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## **EU diplomacy 2.0: The European Union's exercise in soft power in the Philippines through Facebook**

STUDIA I ANALIZY

**Keywords:** *Digital Diplomacy, European Union, soft power, EU-Philippine relations*

**Abstract:** *Digital diplomacy, also referred to as e-Diplomacy or Diplomacy 2.0, is a form of public diplomacy that entails the pursuance of foreign policy objectives using the Internet and social media. It is one of the ways that actors in contemporary global politics can exert soft power, thereby shaping a host country's perceptions, agendas, and policies. The increasing use of digital diplomacy exemplifies a shift in diplomatic from purely government-to-government (G2G) relations, to one in which communication is directed towards publics (G2P), and can even encourage citizens to interact with one another (P2P). One actor that has become increasingly active in this area is the European Union (EU). However, unlike a country, the regional bloc is a coalition of twenty-eight member states. Consequently, the challenge for EU digital diplomacy specialists is to represent a group of countries to local audiences. There is minimal literature on this subject, and this paper hopes to contribute to it by presenting a case study of the EU's digital diplