead to the banning of their Weibo accounts. Meanwhile, in order to attract more users and public attention to their Weibo service to compete with other Weibo companies, Sina Weibo service provider may welcome the result of publishing content, which sometimes is sensitive to keep Weibo users interested. However, they also have to regulate the content at the same time to comply with the government policy on new media content in order to survive. Therefore, analysing those dynamics and dilemmas reveals the inner mechanism of their interaction and explores which content, although being sensitive, still can be published on the British Embassy Weibo without being banned by the Chinese government. The research outcome provides useful empirical evidence for the study of professionalisation in digital diplomacy.

Some researchers pointed out that since the mid-1970s, in order to develop the country, the Chinese government set their policy principle upon maintaining social stability (Cao, 2010; Zhang, 2010). It significantly reduced the space for political debate. The media

control becomes power enforcement under the condition of social stability and depoliticisation (Wang and Xu, 2006). Since China became the largest Internet market globally in 2008, in order to use the Internet to promote economic development rather than to put threats over the government authority, Chinese government sets up a set of regulations on social media to supervise their development. There are 19 different ministries and government organisations have been involved in new media regulating and management in China (Hu, 2010). Internet companies need to apply for licenses and approval of business operations from different offices and departments before they could run their business. After they receive the license and start operation, some other organisations and offices will supervise their daily operation and content editing (Interview No.4).

Because this type of management system involves many different departments and offices, the internal contradictions challenge the effectiveness of Internet governance as well. Some departments are more concerned about political censorship while some other departments care more about commercial opportunities of the new technology (Interview No. 3). As a result, "Power struggles and turf-grabbing by various ministries have at times curtailed the state's ability to effectively govern the Internet. In addition to these conflicting interests, inefficiencies and lack of communication among bureaus can also hamper effective state control of the medium" (Kalathil & Boas, 2001). Another Chinese scholar Hu Yong critically pointed out that such management system is low-efficient, time-consuming and wasting human resources. It also encourages corruption (Hu, 2010).

The vast investment and labours spent on this management system show that the Chinese government made a great effort in creating an Internet environment in the name of promoting a safe, healthy and clean Internet space for the Chinese public. Among the 19 Internet supervising and managing organisations, Ministry of Public Security is responsible for filtering and monitoring the Internet content, safeguarding the cybersecurity, cracking down illegal and criminal activities online (Zheng, 2008). This ministry trains and employs a significant number of specialists to check the Internet content from both domestic and overseas websites and social media networks to find political sensitive information and block or delete such content. In this closely knitted

Internet supervision network, domestic website and social media networks are required to enforce self-censorship to filter their online content. By doing so, they can eliminate any illegal or sensitive information before the government finds out which may result in the website or social media networks being fined or shut down by the central government. Therefore, to Chinese Internet firms, survival and policy support are the key issues of secured market share and profits. The government always targets on maintaining "social stability" on online space by filtering unfavourable and sensitive information. However, online media users often expect to use the social media platform to express their opinions freely and comment on political issues. When the conflict between these two parties occurs, the Internet companies usually act as a medium to balance the two parties' relationship.

Under this Internet supervision and management system, in order to protect their profits, social media services need to negotiate with the state and political groups with solutions, such as compromising on, covering up, modifying, and restructuring any particular issues and content, to avoid government's punishment. Since social media users can have contradicted opinions to the Chinese government on quite a few numbers of public affairs and political issues online, the Internet companies realise that they have to conduct self-censorship to avoid legal and political risks. At the same time, Internet companies also need to please their users to increase the number of their service consumers and win their support. Thus, Chinese Internet companies' business strategy seems usually swinging between the government and the public. The former director of Sina Weibo said, "I never believe media can survive with 100% freedom. We are clear of how to provide an inclusive as well as a healthy environment for media to development, no matter it is a search engine, blog, or Weibo" (Interview No. 3).

However, it is not an easy job for Internet companies to satisfy the demands of both the Chinese government and social media users. *Reincarnation Party* refers to a specific group of Weibo users whose Weibo accounts are banned or suspended because of their inappropriate opinions that upset the Chinese government. They register new accounts and name them with their suspended Weibo usernames plus 2nd generation, 3rd generation, and so on (such as xxx1st and xxx2nd) to protest Sina's censorship. Guo Yuhua, a professor from Tsinghua University, wrote articles about his own

experience of being one of the reincarnation party, "I think Sina limited my right of speech and right to know. They also breached the faith and broke their promise" (Hu, 2008, p. 28). It is very challenging for Sina Weibo staff to control those accounts because it is time and labour consuming. Therefore, the Chinese government issued the new policy to require every Weibo user to register their account with real names and ID cards. The new policy has been effective in controlling the number of reincarnation party (Interview No.3). However, compromising on editorial freedom could potentially reduce the number of users, especially those KOLs (key opinion leader) in both online and offline communities. Many past examples have shown that whenever the Chinese government tightened their media censorship, the Internet companies' share price fell, and their market value rapidly dropped (Interview No.3).

The Chinese Internet users are all censored at backstage. If they repeatedly publish sensitive information or express attitude against the Chinese government, they might receive criminal charge or even face sentences (Interview No.4). For example, the closing and recovering of the U.S Embassy Weibo account indicate that even the Weibo account holder is a foreign government body, they could also face political risks if their content is regarded inappropriate by China's Internet censorship. On 5th May 2016, U.S Embassy Weibo can not be accessed as usual from 7 pm. When Weibo users open the front page, an official Sina Weibo statement appeared saying, "According to the relevant regulation and policy, the searching result could not be shown". Their Weibo editor reported it to Sina Weibo and prepared to release a statement about this. However, at 9 pm, the account recovered automatically without any prior arrangements from Sina Weibo. It is not the first time that the U.S Embassy Weibo is banned temporarily by Sina Weibo. It happened every time after the U.S Embassy Weibo published posts with content conflicting with the Chinese government's media censorship. Those posts generated a significant number of supportive and negative comments from the Chinese public. For example, the U.S Embassy Weibo publishes Beijing's air quality index (pm 2.5) regularly since 2011, which made China's environment protection department very embarrassed. That is because the Chinese government never released this information to the public before. Unlike the U.S Embassy Weibo, the British Embassy Weibo seems more cautious on sensitive issues. Even though, some of their posts were deleted by Sina Weibo because the content was

regarded as not appropriate by Sina Weibo's self-censorship (Interview No. 1). For example, the British Embassy Weibo published a post about the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei's art exhibition in London in September 2015. However, this post was blocked by Sina Weibo just 5 minutes after it was published because Ai Weiwei is an influential human rights activist who is not favoured by the Chinese government.

Although China's censorship on Internet content seems complicated and powerful, it is very challenging and even impossible to control all the Weibo content because there are always ways to bypass the censorship by installing anti-blocking software, using proxy servers and email services, as well as avoiding sensitive keywords to create desired content online. At the same time, the Chinese officials also realised that making good use of the challenges from the Internet could increase the country's stability and openness. The government realised that social media, such as Weibo, need to be kept as the "safety valves" of public opinion and emotion (Li & Yeo, 2012). On the one hand, the government has the willingness to know about public opinions to win more support from grassroots; on the other hand, Weibo provides means to control the information dissemination among the public to minimise factors affecting the stability of the Chinese society. Thus, the government's social media strategy is contradictive from within. They also need to learn how to be more adaptive in utilising and managing the Internet content for the country and government's benefit. Therefore, the sophisticated balancing game among the Chinese government, Chinese Internet companies and Internet users will never stop.

As discussed above, the Chinese government is not only controlling the online content but also trying to find the way to be adaptive in the digital age for their own benefit. They are struggling between the freedom brought over by the Internet and challenges of maintaining their political leadership status. Weibo service providers, such as Sina Weibo, need to maintain the balance between survival and profits at the same time. Diplomatic Weibo account holders have the responsibility to fulfil their foreign policy goal in China, communicate with the Chinese public to promote their country and seek benefits for the country they represent. They all intend to maximise their benefits and minimise losses when they interact with each other.

However, Sina Weibo may like a "rambunctious sandbox' (Epstein, 2011) type of toy, but it does have "walls and adult supervision" (Epstein, 2011). As the Chief Correspondent of Forbes China Bureau, Gady Epstein commented, "what goes on inside is monitored and censored rigorously" (Epstein, 2011). In one of his report in March 2011, he discussed the potential barriers to Weibo's growth, one is the Chinese government's regulatory control, and another is "the disconnect between China's Internet and the rest of the world" (Epstein, 2011). For example, in July 2012, Sina suspended the Weibo account of the U.S. Consulate General in Shanghai, which was not the only foreign diplomatic Weibo in China. The Weibo account of Smith Harrison, spokesperson for the U.S. Consulate Generate in Shanghai, was also banned from posting but not suspended. Sina Weibo did not give any reason for the ban but claimed that it might be the technical malfunction. However, according to *Global Times*, a Chinese official newspaper featuring international news, a Weibo post published by the Weibo account of the U.S. Consulate General in Shanghai was responding to a Weibo user called *Shenzhen Laocui*, whom challenged the official announcement of the investigating on a fire accident in Tianjin, could have been one possible reason for the ban (Global Times, 2012). The official announcement announced that there were ten people killed by the department store fire in Tianjin in 2012. However, many people believed there are more victims and discussed this issue on Sina Weibo. The Weibo users challenged the Chinese government for covering up the death toll and real reason for the fire. Police charged an 18-year old social media user with a detention of five days for spreading rumours online and exaggerating the number of death tolls. The China Internet and Information Office also removed some Weibo and WeChat accounts for the same reason. Since the control of online media content is very strict in China, not all information on foreign embassy Weibo could be successfully published. Foreign embassies are becoming used to create effective tactics, such as words with a hidden meaning, to express their opinions and avoid being caught by the censorship.

As a digital public diplomacy tool, the British Embassy Weibo is making an effort in influencing the Chinese public's opinion by publishing information related to China's current affairs and society. Nick Cull states that public diplomacy is all about relationships (Cull, 2016). Moreover, he also emphasised the importance of public opinion as the only one super-power left on the planet (Cull, 2016). Therefore, winning

foreign minds and influencing their public opinions on social media would potentially achieve a diplomatic success. However, the British Embassy Weibo never take too much risk to offend the seven bottom lines set up by the Chinese government on media content. Although they always indicate their opinion with direct reference to particular aspects or problems of China's politics and society, they never give negative comments or show any offensive attitude to the Chinese government. The content is often based on data released by trusted international organisations, such as the United Nations and Red Cross. For example, 10th October 2011 is the *World Day Against Death Penalty*, the British Embassy Weibo published a video featured the British Ambassador to China, Sebastian Wood, saying that the British government hopes to cooperate with the Chinese government and legal sectors to find a way to reduce death penalty. The tone in this post is positive and cooperative. Another example is a post published by the British Embassy Weibo on the World Aids Day 2011 saying that, according to an official investigation among 2,000 Chinese AIDS patients, 42% of these patients think they had suffered discrimination, and 15% lost their jobs due to the illness. This post used the concrete figure from an international authoritative resource to point out the level of the discrimination against the AIDS patients in China. Such kind of approaches make the Chinese government and the Weibo users feel more comfortable to accept different opinions from a foreign embassy.

At the same time, the British Embassy also fulfilled its diplomatic goal and strengthened its influence among the Chinese public. Following Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to the UK in Oct 2015, a "Golden Ten Years" of UK-China relationship was announced officially by the both governments to strengthen further and wider cooperation in many fields especially the economic cooperation between the UK and China. The primary diplomatic goal of the British government also gradually transits to exploring more opportunities to collaborate with China to boost the UK economy. From 2015, the Weibo posts focused more on cooperation, tourism and cultural exchange. According to the former managing editor of the British Embassy Weibo, the number of posts related to Chinese politics has been kept minimal to comply with the new foreign policy objects since 2015 (Interview No.1). The interview and the analysis of this section proved the hypothesis that under prevailing institutional constraints, local political sensitivity indeed has a critical influence on the diplomatic social media interactions with the

foreign public and is decisive in the outcome of the communications agenda.

However, there still are a few occasions that more sophisticated game is played by the editors of the British Embassy Weibo to get away from the government media control. A well-known British Embassy Weibo post provides a classic example of how foreign embassy Weibo accounts survive under the pressure of the Chinese media censorship control. The British Embassy Weibo published a post with a link to the *2013 Human Rights and Democracy Report* in April 2014. In order to get away from the self-censorship of Sina Weibo and the Chinese government's media control, the Weibo editor used "MZ" (the initial alphabets of *Min Zhu*, which is the Chinese word of democracy) and "木又" (two individual Chinese characters that form the character 权, which means rights in Chinese) in the Weibo post. It is one example of the approach called "Martian language" that is used by Chinese Internet users to avoid media censorship's sensitive words filtering. By doing so, the language filtering system could not catch those specific sensitive words in the Weibo posts. This post on the British Embassy Weibo generated 62,000 viewings and heated discussion among Chinese Weibo users. Some users supported this action, but some others also questioned the British government about their problem of human rights and democracy. Since the average number of views of each post on the British Embassy Weibo is about 80, the viewing number of 62,000 is apparently a significant number comparing to that. This example of the game among government media control, Weibo provider and foreign embassy Weibo reflects the contradictions and dilemma among them. Whether to control or to promote certain topics is determined by the level of government's concern upon public opinions. It will subsequently affect the Weibo companies' decision on whether to control or promote specific information on Weibo. As a result, the Weibo companies' decision will affect their user number and profits.

Weibo companies' attitude will also affect foreign embassy Weibo's topic choices, which, in some extreme cases, might determine whether they are allowed to exist. A typical example is the U.S Embassy Weibo's post content about free Chen Guangcheng movement, which was deleted by Sina Weibo. Chen Guangcheng is a blind activist who helps people from his home village to defend their rights. During the process, despite the local government's warning, he revealed the power abuse of local authority.

As a result, Chen was sentenced to jail in 2006 and released from prison in 2010. However, he was still under the house detention and authority monitoring since then. Chinese media have been informed not to touch this topic. However, some Big Vs (public opinion leaders on Weibo) and activists posted information regarding this issue consistently on Weibo. The U.S Embassy Weibo also joined in this heated discussion by posting the photos of Gary Locke, the former U.S Ambassador to China, taking Chen to the hospital. It was not a surprise that Sina Weibo deleted those posts immediately. However, his story has been amplified by public opinion on Weibo, which pushed the government to compromise on this issue and similar issues after Chen's case. In 2014, the British Embassy Weibo published a post to support the jailed Chinese human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng. Sina Weibo did not delete this post, which action received wide recognition from Weibo users. The post used a photo of Gao and his son with a simple sentence means daddy is coming home in a week. It tagged a popular Chinese TV show, *Where Are We Going, Daddy,* to attract more public attention and keyword search without mentioning the sensitive word - human rights.

In summary, the interactions among Sina Weibo, the Chinese government, and foreign embassy Weibo reveal both contradictions and balancing efforts of the three parties. The actions and decisions made by each party tend to affect the balance of their relationship. Although the Chinese government has a higher-level alert for political and civic topics on Weibo, it is also aware of the necessity of allowing some but limited spaces and freedom for Weibo users to express their opinions, which could in return bring more stability to its governance. At the same time, the Weibo operators increasingly play an important role in balancing the relationship between the government and foreign embassy Weibo. They are making the best effort to attract more foreign embassies to open Weibo accounts and at the same time to enforcing self-censorship to reduce the risk of being punished by the government. As Weibo is gradually changing the online public sphere in China, it provides more opportunities for a foreign government to communicate their political opinions to the Chinese public and the government. It opens up a new space for both governments to communicate with each other and fulfil the foreign government's foreign policy objectives.

However, since the limited freedom on Weibo still can not fundamentally change

China's political process and media censorship, foreign embassy Weibo still has to find the best way to influence Chinese public and government's opinion on specific issues. Foreign embassy Weibo such as the British Embassy Weibo is finding the way to bypass the censorship and also balance its relationship with the Chinese government and Sina Weibo. The discussion in this section proved the hypothesis that the contradiction between editorial independence and control increases over time despite the goal to establish a direct dialogue with the foreign public through social media. The findings also prove the other hypothesis that is, in certain countries, digital public space is constrained by both governments and market forces. Diplomatic social media platform could hardly influence and challenge the foundation of the current political regime in a short period.

3.3 Weibo Post Topics and Foreign Policy Implementation

As explained in the theoretical framework section, based on Farrell and Webb's (2002) framework, the professionalisation is relevant to in which way social media can be regarded as a new diplomatic communications method and professional diplomatic technique. This chapter uses the post topics of the British Embassy Weibo to examine how different the digital diplomacy is comparing with traditional diplomatic communications methods such as official press release, arranged interviews via mass media and information published on diplomatic websites. This chapter summarises the Weibo post topics and interaction formats to find out whether social media enables new content in diplomatic communications.

The first focused timeline in this section is from January 2010 to December 2010. At that time, the number of monthly-published posts is ranging from 25 to 64. However, there was a peak of the post number in November 2010 when the British Prime Minister David Cameron visits China. The British Embassy broadcasted his visit live on their Sina Weibo platform. Therefore, the number of posts in that month reached 142. It is the first official live Weibo broadcast of a foreign country leader's visit to China. The content includes not only state visit stories but also light-hearted content such as what lunch that David Cameron had and informal photos of him taken by the British Embassy staff when he had breaks between official meetings. These posts are much less formal

but more personal than the official FCO statement or mass media coverage. The Chinese public had an open window and direct access to see the more private side of a foreign leader and read different stories that are unable to be seen on the British Embassy websites or major mass media outlets in China.

As mentioned earlier, David Cameron wore a poppy to pay tribute to the British war veterans when he appeared in public and major media during his first China visit, which, was unexpected by the British Foreign Office and Cameron himself, as an offence to the Chinese public. In China, poppy associates to opium and the war between China and the UK in the Qing Dynasty. Chinese people, mainly students and young professionals, whom are the most vocal groups on China's social media (Ruan, 2016), considered it indicates an insult from the UK government and posted more than over 20,000 negative comments about the UK and British government on the British Embassy Weibo just a few hours after Cameron appears on TV news and the British Embassy Weibo wearing a poppy. Major mass media outlets in China started to pick up the story with a negative tone. A potential escalation of the conflict was on the edge. There was no time for the British government and the Embassy to respond to the critics through traditional communication channels. It was also challenging to establish a conversation with the Chinese public about this issue directly through traditional communication channels. After measuring the risks and communication methods, Weibo is selected to be the tool to react to this incident. Since Weibo enables large-scale information dissemination and real-time interaction, the British Embassy Weibo team posted content to explain the history of poppy-wearing tradition and established a conversation with the Chinese public via their Weibo platform. They also published a post stating that the UK and China were friends during the 2nd World War. Just two days later, there were no further negative comments regarding poppy left on the British Embassy Weibo. In addition, many major Chinese media also published articles about the UK's poppy tradition. The fast action via social media tool successfully calmed down the situation and established a positive image of the British government at the same time.

The British Embassy Weibo post number was gradually increased from 2010 until a peak was reached in 2012. Then the number started to decrease each year slightly. In

2015, the British Embassy Weibo published 407 posts in total during the first eight months of that year. The average monthly post number for this period was 50, which is nearly as same as that in 2010. Meanwhile, the Weibo posts in parallel to major events during the first six months of 2015 is analysed to find out the connection between major events and post number. In 2015, the British Embassy Weibo normally publishes at least one post on daily basis. During the first six months of 2015, their average daily post number is 1.81, and the average original post number is 1.23. The daily post number increased significantly when Prince William visited China from 1st March to 4th March. On the last day of Prince William's visit, the British Embassy Weibo sent out 14 original posts which number reached the peak of the daily post number in the first six months 2015. This number is also much higher than the average daily post number. In October 2015, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited the UK. The British Embassy Weibo posted a selfie of Xi Jinping, Manchester City football star Sergio Agüero and British Prime Minister David Cameron. The selfie style of the image shows the informal side of the political leaders. It is a typical example of using social media to bring the general public closer to the political leaders and government during major events. The post was reposted 208 times by the followers and generated many reports on mass media. The number of reposts is much higher than its average value of 58 in 2015. This example shows that the British Embassy Weibo usually sends posts in parallel with major diplomatic events and the UK domestic hot issues.

The study also found that the British Embassy Weibo does not focus its agenda too much on the Chinese domestic issues but sometimes echoes to China's current affairs or hot issues. For example, a post on 28th February 2015 featured Ed Davey, the former British Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, in a video investigation about China's pollution produced by a Chinese famous TV presenter Chai Jing, introduced the experience of how the British government used legal, marketing, innovative and industrial transforming methods to reduce 80% of pollution in ten years. Another example is a post published on 29th May 2015. In this post, two Chinese film stars announced their relationship with a photo titled "Us" on Sina Weibo. This post generated a vast volume of responses among the public. Shortly after, the British Embassy Weibo posted the photo of Prince William and Kate Middleton as well as their new-born Princess Charlotte with a title – "Us". This post also received many responses

and well wishes from the Chinese public. As Ping Liu, the former managing editor of the British Embassy Weibo, described: "We try to link with local hot topics, too. For example, given milk produced in China does not have a decent reputation; we thought it might be interesting if we told some stories about British milk. In the final tweet we published, we explained how different coloured caps represent the different fat percentages of British milk. The tweet was retweeted 286 times. Many people expressed their interest in drinking British milk, while there were also people who had been to the UK saying that they missed the true taste of milk. The tweet was published when Owen Paterson, Secretary of State DEFRA, was visiting Shanghai and Guangzhou on a business trip during which he was hoping to balance the exports and imports of British dairy products, so the tweets tied in with our prosperity agenda" (Liu, 2013). Her explanation further proved the findings from content analysis in this study.

Taking all the 325 British Embassy Weibo posts in the first six months of 2015 as examples, there are 221 original posts created by the British Embassy Weibo team. Among those original posts, except the posts about the British Embassy events and visa information, which are mainly official statements and press releases, the rest of the posts provide multimedia content of alternative coverage of the major events and personal experience of the British diplomats and politicians. The types of these 211 original posts are divided into eight categories, which are introduction to the UK, culture/history, embassy event/visa information, UK-China exchange, tourism, education, environment/animal protection and others. It is noticeable that 51.6% of the original posts focus on UK-China exchange activities and introduction to the UK society. 20.4% of them are about the British Embassy events and visa information. Only 9.5% of the posts are about the British culture and history. There are even much fewer posts about tourism and education. The reason behind this is that the Weibo accounts of the British Council and Visit Britain mainly provide original Weibo content of culture, education and tourism, while the British Embassy's primary duty is developing bilateral relationship between the UK and China.

There are links to the other official Weibo accounts of the other British government and non-government organisations, such as the British Council Weibo, IELTS Weibo, Visit Britain Weibo, and Scottish Government Weibo, that are available on the front page of

the British Embassy Weibo. Weibo users can access specific information according to their interests from those links. Besides, the British Embassy Weibo also provides links to some selected posts from those Weibo accounts to promote them. By doing so, "the Weibo users can find needed information more efficiently" (Interview No.1). Under certain circumstances, this practice also helps to unify the message across different UK related Weibo accounts and promote these accounts to attract more followers. For example, David Cameron launched the GREAT Campaign in 2011 to promote the positive image of the UK world widely to boost the British economy. In China, all the UK government Weibo accounts and many non-governmental accounts joined the online campaign of this initiative. They sent Weibo posts featured their specialised area with a unified format of "… is GREAT" to promote the different sectors in the UK and shared post links from other organisations' Weibo accounts. This practice amplified the voice and message of the GREAT Campaign by integrating the Weibo content across different UK related Weibo accounts.

This study selected three focused time frames to observe the evolution of the British Embassy Weibo topics over these periods. They are:

- 01/01/11 – 30/06/11

   This time frame was selected because 2011 is the first full calendar year of the former British Ambassador, Sebastian Wood's term in China. This study chose the other two periods within which the former British Ambassador, Barbara Woodward, is on her term in the British Embassy China. This study aims to find out the differences in Weibo post topic choices between the terms of these two ambassadors.

- 01/01/15 – 30/06/15

   In January 2015, the former British Ambassador to China started her term of appointment.

- 01/01/18 – 30/06/18

   It is the end of the research time frame of the whole study. The British Embassy Weibo posts during the period is analysed in order to compare and therefore find

out the differences between the topics of earlier posts and most recent ones on the British Embassy Weibo.

Figure 4 shows that the British Embassy Weibo focuses mainly on promoting the British culture and providing information on the UK's political and diplomatic event, as well as diplomatic services such as the UK visa application information. Most of the posts have distinctive themes and carry key messages defined by the communications department of the FCO (Interview No.1). It is noticeable from the figure 4 that the British Embassy Weibo posts cover a wide range of topics which are discussed below to find out if they reflect the British government's foreign policy communication goals in China.

Types of British Embassy Weibo Post Topic

Topic	2011	2015	2018
UK Introduction	22	20	23
Culture/Sports/Entertainment	107	82	104
Politics/Diplomacy	187	102	87
UK-China Exchange	38	23	46
Tourism/Education	44	39	56
Public Welfare	37	54	42
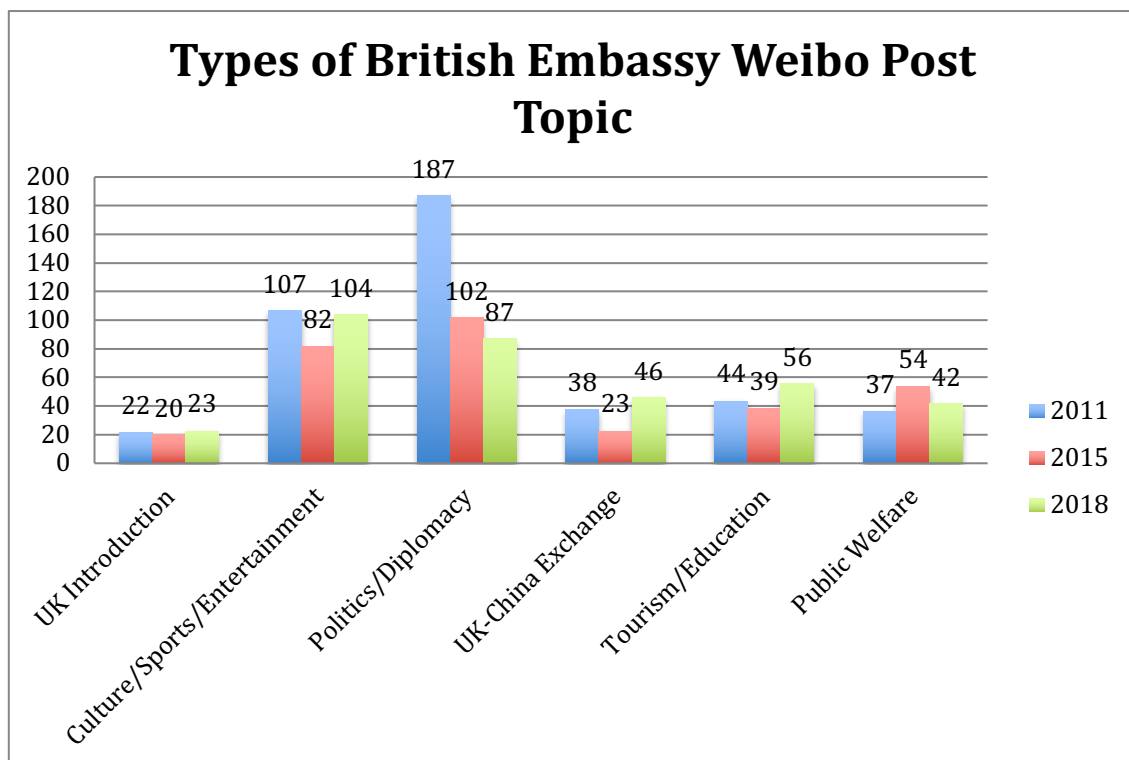
Figure 4: British Embassy Weibo Post Topics Number Breakdown (Sample Time Frame: 01/01/11 to 30/06/11, 01/01/15 to 30/06/15, and 01/01/18 to 30/06/18)

- Live Weibo broadcast of diplomatic and political events
  Since Weibo can disseminate information in real time and reach the target audience directly, the British Embassy uses these features to cover the major diplomatic and political events live with text, image, and video formats. The

British Embassy Weibo also enabled live discussion along with the live event coverage on Weibo to collect public opinions and further explain the events in detail to the Chinese public. This kind of live Weibo broadcast has two main characters. The first one is multi-media format which increases the quantity and quality of the information that is limited by traditional media coverage. The Chinese public receives more information on the event than they could receive from mass media. The second one is the use of the informal style of narrative and specific language on social media to attract more followers on Weibo. The traditional media coverage of diplomatic event usually has a formal tone, which is less attractive to the younger audiences who are the main active Weibo users (Du and Hou, 2013). On the contrary, the British Embassy Weibo uses personalised and unofficial tone to cover the formal diplomatic event.

For example, Prince William visited China in March 2015. His visit was live broadcasted on the British Embassy Weibo with multi-media content, which provided richer information than traditional media reports. The first posts of his visit generated more than 1,273 reposts, 498 comments, and 713 likes. These figures are over ten times of the average values of each category in 2015. Key influencers on Weibo generated a significant number of reposts. Since these influencers have a vast number of followers, their reposts helped the information to be disseminated among wider users. Mass media also used information from the British Embassy Weibo posts in their coverage. Besides, the British Embassy Weibo organised quiz and prize draw to attract more attention from the younger Weibo users to the event. Therefore, social media provides the suitable method and channel to reach the younger generation (Mershon, 2012). Weibo provides a public sphere to interact and engage with the Chinese public. Therefore, using Weibo to reach this specific group of audience reflects the "FCO's goal to engage with Chinese youth" (Interview No.1). However, although some of the live broadcast posts on the British Embassy Weibo have a high number of repost, it does not necessarily suggest that the followers all have a positive attitude towards the events. Therefore, the high numbers of reposts and comments do not necessarily link to significant influence and success of Weibo diplomacy. This phenomenon is further discussed in chapter 5. This research aims to provoke further critical thoughts about tackling those challenges when

using social media to fulfil foreign policy goals in the future.

- Introducing British culture and society

  Public diplomacy researcher Kejin Zhao wrote, "In the era of globalisation, the competition of soft power becomes an important part of international competition. Many countries develop strategic culture diplomacy in order to shape and promote their nation's cultural image" (Zhao, 2007, p409). Figure 4 shows that the number of posts about the British culture on the British Embassy Weibo ranks the 2nd place among all the topic categories. These carefully and purposely selected topics contain tailored and exclusive information that attracted attention from the Chinese Weibo users and developed their knowledge and understanding about the UK. The Weibo posts about the British culture covers below areas:

1. British Food – The Weibo posts introduce British food with impressive images and description.

2. Sports – The Weibo posts introduced the English football team and famous footballers, as well as other sports in the UK.

3. TV and Film – Many British TV programs and films such as *Downton Abbey*, *Sherlock*, *Paddington, and Harry Potter* are very popular in China. The British Embassy introduced many filming locations of those products and told stories behind the scene in their Weibo posts. When *Downton Abbey* was aired on China Central TV on 23rd April 2013, The British Embassy Weibo sent a series of posts to introduce this TV drama.

4. Festival – The Weibo posts introduced many British traditional and popular festivals such as Christmas, St. Patrick Day and Gay Pride.

5. Tourism – The British Embassy sent out original posts and share the posts from the Weibo account of Visit Britain to attract Chinese tourists to visit the UK.

6. Transportation – The UK is well known for the trains and undergrounds network. The British Embassy sent may posts to introduce the history and knowledge of London undergrounds, as well as some famous railway stations such as 9¾ platform in King's Cross Railway Station which became famous among Chinese public because of the books and films of *Harry Potter*.

7. UK education information: Student visa information and introduction to the UK

education - The primary duty of a foreign embassy is representing a country to improve the political relationship and promoting cooperation in economy, culture, education, science, and military between two countries. Therefore, providing useful information such as visa application, tourism, and education is one of the major functions of the British Embassy Weibo. Chinese people can ask questions in these areas and receive instant and official answers through online Weibo interview, reminders, and real-time response on the British Embassy Weibo. Any changes of the UK visa application policy were updated in time on their Weibo account. In addition, the Weibo also provide tips on entering the custom in the UK, such as the food items that allowed to be brought into the UK and how to fill in the border entry card. In this respect, the British Embassy Weibo serves as a diplomatic service provider for the Chinese people.

- UK-China exchange and cooperation
  By analysing the post content, this study finds that the British Embassy Weibo helps to promote the exchange and cooperation between the UK and China to bring benefits to the UK. As former British Foreign Secretary William Hague described in his speech on Britain's Foreign Policy in a Networked World in July 2010, "There is now a mass of connections between individuals, civil society, businesses, pressure groups and charitable organisations which are also part of the relations between nations and which are being rapidly accelerated by the internet." He said that the Britain intends to pursue a Foreign Policy that "makes the most of the abundant opportunities of the 21st century" (Hague, 2010).

Since 2004, the UK and China have become the strategic development partners. The former British Prime Minister, David Cameron, coined the notion of *the Golden Era of UK-China relations* "to promote Chinese President Xi Jinqing's state visit to the UK in 2015" (Turner, 2018). The British delegations also visited China twice in 2011 and 2014. The United Kingdom became China's third biggest trade partners within the EU. Meanwhile, China is the third biggest trade partner to the UK internationally. The British government hopes to attract more investment from China to the UK to stimulate the UK economy in a long term. In

addition to the Weibo posts about official cooperation and exchanges, there are also many posts contain information of unofficial or non-governmental exchanges. For example, the British Embassy Weibo provides links to the news coverage about China from the British press and tagged it as "What the UK papers say about China" to enable Chinese Weibo users searching the content conveniently. It also sent a series of posts with the topic of "British People in China" on the official launch of the British Embassy Weibo to introduce the life and career of British people in China as well as their experience about China. These topics successfully attracted the Chinese public's attention because they introduce the daily life in the UK directly and vividly.

- Weibo hot topics

Since 2010, the British Embassy Weibo posted a great number of posts about many different aspects of the UK. The British Embassy Weibo uses hashtags to help the Weibo users to search content they are interested in much faster and easier. According to the Sina Weibo editor, using hashtags could significantly increase Weibo user's stickiness to the site (Interview No.4). In other words, Weibo users tend to return to the British Embassy Weibo for tailored content and fast searching function. As a result, the level of engagement with the public increases accordingly. Below table shows all the hot topics featured in the British Embassy Weibo content in the first six months of 2015. As shown in table 3, nearly half of all the topics are related to the UK's national image. The rest of the topics are mainly related to the British culture and society. Therefore, it can be concluded that the most important objective of the British Embassy Weibo is establishing a positive national image of the UK among the Chinese public.

On the other hand, China's economy is getting much stronger in the past 20 years. From 2010 to 2017, China's GDP increased from 41,303 billion to 82,712 billion (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2018). In responding to this change, the British foreign policy in China focuses more on economic cooperation and cultural exchange to strengthen the relationship between the two countries (Interview No.1). The Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and the British government announced 2015 as the Year of UK-China Cultural Exchange while Li visited the UK in 2015. Therefore, most of the British Embassy Weibo posts

in 2015 are related to the cultural exchange theme. Under this setting of the foreign policy in China, the British Embassy Weibo sets out its agenda of topic dimension in two directions since 2015: One is promoting UK's national image and core value to win popularity among Chinese public; Another one is shortening the distance between the UK and Chinese public to build a stronger relationship between people in the two countries (Interview No.1).

No.	Hot Topic	Related Post Content
1	UK Visa Guide	Part of GREAT Campaign
2	UK-China Year of Culture	All Events of UK-China Year of Culture
3	Music is GREAT	Part of GREAT Campaign
4	Countryside is GREAT	Part of GREAT Campaign
5	Creativity is GREAT	Part of GREAT Campaign
6	Film is GREAT	Part of GREAT Campaign
7	Heritage is GREAT	Part of GREAT Campaign
8	Innovation is GREAT	Part of GREAT Campaign
9	Sport is GREAT	Part of GREAT Campaign
10	UK Summer Camp Visa Tips	Visa Application Information of UK Summer Camp
11	Global Women Entrepreneur Conference	All Events and Reports of Global Women Entrepreneur Conference
12	International Day of Against Homophobia	All Events of International Day of Against Homophobia
13	World Press Freedom Day	Report and information of World Press Freedom Day
14	Harry Potter Tree	Story of the Harry Potter Tree
15	Nepal Earthquake	Information and Well Wishes to Nepal Earthquake
16	Eternal Shakespeare	All Events to Highlight Shakespeare's Products
17	Beijing International Film Festival	UK's Participation in the Beijing International Film Festival
18	British Embassy Jobs	List of jobs at the British Embassy China
19	No Dealing, No Killing Campaign	Campaign Video and Event Information
20	Say NO to Illegal Wildlife Products Campaign	Report on combating Illegal Wildlife Hunting
21	Prince William Visit to China	Live Weibo Broadcast of Prince William's Visit to China
22	Wuhan UK Week	All Events of Wuhan UK Week
23	St. Patrick's Day	History of St. Patrick's Day
24	Creative UK Celebration	All Events of Creative UK Celebration
25	International Women's Day	Greetings to Chinese Women
26	Paddington Film	All Events and Information of Paddington Film
27	Name UK Visa Competition	Competition to Name 3 Types of UK Visa
28	800 Years of the Great Charter	Events and History of Great Charter

29	International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust	Memorial Messages of Victims of the Holocaust
30	Hogwarts Express Train	Hogwarts Express Train launched in London Harry Potter Theme Park
31	Burns Night	History of Burns Night
32	UK Press	A Collection of Latest news from UK Press

Table 3: Hot Weibo Topics Within the First Six Months of 2015 on the British Embassy Weibo (Accessed on 30/05/2018).

Therefore, the analysis result of the Weibo hot topics reflects the main British diplomatic goals in China, which are strengthening the partnership with China and further maintaining Britain's status in the EU and worldwide. However, in the light of the Brexit, Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the Huawei issues, the relationship between the UK and China may be shifted and reformulated. Future researches are needed to find out how British foreign service adapts to these changes in digital diplomacy strategy in China.

The British Embassy uses Weibo to communicate "with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation's ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture" (Tuch, 1990, p.3). Existing researches suggest that social media platforms are vital tools of public diplomacy (Harris, 2013). This research regards the British Embassy Weibo as a new public diplomacy tool yielding soft power and focuses on how Weibo content generates cultural appeals of the UK among the Chinese public. Weibo facilitates a channel for promoting cultural understanding beyond boundaries between countries. The cultural, tourism, and educational information, as a resource of soft power, provided by the British Embassy Weibo are all aiming to promote cultural understanding and engagement. However, this kind of cultural communication sometimes is resisted by the followers who have negative attitudes towards the UK or any Western countries. This resistance force limits the impact and influence of the British Embassy Weibo. It is discussed in chapter 5 in details. Another notable finding of the content analysis is that most of the posts about culture and tourism are simply information posting rather than interaction with followers. The British Embassy tends to use the Weibo account as a media rather than social media to influence the followers at a more profound level.

The analysis of the topics of the British Embassy Weibo's posts shows that the British Embassy Weibo uses Weibo as a diplomatic tool to implement and fulfil the UK foreign policy goal in China and promote the UK's positive national image among the Chinese public. Realism scholar Hans Morgenthau suggests that the primary goal of diplomacy is to promote national interest with moral solutions (Morgenthau, 1948). In the Realism point of views, a country's foreign policy is primarily owned by its national leaders and government bodies. However, the fulfilment of foreign policy goal depends on the decisions and actions made by national leaders (Bettistella, 2007). Before public diplomacy was recognised in IR studies, nations are anthropomorphised as national leaders' characters among the foreign public. With the arrival of Internet technology, the foreign public can access information of a foreign country without merely relying on mass media but also website and social media. As a result, they have been given more resources to understand a foreign country from multiple angles.

Although the British Embassy Weibo has a focus on the economy and cultural exchange, it does not avoid discussing the hot political issues in China and presents the view of the British government directly even there is disagreement and different opinions between the two countries. Every year, the British Embassy Weibo shares the links to the *Human Rights and Democracy Report* published by the British government, which contains critical content about China's human rights status. The British Embassy Weibo is also actively involved in some other issues in China, such as China's wildlife protection development. For example, during Prince William's visit in March 2015, the British Embassy Weibo sent 18 posts encouraging China to be part of the international wildlife protection actions. Later on, they published a post on 29th May 2015 to praise China's action in destroying illegal wildlife products. Those examples show that the British Embassy Weibo presents the British Government's political view directly and comments on China's current affairs actively. Therefore, above findings proved the hypothesis that social media used in diplomatic communication serves as promising vehicles for government agency members to "address issues that may not be part of the official policy agenda, to raise complaints that cannot be delivered in person, and to collaborate across organizational or geographic boundaries" (Mahler and Regan, 2009, p. 2).

While the diplomatic social media platforms send posts to promote their foreign policy

and political interests, foreign public also takes an important role in influencing foreign government's policy formulation and diplomatic practice. The openness of social media technology provides space for the foreign public to take part in direct and real- time dialogue with the foreign government. Social media users can reach an agreement to a particular agenda and formulate their judgment upon those issues on the social media platform. Nowadays, foreign policy formulation and practice are increasingly related to public opinions received from social media. Social media users have become a new network in addition to NGOs that cast their influence on foreign government's foreign policy formulation and practice. Section 3.4 gives the examples about the interaction between the British Embassy Weibo and Chinese public, which affects the foreign policy decision-making process.

This section argues that the British Embassy Weibo posts coordinate with major diplomatic events and current affairs very closely to implement the British government's diplomatic practice in China. Social media technology enables the change of the traditional diplomatic communication model from one-way communication to two-way real-time interaction. The foreign public is given access for the first time to participate in direct diplomatic communications with foreign diplomatic service and diplomats to influence their practice and even foreign policy agenda setting process. The hypothesis responded by the analysis of this section is that the evolution of the web 2.0 technologies improves a country's communication with its foreign public around important events and helps to establish the interest groups over the time.

3.4 Interactivity Matters

The message dissemination needs to be accomplished through media. Traditionally, the general public obtains foreign policy information through mass media. With the arrival of social media, the public can receive, respond to diplomatic information and participate in diplomatic communication process and activities directly. Based on Farrell and Webb's (2002) operationalisation of professionalisation, immediacy and interactivity emerged in the new diplomatic communication on social media. Social media such as Weibo helps foreign service to attract attention from the foreign public through immediate interaction enabled by the Web 2.0 technology. As Steven Linzell, digital communications officer at the British Embassy Madrid, wrote in his blog, "Seeing

the online activity from around the network, one thing has stood out above all else – the ability to engage, and, through that, the opportunity to provide platforms for open, democratic and transparent discussion, sometimes in places where few exist" (Linzell, 2016).

On the other hand, social media content can be published, revised and updated immediately. Meanwhile, the technical requirement to the digital diplomatic communication practitioners is not high. They can update the posts and deal with the public comments from their devices anywhere with Wi-Fi or mobile Internet connections. This feature enables fast updating of information and quick response to diplomatic events and current affairs. As one of the variables in this research, immediacy was measured by using content analysis to calculate the response rate of diplomatic events on the British Embassy Weibo, for example, the former British Home Secretary Teresa May scrapped the PSW visa (Post Study Work Permit) for international students in 2009. China's major media outlets interpreted it as a hostile attitude towards international students. The number of Chinese students in the UK dropped dramatically that year. Before the British Embassy Weibo launched later in that year, the communications team of the British Embassy and the British Council had to travel around China to explain the new visa policy to mass media and public, as well as bought media columns to publish related information, which incurred high costs and workloads. Since 2010, the newly launched British Embassy Weibo started to host a series of new student visa policy campaigns including video, live chats with visa officers, and real-life stories to provide official information and answer questions from the public directly. The British Embassy Weibo also called for the Chinese students to name the new visa application service to encourage further positive communication with them. These tactics helped to eliminated misunderstandings among the Chinese public on the new visa policy. Since then, the number of Chinese students started to resume gradually. It is a typical example of how social media helps the British foreign service to stop negative media coverage, engage with the foreign public, and response immediately during a crisis without huge costs and labours.

The findings from data analysis during the selected period shows that the British Embassy Weibo responded to diplomatic events as well as China and UK's current

affairs almost 2-3 times every week. The major events covered during this period include UK/China state visits, the royal baby, Changjiang River ferryboat accident, Queen's speech, and the UK's achievement in science and technology. The number of public responses to these posts is fairly high. Furthermore, most of the responses were published within 24 hours after the post was sent out. Thus, the public responses to the British Embassy Weibo account are received faster than that to official statements or news stories and interviews on traditional media. To certain extent, Weibo becomes the new and alternative press conference for the British foreign service in China. Those Weibo posts provided an alternative version of the story that is reported in the major media outlets and depicted the events differently from the angle of the British Embassy's original view. The language used in the posts adds more personal touch which the official foreign service statement does not normally contain.

Timing is another variable related to immediate interaction in this research. In order to study this variable, this research reviewed the frequency of sending Weibo posts over the selected time scale. During the first six months of 2015, the British Embassy Weibo sent out 2.3 posts every day in average, except 28th February 7th, 11th, 1st, 15th, 21st and 22nd March, when there were no posts published. The post number peaked in March when Prince William visited China. The figure indicates that the British Embassy Weibo has made great effort to promote the important diplomatic event to attract attention from the Chinese public. On 1st and 4th March, the interaction rate increased significantly and peaked within the selected period when the British Embassy Weibo live broadcasted Prince William's visit to China. During these two days, the average comments received from the Weibo users were 26.7. While the average number of reposts is 66 for each post.

The British Embassy's effort in taking more initiatives in Weibo communication have been recognised by the Chinese public and major media outlets positively. This study found that the Chinese media coverage (including Chinese media outlets from Hong Kong, Taiwan and overseas) about the British Embassy Weibo since it was launched are mostly positive and used words such as "creative", "transparent", and "meng" (a newly created Chinese word on social media means adorable and charming) to describe it. Some articles directly used the British Embassy Weibo content as an official

information resource when they cover the UK related news. It shows that the Chinese media has recognised the British Embassy Weibo as another official information resource of the British government and taken a positive stance in it.

The result of focus group interviews in this study also shows the Chinese public welcomes and has a strong willingness to interact with the British Embassy on this platform. The result of the focus group survey shows that 90% of the participants strongly agree that the British Embassy Weibo provides exclusive information about the UK, which they could not obtain from other resources. Over 85% of the participants agree that the British Embassy Weibo provides a convenient channel to access diplomatic service information. Almost 60% of them strongly agree that there are active interactions between the British Embassy Weibo and its followers. The rest of them would like to see more interactive features in the future. However, only 25% of the participants received direct response towards their comments, but more than half of them found answers to their questions from the Weibo posts that provided answers for general public. All the participants feel being involved directly in the communication process with a foreign service organisation. They all agreed that they had a better understanding of the British culture and society after following the British Embassy Weibo. All of them have more interest in studying, travelling and working in the UK, as well as participating in the UK related events and activities. One of the British Embassy Weibo follower mentioned during the focus group interview in 2015, "I am really excited to be able to have a direct dialogue with a foreign embassy and obtain original information without being edited by media just with my fingertips." Another follower said the British Embassy Weibo is "informal and close to normal people by speaking our language." (Focus Group, 20/07/15). Those public responses indicate that the Weibo users generally have a positive experience of the communication and interaction features of the British Embassy Weibo. The level of communication immediacy through Weibo communication increased significantly than what it was during the time of traditional diplomatic communication.

In summary, the findings prove the hypothesis that a higher number of responses from digital diplomacy content editors to target foreign public indicate a higher level of engagement than traditional diplomatic communication methods. Those findings also

prove the hypothesis that social media provide instant response platform for foreign service to communicate with the foreign public directly and response to events or urgent issues immediately.

Interactivity does not only refer to real-time dialogue and immediate response but also relates to technical interactions. Weibo links different information resources in the digital network and enables information sharing and wider conversation with other Weibo accounts owners. The links provided in British Embassy Weibo posts are selected from various resources, including major media outlets from both China and the UK, the British and Chinese government as well as other relevant organisations. During the first six months of 2015, there were 85 links in total embedded in the British Embassy Weibo posts. Among them, 33 links linked to the other UK organisations' Weibo accounts or websites, 25 to the UK and Chinese current affairs media coverage, 21 to the UK Gov's visa policy website, and six to the video Interviews of British diplomats in China. The majority of these links are from professionalised and authoritative resources, such as mainstream media and government organisations, which content are more credible. It indicates a high level of professionalisation of the British Embassy Weibo. The findings prove the hypothesis that using social media allows diplomatic service to connect the foreign public to other sources and therefore widen the scale of engagement. However, the high percentage of the links to government resources also indicates the high level of restrictions of the resources that diplomatic social media accounts can link to due to their official nature.

On the other hand, the new media technology also enables real-time comments, feedbacks and content sharing. "According to the Web 2.0 philosophy, the success of a blog derives from its external visibility in the blogosphere, and the blogger's ability to link and engage with other bloggers interested in the same fields or topics" (Criado & Fuentes, 2007, p. 7). During the first six months of 2015, this research selected the posts between 24th February and 25th March to calculate the interaction rate. The reason for selecting this specific period is that there are more comments left for the posts regarding the visit of Prince William to China. This study observed and compared the levels of interaction between the British Embassy Weibo and Chinese public during major events and quieter time. In this research, the interaction rate is defined as the

percentage of the number of comments and reposts against the total number of the British Embassy Weibo followers. Within this selected period, the average number of comments is 26.7. While the average number of repost of each post is 66. Thus, the interaction rate is between 0.00008 and 0.0064. During this period, there were no Weibo post updates on 28th Feburary, 7th, 11th, 14th, 15th, 21st, and 2nd March. Thus, the interaction rate on those dates is 0. The numbers of comment and repost reached to the top between 1st and 4th March because the British Embassy live broadcasted Prince William's first visit to China on their Weibo account. It attracted a great number of followers whom left comments and asked questions on the British Embassy Weibo. The number of comments in March 2015 peaked at 677, which is significantly higher than the average number of comments in that month. The interaction rate peaked as 0.0064 at the same time.

The figures prove the hypothesis that social media tool enhances responsiveness and transparency of diplomatic communication, which attract foreign public's participation in diplomatic dialogue. Although much higher than the average values, the number of responses from the British Embassy Weibo to the Weibo users remains low comparing to the number of comments. Meanwhile, the interaction rate during the rest of the period kept relatively steady, which indicates that the British Embassy Weibo interacts with its followers at a steady level. The content analysis in this section shows that the interaction and conversation on the British Embassy Weibo remain limited. The Weibo communication's advantages for strengthening engagement with the Chinese public has not been fully exploited. The high number of comments does not necessarily indicate a high level of connection.

The last indicator of the level of interaction is the use of multimedia content and interactive technology on the British Embassy Weibo account. It shows to what extent that interactive and multimedia technology has been used in the British Embassy Weibo account. During the first six months of 2015, the British Embassy Weibo produced and uploaded 24 videos including the original video content created by the British Embassy through a Chinese mobile video production application MeiPai, the video links to external video websites such as YouKu, as well as the video materials from other resources such as film trailers, TV news clips and live performance recordings. They have widely explored the use of multiple resources to provide multimedia content on

the British Embassy Weibo. The use of videos is also increasing over the time. During the last six months of 2017, they created and uploaded 76 videos, which tripled the number in the first six months of 2015. It shows that the British Foreign service is increasingly embedded multimedia technology in their digital diplomatic content. There are also some other interactive functions used on the British Embassy Weibo, such as online poll, as well as Weibo campaign and prize draw. Those functions effectively attract many more followers and content sharing. There are also links to the "visa information page", "human rights report page" and the other external webpages containing more detailed information of a specific topic featured in the Weibo account.

All of those above interactive features are made accessible on the British Embassy Weibo. There are direct links to follow the Weibo, send private messages to the editors, as well as share, comment and like the British Embassy Weibo post attached to each post. Those links encourage wider disseminations of the content outside the British Embassy Weibo account. Topics are highlighted by hashtags for easy searching and participation of discussions. On the left-hand side of each Weibo page, there are links of relevant articles, videos, other related organisations to enhance followers' information-seeking experience and make it easier to access related information resources. The primary colours of the British Embassy Weibo's visual design are blue and red, which represent the British national flag's colours. It used an image of an energetic urban young girl posing in front of the landmark buildings in London, which reflects the key message of the British Foreign Office's GREAT campaign in China featuring culture, sports, tourism, health, science innovation, and education. The visual effect tries to portrait the UK's image as a young, modern, innovative, and classic. This appealing design helps to generate the key target group of the British digital diplomatic communication in China, the young urban Weibo users' interests. It also indicates the professionalisation of the digital content, which encourages better acceptance among the younger generation of Chinese public as any political public relations practice would do.

Picture 1: The Front Page of the British Embassy Weibo (Accessed on 08/02/18)

The result of the analysis in this chapter indicates that the British Foreign service makes regular use of the Web 2.0 technology to interact with the Chinese public and explores external online resources to enrich the experience of using the British Embassy Weibo. Their Weibo communication with the Chinese public is two-way and changes the traditional approach of diplomatic communication by providing interactive features and multimedia content. However, since the British Embassy Weibo is still restrained by the authoritative nature and political sensitivity, it needs to manage the Weibo content smartly to comply to both the standard of the FCO's communication policy and China's local media regulation. In this respect, the same code of conduct of traditional diplomatic communication also applies to digital diplomacy.

The discussion in this section indicates that perhaps it is still not easy to let go of the traditional hierarchies and allow space for the new media to perform effectively with all its new technical features. The biggest challenge in conducting innovative digital diplomacy practice comes from the tension between being both discreet and exposed at the same time. Since personal presence becomes vital in political influence, the line

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divides personal and professional is increasingly blurring. Some of the digital diplomacy practitioners start to give non-classic advice. Those experienced digital diplomacy practitioners identified the limitation of diplomatic social media openness. Hugh Elliott, Director of Communication at the British Foreign Office, and Tom Fletcher, a senior British diplomat and the writer of *Naked Diplomacy* both consider taking risks is a key success factor in social media. Tom Fletcher (2016) suggests to "create an argument", which refers to create content that can attract attention from the foreign public and encourage discussion among them. Meanwhile, he also suggests that all diplomats "have to be prepared to tolerate mistakes" (Fletcher, 2016). As Hugh wrote in his blog, "The reality is that you can't be successful at social media as a diplomat without taking risks. You have to be interesting, or no-one will read, watch or listen to you". According to the former British Embassy Weibo's managing editor, the Weibo content is normally approved by the Press Secretary of the British Embassy China and sometimes by the British Ambassador or even higher level of staff in the FCO depending on the content and occasions (Interview No.1).

Thus, the Weibo content is not always managed like the other official information released by the FCO, which was completely edited and agreed by the FCO's central communication department. It indicates that the British Embassy Weibo allows content that is not appearing in any other official channels of FCO. On the other hand, it means the Weibo content could carry the personalities of its editors and creators. Therefore, the next chapter aims to find out what influence of personal presence has been brought to digital diplomatic communication and the content evolution from formal statements to personalised multi-media social media posts.

In summary, this chapter explores the communication tactics and the change of the role of diplomats and diplomatic communicators in the transition from traditional way of conducting diplomacy to digital diplomacy. The findings in this chapter suggest firstly that the British Embassy Weibo content always coordinate with the major diplomatic events and echo the current international affairs to implement foreign policy communication of the FCO. The British Embassy Weibo allows alternative and light-hearted content to attract audiences whom may not favour the formal information on mass media and other official channels. The language used in the Weibo posts is

sometimes informal, which helps the British Embassy Weibo carry some of the same characters of other Weibo accounts. Secondly, the lack of interactions between the British Embassy Weibo and its followers during the selected research timeframe is quite apparent. Interactivity is still very limited but has potential in future development. Therefore, the British Embassy Weibo does not actively utilise the interactive feature of the Weibo platform, which may due to the constraints of active conversation on diplomatic communication channels. Thirdly, the outlook of the British Embassy Weibo is professionalised and tailored to attract target groups on social media. Lastly, like all the other digital diplomacy channels, the British Embassy Weibo also struggles with the conflicts between openness and sensitivity. Besides, it must face up to the tensions from local media censorship and online nationalistic activities in China. This issue is discussed in chapter 5. Chapter 4 researches the narrative of the British Embassy Weibo to understand its content from the angle of personalisation.

Chapter 4: Develop Personality of Diplomacy: Personalisation in the British Embassy Weibo

The press team at the British Embassy drafts press releases and organises press events as their daily routine practice. These duties are the most common everyday task of diplomatic communication in most of the foreign embassies in China by 2010 (Interview No.1). The First Secretary of Press at the British Embassy provides daily press briefing and oversees press events. However, Weibo breaks this traditional diplomatic communication routine. As a result, digital diplomatic communication content enriches the information that could be accessed by the Chinese public. Additionally, according to the reports of China Internet Network Information Centre (CNNIC, 2015 and 2018), social media and mobile application have become the primary news and information resources accessed by people aged from 18 to 40 in Mainland China. These group of social media users prefer informal language style and personal experience presented in the social media content (CNNIC, 2018). Therefore, traditional media coverage on diplomatic event and official statements from diplomatic services are not attractive for the younger generation of Chinese people. Instead, the personalised and unofficial narrative used in the foreign embassy Weibo accounts has more opportunity to be accessed and well received by the Chinese public.

Since Weibo became one of the communication tools of the British Embassy in China from 2009, the British diplomats and press officers can have a conversation directly with the Chinese social media users. The diplomats can interact with any Weibo users as an individual rather than as a government officer from foreign countries. Therefore, people can see the British Ambassador to China posing like Jessie J to promote the campaign of Music is GREAT. They can also learn how to make gingerbread biscuits as a Christmas tradition from the British Consular in General in Guangzhou. The British Consular in General in Shanghai plays a role in their office version of *Love Actually* to promote British film and give his Christmas greetings to the Chinese people.

The digital diplomacy practitioners' personal style and choice of language add personal presence to the diplomatic content and affect the openness and interactivity on social media channels. However, as discussed in chapter 3, there is a great challenge in

maintaining the balance between secrecy and openness on digital diplomacy platforms. In this context, personalisation means "writing style characterised by personalisation" (Wall, 2005). This chapter's analysis is built upon the theoretical framework adapted from Bjerling's (2012) three dimensions of personalisation, which are personified, orientation towards persona, and intimization. Chapter 4 addresses these three dimensions to reflect the character and level of personalisation of the British Embassy Weibo. It helps this study to have an in-depth exploration into the personalised narrative and address the complexity of digital diplomacy communication process in a separated dimension from professionalisation. Therefore, the findings answered a part of the central research question: how did personalisation help to articulate the British Embassy Weibo content? The research method in this chapter is narrative research, which focuses on the content style and language usage in the Weibo posts.

Section 4.1 discusses how is the British foreign policy communicated through personified of the Weibo post content and how does the changing of Weibo post authors affect the level of personalisation. Section 4.2 is linked to the orientation towards persona. This section explores to what degree the British Embassy Weibo uses the personalised narrative format and unique Weibo language referring to emotions and personal experience. Section 4.3 in this chapter is adapted from one of the three Bjerling's dimensions, intimization (Bjerling, 2012). The findings in this section show how does the British Embassy Weibo mix official and personal information in its content and what message they would like to send to their followers. The three dimensions of personalisation (Bjerling, 2011) in the theoretical framework helped to structure these three sections to explore the Weibo narrative in the context of diplomatic communication. By using social media tool, diplomats and embassies have never been so approachable by the general public in foreign countries. Thus, this chapter discusses how social media, such as Weibo, personalises diplomatic communication by using personalised/informal content narrative. Social media dramatically changed the language style and created many special phrases used by the users. Language style relates not only to language narrative but also communication circumstances. Foreign Embassy's Weibo mixes text, image, video and links to enrich their content to attract foreign public's attention and influence their opinions by speaking in their language's styles. The discussion of all of these three dimensions in this study adds the context

of digital diplomatic communication to the theory of personalisation.

4.1 Personified Diplomatic Weibo Communication

On social media networks, individuals locate themselves in different online communities. The online activity they participate and social media channels they subscribe define their personality and allow them to connect to other like-minded persons virtually. Social media's core feature is a collection of personal daily activities record. The style of narrative in social media's is personificated by its primary users. Like individuals, diplomatic Weibo channels are also trying hard to develop a personality and identity to attract target users to subscribe to their accounts and influence their opinions towards the countries they represent. Their Weibo personalities are the crucial force driving people to follow them. Even their content may be fun and useful, a presence of personality is still the key element to engage people and make the Weibo content stay relevant. Social media users tend to attribute humanised characteristics to diplomatic Weibo channels and may regard them as individuals and describe it as cool, funny, or too serious and snobbish. Diplomatic Weibo accounts that have been personified positively or creatively tend to receive positive responses from the foreign public and increase the loyalty of their Weibo accounts followers. For example, the British Embassy Weibo sent out a Chinese New Year greeting at 12 pm precisely on 31 January 2014 by using twelve onomatopoeias to represent the sound of the Big Ben. This post generated significant responses from the Chinese social media users. Most of the responses are positive and saying the British Embassy is humorous and "Meng" (a word used by Chinese social media users that means cute and adorable). In this case, the British Embassy Weibo was cleverly using attention-grabbing content with a sense of humour as well as well-known British culture icon to generate a positive attitude from the Chinese public.

After researching the posts on the British Embassy Weibo and comparing it with traditional diplomatic communication methods, the result showed that most of the posts on the British Embassy Weibo use informal language to tell stories. The online language styles used by young social media users appear very often, particularly in the posts with interactive features such as prize draw and event promotions. The casual

language style is also used quite frequently in the posts about state visits and political figures to provide an alternative story angle, which is informal comparing with the formal news coverage and official diplomatic statements. The British Embassy Weibo speaks like a young urban social media user by focusing more on personal experience of diplomatic activities and foreign policy issues, which are not featured in mainstream media stories and foreign office statement. For example, on 2nd March 2015, Prince William completed his first day of the visit to China. The British Embassy Weibo sent a post saying, "The first day of the visit has completed. What will he do during the next two days? Check out the *Secret Guide of How to Encounter the Prince* edited by us!" On 5th January 2015, former British Ambassador to China, Sebastian Wood completed his assignment in China. The British Embassy Weibo sent a post to review his 5-year's work in China, "…Let's have a look of the ambassador's *Fleet of Time* in China". *Fleet of Time* is one of the most popular films in China during that time. Those types of posts were mainly written by the digital communication officers at the British Embassy China. Therefore, the findings of this section links to the hypothesis that personalisation of digital diplomatic communication creates a personalised experience of foreign policy communication and shifts the traditional institutional persuasion to individual conversations.

The British Embassy Weibo also links to or shares the content from the Weibo accounts of the British diplomats such as the British Ambassador to China as well as British government officials such as David Cameron and Teresa May. It shows that the British diplomats and politicians are starting to use social media tool to communicate with the foreign public directly. The higher rate of the content generated from the British Embassy staff and British government officials indicates a higher level of personalisation of the British Embassy Weibo. However, there are not many current studies focus on the personalisation of diplomatic activities within the context of social media communication. Although it is an innovative idea to encourage diplomats to use social media as a new tool to conduct diplomatic communication activities, nevertheless, the content is the most important part of the whole process of diplomatic communication. The content is continuously constructing the character of digital diplomacy. The personal experience and stories of the British diplomats and politicians help to attract wider attention from the foreign public. The Weibo post created by the diplomats at the

British Embassy China shows the evidence of personalisation of content. For example, the former British Prime Minister Theresa May visited China around Chinese New Year in 2018 and recorded a video message for the British Embassy Weibo to give her new year greeting to the Chinese public. It generated over 5,000 times of reposting. In another Weibo post, the Vice-Counsellor of the British Consulate-General Wuhan is talking about his hometown, Northern Ireland's accent, Irish beer and landscape in a video. The followers are asking questions about Irish lifestyle, sending their best wishes, and even called Theresa May as "Aunt May" to show their friendly attitude. These interactions suggest that diplomatic content has become more personalised on social media and welcomed by social media users.

The content analysis found that around 90% of the British diplomats and government official's Weibo posts shared by the British Embassy Weibo during 2011 to 2018 are not related directly to foreign policy issues but telling their personal experiences and showing personal emotions. The finding shows that the FCO is encouraging the British diplomats to share their personal experiences on social media channels rather than focusing merely on official foreign policy issues that usually covered by mass media and other official channels. Through social media platform, the foreign public finds out for the first time that diplomats are also ordinary people who would like to share their own life experience and emotions with them. These posts helped its followers understanding the UK from a more personalised angle and established an emotional connection with them. Section 4.2.2 provides more examples of this type of posts and discusses this point in detail.

Although the diplomats' Weibo posts share their personal experience, the information they choose to be included in their Weibo posts is highly selective. The content analysis found that the posts sent out by diplomats and politicians focus more on the topics without direct references to foreign policy and politics. When they send posts regarding political and foreign policy issues, they usually use objective facts or authorised information that people would find in official statements but not personal viewpoints and comments. For example, on 14th April 2015, Barbara Woodward, the British Ambassador to China, wrote in her Weibo posts, "Just now, I handed in the credentials to President Xi Jinping as the new British Ambassador to China." She did not add any

more comments on the UK-China relationship but only uploaded two images of the events. On 29th May 2015, the British Embassy Weibo sent a post about the Chinese government's actions of destroying illegal ivory products. The post did not comment on China's illegal wildlife trading issues but said the UK government would actively work with the Chinese government to reduce illegal ivory trading. The former managing editor of the British Embassy Weibo, Ping Liu, commented, "the code of conduct requires us not to show personal judges and comments towards political and diplomatic issues in Weibo content. All the Weibo posts about these aspects must be approved by senior-level staff at the British Embassy before sending out. All Weibo posts need to reflect the key messages set up by the FCO. The main reason is to avoid unnecessary diplomatic conflicts and coordinate with the central communication policy" (Interview No.1).

All the above examples provided evidence that by using digital communication methods, the British diplomatic communication is becoming more personalised on their digital channels. The British Embassy Weibo posts focus more on non-political issues, which may be a result of the format of social media communication that encourages personalised content. Therefore, the British diplomatic communication is embodied in digital content through personified. The authors of the British Embassy Weibo content use Weibo to relate to their daily life, express personal views and emotion to attract public attention. However, as diplomatic communication practitioners, they must use social media to fulfil their foreign policy goals and collect foreign public's opinions. Their identity as diplomats decides their responsibility of conducting diplomatic duties through Weibo communication is more important than their personal communication activities. Their Weibo posts generated wider recognition of the British Embassy and issues related to the UK among the Chinese public. Their Weibo posts are based on the state interest of the country they represent. Moreover, although the quantity of the Weibo posts created by the British diplomats on the British Embassy Weibo is increasing continuously, most of the posts are still written by the digital content team at the British Embassy. According to Ping Liu, diplomats are not required to create Weibo posts as a mandatory duty (Interview No.1), which indicates that the process of professionalisation of the British digital diplomacy in China is still slow. The absence of original content from the diplomats may result in loss of interest from the public and

weakening of the influence of the British Embassy Weibo. It also shows that there is not a wide adoption of social media tool among those diplomats.

Therefore, the British Embassy Weibo should be regarded as another formal mouthpiece of the FCO since the personificated content is not the dominating the British Embassy Weibo. It proves the hypothesis that if the perspective of personal experience and adaption of diplomatic events dominate the perspective of digital diplomacy content, then the digital diplomacy channel can be best understood as a platform for sharing digital diplomacy content creator's personal experiences among foreign audiences rather than a formal mouthpiece of foreign service.

Before social media becomes one of the communications tools for foreign embassies, diplomats mainly establish links with the foreign public though interviews and reports on conventional mass media and meetings with government officials in the countries they are posted to. In the recent ten years, social media enables diplomats to get in touch with and therefore influence foreign public directly. Although most of the British diplomats in China start using Weibo to disseminate information and expect to enhance communication with the Chinese public, this change of practice is still in its early stage and does not change the existing diplomatic communication fundamentally. The reason behind it is the contradiction between the new public sphere created by social media and diplomatic communication's political nature. There are inevitable differences of communication goals between the grass-root public and elite diplomats. On one hand, diplomats intend to share information with the foreign public in real time; On the other hand, as high-level government officers, those diplomats are not only responsible for the social media content they create but also their job as diplomats. Their duty and responsibility make the task of interacting with the foreign public on social media significantly challenging. It is impossible to fully estimate the outcome and influence of the social media content created by diplomats before its publishing. Sometimes, due to the constraints imposed by the nature of their job, diplomats have to sacrifice the level of communication effect to avoid political and diplomatic risks. All these factors affect the level of personification of the British Embassy Weibo. It is also a universal problem of all diplomatic communication practice via social media. As David Sharma, the former British Ambassador to Australia, stated, "Seeking the edge, you'll inevitably find

yourself dangling perilously over it" (Elliott, 2017).

It is for sure that the content on digital diplomacy platforms must be attractive to the foreign public. However, what makes digital diplomacy different from all traditional diplomatic tactics is that diplomats and diplomatic communication practitioners must listen and speak to the foreign public directly to keep their ongoing interest. Sometimes, digital diplomacy content should even "create an argument" (Fletcher, 2017) to encourage participation and conversation. Fletcher argues that foreign service departments have to tolerate mistakes, as diplomats would not always make things right. Being too conservative on social media might avoid risks but definitely bury the content fast (Fletcher, 2017). The content analysis found that the number of public responses for the posts with formal content is much lower than that of those personalised posts. Therefore, Fletcher's worry is not an overestimation of the situation, but a highlight of the contradiction between the ways of social media communication and traditional diplomatic communication.

Additionally, this study finds that although the interactive functions on the British Embassy Weibo are open to all the British Embassy staff, there still lacks direct conversations between the diplomats and the Weibo followers. Usually, the British Embassy Weibo editors respond to the public on behalf of the diplomats. The diplomats are not actively participating in the interactive activities. They mainly respond to a few comments from other British or foreign diplomats and big Vs (Weibo phrase, which means the Sina verified Weibo user). The reason behind this could be the sensitivity of diplomatic information and diplomats' identity. Although the diplomatic crisis is effectively avoided by minimising direct interactions with the foreign public, the interactive feature of social media is not fully used by the British diplomats to engage and have conversations with the foreign public.

Since social media is not specially crafted for diplomacy since its arrival, its format facilitates interactivity and personalised content, which were not found in traditional diplomatic communication format. Therefore, the roles of diplomats and traditional diplomatic communication practitioners need to shift from the discreet and impersonal policy implementers or communicators to the frontline and individual online

campaigners. The dividing line between personal and professional life on digital diplomacy platforms is fading since personal presence is now becoming vital for making real influence among foreign social media users.

4.2 Oriented Narrative Towards Persona

Weibo narrative is a newly created online content style. Same as other types of narratives, the purpose of Weibo narrative is persuading and influencing content receivers to take actions towards the narrator's view. This section analyses the language feature of the British Embassy Weibo from the angle of narrative studies. The Chinese characters carry abundant culture elements in each single one of them. Any single character could affect the meaning and narrative of Weibo content. This section analyses and summarises the narrative style on the British Embassy Weibo on two aspects: casual and informal, as well as the reference to daily life.

4.2.1 Informal Narrative of Formal Diplomatic Events

State visits and diplomatic events attended by international high-level government officials are the most formal and official conducts of international relations between two countries. The personalised narratives on the British Embassy Weibo intend to reveal the stories behind the front stage and attract the wider public to pay attention to the visits and events by providing informal content, which is not normally found in formal official statements and mass media coverage. Comparing with the formal press releases and major media coverage, Weibo content provides the alternative and informal aspect of the formal events. It also opens a door for the Weibo followers to read the live updated stories of these events. Those stories are often put together with the Weibo editor's personal ideas and writing styles. For example, in order to promote the launch of the two-year visitor visa for the Chinese citizens, the British Embassy Weibo uploaded many pictures of "finger shots" featuring two fingers (referring to two-year visitor visa). The posts featuring the "finger shots" provide a type of informal content that is a well-designed adaptation of the formal visa policy communication in the context of social media. This approach makes the best use of selfie culture among young Weibo users in China to adapt traditional diplomatic content to social media

content. This type of digital content with personal ideas and informal narratives is facilitated by social media format, which brings informal and personalised elements into diplomatic communication.

Another example of using informal style to present formal diplomatic event is the post about the Chinese President Xin Jinping's state visit to the UK. Instead of posting any official released photos, this post reposted a selfie image of Xi Jinping, David Cameron and the English footballer Aguero from Aguero's personal Weibo account. There is another post sent out during Xi's visit shows an image of Xi Jinping and the former British Prime Minister David Cameron drinking beer in a local pub with details of the beer they were drinking. In these Weibo posts, political figures show their informal side in non-rehearsed activities. In another example, the British Embassy Weibo editor sent out a post about the personal experience of Jeremy Brown, the former Minister of State of Foreign and Commonwealth Office, during his visit to Chongqing Panda Protection Centre: "The pandas in the panda nursery are cute in every way… Do you know who is Mr. Brown's favourite panda? It is that one on the tree! Do you know what Mr. Brown would like to tell him? 'Be Careful, do not fall!' ". Meanwhile, the British Embassy Weibo also covered full trip of Jeremy Brown's visit to China by mixing both official information and personalised content. These posts use a narrative format similar to personal social media accounts to tell stories about informal activities during formal events.

This approach puts a humanised face on the British foreign service, which could be seen as the conducts of public diplomacy on social media. There are many more similar posts on the British Embassy Weibo do not contain formal diplomatic information but focus on the informal side of diplomatic events and official visits. By calculating and analysing the posts on diplomatic events and government official visits during the first six months of 2015, the study found that only 23% of them contain formal foreign policy content. The rest of these posts show personal feelings and experience of the Weibo post creators in informal style. It shows that the British Embassy Weibo content focuses more on the casual and informal sides of diplomatic issues than on the direct references to diplomacy and UK-China relations. Most of the posts about formal events are oriented towards persona on the Weibo. As a result, formal diplomatic events show a humanised side to the foreign public in digital channels.

On the other hand, the casual and informal style of the British Embassy Weibo posts is not only reflected by the post content but also by its language style. By studying the narrative style used by the British Embassy Weibo, this research found that because of the rich varieties of the Weibo content topics, the language style in the posts not only keeps the elements of the British sense of humour, but also use the popular new phrases created by the Chinese social media users. The combination creates a unique language style on the British Embassy Weibo. For example, a Weibo post on 11th February 2015 asked followers to guess which is the most popular item exported from the UK among umbrella, wellington boots and sunglasses. Some of the followers answered "Benedict" (a famous British actor). Later the British Embassy Weibo published a post to respond to this answer: "The classmates who said Benedict, it is enough! Please don't go too far!". In this post, they used popular Chinese social media phrases "Tong Xie" (means classmates which is used to show a friendly attitude to a person), and "Ni Gou Le" (means mud and dirt which has the similar pronunciation to "it is enough"). These two phrases were created and often used by young social media users in their personal Weibo posts. The comments left for this post show that the followers were impressed because they never expect a foreign embassy's official communication channel uses such kind of informal language style.

Another example is a post introducing the British national dish, fish and chips which says: "What are the types of fishes in the British national dish Fish & Chips? The first choice is of course the most favourite cod…you may never know that the traditional batter is made by dark beer. I feel drunk! …". "Zui Le"(means drunk). In Chinese social media language context, this phrase describes someone who loses the will even to scold or comment in a humorously way. The phrase also cleverly refers to the dark beer as beer may make people drunk. As shown in these two examples, the general language style of the British Embassy Weibo is informal and casual which encourages Chinese public, especially the younger generation to pay attention to its content and actively interact with the Weibo editors. The findings prove the hypothesis that personalisation of digital diplomatic content creates a personalised experience of foreign policy communication, increases the level of engagement with foreign public, as well as shifts the traditional institutional persuasion to the individual conversation.

4.2.2 Engaging the Foreign Public with Personal Feelings

The feelings and experiences of everyday life are key elements in orienting Weibo content toward the persona. For example, The General Consular of the British Consulate in General in Shanghai uploaded a video post featuring his son Leo and himself on the World Book Day in 2018. He shared his favourite books and the emotion between him and his son in the video. He wrote in the post, "My son Leo and I would like to share our favourite book. By the way, I asked my son how much he loves daddy but suffered millions of times of hurt…" Another example of showing personal emotion and experience from daily life is the post sent on 20th August 2015 when it was the Chinese Lover's Festival. In order to greet Chinese people on this particular festival, the post featured the love story of the British Consular in General's parents told by himself and a few pictures of his parents. The comments on this post are all positive. Many of them showed that the followers were deeply moved by the story. Some of these comments praised that it is a great way to create government Weibo content. Both examples show that the British Embassy Weibo uses expressions of emotion and everyday life experience in its content to shorten the distance between the British Foreign Service and the Chinese general public. These personified references show that the British diplomats are ordinary people who would like to share their emotion and life with the Chinese public. Those references help the British Embassy Weibo to orient their content towards the persona.

However, the result of the content analysis on reference to emotions shows that there are only 2% of the sampled posts during the first six months of 2015 and 2.2% in the last six months of 2017 show the evidence of personal emotion. Therefore, the quantity of the British Embassy Weibo posts containing reference to emotion is quite low and did not increase over the years. The Weibo editors did not use the expression of emotions as a major narrative to encourage personalised content. The reason could be the increase of using adapted official content over the years, and the policy of limiting the use of diplomat's personal Weibo content since 2016 (Interview No.1). Another aspect of content personalisation is references to everyday life. By using content analysis to measure the number of references to everyday life in the British Embassy Weibo content, this study suggests that this figure is slightly higher than that of

references to emotions. Among all the posts during the first six months of 2015, 4% of the posts contain the references to everyday life. The figure for the last six months of 2017 is 5.1%, which shows a slight increase.

In summary, the British Embassy Weibo content is becoming more personalised than formal foreign policy statements and press releases. However, the level of personalisation of the British Embassy Weibo remains low. Therefore, it is difficult to have a concrete conclusion that personalisation of political communication is vital in digital diplomacy since the nature of social media is the exposure of personality. However, all digital diplomacy practitioners need to continue the experiment to stay in trends and create impact. One thing is sure that the traditional distinction between personal and professional in digital political communication is changing because the social media format and technology encourage sharing of personalised content.

4.3 Intimization of Foreign Policy Agenda

Stanyer describes Intimization as "a revelatory process, which involves the publicizing of information and imagery from what we might ordinarily understand as [an individuals'] personal life – broadly defined. It is a publicity process (involving the media) that takes place over time and involves flows of personal information and imagery into the [media]" (Stanyer, 2012, p14). Intimization in Bjerling's (2011, 2012) three dimensions of personalisation reveals the dynamics between personal factors and diplomatic publicities. This research adapted it in the theoretical framework to analyse the personalisation process of diplomatic content on social media channels which have been increasingly regarded as the new public diplomacy tool within the recent ten years (Bjola, 2015; Cull, 2013). Recent research outlines the new public diplomacy as "no longer confined to messaging, promotion campaigns, or even direct governmental contacts with foreign publics serving foreign policy purposes. It is also about building relationships" (Melissen, 2005, p. 22). Therefore, one approach for the government to build relationship with individuals in a foreign country is social media communication, which becomes the new public diplomacy tool to bring private and personal factors to diplomatic communication.

The British Embassy in China attempts to use Weibo to influence its followers through intimization by using narratives containing personal or private experience which are hardly found in mass media and official foreign office statements. In traditional media coverage, due to the limitation of airtime and page space, the information covered by mass media is carefully selected and edited by the news reporter and editors. By using this narrative style, the British Embassy of China now has the opportunity to promote their stories to the Chinese public on a daily basis without seeking mass media publicity. This narrative style is very similar to the one that appears in personal and private Weibo accounts. Many posts on the British Embassy Weibo appear like someone talking to their friends or describing their personal experience. The British Embassy Weibo content contains the first-hand personal experience of the Weibo editors and the British diplomats. Those kinds of information and details would not be found from any other official resources and communications channels of the British foreign service. Meanwhile, since Weibo has the live cast function that enables instant live coverage of the event with text, image and video. Therefore, the immediacy of social media communication gives people an experience of participating in the event on-site. Additionally, this narrative style also extends the traditional format of official foreign policy communication by adding personal interactions and daily life references. The British Embassy Weibo presents an accessible platform for the Chinese public to read diplomats' personal stories about major diplomatic events and official foreign policy statements.

In practice, when the British Embassy Weibo editor joined in the press office team, this new role develops personalised narratives style on the Weibo account by adding personal and unofficial information to the formal content. The personal information and unofficial stories are used to humanise the image of the British Embassy China and the UK as a whole country. In early 2010, the newly appointed British Ambassador to China, Sebastian Wood arrived Beijing and started his 88 days trip to 8 cities in China. The British Embassy Weibo revealed details of his trip and posted his feeling and experience during the trip. In November 2010, David Cameron, former British Prime Minister, visited China with 50 British industry and business leaders. The British Embassy Weibo sent 83 Weibo posts to cover the whole event, which resulted in a rapid increase of its number of followers from 8,000 to over 30,000 within just a few days. There are many posts telling alternative and informal stories that would not be

picked up by the mass media. Such as the post about David Cameron chatting with a Chinese businessman about his iPhone during their lunch meeting and another post about him missed lunch and had to eat a sandwich in the car to catch up with the time of next event. In November 2013, Owen Paterson, Secretary of State for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs, visited China with a mission to balance the exports and imports of British dairy products. The British Embassy Weibo published a post to explain that the different colours on the British milk carton represent the different levels of fat percentage and some other posts about the British diplomat's personal experience of British dairy products. There are many more this kind of examples of delivering foreign policy agenda through initimizaion. In October 2015, the British Ambassador to China at that time sent a post featuring her photo with the Queen at the Buckingham Palace while they were waiting for the arrival of Xi to show the UK's welcome to Xi's visit. On 8th March 2018, the International Women's Day, the diplomats in the British Embassy and British Consulate-in-General talked about what this day means to them in a video posted on the British Embassy Weibo.

These posts used personalised content to tie in with an official foreign policy agenda and received a good number of reposting and positive responses from the Chinese public. This type of Weibo posts contain references to everyday life and unofficial tone make the British Embassy Weibo content different from the official stories on the FCO's official website and mass media coverage. The narrative style in these posts humanises the British foreign service and enables the British Embassy to establish an intimate human connection with the followers. The lively narrative of these posts contains key diplomatic messages through sharing part of the diplomats' personalities in their daily life to give the public a feeling of intimacy and include them in foreign policy communication. In addition, this type of Weibo content attracts the Chinese public with a softened angle that different from the hard political news stories and official communication content to increase the influence of foreign policy among general foreign public. The daily diplomatic activities are narrated in a personal style that contains descriptions of daily life references such as private photos and personal conversation. It gives their Weibo followers fresh experience of getting alternative and unofficial information that is coherent with official statements and media news but having more personal connections with the foreign public. During the crisis and

emergency circumstances, this narrative style can respond faster and reach the foreign public more effectively to increase the credibility of the British Embassy through interpersonal links.

Sometime, the foreign policy agenda may not be able to be communicated through traditional communicating channels because of its sensitivity or conflict with local culture. These stories would not be able to appear on official communication channels either, such as the British Embassy's official website. For example, in China, the gay and lesbian relationship is not widely accepted by the public and Chinese law does not allow gay and lesbian marriage. Gay and lesbian staff may even lose their jobs due to their sexual preference in China. To counter the views of discrimination of the gay and lesbian relationship and promote the value of equal opportunities, the British Embassy Weibo sends posts to support gay and lesbian relationship every year. Many British diplomats also send out the posts on their personal Weibo accounts to support it. The most influential Weibo posts about this topic are the ones sent by Brian Davidson, the Consular-in-General of the British Consulate Shanghai, and Sebastian Wood, the former British Ambassador to China. The posts they sent are regarding the civil partnership between Brian Davidson and his homosexual partner. Since this type of marriage is illegal in China, this topic will never be picked up by China's mass media. On 6th September 2014, Brian Davidson and his partner held their wedding ceremony at the British Ambassador's residence. Brian wrote in his Weibo post on his wedding day, "#Love is GREAT# I am very proud that the British law enables me to have the right to get married with my loved one. This post is a typical example to show the respect of equal opportunity in our country. Personally, it means I can stand in front of family and friends (British, American, and Chinese) to exchange our vow to spend the rest of our life. It means a lot to me and my partner". The former British Ambassador said in his Weibo post, "Today I am very pleased and proud that David's civil partnership wedding is held in my residence. I wish them happy forever!" His post was reposted 10,995 times and received 4,897 comments as well as 6,184 likes. Most of the responses to these posts are well wishes. The large number of positive responses for these two Weibo posts shows that their first-hand personal experience shifted the view of the Chinese public who could not get information and positive facts of this topic from mainstream media.

Therefore, the finding proves the hypothesis that social media can help foreign service to deliver foreign policy agenda in person and the hypothesis that personalisation of digital diplomatic communication creates a personalised experience of foreign policy communication, increases the level of engagement with the foreign public, as well as shifts the traditional institutional persuasion to the individual conversation.

4.4 Summary

Chapter 4 explored the presence of personalisation in the content of the British Embassy Weibo. In this research, Weibo is studied as a new diplomatic communication tool that is revolutionising the way of diplomatic communication and overall practice. The content of the British Embassy Weibo combines formal and informal stories, official statements and personal experiences to create a personalised narrative that successfully put a human face on a foreign embassy and establishes an interpersonal conversation with Chinese public via social media channel in a way that has never been used before. Weibo enables the British Embassy to promote their official and unofficial information that could not be picked up by Chinese mass media among Chinese people. Weibo content provides an alternative story resource to the British foreign service's target audience in China. The main themes of the personalised narrative of the British Embassy Weibo posts are culture, diplomatic events, and diplomatic services. Therefore, the British government seeks to strengthen the influence of British culture among the Chinese audiences and promote wider bilateral cooperation with China. Besides, the British Embassy Weibo content also provides a multi-angle information resource including daily life, economic development, and personal experiences of the British diplomats and politicians, which are not found in traditional diplomatic communication content, to promote a more comprehensive and humanised understanding of the UK. The British foreign policy agenda is personalised and communicated to the Chinese public in a digital narrative style. Thus, Weibo does encourage a causal and personalised content narrative that is not common in official diplomatic communication. Weibo provides a channel for diplomats to express personal views and emotions. It also becomes an official media to allow alternative versions of diplomatic stories and foreign policy agendas with more behind-the-scene details and

personal experiences when compared them with traditional diplomatic communication content.

However, it is interesting that the observation in this research found that the personalised content on the British Embassy Weibo did not increase much over the years between 2011 and 2018 despite that the total number of Weibo posts was increasing steadily every year. The research found that the posts telling inside stories of diplomatic events increased over these years. These posts are still narrated in an informal and casual style. However, they are showing fewer personal emotions and references to everyday life. It may because of the change of FCO's digital diplomacy policy which regulates the social media content more strictly. This change could link to the increase of the level of professionalisation in digital diplomacy content. The conclusion of this study discusses this change further and links it to the whole research outcome.

The next chapter discusses how does the British Embassy Weibo content present PR element in the posts to encourage more effective communication with the Chinese public. Additionally, in order to measure the level and nature of this element, chapter 5 discusses the result of the British Embassy Weibo's influencing power evaluation.

Chapter 5: Digital Soft Power: Influencing Foreign Minds and Making Impact

This study does not only aim at examining whether or not that the Weibo becomes a new tool of diplomatic communication, but also finding out how it has been used to translate the British foreign policy into digital content that local audiences can understand and have interest in. The samples of this section were mainly selected from the British Embassy Weibo posts during the first six months of 2018 to reflect the latest trends and development in its content. The analysis of this chapter answers the second part of the research question, which is whether Weibo enables two-way symmetrical diplomatic dialogue that makes real influence among the Chinese public. In summary, the discussion of the British Embassy's Weibo content, communication model, and its influencing power in this chapter reveals to what extent the British Embassy Weibo becomes the resource of soft power by utilising social media communication's advantages to influence and engage with China's younger generation. The study result also demonstrates at what development stage of the British digital diplomacy practice in China.

This chapter is divided into three sections as below. Section 5.1 reviews how the British Embassy in China uses Weibo to influence Chinese public through soft power. The analysis in section 5.1 is structured by applying Joseph Nye's concept of soft power, which is one of the key elements in this research's theoretical framework. Section 5.2 measures the British Embassy Weibo by applying global public relations theory to critically examine can Weibo itself enable two-way symmetric communication in digital diplomacy, or instead, it is the Weibo content authors determine how effective the Weibo communication is in terms of creating transparency and interactive communications. Section 5.2 addresses the level of foreign public engagement, participation and interaction on the British Embassy Weibo by analysing the comments of selected post samples with excellence theory in public relation studies. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the British Embassy Weibo in foreign audience engagement, the method of narrative analysis is used in analysing the comments of selected Weibo posts. Section 5.3 uses original Weibo influence analytical method to measure the influencing power of the British Embassy Weibo in China. This section

combines AHP (Analytical Hierarchy Process) and Delphi research methods as well as focus group interviews among the British Embassy Weibo followers to obtain the results from content and textual analysis of Weibo posts. This analysis finds out how the British foreign service constructs the national image on the Weibo to exert influencing power. The contribution of this chapter to the research of digital diplomacy is developing an original analytical framework and methodology for evaluating the influence of digital diplomacy within a specific country's context by considering both digital diplomatic communicators and their target foreign audiences.

5.1 Digital Diplomacy as an Alternative Source of Soft Power

The study in this section is mainly informed by Joseph Nye's theory of soft power adapted in the theoretical framework. Its discussion specifically focuses on three aspects of soft power: culture, British political value, and bilateral relations policy. This section also discusses the impact of China's nationalism on social media and how digital diplomacy is used by the British foreign service to provide an alternative resource of soft power which forms smart power when combining with hard power.

In Nye's point of view, culture, political value, and foreign policy are the three pillars of soft power. He also developed the concept of soft power to a new term called smart power to address the limitation and academic criticism of the original concept of soft power, which believes "soft power along can produce effective foreign policy." (Nye, 2009, p. 160). He pointed out that integrating hard power and soft power can form a contextual intelligence to affect the foreign minds to obtain preferred outcomes through coercion, payment and attraction. Hard power comes from the use of coercion and payment. While soft power is the ability to attract the foreign public. (Nye, 2009, p. 160-163). Since the term of smart power was created, there have been full of mentioning and references for this new power in academic papers and foreign policy discussions. The former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, "We must use what has been called 'smart power,' the full range of tools at our disposal." in the senate confirmation hearing (Nye, 2009, p. 160). A report on soft power published by Edinburgh University lists some of the activities government ministers have recently referred to as UK's soft power 'assets'. "… Ministers…listed what they saw as the UK's soft power

assets: its values, democracy, economic and political freedom, freedom of speech, education, innovation, the English language, culture (particularly the BBC), the arts (particularly literature, no doubt reflecting the then focus on the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death), heritage, and sport" (British Council, 2017).

With the global popularisation of social media, the ability to tell engaging stories becomes a new way to influence foreign minds. Foreign services can use social media to communicate their foreign policy agenda as well as promote their national culture and value to influence the foreign public, avoid misunderstandings and conflicts, as well as accomplish their foreign policy goal. A Chinese scholar Li Zhi defines foreign embassies and diplomats as actor A and their post country's government as actor B to reveal the communication mechanism inside cultural diplomacy (Li, 2005). This study adapted Li's mechanism into the mechanism of Weibo Diplomacy as shown in figure 5. In this figure, actor A publishes digital content about diplomatic services, culture, politics, and economy onto their Weibo channels to promote positive national images in order to influence foreign public's opinion towards their countries. Ideally, the foreign services gain their preferred outcomes, such as favoured policy changes from actor B. When the foreign public receive the content, they interact with actor A by reading posts, giving feedback and sharing content in their social media networks. In this way, the influence of actor A's content grows wider and therefore changes the foreign public's opinions towards actor A's countries. When this influence reaches a certain level, actor B may change its policy towards actor A's preferred outcomes. Comparing with the traditional public diplomacy, the unique features of Weibo diplomacy are real-time interaction and large-scale information dissemination. These features could influence or put pressure on diplomatic services to adjust their daily practice and policies according to the feedbacks and responses from the foreign public. Figure 5 shows how Weibo technology enables transnational cultural communication as a source of soft power to influence the foreign mind and in return to inform foreign policy decision making by interacting with the foreign public.
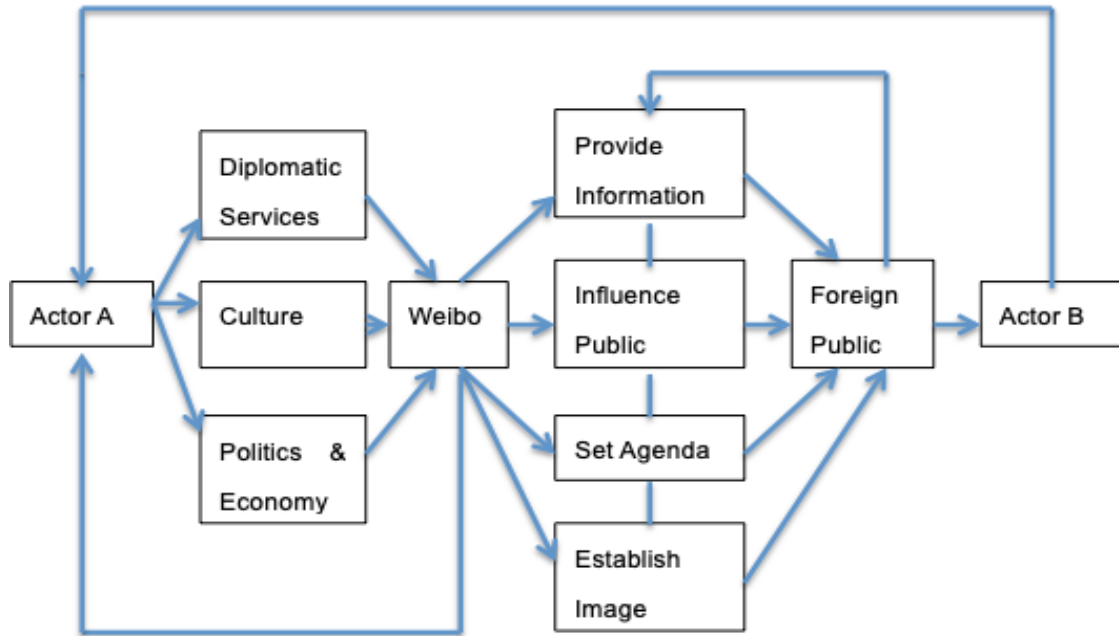
*Figure 5: Mechanism of Weibo Diplomacy Adapted from Li's Mechanism
of Cultural Diplomacy (Li, 2005)*

If we consider using social media as a new element of diplomatic communications by applying the concept of soft power to the analysis, the research should focus on how the British Embassy articulate the social media content to promote British culture and ideology in a way that appeals to Chinese audiences. As discussed earlier in this thesis, social media technology enables diplomatic communication to engage the foreign public across national boundaries with culture-oriented content which is softer than those official foreign service statement and state visits. A significant number of posts on the British Embassy Weibo contain cultural and educational elements which are typical public diplomacy communication content. In addition, there are many posts presenting personal emotion and experience of the British diplomats in China. As concluded in the previous chapter, these posts helped to put a human face on British diplomatic practice and softened the tone of the voice of diplomatic communication content. Section 5.1.1 mainly discusses how Weibo is served as a national value carrier to influence Chinese public. Section 5.1.2 mainly discusses how foreign policy agenda is embedded in the Weibo content.

5.1.1 Influence Through National Value

Joseph Nye's soft power theory points out that the major elements of a country's soft power are its culture, value and policies. A country's value yields a strong influence of soft power when it is attractive and consistently practised (Nye, 2000). The analysis in this section examines how the British value is embedded in the British Embassy Weibo content. By using content analysis method, the count of keywords and topics with references to the British social and political values shows whether the British Embassy Weibo has been used to influence the Chinese public through soft power to promote the British value and ideology.

In 2015, Nicky Morgan, the British Secretary of State for Education, gave a speech about her vision for education. In her speech, she pointed out that the fundamental British values are "democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs" (UK Department for Education, 2015). She also urged the British education institutions to continue to hold the British values of tolerance, fairness and freedom of speech. *Fundamental British Values* is not a new phrase featured in Nicky Morgan's speech but was addressed continuously on many occasions and documents by the coalition government of Conservative and Liberal Democratic Parties since 2014. The British government added respecting British culture and policy into the British values in order to strengthen its national identity.

In China, the Chinese government defined the core Chinese values as prosperity, democracy, civility, harmony, freedom, equality, justice, rule of law, patriotism, dedication, integrity, and kindness. It can be found that these two different sets of national values have some same items, which are democracy and rule of law. However, the definitions of these items are different due to the different historical and political backgrounds of the two countries. The strict media censorship in China is closely supervising all digital media content, including foreign embassies' social media accounts, and emitting any content classified as inappropriate or illegal to prevent anti-government activities online. How to influence the Chinese public with soft power to promote the British values and at the same time respect the Chinese values defined by the Chinese government is the key issue in developing positive and effective

engagement with the Chinese public.

In this section, the terms of democracy, liberty, equal opportunity, and rules of law are chosen as the keywords and topics to be identified in the British Embassy Weibo posts between 1st January and 17th July 2018. Liberty and equal opportunity are the fundamental values of the UK, which are shown in the post topics such as press freedom, homosexual groups, and female equal opportunities on the British Embassy Weibo. This study finds that the term of liberty was mentioned in four posts, and equal opportunity was mentioned in ten posts among all 391 selected posts. Most of the selected posts have no direct references to these two terms. There are also only a small number of mentions of democracy and rules of law in the post content. It might because that the strict media censorship in China puts forward pressures on foreign embassies' social media content editors to minimise mentions of the sensitive words. It also could be understood as that the British Foreign Office's main diplomatic goal in China at present is to strengthen the cooperation with China in all areas to maintain the *Golden Decade of UK-China Relationship*. Comparing with the U.S. Embassy Weibo, which sets promoting and advancing democracy and democratic values abroad as their diplomatic tenet, the British Embassy Weibo has much less content about democracy and freedom.

Therefore, the content analysis study in this section suggests that there is a possibility that the content on the British Embassy Weibo is deliberately avoiding direct references of politics-related issues to comply with its diplomatic objectives and avoid political risks in China. In this sense, such a small portion of the posts with direct references to the British values might be an intended diplomatic communication strategy that separates the social media content from the formal traditional diplomatic communication content. In addition, as discussed earlier in this thesis, although Weibo provides a channel for foreign embassies to reach and engage with the Chinese people, it also becomes a target for the Chinese Weibo users to take out their anger on foreign embassies' criticising on China's domestic affairs and policy. Therefore, the British Embassy Weibo is trying to avoid negative public responses associated with the direct references to political values. Instead, the Weibo editors are using topics and stories not conflicting the Chinese values in the Weibo content. For example, a Weibo post sent on 6th

February 2018 is about the 100th anniversary of the British women's wining on the equal rights of vote. The aim of this post is to promote equal opportunity - one of the fundamental British values and the British Foreign Office's prioritised foreign policy agenda in China (FCO, 2018). Another post published on 1st June 2018 is about female equal opportunities in workplace. Among all the selected posts for this specific analysis, except for one post that is featuring homosexual group's equal opportunity, all the other posts about equal opportunities have a focus on female's right and equal opportunities. Female's right is a popular topic among Chinese public and favoured by the Chinese government. In addition, none of the Weibo posts about equal opportunities contains direct political references and comments on China's equal opportunity issues.

This kind of tactic successfully avoids political risks and attracts the Chinese Weibo users at the same time. It is different from the official and traditional diplomatic content which has clear political stand and acknowledgement of political references to the British values. Thus, the Weibo communication balanced and softened the messages conveyed by official communication content. However, as a diplomatic communication tool, the British Embassy Weibo still serves the ideological interest of the UK and supports the official diplomatic communication. Some of the posts unified with the message in the official statement to support the British political values and principles when it is necessary. For example, a post published on 17th July 2018 features the British government's *2017 Human rights and Democracy Report* and expresses the UK government's concern on the Chinese government's newly launched *State Security Law* which tightens the Chinese government control on free speech and public gathering. Another post published on 3rd May 2018 commemorates the World Press Freedom Day and condemns the control over the Internet to support the freedom of journalists. Although there are only 14 Weibo posts (2.5% of the total number of the posts published in 2018) published in 2018 have direct reference and clear political stand in the content, the posts with direct reference to the British political values are repeatedly published every year to show the firm and unified political stand of the British government across all of the British diplomatic communication channels.

In summary, this section examined the presences of the fundamental British value and direct political reference in the British Embassy Weibo content by using content

analysis method. The posts examined are selected within the first six months of 2018. The analysis result suggests that although liberty and democracy had a limited presence in the British Embassy Weibo platform, these two British values are addressed repeatedly every year to unify the messages with the traditional diplomatic communication content and thereby justify the FCO's foreign policy agenda in China.

5.1.2 Influence Through Foreign Policy Agenda

As discussed in section 5.1.1, in order to promote a country's national value and fulfil its foreign policy goal, digital communication channels are employed by foreign services to publish content aligned with their foreign policies. In this section, the study selected the Weibo posts published on the British Embassy Weibo between 1st January and 17th July 2018 to conduct content analysis to examine how is the British foreign policy agenda is embedded in the Weibo content to make influence among Weibo users. Ping Liu, the former British Embassy Weibo Editor, stated that the British Embassy Weibo never change its content style and story angle with staff changes because the output of the Weibo content must be consistent with the FCO's key media message guidance (Interview No.1). The content analysis shows that since 2011, the post themes of the British Embassy Weibo had a consistent focus on a variety of topics including foreign policy communication, culture and introduction to the UK society. However, a major shift of the post theme appeared in 2015. There were an increased number of the Weibo posts featuring the UK-China cooperation and the British tourism after the Chinese President Xi's visit to the UK in October 2015 when the FCO announced the beginning of the *Golden Decade of UK-China relationship*. This change of the British foreign policy agenda in China was reflected in the British Embassy Weibo content accordingly. This finding shows that the digital diplomacy tool echoes the government policy as same as the traditional diplomatic communication channels. The FCO's key media message in China is unified and multiplied across all the communication channels, including formal statements, press releases, official government and embassy websites, as well as social media platforms.
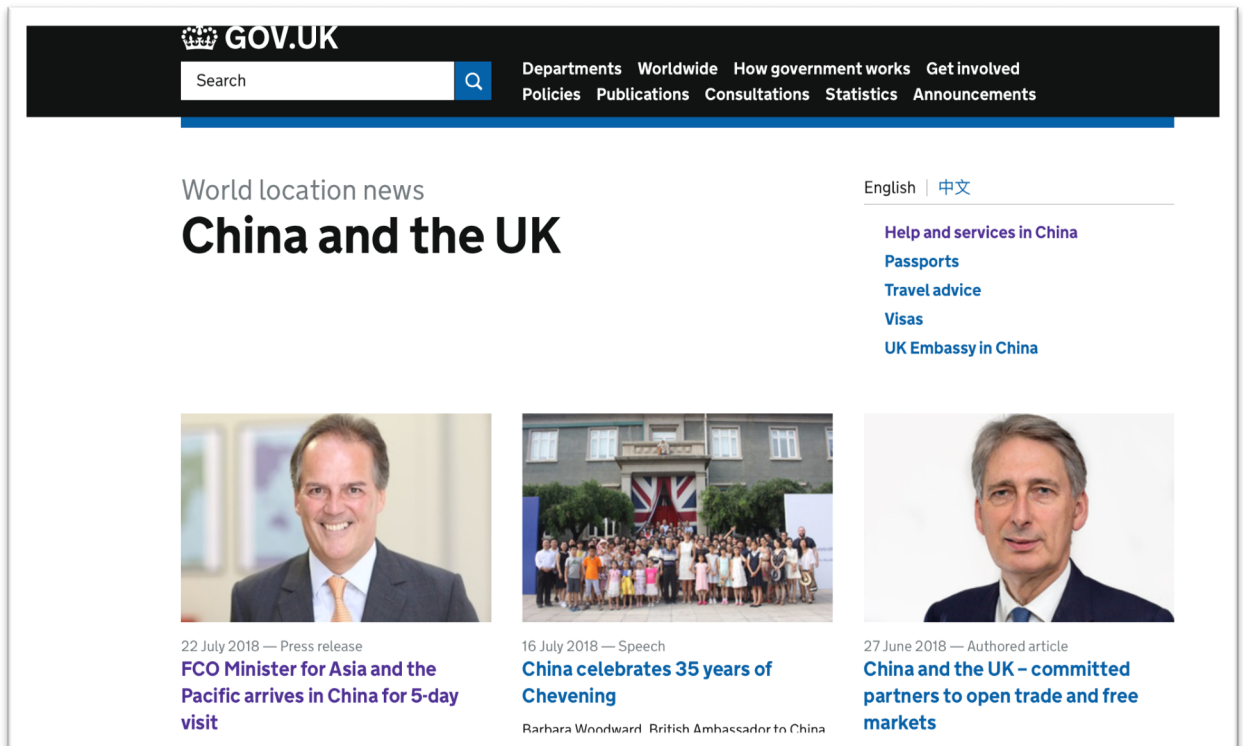
Picture 2: Front Page of the Official Webpage of the British Embassy Beijing on 24/07/18

Picture 2 shows the front page of the official website of the British Embassy China on 24th July 2018. There are two announcements about the visit of the FCO's Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer to China. Picture 3 is the screenshot of the Weibo post about the British Chancellor of the Exchequer's visit to China. It shows that the official statement and press release content on the official British Embassy website are coordinating with the content on the British Embassy Weibo.

Picture 3: British Embassy Weibo Post of the British Chancellor of the Exchequer's Visit to China Published on 27/06/18

However, the difference between the Weibo content and traditional diplomatic content is that most of the posts on the British Embassy Weibo do not use the phrases that often appear in official statements, such as *UK-China Golden Decade. The* content analysis found that the Weibo posts present the foreign policy issues with diplomats' personal experience and reference to culture, which soften the hard political issues. For example, the Weibo post about British beef export to China were published on 28th June 2018 when the Chancellor of the Exchequer was visiting China. The post did not mention the UK's intention to partner with China to develop open trade and free markets, but used personalise tone saying that the British beef will soon return to the Chinese people's dining table because the Chinese government has removed the ban on the British beef export to China. The post also provided figures to show how big the Chinese market for the British food is. The image used in this post is not any pictures of government officials but a picture showing a delicious British beef dish. This finding shows that the British Embassy Weibo presents the British foreign policy agenda through soft content and informal style. The story is told with a humanised angle to

make it relevant to the general public's life and interests. Liu Ping said that the message on the British Embassy Weibo "has to be consistent with the FCO's key message with a responsibility of both speaking for the British foreign policy in China as well as engaging China's younger generation" (Interview No.1). Although the Weibo content does not mention the British foreign policy agenda directly, it reflects the policy issues with reference to everyday life. The message of foreign policy issues is multiplied and enhanced across different communication channels which are targeting different groups of the foreign public. Therefore, since 2015, there are fewer and fewer British Embassy Weibo posts containing direct reference to the British foreign policy agenda and issues. But the stories on the British Embassy Weibo echo the policy issues with indirect references and embeds the FCO's key messages with an alternative angle in its content (Interview No.1).

In summary, the analysis in this chapter identified the evidence of foreign policy issues in the British Embassy Weibo post content. Section 5.1 found that in contrast with the official diplomatic communication, the British Embassy Weibo creates a personalised interpretation of foreign policy issues to draw attention from the Chinese public and promote engagement with them. The British Embassy Weibo content, therefore, becomes a new source of soft power. The Weibo narrative softens the hard foreign policy issues and makes it relevant to the general public who may not always be interested in foreign policy issues or diplomatic content in traditional media and diplomatic communication channels. Weibo provides an official information resource with informal narratives for the Chinese public to understand the British foreign policy agenda and the British ideology.

5.2 Is Weibo Encouraging Effective Engagement and Conversation

Analysis in the previous chapters found that the Weibo has become a useful communication tool for foreign embassies to reach the Chinese public especially the younger generation whom are active social media users, as well as provide an accessible information source and alternative stories of foreign policy issues. Therefore, engagement and conversation are two of the variables in this research. Will Weibo help the British foreign service to fulfil their new mission to have real engagement and

conversation with the Chinese public? James Grunig highlights in his article *Paradigms of global public relations in an age of digitalisation* that social media has a significant feature to enable two-way communication and provides a global interactive and socially responsible way to engage with the public (Grunig, 2009). In the perspective of the British Embassy Weibo's practise in China, would it be possible to use the features of social media to fulfil the goal of engaging the Chinese public and generate two-way symmetrical information flow? What is the main advantage and obstacle of digital media in implementing the best practice in this two-way diplomatic communication? Will China's own culture, political system, media regulation and online nationalistic activities pose a significant challenge on this implementation process? This section analyses whether the British Embassy Weibo has been adopted as an effective communication tool for the British foreign service to engage with the Chinese public directly and encourage their active participation in diplomatic communication.

Meanwhile, the content analysis also found many negative and even extremely hostile comments left on the British Embassy Weibo, which show that the British Embassy's Weibo communication may not always create positive result. Many of these comments contain nationalistic elements that put up great challenge towards the British Embassy's digital diplomacy practice on Weibo and even the British foreign policy decision making process. Based on the theoretical framework, this section studies the online nationalistic resistance to the British foreign service's digital effort to encourage engagement and conversation among Chinese social media users.

Before discussing how does Weibo serve as a public diplomacy tool and measure its influence, it is worthy to find out if the Chinese public welcomes digital diplomatic communication. In the last ten years, China's GDP and personal income have grown rapidly. There are more and more Chinese citizens go abroad for travelling, studying, and working. According to a report from China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the main purposes of Chinese people's overseas trips are tourism, visiting friends and family, work and business, education and cultural exchange activities. In 2017，there are 130 million Chinese citizens who went abroad for tourism purpose. Most of them are between 25 to 50 years old (China Tourism Research Institute, 2017). In 2017, there are 608,400 Chinese students went to overseas education institutions to study

(People's Daily, 2018). Among all the destination countries, the UK attracted over 90,000 Chinese students in 2016 and 2017 (Xinhua News, 2018). However, in contrast to this growth, there are not enough official resources available for the Chinese citizens to obtain information about foreign countries' culture, history, society and government. It caused misunderstandings and even accidents when Chinese people go abroad.

According to a 2016 report from iResearch, an Internet consultancy service provider based in China, the top three resources that the Chinese people use to obtain information about foreign countries are search engines (80.8%), social media (73.7%), and offline channels such as mass media and travel agencies (66.2%) (Airui Consultancy, 2016). Among these three main information resources, only social media enables users to search other users' experience, share knowledge and information, as well as interact with other users. Furthermore, according to the latest report from the China Internet Network Information Center, the number of Chinese Internet user has reached 772 million in 2017. 97.5% of them use mobile phones as the first choice of browsing Internet and using social media The majority of the Chinese social media users are aged between 18 to 45 years old, which is within the same age range of the people who have interest in going abroad for study, travel and work (CNNIC, 2018). They are actively looking for information about foreign countries. Therefore, social media serves as an effective communication channel and information resource to reach the Chinese people whom are interested in foreign countries and their culture.

The activeness and nature of the communication between the British Embassy Weibo and its followers are measured by calculating the number of comments in 2010 and 2017, plus identifying the nature of these comments. The result of the study in this section is shown in table 4 which is a comparison summary of the comments left on the British Embassy Weibo in 2010 and 2017. The comparison shows the change of the level of public participation in the British diplomatic communication in China. The most notable finding is the significant increase in the numbers of both positive and negative comments in 2017. Although there are more positive comments in both 2010 and 2017, the percentage of negative comments among the total number of comments increased significantly in 2017 comparing with that in 2010. It could because of the wearing off of the excitement on foreign embassy's Weibo over time. Moreover, it could also because

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of China's increasing online nationalistic sentiment towards foreign governments.

Another notable change is the increase of the number of questions asked by Weibo users and the decrease of the number of responses from the British Embassy Weibo in 2017. Most of the questions from the British Embassy Weibo followers focus on visa applications in both years. In order to measure the level of digital diplomacy engagement with the foreign public, this analysis includes the comment response rate shown in table 4. It seems the British Embassy Weibo has become much less responsive to the followers. However, in 2017, there are 12 posts were published to provide visa policy information, answer to the questions about visa application as well as offer live chat about visa application. These posts covered the majority of the questions from the followers. In addition, although the number of responses to comments decreased by almost 2/3 in 2017, according to the former editor of the British Embassy Weibo, her team responded to some of the questions in person by using private message function on Weibo to protect these followers' privacy and reduce irrelevant information in the comments area (Interview No. 3).

The study also found that there are no responses to the questions about foreign policy issues in the public comment area on the British Embassy Weibo. It indicates that the British Embassy Weibo is not willing to have open and interactive discussion about the British foreign policy among the Chinese public. It also may because of the British Embassy China's pre-cautious about potential risks of discussing foreign policy issues on social media channels which is closely monitored by the Chinese government. The British Embassy China also concerns that mass media may pick up issues from their Weibo conversation with the Chinese public to cause unnecessary or unfavoured media exposure. Overall, the communication flow on the British Embassy Weibo is mainly two-way but not symmetrical with only a few exceptions due to the low interactivity between the Weibo editors and the Weibo followers. This result helps with the discussion of linking professionalisation to the level of government engagement and diplomatic Weibo's influencing power in section 5.3.

Categories of Comment Analysis	2010	2017
Total comments	4670	24835
Maximum number of comments left for a single post	253	1071
Minimum number of comments left for a single post	0	0
Average comments per post	7.6	20.7
Positive comments	773	3181
Negative comments	199	1692
Response requests	156	1087
Responded comments	167	65

Table 4: A Content Analysis of the Comments on the British Embassy Weibo in 2010 and 2017

Table 4 also shows that some posts attract a significant number of comments while some other posts attract no comments at all. In 2010, the post attracted the maximum number of comments was about the British Prime Minister David Cameron's visit to China with his cabinet members and 50 British industry leaders. The post announced the first official live cast of a foreign state visit on Sina Weibo. In 2017, the number of comments left for the post regarding the launch of the two-year UK visiting visa in March reached the peak. This post generated 1,071 comments and questions about the new visa application procedure. The British Embassy Weibo therefore organised a live chat to answer the visa application questions in May and another two video posts featuring the visa section officers explaining the new visa policy later that year. Another post received a high number of comments in 2017 is the one supporting the World Day Against Death Penalty and urging the Chinese government to limit the use of death penalty. More than half of the comments are against the UK's stand in the abolition of death penalty and their call for the Chinese government to limit the use of death penalty. The comments contain the words forbidden by the China's online media censorship were deleted or even not published by Sina Weibo. The British Embassy Weibo editor has to monitor and make screenshot of the comments immediately after sending the Weibo posts to be able to see all of them. Otherwise, Sina Weibo may delete some comments just within 5 minutes after the post is published.

The comparison in table 4 shows that the British Embassy Weibo provides a virtual

platform where the Chinese public can express their opinions and get responses directly from the embassy. This approach can be regarded as a way of opening up a public space for diplomatic conversations and encouraging discussion between the embassy and the foreign public. The foreign embassies, such as the British Embassy, would like to change their image of being difficult to approach by interacting with the foreign public directly online. However, the findings in this section also suggest that although the numbers of followers and comments of the British Embassy Weibo grew fast from 2010 to 2017, the actual positive engagement level did not catch up with it. The comments and feedback received by the British Embassy Weibo are quite often negative and even violent, especially when there are controversial issues between China and the UK. The advantage of social media that enables direct engagement with the foreign public sometimes can also turn into disappointment when the responses from social media users are negative and resistant.

Thus, the foreign missions realise that conversation and engagement do not simply happen because the technology is ready and available. When the bilateral relationship becomes tense and sensitive, even a Weibo post without any reference to politics may be understood negatively by the foreign public. Foreign embassies would be forced or threatened by these the foreign public to take up the correct political stand.

For example, on 17th January 2013, Jianrong Wang, a Chinese professor from China's Social Science Academy, was requested to provide his household register book when he applied for the UK visa. He was not happy with this request and sent a post on his personal Weibo account, "I hate the household register policy, and anyone requests to check household register… I'd rather not to go to the UK for my lifetime than submit my household register book." He was widely supported by the Chinese public, including some famous people on social media. On 19th January, he sent another Weibo post to formally request the British Embassy to abolish the visa policy of submitting household register book. At the same time, many Weibo users left comments on the British Embassy Weibo account to support Professor Wang's action. Most of these comments are negative and even threatening to boycott the British products and business in China. To respond to the incident, the British Embassy Weibo posted a statement on the same day, which says, "We suggest the Chinese visa applicators to submit their household

register book to make the evaluation process faster and smoother." The UK Border Agency and the British Embassy also invited professor Wang to have a meeting and stated that the visa section only suggests but not requests to have household register information from visa applicators. Another example is the post published on 24th December 2015 about how the British families celebrate Christmas. Although the post only tells what activities that people in the UK normally do on the Christmas day with pictures of Christmas theme, most of the 182 comments left for it are negative and critical. The cause of these negative comments might be the threatening incidents that happened on the same day targeting at the Western people in Sanlitun, the foreign embassy zone in Beijing. Accordingly, many nationalistic activities were targeting at foreign embassies of Western countries on social media as well. Meanwhile, there are many comments on the British Embassy Weibo demonstrate China' emerging online nationalistic emotion towards the Western countries, including the UK.

Since China has quite strict regulations on large-scale gatherings and street demonstrations, Weibo has become one of the main online platforms for the Chinese public to engage in political discussion and activities. Although the British Embassy limits the Weibo content related to politics, the Weibo account becomes a battlefield for the Chinese Weibo users and nationalists to protest and attack the UK government verbally when there are controversial issues between the two countries. For example, just minutes after the news about the former British Prime Minister David Cameron announcing to meet Dalai Lama was released in 2013, the Chinese Weibo users left extremely negative comments and threatening messages on the British Embassy Weibo to protest Cameron's decision. Those messages were not filtered by Sina Weibo even some of them contain aggressive words. Soon, the Chinese government announced that they cancelled all the high-level official visits to the UK. Under the increasing pressure from the Chinese public and government, Cameron announced the cancellation of his meeting with Dalai Lama a few days later.

Many of the Weibo users who show nationalistic emotion online are young Chinese citizens nicknamed as *Xiao Fen Hong* (little pinkies). The term *Xiao Fen Hong* originally refers to young girls who like reading romantic fictions. The term was later used by a famous Weibo user to insult some online forum users during the argument between

them. In June 2016, a Taiwanese actor starred in a Chinese romantic film was resisted by the Chinese online users because he supported Taiwan's independence. The term was then used by China's liberalism social media users to describe the group of Chinese young social media users born after the 1990s whom are considered innocent, brain-washed, and irrational by them (Fang and Repnikova, 2017).

Although *Xiao Fen Hong* became an offensive term, many Chinese mainstream media outlets such as *Global Times* use it in a positive way to describe those young social media users as patriots. Although they may not have good knowledge of politics and history, as well as the sense of judgments, they are just people loving their country deeply (Ouyang, 2016). Therefore, to a certain level, the Chinese government acquiesces their opinions expressed on social media mainly because they are not only supporting the country but also supporting the Chinese government. Since China hosted the 2008 Olympic Games, the level of national pride reached to a very high point. The younger generation of Chinese people, especially those were born between the 1980s to 2000s, enjoy China's fast-growing economy in the past 20 years and use social media everyday. Many of them demonstrate strong nationalistic emotion online. Although they receive more influence from the Western culture than their parents do, they seem to have stronger resistance to the Western political values. They are passionate about protecting China's national image and resenting critics from foreign countries on political issues such as Tibet, human rights, and media censorship.

Therefore, the nationalistic sentiments displayed on the Chinese social media have triggered criticising comments and resistance to the effort made by foreign embassies to encourage positive communication among the Chinese public. Foreign embassies' Weibo becomes targets for them to criticise and even condemn foreign countries and government bodies when there are any controversial issues happen and sometimes even the Weibo content is irrelevant to politics. Foreign embassies' Weibo accounts has been used by them to vent anger. As a result, the online nationalistic sentiment has become a resistance power for the British foreign service to deliver their digital diplomacy objectives which aim to use social media to get their message out and encourage a high-level participation from the Chinese public. As a result, the British Embassy Weibo has not yet achieved the two-way symmetrical communication model.

The analysis in this section reviews China's online nationalistic sentiment displayed on the British Embassy Weibo between 2014 and 2018, and critically analyses the challenges it puts forward for the British Embassy Weibo's communication practice. Firstly, this study calculates the number of critical comments between July to December 2017 and identifies the nationalistic sentiment displayed in these comments. This study found that among all the critical comments received by the British Embassy Weibo during this selected period, 78% of them displayed nationalistic emotions. Taking a post published by the British Embassy Weibo on 10th October 2017 as an example, the content of this post features the *World Day of Abolish the Death Penalty*. The translation of the post is: "Today is the #World Day of Abolish the Death Penalty#. The UK supports abolishing the death penalty and call for a suspension of the death penalty globally with most of the countries. In our opinion, the death penalty damages people's dignity. There was no evidence to prove its value of deterrence. Furthermore, any misjudgement is irreversible and irreparable. The death penalty is against basic human rights. We support China to limit the use of the death penalty to a further level." In this post, the British government was calling for the Chinese government to limit the death penalty. This post received 600 comments with 75% of them are negative and even hostile. There are over half of these negative comments have the nationalistic theme. Table 5 is the translation of some of the comments left for this post. From the table, it is easy to identify the verbal attacks on the UK's political issues such as Muslims, Northern Ireland, and Iraq. The study found that the posts with topics related to politics and government relationship tend to attract a higher volume of attention and comments from Weibo followers and are more likely to become the target of nationalistic comments. Therefore, although the attention and the number of comments seem high, it does not necessarily link to a strong and positive engagement with the foreign public.

Weibo Follower Name	Comment
Fei Wu Zhi Yun	A life for a life
Li Yi 12 Bei Yong Weibo	We are regret for the explosion in the London underground. We call the UK to sincerely respect ethnic minority groups' freedom of religious and their human rights, as well as open pragmatic conversation with them. People have to use violence when their appeal could not be expressed through normal channels; We feel worried about the British Muslims' living circumstances. The repeated oppression on ethnic minority groups will deteriorate the already terrible human rights situation further.
Liu Xixi (V)	If the death penalty is abolished, whipping penalty has to be used. Otherwise, things will lose control.
Yi Bao Tou Teng Fen	Why did Muslims cause the nonsense violent incidents? Your government should reflect that why don't you donate your land, add green onion dome on Buckingham Palace, and dress the Queen in Burqa? Is this your universal value? We hope your government to consider Muslim's religious and belief. There is no Bacon could be found in your country.
Zhuang B de Guo Jing Zhi Nan	Hehe, this is called European disease.
Mao Zi Shang You Tu	British white skin pigs do not respect the human rights of Northern Ireland and disturb them to be independent!
Mao Zi Shang You Tu	Do White skin pigs have face?
Fei Er Nan Ji	White skin pigs are seeking death! Seeking curse!
Yi Ge Ren De Qiu Tian 2015865	Britain is the world-famous hypocrite, garnished gentleman. How could evil members of the society be controlled if the death penalty is abolished?

Dian Jie-Gan Xi	You have buried the basic human rights which is in the centre of your heart when you bombed civilians with unmanned aerial vehicles in Syria and Iraq. You never truly care about the human rights, precisely other countries' human rights, in your heart. Therefore......shut the fuck up! Death penalty has deterrence value in China. The use of death penalty should be cautious and careful. However, it should not be abolished! Would you please shut up?
Bai Yi 818	You do not mention human rights to those victims of crime but jumping up and down to protect the human rights of the criminals. It seems you cannot show off your democracy and human rights if you do not do so.
Cong E Mei Feng Dao-Shen Hai (V)	Hehehe, you do not death penalty, all you killed are foreigners.
o0 Yi Qi Yi Hui0o	Thus, so many terrorists were created by your attractiveness as Holy Mother.

Table 5: Comments Samples of the British Embassy Weibo Post Dated 10/10/17

On the other side, it should be noted that before social media is used by foreign embassies as digital diplomacy platform, it was not easy for the Chinese people to discuss foreign policy and political issues in public space. The British Embassy Weibo provides an official public space for the Chinese social media users to have foreign policy discussions directly and openly with a foreign diplomatic bureau. It supports the process of promoting foreign policy's transparency advocated by the Foreign Office's digital strategy (FCO, 2012). The Chinese social media users were impressed with the level of freedom and transparency allowed on the British Embassy Weibo even there is strict content control from the Chinese government. They are also surprised on the tolerance of politically sensitive information on foreign embassies' Weibo accounts. The examples of this kind of information are two posts about *Human Rights and Democracy Report* dated 13th April 2014 (picture 4) and 17th July 2018 (picture 5).

Picture 4: Screenshot of the British Embassy Weibo Post Published on 13/04/14

The Weibo post shown on picture 4 provides a direct link to the *2013 Human Rights and Democracy Report* published by the British government on its official website. It was the first time for a foreign embassy in China to post information about human rights on a digital media channel that is accessible by the general public. In order to avoid the Chinese media censorship on human rights topics, the editor divided the Chinese character 权 (rights) into two individual Chinese characters 木 and 又. As a result, the content filter system could not catch the key word – human rights.

Picture 5: Screenshot of the British Embassy Weibo Post Published on 17/07/17

However, the Weibo post published three years later with the same topic shown on picture 5 used correct Chinese characters for human rights and provided a link to the Chinese translation of the full report. It indicates that although the Chinese government did not announce openly that the foreign embassies' Weibo accounts are free from media censorship, they have silently and gradually allowed such kind of sensitive topics appearing on the British Embassy Weibo and some other foreign embassies' Weibo accounts recently. This change has been noticed and discussed by many professionals and researchers. Xu Xiang, a Chinese media professional, commented in an interview with Radio Free Asia, "Chinese government is deeply annoyed by those sensitive Weibo content because they would look narrow-minded if they delete it. At the same time, their image as an imperial court will be damaged if they do not delete it" (Zhong and Huang, 2014). An unnamed Chinese human rights activist hopes this change will help the Chinese people to understand the real human rights status in China without using the VPN to access blocked foreign online resources. However, even many Chinese social media users are thrilled by the level of freedom in viewing and commenting the sensitive issues on foreign embassies' Weibo accounts, there are far more users show critical and negative opinions towards these foreign countries, especially the Western ones. Table 6 shows the examples of the critical and negative comments left for the British Embassy Weibo posts shown in picture 5. The table shows that most of the comments expressed anger and hostile emotion.

Although this kind of negative and critical comments carry no real value for the British foreign service to fulfil their diplomatic goal in China, the British foreign service receives first-hand feedback from the Chinese public to understand their opinions through comments. On contrary, the posts featuring culture, education and other non-political topics normally receive much less and even zero negative comments with nationalistic emotion. The former British Embassy Weibo managing editor, Ping Liu commented, "It is always easier for people to accept your views and to advance UK interests when they are interested in and familiar with you" (Liu, 2013). Therefore, over half of the British Embassy Weibo posts are related to British culture, education and entertainment, which are easier to be accepted and favoured by the Chinese young social media users.

User Name	Comments
Qianqiuwujuesea	You Britain can start a war in China with your boats and gun as you did in 19th centuries. Are there any differences between you and BBC China by publishing some superficial posts?
Zanglan1997	You see your post is not deleted by the government. Do you still think our country does not have human rights? In addition, Britain is a capitalism country that still keeps monarchy. We strongly call for the UK to abolish monarchy and capitalism, stop exploiting and oppressing proletariats, and return freedom to British people. Do you feel happy if I said that? So why not play together happily? Why are you causing so much drama?
Madison9139	Stop bleeping! Upholding justice needs power. You do not know how weak you are now. If you keep talking about it again, the Chinese Liberation Army will take over Liverpool and surround London to sign the unequal Cambridge Treaty which forces you to cede Scotland and give you Britain a century's shame. Then everybody will laugh.
Shijiandashideerbianfeng	The ones who mention the Tibet issues, I personally recommend you listen to A Jie Gu. Human right is only a tool used by some countries to overturn other countries. Nationalism is excellent.
Yirantaoshengyijiu	The report about Xinjiang and Tibet is not true. Other parts are basically fair.
Baiyin-Baolige	It is difficult to cater for all tastes. It is the common problem for all the countries including UK! Therefore, I think we should manage our own affairs well! It is the best to work from oneself. Democracy and freedom should be built on rules! Otherwise even the UK would not accept such kind of ruleless democracy.
Suoweishidengranchenzaicirui	It is the fact without mistakes. But is also fits China's own conditions. China has reasons and necessity to restrain the whole country.

Table 6: Examples of Negative and Critical Comments of the British Embassy Weibo Post Featuring 2017 Human Rights and Democracy Report Dated 17/07/18

For example, the posts telling the tradition of Halloween published on 31st October 2018 used the photo of a pumpkin carved to look like the head of communications of the British Embassy China. The post introduced the connection between Halloween and Scotland as, "31st October #Halloween#, the English is "Halloween" which is the short

version of "All Hallows Eve" meaning the night eve of All Hallow's Day. Halloween is still called "Allhallowmas" in Scotland and some areas in Canada, which means Mass for the memorial of all hallows. (The photo published with this post is the pumpkin lantern carved to look like my boss, applause here!) Happy Halloween!" This post received 94 reposts. All the comments are positive with some of them laughing at the British humour shown in this post. Many comments left for this post are similar to what a user named Caoshuxunyi says, "Faint! The UK keeps acting so cute. Hahaha. You even make fool of your boss." Most of the comments greeted "Happy Halloween!" or praised the photo of pumpkin lantern is "lovely".

Another example of the positive comments left for the non-political posts of the British Embassy Weibo is the post published on 27th December 2017. This post features the British national symbol, the Queen, by posting a video of the Queen's Christmas speech and highlighting one of the sentences in her remarks, "We think of our homes as places of warmth, familiarity and love; of shared stories and memories". 95% of the comments left for this post is positive and there are no negative comments. Table 7 shows the first five comments left for this post. All of them are friendly and positive, which indicate that the Weibo content telling British culture and customs works better in establish a positive engagement with the Chinese social media users.

Fengxingxing: Sixty years passed... Everything changed excepted Her Majesty and HIM.
Jingqiangjingyunziduoqing: I listen to HM the Queen's Christmas speech every year. Hope it's not too late this year. Happy Christmas and be loved.
BaixiaomengCindy: It is the 3rd Christmas in London. I listen to the Queen's Speech every year.
SexyJack: The British Queen has white hair but a youthful face. She thinks sharply and speaks clearly, impressed!
ChristianatuUK: Her Majesty's Most Gracious Speech

Table 7: The First Five Comments Left for the British Embassy Weibo Post Dated 27/12/17

Comments left from 02/10/18	Comments left on 01/10/18
Zhouzhongguke: Support independence of Northern Ireland and Scotland. You British robber release should release our female journalist. A country is bullying a woman. We will beat all Hong Kong independence supporters!	Dorothy0220: British historical castles, food, culture and natural landscape are all good choices.
Jiangnanyinjushi: Support Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales! Come on white skin pig	Banxiajinliangqingrencheng: I want to go to Wales to enjoy the beautiful sea, visit the world-famous British Museum, listen to the works of the great play writer Shakespeare, and ride horse in a beautiful manor house.
Ailifei1969: Britain's democracy is hypocritical and fake. You even seized our journalist. You are shameless and interfering our internal affairs. You did not allow our journalist to speak. What a shitty and fake democracy!!	hvxfchj: I feel returning back to my childhood when I learnt the Big Ben, Loch Ness, and Greenwich on map. The accent and words such as penny and underground when I was practising English listening in childhood. I knew industrial revolution, Tudor, and the house of Stuart from history class. I knew Dickens and Shakespeare when I studied literature. I never know that all the first knowledge of Western countries are all about the UK if I haven't been there.
Capitaines-Yu: I used to feel good about the UK and went to university there. I have British friends whom are really nice. Is it necessary to hold double standards? Now the U.S is making the world messy. Is the next world war coming soon?	Baobaostudy: I like British pop music and also want to experience the real afternoon tea because it seems nothing special but is more popular than Chinese tea culture. Therefore I want to experience and see it.
Buding_Xiaobai: How dare you interfere with China's internal affairs and treat our journalist like this? I hope your country will be torn apart and other countries hold a press conference to support separatists! After all you do like it, don't you? You should treat others in a way that you want to be treated. Sure enough that robbers are still robbers no matter how many years have past! Shameless!	RibuluoxiadeAli_z: Britain is my second home.

Table 8: Comment Examples Left for the British Embassy Weibo Post Published on 01/10/18

However, soft and culture-related content does not always work for every occasion. Whenever there are any controversial issues, especially political issues or incidents, occurring between China and the UK, even the significant attention from Weibo followers and a high number of comments would not guarantee a positive outcome and a success of digital diplomacy. For example, a post published on 1st October 2018, which is China's National Day, says, "The National Day holiday is coming~If you have an opportunity to #encounter the UK#, what kind of experience and stories you would like to share with us? Are those experiences about British gardens, historic castles, grand houses, and churches or cultural stories of English tea and drinks? Please take the topic of #encounter the UK# with you and share with us the UK in your eyes! We will select the five most special followers in the topic page and send a secret gift to them~ (below pictures are from the book *Journal of British Custom and Scenery*)". This type of soft topic featuring culture and tourism is normally welcomed by the Chinese public and usually generates positive comments from the Weibo followers. This post received 490 comments, which is a higher number comparing with that of other posts. However, it is notable that all the positive and friendly comments were left on 1st October, while nearly all the comments left after 2nd October are mainly negative and unfriendly which is dramatic change comparing with to the comments left just one day before. Table 8 shows five randomly selected comments left on 2nd October 2018 and five randomly selected comments left on 1st October 2018 for this post.

It can be seen from table 8 that the tones of the comments in the two columns are completely different. The sudden change of the tone came after the incident happened on 1st October 2018. Linlin Kong, the China Central Television's London correspondent, was taken away by police for disturbing a forum about Hong Kong governance during the Conservative Party's annual party conference. The British media depicted her as a nationalist who was shouting "liar" and "anti-China" at the party activist Benedict Rogers when he gave the final remark about Hong Kong's political freedoms at the end of the forum. Rogers is the head of a UK-based human rights group called Hong Kong Watch which is critical towards China's governance over Hong Kong. Kong called the Hong Kong separatists "traitors" and allegedly slapped a student volunteer when he asked her to leave and tried to grab her arms. However, Kong was highly praised and strongly backed by the Chinese government and China Central Television. Chinese official

media made the alleged slap low key and claimed she was physically assaulted, and her detention was in violation of her rights to express political opinions. The Chinese Embassy in London also claimed her removal from the conference was unacceptable. This incident stimulated a wide public discussion online and offline in China since it was reported by mass media. A huge number of comments left on Sina Weibo praised Kong for her brave defending on China's governance in Hong Kong. Only very few comments are criticising her alleged attacking to the conference volunteer. While some Weibo users questioned about the strength of the UK-China relations. One user said, "Britain's friendship with China is only superficial". This view is also reflected in the comments shown in table 8. The British Embassy Weibo soon became a target for the Chinese public to throw their anger and condemnation no matter if the posts published around the time of this incident are relevant to this incident. Within the week after this incident, the British Embassy Weibo received more than 10,000 comments. The content analysis found that the majority of these comments are negative and often display nationalistic emotion. The Chinese public is criticising the UK government's "double standard" and "interfering on China's internal affairs". Some comments even claim they are supporting the independence of Wales and Scotland. This example indicates that the nationalistic sentiments from Chinese social media users form the online resistance to the British foreign service's effort of digital engagement in China. It provides the evidence to the argument that a higher number of comments does not necessarily link to successful digital diplomatic communication outcomes.

The main group of Weibo followers that left emotional and nationalistic comments is the young generation of Chinese people who enjoy the good life quality as the result of China's fast economic development in the recent 20 years. They are influenced by Western culture and predicted to be the potential reformists of Chinese politics and society by foreign media and researchers. However, they become the generation that have strong proudness of all aspects of China's achievements and big fans of many Chinese films and documentaries with the theme of patriotism, such as *Wolf Warrior* and *Amazing China*. They become the new power to influence the dialogue between Western countries and China since 2016 when these kind of films and documentaries were released and supported by the Chinese government. For example, a Chinese sportsman Sun Yang was called "drug cheat" by an Australian gold medallist Mark

Horton during the 2016 Rio Olympic Games. Chinese social media users left over 243,000 negative comments on Horton's Weibo account (Ruan, 2016). Their love for China has been presented as passionate support to the Chinese government and strong resistance to critical opinions about China. Some of them are even educated or living in Western countries. The foreign embassy Weibo provides a direct platform for them to express their opinions and pose anger when there are any controversial issues that happen between the two countries. It is no doubt that Weibo has shown certain level of effectiveness in furthering the UK's interests among the target groups of the Chinese public and promoting direct dialogues with them. However, on the other hand, this research also shows that under the pressure of China's online nationalism activities conducted by the younger generation, the British Embassy Weibo has to face up to the challenges of encouraging positive engagement with these young social media users. Another finding is that all negative comments, even the hostile ones, are not removed or blocked by the British Embassy Weibo. It supports the FCO's claim of transparency promoted by digital diplomacy. Some Chinese Weibo users are also surprised by the level of transparency tolerated by the British Embassy Weibo account.

Indeed, Weibo is a highly interactive communication tool that does not only provide information like websites but also provides the mechanism for active engagement and potential for a symmetrical communication. However, the analysis of the negative comments on the British Embassy Weibo indicates that employing new digital communication tool does not equal to achieving positive engagement with the foreign public. Weibo also provides a space for the online resistance to foreign ideological influence. James E. Grunig believes social media has the potential to create socially responsible two-way symmetrical or dialogical communication (Grunig, 2009). In order to apply his theory in the discussion of this section, the Chinese public is regarded as the key strategic stakeholder with whom a good and long-term relationship helps the British government to achieve its foreign policy goals through the two-way interactive communication on social media. However, Grunig also pointed out that the excellence in communication practises should be varying for different parts of the world (Grunig, 2009). In this section, Grunig's theory of excellence in communication management adapted to the theoretical framework of this study promotes our understanding of the challenges that the digital diplomatic communication faces and examines the nature of

the communication process of the British Embassy Weibo.

Renken examined the concepts of public diplomacy in the context of public relations when he studied the case of German mission's Facebook use in foreign countries. He noted that the dialogue means the effort to reach more stakeholders by treating them as persons rather than only target groups (Renken, 2014). Public relations and digital diplomacy are both approaches to reach more stakeholders and exchange messages to influence their opinions. However, from the results of existing research and analysis in this study, it seems that the British foreign service has used new technical features of Weibo and tailored strategy to reach the Chinese public, but not yet fully explored the full potential of the features of social media and make solutions to the risks. A smarter strategy is needed to solve the problems brought over by China's online nationalism emotions and build real influence among the young Chinese people. Thus, the outcome of online diplomatic dialogue sometimes is beyond the predication from digital diplomacy practitioners whom may be cautious on specific topics in fear of "exposure and loss of control over their image and reputation" (Theunissen and Noordin, 2012, p.11).

Grunig's four models of public relations, which are press agentry, public information, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical communication, define the role of public relations as mediator and persuader (Grunig, 2009). The two-way asymmetrical model and two-way symmetrical model are the two characteristics of two-way communication in Grunig's four models (Grunig, 2009). By adapting his theory in the digital diplomacy context, this study argues that if the foreign service only intends to influence foreign public's mind and have some conversations with them, the communication should be defined as asymmetrical. However, if the foreign service would like not only to influence the foreign public but also takes on their feedbacks and make adjustments to the foreign policy, the communication could therefore be defined as symmetrical. In a word, all parties must receive mutual benefit from the communication process. However, the needs of the two parties sometimes conflict for many reasons, such as cultural differences and political conflicts. Many scholars even questioned the possibility of symmetrical communication in some specific contexts. Leitch and Neilson argued that the genuine dialogue might "produce unpredictable and

dangerous outcomes" which could lead to disagreement among the participants in the communication process (Leitch and Neilson, 2001, p.135). As a result, "organizations might be less likely to engage in it" (Theunissen and Noordin, 2012, p.11).

Based on Grunig's theory, Yepsen further distinguished the difference between tactical and strategic listening in two-way communications. According to Yepsen, tactical listening would normally be identified in asymmetrical communications, which is used to find an effective way to communicate with the target audience. In contrast, strategic listening would be part of symmetrical communication, which aims to make strategic decisions in policy formation (Yepsen, 2012). In this sense, this study shows that the British Embassy Weibo is still in the stage of finding an effective and strategical way to communicate with its target audience. It tends to be tactical but not yet strategic. The British Embassy Weibo currently focuses on establishing a positive image among the Chinese young urban social media users to encourage their interest in the UK. Therefore, at this stage, the communication model of the British Embassy Weibo should be considered as asymmetrical, because it mainly focuses on influencing Chinese public's opinion towards the UK rather than influencing the British foreign policy formation and decision-making process by listening and talking to the Chinese public. There are only some rare occasions when the British Embassy made changes according to the feedbacks from the Weibo users. This model can hardly be changed suddenly to a two-way symmetrical model because the foreign policy only changes when the changes benefit for the nation and citizens. Digital diplomacy may be a new form of diplomatic communication, but its nature is still a diplomatic communication format.

Since the British Embassy primarily aims to build a positive image in China by using the advantages of Weibo, the British foreign service may not want to generate dialogues and discussions around some particular issues because of the risks and uncertainty of online dialogues. The content analysis found that the responses to the comments left on the British Embassy Weibo were normally given to the enquiries about non-political issues. When the followers asked questions about foreign policy or politics, there were normally no replies given to them. This finding links back to the finding of a low response rate in chapter 3.4. The findings in chapter 5 show that the British Embassy Weibo has been used as a communication channel to provide

information and increase interaction with the Chinese public directly online. However, it has not been truly used in the FCO's decision making and policy forming processes.

In summary, the result of this section's content analysis on the comments left on the British Embassy Weibo suggests that Weibo provides a platform for the British foreign service to have an immediate and direct dialogue with the Chinese public, which brings new possibilities to maximise information flow between the British foreign service and the Chinese public in both directions. The level of engagement and conversation on the British Embassy Weibo is higher than that in traditional media channels. However, the depth and effectiveness of conversations and interactions on the British Embassy Weibo are still limited. However, China's online nationalistic sentiment poses resistance and real challenge towards the British digital diplomatic communication. The communication model of the British Embassy Weibo is mainly asymmetrical with only a few exceptions. The potential of two-way symmetrical communication on social media is low at this stage. Diplomatic Weibo and foreign services should consistently be more responsive in a smarter way to engage its target foreign public and build stronger influencing power. In addition, the study finds that the British Embassy Weibo brings transparency to diplomatic communication by showing all negative public comments. It does not only elevate the reputation and credibility of the British government, but also win supports and trust among the Chinese.

The study in this section identifies the new dimensions and complexities in digital diplomatic communication. These new dimensions and complexities advance our traditional way of understanding communication management with Grunig's four models of communication. This study's adaption of Grunig's theory helps foreign services to develop effective digital diplomacy practice from a strategical level. Although the British Embassy Weibo still has not been utilised with its full potential to be as close as it could be to achieve excellence in digital diplomacy communication management which benefits all stakeholders in the relationship, the number of the British Embassy Weibo followers and comments keep increasing steadily every year. It proves that in China, Weibo has become a fast-growing diplomatic communication platform for foreign governments and made a certain level of impact among the Chinese social media users. Next section uses a combined methodology to measure the influencing

power that this impact generates.

5.3 The British Embassy Weibo's Influencing Power

One of the objectives of the *FCO Social Media Guidance* is "provides real-time channels to deliver our messages directly and influence beyond traditional audiences" (FCO, n.d.). The substance of digital diplomacy is the virtual information flow beyond traditional boundaries between countries created by the usage of digital media in diplomatic service. Thus, digital media provides a new tool for diplomats to "follow discussions, keeping track of news and building networks" as well as "monitor events, harvest information and identify key influencers" (FCO, n.d.). By the time of this study, the British Embassy Weibo has been running for almost eight years since it was launched. Does it accomplish the objectives set in the *FCO Social Media Guidance*? How influential is it among the Chinese public? How could their influence be measured and evaluated? These questions are increasingly asked by researchers of different disciplines internationally. Although there are some attempts in exploring effective measurements to measure the outcome of digital communication, none of them is developed specifically for measuring the influencing power of digital diplomacy. In order to address this gap, this research tries to measure and evaluate the British Embassy Weibo's influencing power by using Delphi method and analytical hierarchy process (AHP), which was introduced in the methodology chapter of this thesis. This research chooses the indicators related to Weibo development, foreign embassies' public diplomacy goal, and Weibo users' demands to measure the foreign embassies' influencing power from multiple dimensions.

The British Embassy Weibo influencing power is evaluated in two steps. Firstly, in order to reveal the changing process of the British Embassy's online communication from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 era, this research compares the communication models of both the British Embassy China website and its Weibo to address the differences between the two online communication channels. The comparison shows the evolution of the British foreign service's online diplomatic communication through the different stages of digital media technology development. Therefore, the first step of evaluating the British Embassy Weibo's overall influencing power is inviting three Weibo experts from

a top public relations agency in China and three content editors from three major Chinese social media service providers were invited in March 2015 to give scores between 1 to 9 to a set of 24 indicators identified in this research to evaluate the British Embassy official website's performance. Table 9 shows all the indicators identified in this research to reflect the performance level of the British Embassy China website. The indicators were categorised into three hierarchies. The first hierarchy includes information level, diplomatic function level, interactivity level and service level. Information level refers to the performance level of providing essential information about the British Embassy China. The scoring criteria for this level focus on comprehensiveness, practicality, and promptness. Diplomatic function level means the performance level of direct online diplomatic services and the availability of external resources used to provide value-added diplomatic services. Interactivity level evaluates the performance of interactive features and communication effectiveness. Service level indicates how well the website was designed to provide a user-friendly experience.

1st Level Hierarchical Elements	2nd Level Hierarchical Elements	3rd Level Hierarchical Elements	Description
Information level	Background information	Embassy Introduction	Embassy's function, structure and daily work
		Country Introduction	Introduction to the country it represents
		News and Notice	News and public notice updates
		Cooperation with China	Cooperation information
	Practical level	Promptness	Post updating frequency
		Information Value	Information value of posts
Diplomatic function level	Embassy function	Service guide	Embassy service guide and introduction

		Forms and Documents	Forms and documents download link
		Online service	Online service application function
		Service updates	Service updates
	External resources integration	Breadth of external resources integration	Breadth of External resources integration
		Frequency of interaction with external resources	Frequency of interaction with external resources
Interactivity level	Multiple communication channels availability	Forum and comments	Forum and comments management
		Online feedback	Online feedback
		Private message	Private message function
		Interactive activities	Interactive event and poll
		Live interaction	Live chat
	Response	Feedback frequency	Feedback frequency
		Feedback satisfaction	Feedback satisfaction
Service level	Webpage design	Convenience	If webpage is well designed and easy to use
		Visual design	If webpage looks pleasant and attractive
	Supporting information availability	Information search	If desired information can be searched
		Help information	If help information is available
		Contact details	If contact details are up to date and useful

Table 9: Indicators of the Performance Level of the British Embassy Website

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Secondly, based on the communication mechanism of Weibo, the British Embassy Weibo influencing power is measured and compared with the influencing power of four other foreign Embassies' Weibo accounts. The four other foreign embassies Weibo accounts are the U.S Embassy Weibo, Australian Embassy Weibo, Japanese Embassy Weibo and Israel Embassy Weibo. The reasons for selecting the Weibo accounts of these four foreign embassies to be compared with the British Embassy Weibo are:

- They are all major developed countries in America, Europe, Oceania, and Asia
- Their Weibo accounts are actively operated and updated
- They all have very close links in culture, politics and economy with China

These foreign embassies disseminate information to their target public groups through content sharing and viral communication enabled by Web 2.0 technology. They also aim to have more interactions and real-time conversation with the Chinese public through comments and feedback functions on Weibo.

Therefore, the measuring method of the influencing power of the British Embassy Weibo is put together by considering the British public diplomatic objectives in China, foreign embassy Weibo's development, and the Weibo followers' needs. The influence of foreign embassies' Weibo is mainly indicated by the level of interactions between Weibo accounts and Weibo users. Since foreign embassies have political and diplomatic duties, their Weibo content contain politics and foreign policy related elements, which also affect the result of this evaluation. Thus, in this study. the level of the influencing power of all five selected foreign embassies' Weibo accounts is measured by the indicators in table 10.

| Serial Number	1st Level Hierarchical Elements	2nd Level Hierarchical Elements	3rd Level Hierarchical Elements
1	Communication Capability	Promotional Level	Number of Weibo Post
2			Post Updating Rate
3		Interactive Level	Participation Rate
4			Original Post Rate
5			Weibo Following Rate
6	Interactive Capability	Awareness	Number of Weibo Followers
7			Weibo Followers Growth
8		Recognition	Number of Reposts
9			Number of Comments
10		Reputation	Number of Likes
11			Number of Critical Posts

Table 10: Evaluation System of the Influencing Power of the Five Foreign Embassy Weibo Accounts

After identifying all the hierarchical indicators and categorising them into three hierarchies, all the experts in the panel were invited to estimate the relative criterion weight of any two 3rd hierarchical indicators through pair-wise comparisons and then give scores to each item shown in table 10. The expert scoring sheet sample is shown in appendix B. At the end of the process, all experts returned their scores which were then calculated to get a mean value and form a judgment matrix showing the dominance of each indicator with respect to the other ones. The data of each indicator was collected between 24th February and 25th March 2015 and calculated with min-max normalisation formula introduced in the methodology introduction chapter to get the standardised values between 0-10 for an easier comparison. At the end, the rank of the British Embassy Weibo's influencing power was worked out by comparing all the final scores of the five foreign embassy Weibo accounts. Additionally, the evolution of the British foreign service's online communication from Web 1.0 to 2.0 is discussed by comparing the interactivity levels of the British Embassy Weibo and the British Embassy China website.

- The Performance of the British Embassy Website

Figure 6 shows the average score of the 1st level hierarchical indicators in table 9. According to the result, the British Embassy China website is performing the best in

providing diplomatic service information and updating news and public notices. On the contrary, the average score of the interactivity level falls to the bottom of the score rank chart with a significant difference from the score of the other three items. It indicates that interactivity and real-time conversation are not the primary communication objectives on this website. Figure 6 shows that the British Embassy China website does a good job in providing essential basic information such as contact details, UK and the British Embassy profile, and service introduction. Therefore, the British Embassy China website mainly serves as an official information resource rather than an online two-way communication tool.
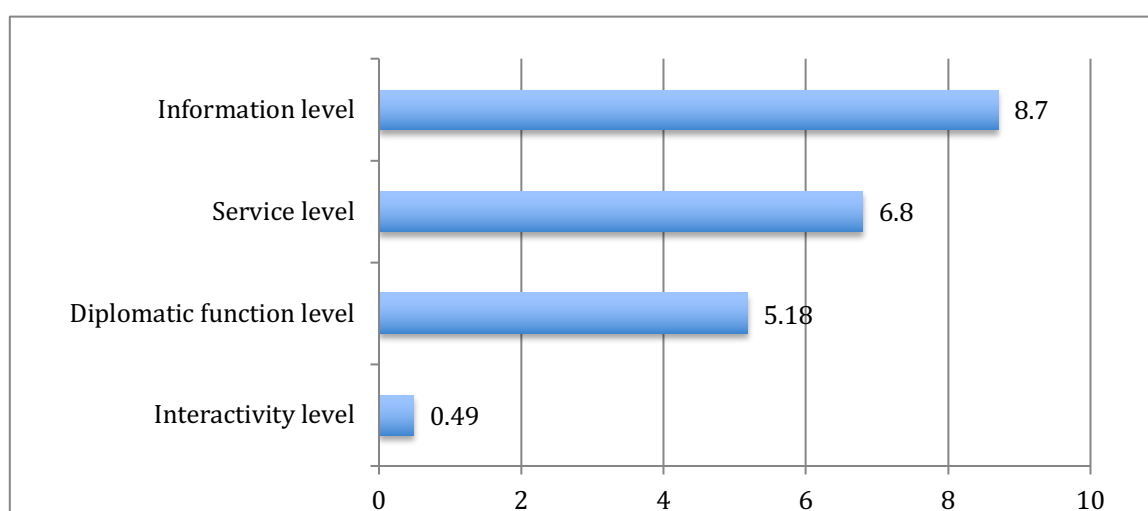
Figure 6: Average Scores of 1ˢᵗ Hierarchical Level indicators in Table 9

The highlights of the British Embassy China website's online diplomatic service function are:

1. Links to the online UK visa application service and Chevening Scholarship application are available on the front page. The link on the front page provides access to make online UK visa application and reservation of time slot to hand in documents. It also offers online visa fee payment access and live update of the visa application process. The visa application information has both the English and Chinese versions. In addition, the website also provides access to value-added services offered by their official external visa application partner and a calculator of additional medical fee to make the whole application process as convenient as it could be for all visa

applicators. The link to the Chevening Scholarship is also provided on the front page of the website for easy access.

2. The British Embassy and Consulates email addresses for personal enquiries, and links to the British Embassy China's social media accounts as well as the Weibo accounts of the British Ambassador to China are all provided on the front page to promote better communication with the Chinese public and direct the online traffic to the social media accounts.

Figure 7 shows the average scores of each 3rd level hierarchical indicators in table 9. The indicator of promptness obtained the highest score among all the 3rd level hierarchical indicators. It shows that the British Embassy China website is updated frequently and promptly. The web page is visually appropriate for the nature of a diplomatic service and convenient to use by the general public. The British Embassy China website also provides links to extensive external resources to enrich its content and improve the service. However, the British Embassy does not offer full diplomatic service on their official website except the links to the visa application online service webpage.   The values in figure 7 show that most of the indicators regarding interactivities were scored 0 and the scores of feedback and live interactions are also very low. This result indicates that interactive activities on the British Embassy website remain minimal.

Comparing with the official website of the British Embassy China, the British Embassy Weibo enables richer media content, more real-time interactions, and softer story angel to attract China's younger generation and engage with them online. The British Embassy is the first foreign embassy launched Sina Weibo account among all the foreign embassies in China. The British Embassy also launched many official channels on other popular social media services in China, such as Douban and WeChat, to actively disseminate tailored messages among target groups and attempt to establish a positive conversation with them. These social media accounts have successfully attracted the attention from the Chinese social media users by using these tactics. This study shows that the official British Embassy China website and the British Embassy Weibo have different responsibilities, but in a collaborative way. The website is

responsible for publishing formal official public notices, political messages, and diplomatic documents, which are written in a rigorous style and representing the foreign government's position. Most of the British Embassy Weibo posts are narrated in an informal style with some phrases only been used in social media communication and content. Meanwhile. most of the Weibo topics, such as culture, education and tourism, are much softer than the topics appearing on the website. Additionally, the Weibo posts are updated on a daily basis, while the website is only updated when necessary. Because of the immediacy and mobility of the social media technology, social media users can receive the content they are interested in spontaneously and easier than searching demanded information on the website.
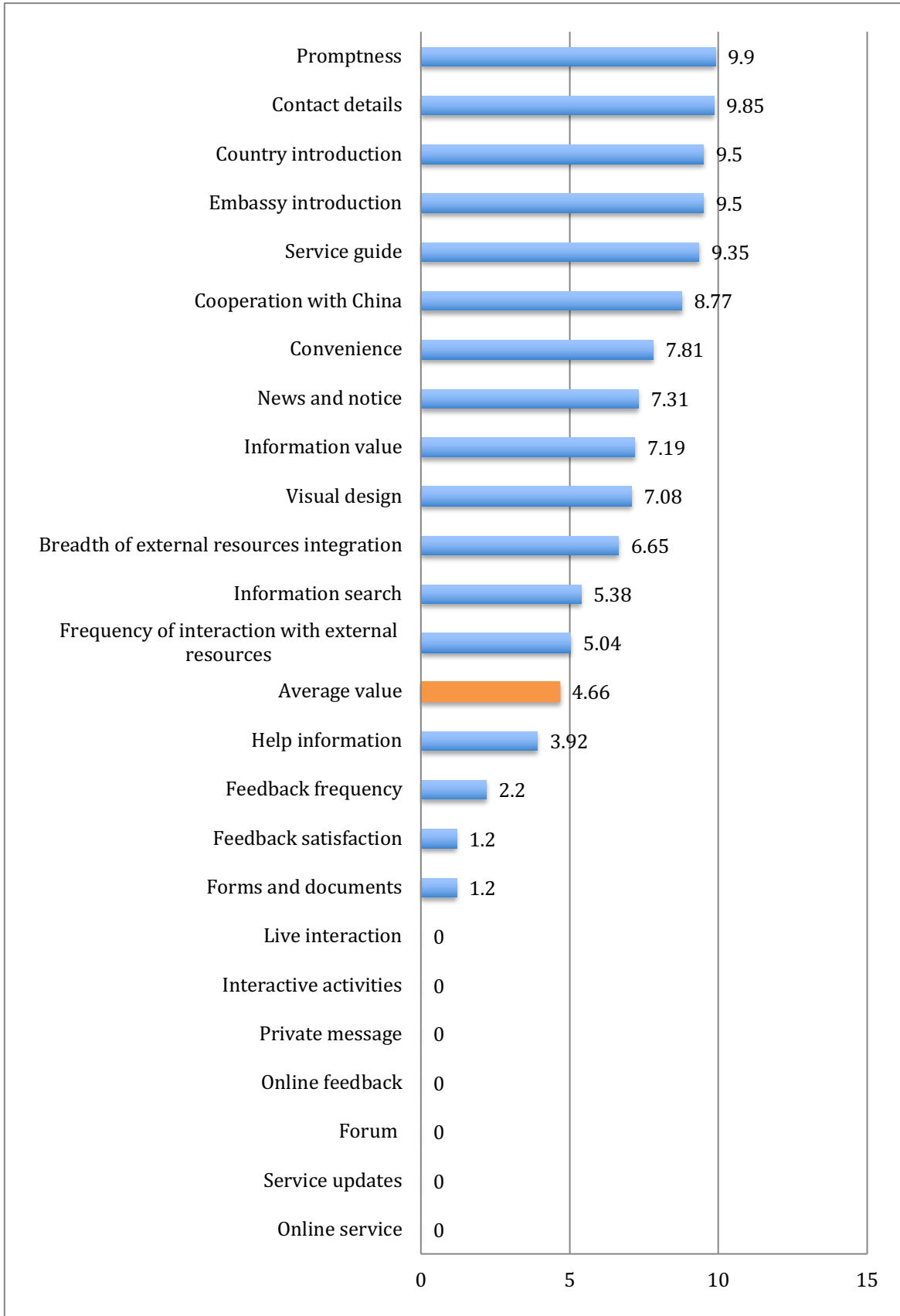
Figure 7: Average Scores of 3ʳᵈ Level Hierarchical Indicators in Table 9

Therefore, the British Embassy Weibo has the capability to disseminate more messages and create a more significant impact among the target groups than the British Embassy China website. The Weibo followers can also have a direct conversation with the British Embassy Weibo authors and participate in interactive activities on Weibo. Therefore, the advantages brought over by social media services gives diplomatic services an opportunity to listen and understand the foreign public, which is the priority of digital diplomacy. However, the research result in this chapter and chapter 3 suggests the levels of positive participation and interaction on the British Embassy Weibo are both relatively low. This research found that there are very few feedbacks given to the public comments from the British Embassy Weibo. The Weibo followers quite often have conversations and debates among themselves in the Weibo comment area.

- The Influencing Power of the British Embassy Weibo

This study used the British Embassy Weibo posts published between 24th February and 25th March 2015 as the original data to measure the influencing power of the British Embassy Weibo. The original data of this analysis are grouped into 11 categories shown in appendix C. The post-updating rate refers to the average number of daily post updates. The participation rate is the average number of comments and reposts per follower of the British Embassy Weibo. The original post rate refers to the percentage of all original posts among the total selected Weibo posts. The Weibo following rate means the percentage of all the British Embassy Weibo followers among all the Sina Weibo active users. The numbers of the British Embassy Weibo followers and all the Sina Weibo active users were recorded on 25th March 2015. The Weibo follower's growth refers to the number of newly registered British Embassy Weibo's followers within this period. The number of repost means the average number of times that each post was shared by the Weibo followers. The number of comments is the average number of comments per post during the selected period. The number of likes is the average number of positive recognition left by the Weibo followers for each Weibo post, which is called "Zan" (赞) in Chinese. The number of critical posts means the number of critical or negative posts.

By using SAATY Scale shown in table 1, this study formed the judgment matrix to measure the British Embassy Weibo and other four foreign embassies' Weibo's influencing power. The six experts invited to the panel gave their scores to each indicator of the three hierarchies. Then the mean value of the six sets of scores was calculated. After the calculation, the result was processed with the AHP software (MakeItRational), which transformed the result to a series of normalised values between 0 to 1 to show the criterion weight of each indicator shown in table 11. By reviewing the result, the expert panel agrees that the indicator of interactive capability is slightly more important than the indicator of communication capability. From figure 8, a visualised version of the criterion weights of all the 3rd level hierarchical indicators in table 11, it could be seen clearly that the most important indicator considered by the expert panel is the Weibo post updating rate. The criterion weight of this indicator is much higher than that of all the rest of 3rd level hierarchical indicators. Together with the indicators of number of reposts and number of Weibo posts, they become the top three most important indicators that measure the level of influencing power of foreign embassy Weibo.
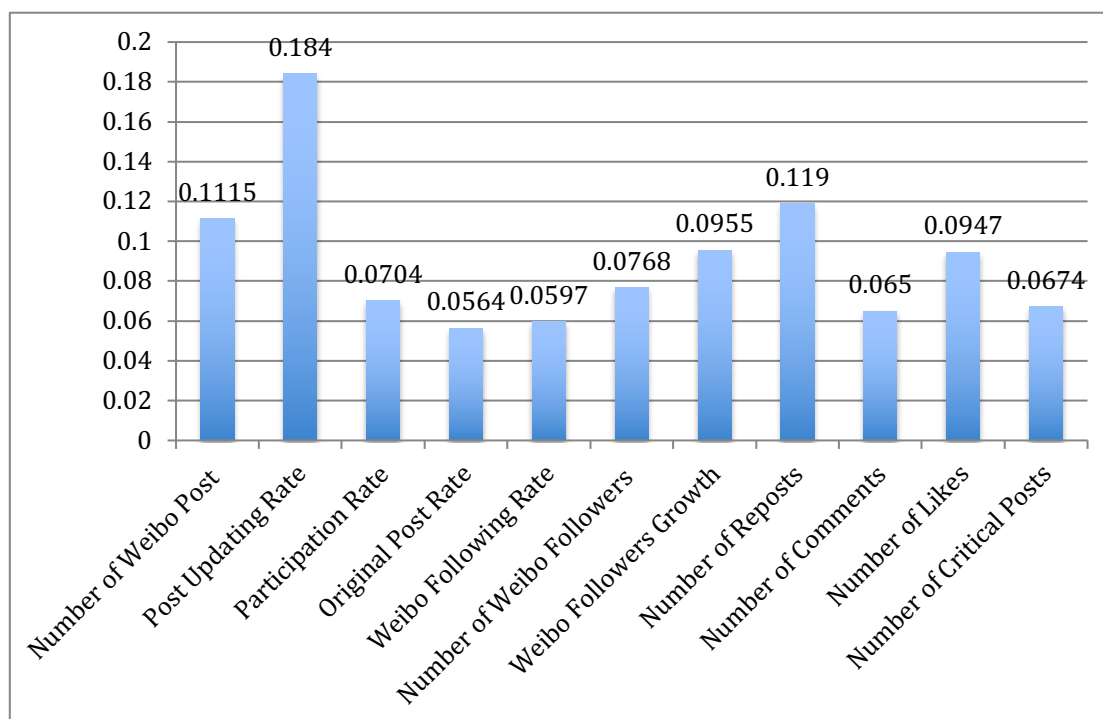
Figure 8: Overall Criterion Weight of 3rd Hierarchical Indicators

This research collected original data of each indicator from the British Embassy Weibo, the U.S Embassy Weibo, the Australian Embassy Weibo, the Japanese Embassy Weibo and the Israeli Embassy Weibo within a month between 24th February and 25th March 2015. The original data collection was then processed by Min-max normalisation method to obtain the standardised values between 0 and 10, which was multiplied with their corresponding criterion weights. The calculated score of each indicator was then added up to obtain the final score of the influencing power of each foreign embassy's Weibo (table 12) account. The details of the data collection and calculation result are given in appendix C and appendix D.

Series Number	1st Hierarchical Elements	Weight of 1st Hierarchical Indicators	2nd Hierarchical Indicators	Weight of 2nd Hierarchical Indicators	Weight of 2nd Hierarchical Indicators Comparing with 1st Hierarchical Indicators	3rd Hierarchical Indicators	Weight of 3rd Hierarchical Indicators	Overall Weight of 3rd Hierarchical Indicators
1	Communication Capability	0.482	Promotional Level	0.613	0.295	Number of Weibo Post	0.378	0.1115
2						Post Updating Rate	0.622	0.184
3			Interactive Level	0.387	0.187	Participation Rate	0.377	0.0704
4						Original Post Rate	0.302	0.0564
5						Weibo Following Rate	0.32	0.0597
6	Interactive Capability	0.518	Awareness	0.332	0.172	Number of Weibo Followers	0.446	0.0768
7						Weibo Followers Growth	0.555	0.0955
8			Recognition	0.355	0.184	Number of Reposts	0.647	0.119
9						Number of Comments	0.353	0.065
10			Reputation	0.313	0.162	Number of Likes	0.584	0.0947
11						Number of Critical Posts	0.416	0.0674

Table 11: Criterion Weights of the Indicators of Influencing Power of the Five Foreign Embassy Weibo Accounts

| Rank	Weibo Name	Score
1	U.S Embassy Weibo	7.6
2	British Embassy Weibo	6.5
3	Japanese Embassy Weibo	5.2
4	Israeli Embassy Weibo	2.4
5	Australian Embassy Weibo	1.4

Table 12: Scores and Ranks of the Influencing Power of the Five Foreign Embassy Weibo Accounts

Therefore, it can be found in table 12 that the U.S Embassy Weibo received the highest score and rank among all the five foreign embassies' Weibo accounts. The British Embassy comes the 2nd place after the U.S Embassy Weibo with only a small difference of 1.1 in the score. The Australian Embassy Weibo fell to the bottom on the rank list with a significant difference, which is 6.2 in the score, from the U.S Embassy Weibo's score. The result shows that although the outlook and structures of all the five foreign embassies' Weibo accounts are highly modularised by the Sina Weibo design templates, the inputs and outcomes of the operations of these five foreign embassies' Weibo accounts are significantly different. The major findings from the result are summarised below.

Major Findings:

- Figure 9 below shows the average scores of the third level hierarchical indicators of all the five foreign embassy Weibo accounts. The two highest scores were given to the categories of post updating rate and number of reposts. The score of the participation rate is below the general average score. The lowest score was given to the number of responded comments. Therefore, the scores shown in figure 9 indicate that the all five foreign embassy Weibo accounts have not fully utilised the technical features of Weibo, which are immediate response and real-time interaction, to actively communicate with the Chinese public. The content analysis result shows that most of the Weibo posts on

these five foreign embassies' Weibo are related to culture, education, and tourism which are favoured by the Weibo followers. However, these Weibo accounts failed to have active conversations with the Chinese public by frequently interacting with them and providing enough responses to their enquiries and questions. This result also proved the findings of the low interactive rate of the British Embassy Weibo that is discussed in chapter 3.
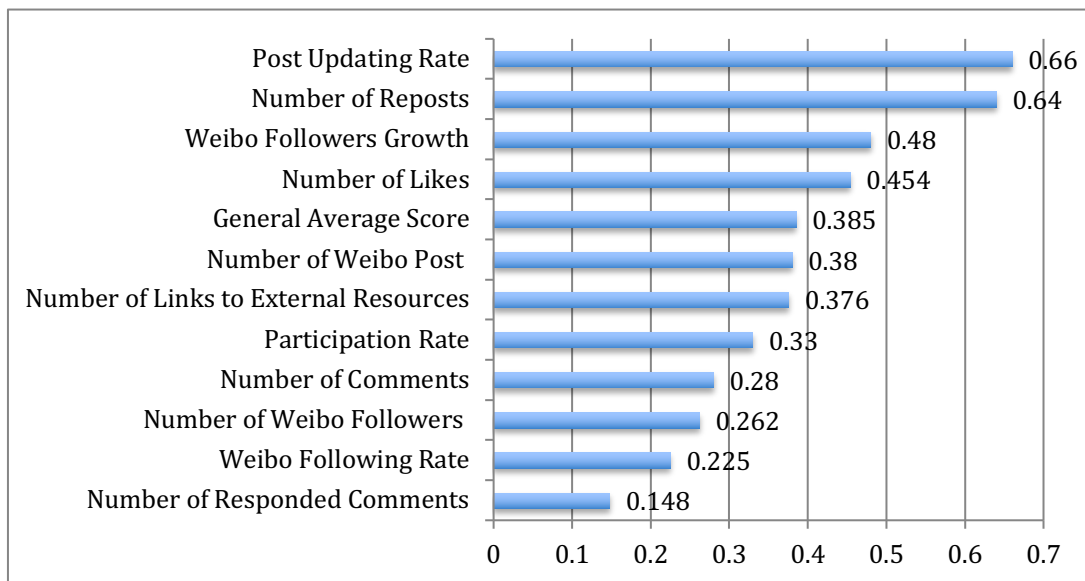
Figure 9: Average Scores of 3rd Hierarchical indicators of the Foreign Embassy Weibo Evaluation System

- Among the five foreign embassies' Weibo accounts, the British Embassy Weibo has the highest score in the categories of participation rate, Weibo follower's growth, and number of comments. However, the scores of number of Weibo posts, post updating rate, Weibo following rate, and number of followers are much lower than those of the U.S. Embassy (See appendix A). The result shows that although the British Embassy Weibo publishes fewer posts than the U.S. Embassy does, the number of the followers of the British Embassy Weibo grows with the fastest pace among the all five foreign embassies' Weibo accounts. It indicates that the British Embassy publishes more engaging content than the other four embassies and successfully encourages the growth

of registered followers. Additionally, the study also found that compared with the U.S. Embassy Weibo, the British Embassy Weibo updates less often. However, there are a larger proportion of the British Embassy Weibo followers sharing the posts and leaving their comments than the U.S Embassy Weibo followers. It indicates that the post topics on the British Embassy Weibo are more relevant to its followers. It may also indicate that the British Embassy Weibo has more genuine followers whom are actively participating in the conversation. Therefore, although the overall influencing power score of the British Embassy Weibo is lower than that of the U.S. Embassy Weibo, the number of the British Embassy Weibo followers keeps growing with steadily. The British Embassy Weibo followers have more interest and willingness in participating in the communication process and interact with the British Embassy Weibo. Thus, there is a potential for the British Embassy Weibo to build greater influencing power.

- The U.S Embassy Weibo received the highest number of negative comments among all the five Weibo accounts, although it has the highest number of Weibo followers.

<u>Similarities:</u>

- The all five foreign embassies' Weibo accounts mainly use Chinese as the primary language in the Weibo posts and conversations with the Chinese public. Their national languages appear occasionally to refer to specific terms, in language teaching posts, as well as official documents and statements originally written in the national languages. Using Chinese as the major language in the foreign embassy's Weibo helps with wider dissemination of diplomatic message and deeper engagement with the Chinese public.

- All the Weibo pages are using the unified Sina Weibo templates. Therefore, their general outlooks and structures are highly similar.

- The all five foreign embassies' Weibo accounts have not fully utilised the interactive features of Sina Weibo to have more engaging conversations with the Chinese public. Only a few enquiries and

comments from Weibo followers were responded. Therefore, a relatively low level of interactivity and immediacy was demonstrated in their Weibo communication.

In summary, the study in this chapter suggests that the role of social media technology in the context of diplomacy brings both challenges and potentials to diplomatic communication and public diplomacy practices. The shift of diplomatic communication from website to social media is challenging, especially when critical comments can be seen by the public and online nationalistic activities becomes a strong resistance force to foreign embassies' effort of promoting their ideology through by exerting soft power through digital engagement. Ideally, social media content is produced through online collaborations between foreign policy communicators and foreign public members. However, because the British Embassy Weibo content is under the editorial control of both the British foreign service and China's media censorship, the British Embassy Weibo post content is solely created and owned by the embassy's Weibo team. Therefore, the British Embassy Weibo content is more professionalised and less interactive without the contribution from the Chinese public. Although Weibo technology enables two-way communication between the British Embassy and the Chinese public, the communication model on the British Embassy Weibo remains asymmetrical. However, the impact and influencing power of the British Embassy Weibo has gained the higher rank comparing with most of the other foreign embassy Weibo accounts.

Therefore, as a new public diplomacy tool, the British Embassy Weibo needs to be more innovative and smarter in using social media technology to disseminate information, creating engaging conversations, and encouraging collaborations with the non-governmental agencies and the Chinese public. It has not yet fully moved forward from the traditional way of communication and learnt the new dynamics of social media to articulate foreign policy communication agenda digitally. The Stockholm Initiative on Digital Diplomacy (SIDD) held in January 2014 was the first international meeting about digital diplomacy. The diplomats and experts discussed and presented

practical solutions for the future development of digital diplomacy. The conference helped diplomatic communication practitioners to understand the new dynamics brought over by the fast development of digital media. The conference pointed out the future direction of digital diplomacy's evolution from Twitter and Facebook to a variety of opportunities to encourage a higher level of digital participation from the foreign public in diplomatic communication and foreign policy decision-making process (Sandre, 2015).
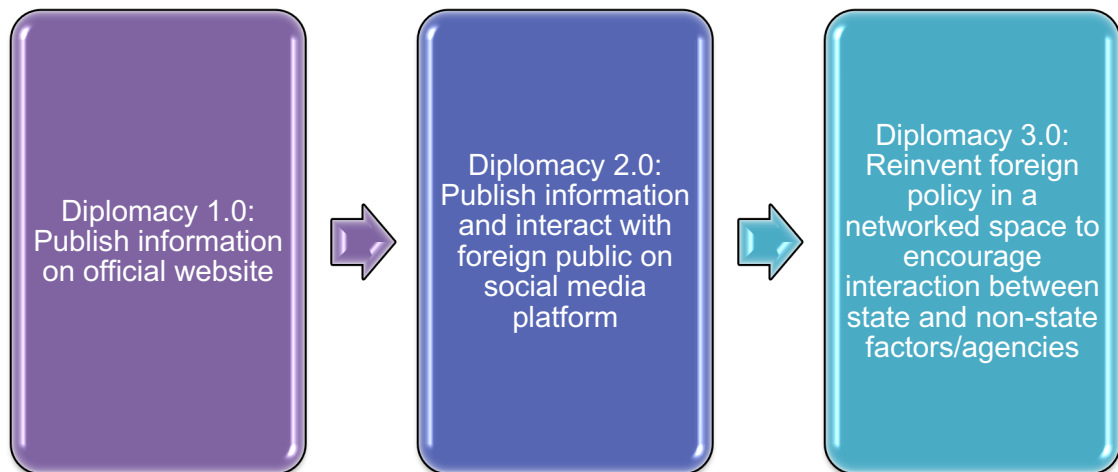
Figure 10: Evolution Model of Digital Diplomacy's Influence Development

Figure 10 shows the evolution process of digital diplomacy summarised from Andreas Sandre's introduction chapter of his book *Digital Diplomacy: Conversations on Innovation in Foreign Policy*. Sandre intends to analyse the evolution with a focus on what he calls Diplomacy 3.0, which is a new diplomatic communication space "about the evolution of foreign policy into a networked environment where state and non-state are horizontally interacting with each other…. It is a space where power is dispersed and dependent on how connected you are" (Sandre, 2015, p. xxviii). Thus, in this sense, the future digital diplomacy should be developed as a reinvented online foreign policy space where both government bodies and the public can interact in a networked space by establishing connections and collaboration with minimal restrictions of hierarchies.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter is to summarise the findings of the study on how the British Embassy Weibo content is articulated through professionalisation and personalisation, as well as the level of influence of the British Embassy Weibo among the Chinese public. By analysing the British Embassy Weibo content published between 2009 and 2018, as well as conducting the focus group discussion and personal interviews, this study reveals the role of social media technology in the British digital diplomatic communication strategy development and practice. Together the findings bring out the answer to the main research questions of this study: How did professionalisation and personalisation help to articulate the British Embassy Weibo content and whether Weibo enables two-way symmetrical diplomatic dialogue that makes real influence among the Chinese public? The findings of this study also point out the limitation of the British Embassy Weibo communication and the aspects they can work on to achieve a more desired result in the future. Section 6.1 summarises the findings of this study and revisit the links between public diplomacy and the concepts of professionalisation and personalisation. Section 6.2 discusses the major contributions and limitations of this study, as well as the suggestions for future digital diplomacy research.

This thesis contributes both empirically and theoretically for the research of digital diplomacy with a focus on the British foreign service's practice in China. It advanced the understanding of public diplomacy in the context of digital diplomatic communication by operationalising the concepts of professionalisation and personalisation in political communication management. This thesis adds a valuable case study and the empirical evidence to the research of digital diplomacy by critically reviewing the development of the British Embassy Weibo over the years between 2009 and 2018.

The major challenge of this study is drawing theories from different disciplines including digital communication, political communication, public relations, and

public diplomacy to construct the theoretical framework for this study and positioning the theories in the context of digital diplomacy communication. Therefore, this research contributes to the theoretical development of political communication studies by adapting the concepts of professionalisation and personalisation, which were mainly studied in the context of domestic political campaign management, in an international digital diplomatic communication context to develop the scope of these two concepts.

6.1 Key Findings

In this section, the key findings of this study are interpreted by relating back to the theoretical and analytical frameworks to answer the main research questions of this study.

6.1.1 Weibo as Cultural Space and Resource of Soft Power

This study found that the British Embassy Weibo tells stories from the cultural angle in a fun and informal way to engage with the younger Chinese people. Providing alternative stories of diplomatic events and formal government announcements becomes the most noticeable feature of foreign embassy Weibo. The British Embassy Weibo's content narrative is generally informal when compared with the traditional diplomatic content. Weibo enables an official yet informal diplomatic communication style to engage with the Chinese public through personalising Weibo content to make it a source of soft power. Personalisation enables foreign services to communicate with the foreign public through diplomats and digital diplomacy content editors to establish a positive and credible image. As Joseph Nye states, "politics in an information age is not only about whose military wins but whose story wins" (Nye, 2011a). However, it is undeniable that quite a few posts on the British Embassy Weibo are light-hearted and even superficial.

Joseph Nye believes that popular culture is the most welcomed part of soft power (Nye, 2011). British culture, especially the popular culture, appears frequently in the British Embassy Weibo content. The GREAT campaign has

become the FCO's most massive global soft power exerting event. Since the campaign was launched in China, the British Embassy Weibo published a large number of posts highlighting the key message of this campaign and told a wide range of stories tailored for the interests of the Chinese audience. The Weibo posts showcase a young, modern, energetic, attractive, dynamic, and open Britain that is different from the traditional image of this country in Chinese people's mind. Those posts with hashtags labeled as "… is GREAT" often generated a higher volume of views and comments than the other posts did. These posts attracted the Chinese social media users and promoted British values through the culture-oriented content. The main argument here is about how social media becomes a new cultural space to enable the new forms of diplomatic communication, which exerts soft power.

This study deepens our understanding of soft power theory in the context of digital diplomacy through analysing the narratives of the British Embassy Weibo content. Using social media as a cultural space and resource of soft power in the context of diplomatic communication is a new area for the study of digital diplomacy. The British Embassy Weibo can therefore be regarded as a soft power device that is used by the British foreign service to present personalised content in a professionalised way. It softens hard power by using the narrative of personal Weibo accounts. Besides, this study also provokes the argument on whether digital diplomatic communication is a new form of propaganda. However, it is not the primary research objective of this study. What is central to this study is that how social media enables new form of diplomatic content which produces soft power. Therefore, the concept of soft power helps this study to extend the discussion of public diplomacy into the new field of digital diplomatic communication.

This study is aware of the new non-state actors involved in digital diplomacy, which is the rising online nationalistic sentiment which expresses resistance to the promotion of cultural communication. The UK has been called "foreign hostile force" in some of the negative comments left on the British Embassy Weibo. However, allowing critical and even nationalism comments to be shown to everyone establishes an image of credibility, transparency, and

tolerance of the UK. These are the values are also key components of soft power and recognised by many Chinese people. Nye pointed out that a government's credibility is shown in many aspects, such as media, NGOs, and intergovernmental organisations (Nye, 2002, p. 69). Therefore, the British Embassy establishes a positive image of the UK government through Weibo. There are also evidences show that some of the critical comments were considered by the British foreign service to adjust their policy and actions in China. It shows that digital diplomacy has the potential to influence not only the digital media users but also the foreign policy decision-making process.

Additionally, this study finds that although the British Embassy Weibo enables more openness and transparency than the traditional communication methods, at the same time it also deals with confidential diplomatic information carefully to make sure it is consistent with the official information on other traditional communication platforms. Sensitivity could not be compromised as the British Embassy Weibo is also part of the government communication infrastructure. Meanwhile, the findings of this study show the contradiction between China's media censorship and the British value of democracy and individual liberty. This study discussed the interactions among the British Embassy Weibo, Chinese government and commercialised Weibo service providers. The study found that although the Chinese government encourages free-market development for Internet companies, it does not mean they loosen their grips on controlling the social media content. Posts contain sensitive messages would not be able to live longer than seconds on Weibo due to the media censorship in China. The findings show that the British Embassy in China does not deliberately avoid controversial and sensitive topics on Weibo but shows an objective attitude in the Weibo content without directly criticising the Chinese government.

It is always easier to tell the story on Weibo through cultural angle than through direct mentions of the British values or the Britain's attitude on political freedom and human rights. Otherwise, the British Embassy Weibo would not be successful if Sina Weibo consistently removes their posts. With limited editorial freedom in a controlled online media environment, the foreign

embassy Weibo can be considered as a supervised social media space with low levels of interactivity and engagement with the Chinese public. This study identifies many contradictions in the digital diplomacy practices and generates the awareness of tensions between traditional and digital diplomatic communication. The future study may look at how to ease these tensions in digital diplomacy management and how to tell the story in Weibo without being blocked by media censorship and maintain a balance between free speech and diplomatic relationship is somewhere that the British Embassy Weibo needs to work on in the future.

Overall, this study proves that Weibo could be used as a carrier of soft power in the toolbox of new public diplomacy that can be humanised and personalised to establish an interpersonal connection with the foreign public. Weibo enables the dissemination of diplomatic messages with an orientation towards persona.

6.1.2 Growing Professionalisation in the British Embassy Weibo

In this study, professionalisation in the British Embassy Weibo management was studied by analysing both its content and staff's expertise and skills in using social media technology to conduct diplomatic communication. Firstly, the findings suggest that more and more posts on the British Embassy Weibo are close to PR materials prepared by professional PR specialist. The content had gradually moved away from personalised stories such as the posts of the diary of the British Ambassador's tour in China published when the British Embassy Weibo was just launched. Secondly, in previous studies of professionalisation in the field of political communication management, professionalisation means expert's input into government communications. However, there was no one qualified as a social media expert in the British Embassy when its Weibo account launched. The British Embassy Weibo posts were created and edited by the existing press team whom mainly dealt with traditional mass media. There were mistakes and lessons learnt by the staff. Now, the members of the British Embassy Weibo team have regular training opportunities to gain skillsets of digital diplomacy. The British

Embassy also works with external social media experts to find solutions and makes their Weibo communication more successful in China.

Therefore, the British Embassy Weibo has evolved from a less professional foreign embassy Weibo to a diplomatic tool being professionally managed by trained staff and outsourced experts. It has a clear structure of management and instructions from the newly created FCO digital communication department. The British foreign service is adapting to the new media technology and skills over the years. The British Embassy Weibo editor has the most central and important role in this process. External experts also provide additional support although their role is very limited. It is mainly because of diplomatic information confidentiality. External helping hands such as Ogilvy PR improved overall visual effect of the Weibo campaigns. The visual design differentiates the British Embassy Weibo from the British Embassy Website and other foreign embassies' Weibo by using vibrant colours and images featuring young people and the British landscape.

Undoubtedly, social media technology brings changes to diplomatic communication. However, it is not sure if Web 2.0 development also changes how diplomats work. Tom Fletcher, former British Ambassador to Lebanon, pointed out in his book *The Naked Diplomat*, "The most important thing social media does for us is not information management, or even engagement. It is that, for the first time, we have the means to influence the countries we work in on a massive scale, not just through elites" and digital technology "can mobile public opinion to change another country's policy" (Fletcher, 2016, p. 9). His point of view recognises the impact of digital media technology on foreign policy decision making process. Apparently, the British Embassy Weibo acts as a promotional tool to disseminate formal foreign policy content in a format and style tailored for social media users. However, this conclusion does not fully reveal the substantial influence made by non-state actors in the process of digital diplomacy. Social media brought over a mix of opportunities and challenges to the traditional way of how diplomats communicate to deliver their countries' foreign policy message to the foreign public.

Another finding is that the British Embassy Weibo content is less official and

less constrained than the content on the British Embassy China official website due to their different communication and service objectives. From post content analysis, it can be found that although the main Weibo content author is the Weibo editor at the British Embassy, there is an increasing number of senior-level staff at the British Embassy China, such as all the British Ambassadors to China between 2010 and 2018, contributing content for the British Embassy Weibo. Some of them also have their personal Weibo accounts. Their personal posts were often reposted on the British Embassy Weibo to showcase their personal experiences. The content they contribute provides more inside and alternative stories about the UK-China relationship. The British Embassy China Weibo shows an alternative image of creativity and openness as a foreign government body. It changes the traditional image that the Chinese public perceived from mass media and other resources before the arrival of Weibo. This finding also shows that the British diplomats are actively adapting their skillset and mindset to keep up with the new digital diplomatic tools. As Fletcher said, "It is a survival of the digitally fittest" (Fletcher, 2016, p.10). Therefore, professionalisation should be best understood with the discussion of personalisation.

Furthermore, the study found that the number of feedbacks given to the comments on the British Embassy Weibo is low. According to the interviews with the British Embassy staff, it because they only have one full-time Weibo editor and a part-time Weibo assistant. It is difficult for them to answer most of the questions and give feedback to every enquiry. Besides, they are not professional diplomats who know how to deal with enquires related to the bi-lateral relationship. This study found that most of the enquiries from Weibo followers are related to the visa application procedure. Since the British Embassy Weibo does not have the capacity to cover these enquiries, they regularly invite visa section staff to give live Q&A sessions on the British Embassy Weibo. It shows that social media enables faster and more efficient responses to the foreign public. However, this feature is constrained by the level of digital diplomacy skills and knowledge, as well as the regulations on digital diplomacy content. The level of foreign public engagement on the British Embassy Weibo is becoming lower over time. This finding brings out

the differences between the social media and the digital diplomacy communication tool. By using Grunig's four models of communication, this study found strong evidence of two-way asymmetrical communication on the British Embassy Weibo. This low level of interactivity is contradicted to the mechanism of Web 2.0 technology. However, from the interviews, the British Embassy in China is seeking to engage the Chinese public. Therefore, this study considers it may be the British foreign service deliberately avoid getting into controversial positions through its online communication which is regarded primarily as a cultural place.

In addition, the British Embassy Weibo team usually remains silent to those nationalism comments to avoid unnecessary political risks. Besides, because the Chinese government closely monitors online discussions of politics and international relations between foreign embassies and the Chinese public, the British Embassy China is cautious about losing control of the conversation on Weibo which may result in political crisis. Therefore, on one hand, new digital media skills mastered by diplomats help the foreign service to conduct diplomatic communication openly and interactively; while on the other hand, the members of staff at the British Embassy China are also fully aware of the sensitivity and risks to involving non-state actors into the online political discussion. All these findings can be interpreted to the understanding professionalisation in the context of digital diplomacy. The professionalisation of digital diplomacy content is a process of transform and evolution.

In summary, this study suggests that the concept of professionalisation can be adapted to understand digital diplomacy when combined with the concept of personalisation and soft power. Farrell and Webb's discussion on professionalisation helps to identify the changes in content management and development of the British Embassy Weibo. The findings suggest that the level of professionalisation in the British Embassy Weibo is increasing since it was firstly launched in 2009. The British Embassy Weibo has become more professionalised in its content and management. It is transferring from an experimental initiative to a professionally managed digital diplomacy platform. Initially, the British Embassy Weibo experimented on creating diversified,

interactive and informal content to attract the Chinese social media users' attention. It serves as an open door of the British foreign service for the Chinese public. However, with the increasing level of professionalisation presented in the Weibo content and management, more emphasis has been put on the content created by the embassy Weibo team and senior diplomats, and lower level of interactivity and response to the public. At this stage, the content complies more to the FCO's foreign policy and content editorial regulation. This finding widens the scope of professionalisation as a concept which explains how digital diplomacy content is increasingly regulated and constrained, as well as how it becomes less responsive due to the higher level of professionalisation in its content development and management. Thus, the finding suggests the British Embassy in China aims to make Weibo a safe communication tool rather than an innovative one in diplomatic communication.

6.1.3 Casual and Personalised Weibo Content Narrative

The British Embassy Weibo content suggests that the presence of personalisation is essential in shaping the Weibo content as a tactic of professionalisation. The methodology for this part of the study combines focus group discussion and content analysis, which helped this study to reveal how the British Embassy Weibo transforms the storytelling techniques to adapt formal foreign policy information into personalised content on Weibo. Unlike what they did in the process of traditional diplomatic communication, diplomats share their personal experiences with the foreign public on a larger scale. Evidence found in the British Embassy Weibo content includes personal emotions, references to their family life and personal experience. In contrast to traditional diplomatic communication, the British Embassy Weibo becomes a new tool to provide personalised stories and an alternative information resource.

Meanwhile, personalisation has become a skill of professionalised diplomats and foreign embassy's staff in content development. Diplomats and staff are actively sharing their experience and telling stories from personal angles that

are contrary to formal content on traditional communication channels. In addition, the personalisation of diplomatic communication also links to personality of diplomats, government officials and celebrities whom contribute to Weibo content. For example, many British government leaders and celebrities are popular among Chinese social media users. They were even given friendly nicknames by Chinese Weibo followers, such as "Auntie May" for Teresa May and "Little Baby" for David Beckham. According to the focus group discussion result, those nicknames can express the Chinese Weibo followers' feelings and emotions towards these people. Thus, personalisation in digital diplomacy has an association with personality appeal.

Furthermore, professionalisation enables foreign service to put up content which cannot be presented or communicated in traditional diplomatic communication channels to attract young foreigners whom spend more time on social media. The British Embassy Weibo content contains personal experiences of diplomats and content contributors to tell the stories of the country it represents vividly without barriers of traditional bureaucracy. Social media has the ability to involve culture and other non-state actors to communicate with the foreign public in a more personalised and culture-oriented narrative. Digital technology transforms the digital diplomacy channels to be a transnational ground for cultural communication.

6.1.4 Limited Engagement and Influence

This study has found that Weibo has become an official new public diplomacy tool that enables personal connections between foreign services and the Chinese public. Although this study found that the level of engagement on the British Embassy Weibo is limited, it indeed encourages wider participation through conversation online than traditional diplomatic communication channels. In this study, the Chinese public's participation and engagement indicates the level of interactivity and nature of the communication model on the British Embassy Weibo. By analysing the overall influencing power of the British Embassy Weibo, this study finds out to what extent this new public diplomacy tool makes the real impact among the Chinese public. In section

6.2.1, the findings suggest that the British Embassy Weibo has become a new public diplomacy tool and resource of soft power. In Nye's later researches, he gave the name "smart power" to the combination of both hard power and soft power (Armitage and Nye, 2007). Britain is called the smart-power super-power due to its high-ranking status on the Portland Communications Soft Power 30 League In 2015 (Soft Power 30, 2015). On this ranking league, Britain's digital influence ranked second place after the United States. The study of the influencing power of foreign embassies' Weibo also suggests that the British Embassy Weibo's influence ranked second place just after the U.S. Embassy Weibo. Thus, the status of the British digital diplomacy's influence in China correspondents to the status of its overall global influence. The British Embassy Weibo is in a leading position among other major foreign embassies' Weibo accounts.

However, the study has shown that the British Embassy has not encouraged active participations from the Chinese public. Desirably, the British Embassy Weibo can engage with the Chinese public by generating more conversations and discussions around British diplomatic agendas. However, according to the result of this study, the anticipation is limited on the British Embassy Weibo. The British Embassy Weibo editors rarely respond to the comments about diplomatic or political issues. Since sensitivity and editorial control are always central in any form of diplomatic communication, foreign embassies have to recede from online public discussion on diplomatic and political issues to make Weibo a safe communication channel. Shortage of well-trained staff to take questions regarding diplomatic and political issues is another reason for low response rate (interview No.1). Thus, the British Embassy Weibo has been constrained and therefore, not utilised the full advantage of Weibo's interactive feature. This finding suggests that the British Embassy Weibo is encouraging conversation and giving feedback. However, the level of public engagement on the British Embassy Weibo is low. There is a divide between the expectations and real performances of foreign embassy Weibo. The communication model of the British Embassy Weibo shows strong character of asymmetrical communication. The findings in this section are summarised below.

Firstly, the freedom of commenting the Weibo content is constrained by the Chinese media censorship and Sina Weibo editorial policy. The comment function would be temporarily closed if the Weibo posts contain sensitive issues. Some of the comments supporting the British government on specific issues were deleted by the Sina Weibo operator just a few seconds after publishing (Interview 1). On the contrary, the British Embassy China allows all critical comments to be shown on Weibo. Even many nationalism comments were permitted to be seen by the public. very little chance for the Chinese public to see them. Additionally, China's online nationalistic sentiment forms the power of resistance to the British foreign service's soft power promotion and potentially stimulates wider online nationalistic activities by information sharing among Weibo users.

Secondly, the British Embassy Weibo created a platform to have real-time conversation with the Chinese public. The Weibo editor can also give feedback to comments directly. These features provide the potential to realise excellence management in diplomatic communication. However, the research result of the comments shows a low level of engagement with the Chinese public on the British Embassy Weibo. The study found that the communication model of the British Embassy Weibo is two-way but has strong characters of asymmetrical communication. According to the interview with the British Embassy staff, the main purpose of using Weibo is to get the diplomatic messages out to the younger generation of Chinese public by bypassing the mainstream media and provide a more casual content to attract wider Chinese public's interests in the UK.

However, this study only found a small number of cases showing that the British foreign service analyses the Weibo comments and take the public opinions shown in comments into account in their decision-making process. Therefore, public opinions on Weibo have not made enough influence to change the British foreign policy agenda. Thus, digital diplomacy is an evolution of diplomatic communication but not yet the revolution. Moreover, the information on Weibo appears short and lack of depth, which can be easily digested and shared online among wider social media users to potentially

generate large-scale public responses. Within this context, this study analysed the resistance to soft power exertion from nationalistic comments on Weibo, and the Chinese government's position in the rising of nationalism emotion from China's young social media users.

Finally, the study found that the high number of comments and Weibo followers do not necessarily indicate a high level of influence and engagement in digital diplomatic communication. According to the result of foreign embassy Weibo's influencing power analysis, even though the number of followers is high, those followers may not all have a strong interest in the UK or support the ideas and views of the British government. Meanwhile, the large volume of the Weibo comments does not mean the followers have been influenced by the foreign embassy Weibo content and therefore changed their minds and behaviours in a positive way. On the contrary, when there are a vast number of negative comments left on the foreign Embassy Weibo, the anger from the Weibo users could spread out online quickly and bring up the online resistance to a higher level.

6.2 Limitations and Suggestions to Theory Development and Future Research

In summary, all the findings in this study suggest that the British Embassy Weibo has become the new and alternative public diplomacy tool to communicate directly with the Chinese public, especially the younger generation of them, in a larger scale. It is used to provide alternative stories and soft content in a personalised narrative which could not be found on the other official British foreign service communication channels or mainstream media. It has attracted many Weibo followers and enabled two-way communication with its followers. However, the participation rate and engagement level are not high due to the increasing level of professionalisation in digital diplomacy management and other constrains identified in this study. Foreign embassies' Weibo accounts have not made use of the full potential of social media technology due to both the control of the message and online nationalistic threats.

There are some limitations of this thesis should be pointed out. Since the research object of this study is mainly the British Embassy Weibo in China, the research outcome can only reflect only part of the broader digital diplomacy sphere. Future studies may research on other digital channels of the foreign embassies in China as well as in other countries to collect richer empirical data and add them to the global digital diplomacy case studies. Future analysis on how all the official foreign policy communication channels of a specific country are interacting and complementing to each other may bring out more mechanism features behind digital diplomacy. The methodology of this study could be more refined accordingly to include more digital diplomacy channels to find out the dynamics among them. It would be meaningful to reveal the how the networks of foreign services' digital diplomacy channels are working together. The methodology used in this study combined content analysis, interviews, focus group, narrative analysis, Satty scale, as well as AHP method, works well to cross-check the findings of each method.

The primary object of this research is the new form of public diplomacy in the digital era. Social media is the new addition to the public diplomacy toolbox that intends to fulfil foreign policy objectives by utilising the features of the Web 2.0 technology. This study is one of the pioneer researches to identify the development and impact of this new tool by observing its content and interactions with the foreign public over a long period. On the other hand, the studies on new public diplomacy in the digital age has been increasing significantly in the recent years. However, these researches rarely examine systematically the relationship between digital diplomatic communication and offline actors on the ground. Therefore, this study also identifies the rising of Chinese nationalistic sentiment on Weibo during the same period, which supports the Chinese government unconditionally by strongly resisting critical opinions about China and the Chinese government from foreign governments. Sometimes insulting and violent language is even used to attack foreign embassies on their social media platforms when controversial issues occur between foreign countries and China. Before the arrival of Weibo, the Chinese nationalism groups used to present their condemnation through their personal

social media accounts and networks. The foreign embassy Weibo provides a platform for them to directly express their anger and political opinions against those foreign countries even when the foreign embassy Weibo does not publish any posts related to politics or controversial issues. China's online nationalistic sentiment has become a strong online power to resist foreign embassies' attempts to influence the Chinese public. Therefore, the outcome of this study clearly disagrees the over optimistic view of digital diplomacy which does not consider the consequences of hard power and complexity of social and political conditions in each different country.

This thesis contributes both theoretically and empirically to digital diplomacy research. Theoretically, this study advanced the understanding of diplomatic communication in the context of public diplomacy 2.0 by discussing the concepts of professionalisation and personalisation beyond domestic political communication field. The utilisation of social media such as Weibo as a new source of soft power is rarely studied. This study puts together a framework which consists of the concept of professionalisation (Farrell and Webb, 2002), three dimensions of personalisation (Bjerling, 2011), the theory of excellence in public relations (Grunig, 2004), as well as the concept of soft power (Nye, 2003). As a political communication process, professionalisation is shown through the personification of the British foreign policy agenda and content, the more professional design of the Weibo outlook, and Weibo's ability of disseminating information with orientation towards persona over time. It leads to the discussion about personalisation as a technical skill of professionalisation in digital diplomacy. It suggests that the digital diplomacy analysis needs to pay attention to the technology, the content management, and the digital diplomacy practitioner. This study advanced the concept of professionalisation by considering personalisation as its manifestation. Therefore, future studies may pay attention to both the development of digital diplomacy content and how foreign service officers gain skills to use this new tool to form a more holistic research approach.

The potential of wider online participation in foreign policy decision-making process through Weibo could increase the level of credibility of foreign

services. Although the participation from the Chinese public on Weibo is limited, the foreign policy issues is presented in an interactive way on the internet for the first time by using social media tools. The controls and restrictions are also part of the digital diplomacy landscape, which is still developing and evolving. Ideally, it can evolve into the diplomacy 3.0 stage when foreign service and civil society are interacting to reinvent foreign policy agendas in the networked space.

This study has a closer look at how the Weibo genre make a new form of content to exhibit soft power and understand digital soft power to a new level. As Nye (2011) suggested, soft power in the digital age should be perceived from the aspects of policies, political values, and cultural background. The content of the British Embassy Weibo contains all these three elements. It is considered as a new public diplomacy tool to exhibit soft power among the foreign public through references to personal feeling and daily life, orientation towards persona, as well as intimization in its content. Thus, digital diplomacy tool, such as the British Embassy Weibo, creates personalised yet official content to form a new format of soft power and culture space that is more visible and accessible for the foreign public. Although the existing studies of public diplomacy have recognised the changes brought over by new media technology, they have not paid much attention to the influence from offline factors in different social contexts to online public diplomacy activities. Thus, this study filled this space by incorporating China's media censorship, social media market, and online nationalistic activities in this analysis. It discussed the challenges and the opportunities that digital diplomacy development is facing up to in depth.

Furthermore, this study developed Grunig's excellence theory in public relations in the context of digital diplomacy to explore the obstacles in implementing a more engaging communication model between foreign services and their target foreign public groups, as well as examine the foreign public's reception of digital diplomatic messages. Foreign public's participation in the process of digital diplomatic communication indicates the level of engagement and influence of this new diplomatic communication

model. The outcome of this part of the analysis reflects the level of professionalisation presented in the British Embassy Weibo. Therefore, this part of the study links the concepts of professionalisation, personalisation and soft power to widen the research scope of the excellence theory in the context of digital diplomacy. The theoretical framework of this study incorporates the excellence theory to relate the discussion to public diplomacy study by considering the British Embassy Weibo followers as new diplomatic content consumers. Foreign ministries must find their way to use digital communication methods to disseminate messages and engage people effectively in the digital age. Future studies may want to consider digital diplomacy platforms as a new public opinion management and national PR tool in foreign contexts.

Overall, this study interconnects the separated concepts from different academic fields to discuss the process of digital diplomatic communication in a holistic way that was rarely seen in the existing studies about digital diplomacy. This study hopes to pave a new way of digital diplomacy research by reinterpreting the concepts and theories of traditional political communication and public diplomacy. The research outcome of this study fleshes out the new dilemmas between confidentiality and transparency, as well as conservation and openness in digital diplomatic communication process. The two-way communication that is enabled by digital diplomacy is naturally against the norms of traditional diplomacy. The findings discussed in section 6.2 provide the evidence to disagree with the over-optimistic assumptions that digital media technology has fundamentally changed diplomatic communication. Using social media in diplomatic communication and public diplomacy is a significant step forward but not yet strong enough to fundamentally revolute the way that diplomacy operates. It is gaining momentum in a slow pace. In addition, digital divide is also crucial in this changing process as a potential barrier to digital diplomacy implementation. Future studies may address these obstacles and find solutions.

By the time I concluded this study, it is almost the end of the second decade of the 21st century. Since 2010, more and more foreign ministries around the

globe realised the significant impact of digital communication on diplomacy. As Tom Fletcher wrote in his book, *The Naked Diplomat,* "Many of us have made mistakes on social media, but the biggest mistake is not to be on it. It is survival of the digitally fittest. We need to seize our smartphones. But are we already too late?" (Fletcher, 2016, p10). Therefore, governments need to reinvent the diplomacy method now to make use of the benefits of social media technology to communicate with foreign minds to achieve mutual understanding.

Appendix A - Content Analysis Coding System

<u>Sample Resource: British Embassy China Weibo Posts Between 30/10/2010 to 31/07/2018</u>

- Time – Note Weibo post publishing time in dd/mm/yy

- Topic – Record Weibo topic of the post

- Content Creator and Weibo Management

    a = British Embassy China officer (i.e Head of press/Head of digital media)
    b = British Ambassador to China
    c = Senior Diplomats at the British Embassy China
    d = Editors of the British Embassy Weibo

- Post Topics – What is the topic of each post?

    a. Promotional content - event or initiative? YES / NO
    b. Traditional diplomatic content (Official statement / statement in response to relevant news coverage/ Speeches / press release) YES / NO
    c. Content on UK-China state visit activities? YES / NO
    d. Non-political issue related content? YES / NO
    e. Diplomats' personal content? YES / NO
    f. Multi-media content? YES / NO
    g. Links to external resource? YES / NO
    h. Others? (Specify)

- Response Rate (Count number of responses to enquiries of following issues)

    a. Political issues
    b. Diplomatic services
    c. Economy and business issues
    d. Culture and education
    e. Tourism
    f. Media enquires
    f. Others (Specify)

- Personalisation (Count number of mentioning of following references)

    a. Frequency of reference to post authors themselves and their family/friends/pets
    b. Frequency of reference to personal feelings
    c. Frequency of reference to personal life and activities

- Links to external resources (Count number of links)

  a. Number of links
  b. Links to FCO
  c. Links to external media content
  d. Links to other Weibo content or accounts
  e. Links to British government department Weibo accounts
  f. Links to multi-media content

- Comment

  a. Number of comments in a total of sampled posts
  b. Number of negative comments
  c. Number of positive comments
  d. Number of comments that both positive and negative
  e. Number or neutral or irrelevant comments
  f. Number comments that request response from the British Embassy Weibo editor
  g. Number of comments that being responded by the British Embassy Weibo editor
  h. Comments with severe critical tone and nationalistic emotion

Appendix B – Expert Scoring Sheet

(Criterion Weight Score of the Influencing Power Indicators of Selected Foreign Embassy Weibo Accounts)

A	B	A is definitely more Important than B	A is much more Important than B	A is more Important than B	A is relatively Important than B	A is equally Important to B	B is relatively Important than A	B is more Important than A	B is much more Important than A	B is definitely more Important than A
Communication Capability	Interactive Capability	9	7	5	3	1	1/3	1/5	1/7	1/9
Promotional Level	Interactive Level	9	7	5	3	1	1/3	1/5	1/7	1/9
Awareness	Recognition	9	7	5	3	1	1/3	1/5	1/7	1/9
Awareness	Reputation	9	7	5	3	1	1/3	1/5	1/7	1/9
Recognition	Reputation	9	7	5	3	1	1/3	1/5	1/7	1/9
Number of Weibo Post	Post Updating Rate	9	7	5	3	1	1/3	1/5	1/7	1/9
Participation Rate	Original Post Rate	9	7	5	3	1	1/3	1/5	1/7	1/9
Participation Rate	Weibo Following Rate	9	7	5	3	1	1/3	1/5	1/7	1/9
Original Post Rate	Weibo Following Rate	9	7	5	3	1	1/3	1/5	1/7	1/9
Number of Weibo Followers	Weibo Followers Growth	9	7	5	3	1	1/3	1/5	1/7	1/9
Number of Reposts	Number of Comments	9	7	5	3	1	1/3	1/5	1/7	1/9
Number of Likes	Number of Critical Posts	9	7	5	3	1	1/3	1/5	1/7	1/9

Signature:

Appendix C – Original Data Collection for the AHP Evaluation of Selected Foreign Embassy Weibo Accounts

	Number of Weibo Post	Post Updating Rate	Participation Rate	Original Post Rate	Weibo Following Rate	Number of Weibo Followers	Weibo Followers Growth	Number of Reposts	Number of Comments	Number of Likes	Number of Critical Posts
British Embassy Weibo	4373	3.20	0.054%	76%	0.99%	385127	4245	66	26.7	76.11	3
U.S. Embassy Weibo	9571	6.23	0.048%	69%	2%	920849	2948	70.6	24.8	78.40	8
Japanese Embassy Weibo	3140	3.43	0.026%	88%	0.91%	312204	3695	63.8	24.6	49.50	0
Israeli Embassy Weibo	3217	2.80	0.012%	59%	0.25%	1896863	3467	35.72	9.4	32.40	0
Australian Embassy Weibo	1628	2.53	0.008%	73%	0.18%	122430	2458	34.9	15.9	30.20	0

Appendix D – Min-Max Normalised Value of the Original Date Collection on Appendix C

	Number of Weibo Post	Post Updating Rate	Participation Rate	Original Post Rate	Weibo Following Rate	Number of Weibo Followers	Weibo Followers Growth	Number of Reposts	Number of Comments	Number of Likes	Number of Critical Posts
British Embassy Weibo	3.46	2.48	10.00	7.33	4.45	1.48	10.00	8.71	6.87	9.52	3
U.S. Embassy Weibo	10.00	10.00	8.70	5.78	10.00	4.50	2.74	10.00	6.11	10.00	8
Japanese Embassy Weibo	1.90	3.05	3.91	10.00	4.01	1.07	6.92	8.10	6.03	4.00	0
Israeli Embassy Weibo	2.00	1.49	0.87	3.56	0.38	10.00	5.64	0.23	0.00	0.46	0
Australian Embassy Weibo	0.00	0.82	0.00	6.67	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.58	0.00	0

King's College of London

Project Title: Study of the British Embassy China Weibo

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The interview and focus group activities are parts of the above PhD research project conducted by Yin Wang, a PhD candidate at the King's College of London in the UK. This research project analyses the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office's digital diplomacy initiative, the British Embassy Weibo, and evaluates its performance and impact. The project also examines how state and non-state actors interact in social media through diplomatic communication. The interview and focus group have passed ethical check at the KCL.

For Participants to Agree:

- The answers and discussions of the interviews and focus group will be confidential and used only in this particular research project. All the data will be saved safely. The project conductor has the right to edit and select information to be used in the thesis. The contact details and identities of all participants will not be disclosed to anyone without prior agreement between the projector conductor and participants.

- The participants of the interview and focus group will be invited to answer a series of designed questions with their personal experience and opinions. The face-to-face interview will last approximately 30 minutes. The focus group will last approximately 1 hour. There is exception occasion when both sessions may last longer if the participants would like to have extra time to express their views or ask questions to the project conductor.

- The participants have their right to refuse to answer any questions they may feel not appropriate to answer. They also have the right to stop

the activities if they feel uncomfortable with any questions.

- The project conductor has the right to contact participants with regards to this particular project. At the same time, participants can also contact the project conductor and supervisors freely through the provided contact channel if they would like to discuss any issues about this particular project.

- All participant will be given a copy of this consent form to be kept for future reference.

I agree with the agreement items and understand the terms and conditions listed above. I would like to participate in the interview/focus group activity with my consent.

_____   _____

Participant's Signature   Date

_____   _____

Project Conductor's Signature   Date

Appendix F – Interview Question List

The question list below is tailored according to the purpose of this particular project and job nature of each interviewee. The questions will be selected to suit different interviewees.

1. What is your work as the (job title) at the British Embassy China/Sina Weibo?
2. What are your daily work routines?
3. Why did the FCO choose the British Embassy China as one of the pilot offices to launch social media accounts such as Weibo?
4. Are there any disagreements or conflicts about how to run the British Embassy Weibo when it was first launched?
5. What do you consider the special features that the British Embassy China Weibo has among all the other social media accounts of British Embassy China?
6. What are the main contributions do you consider the British Embassy Weibo makes to the British diplomatic communication strategy and practice in China?
7. How would you describe the current performance of the British Embassy Weibo?
8. Have you experienced any difficulties or challenges in the daily running of the British Embassy Weibo?
9. What is the major media outlets' response to the British Embassy China Weibo posts? Do you think more stories from the British Embassy China are picked up by major media outlets from Weibo than from official statement and press release?
10. What is the ideal conversation and interaction the FCO would like to achieve through the British Embassy China Weibo?
11. Have you developed or planned to develop any different type of content over the time on the British Embassy Weibo? What is the reason for this change?
12. What kind of content or comments are not permitted to be published on the British Embassy Weibo? What are the reasons behind it?

13. Please give me some examples of the posts generated most traffic, reposts and comments. What are the reasons for the result?

14. How do you negotiate with the Chinese media regulator/ Sina Weibo supervision team on publishing sensitive content on the British Embassy Weibo?

15. How do you negotiate with the British Embassy and Chinese media regulator to publish permitted content only on the British Embassy Weibo? Please describe the system of Sina Weibo's content management.

Appendix G – Focus Group Survey

<u>Please tick the answer you agree the most for below questions:</u>

1. Do you think the British Embassy Weibo provides the essential information you may not be able to obtain from other resources?

Strongly Agree   Not Fully Agree   Neutral   Not Fully Disagree   Strongly Disagree

2. Do you think the British Embassy Weibo are updated regularly and satisfy your needs?

Strongly Agree   Not Fully Agree   Neutral   Not Fully Disagree   Strongly Disagree

3. Do you think the British Embassy Weibo provides a convenient and efficient channel for diplomatic services such as visa application?

Strongly Agree   Not Fully Agree   Neutral   Not Fully Disagree   Strongly Disagree

4. Do you think there are enough interactive features and active interactions between the British Embassy Weibo and its followers?

Strongly Agree   Not Fully Agree   Neutral   Not Fully Disagree   Strongly Disagree

5. If you posted any comments or asked questions on the British Embassy Weibo, did you receive any feedback?

Yes   No

6. Do you feel satisfied with the response speed?

Yes   No

7. Do you think the design of the British Embassy Weibo is user-friendly?

Strongly Agree   Not Fully Agree   Neutral   Not Fully Disagree   Strongly Disagree

8. Do you find the British Embassy Weibo make you feel being involved directly in diplomatic conversation?

Strongly Agree   Not Fully Agree   Neutral   Not Fully Disagree   Strongly Disagree

9. Do you think you have more understanding of the UK and higher motivation to participate in UK-related events or go to the UK for holiday, study and work after you followed the British Embassy Weibo?

Strongly Agree   Not Fully Agree   Neutral   Not Fully Disagree   Strongly Disagree

10. Please specify just ONE aspect you would like to change on the British Embassy Weibo:

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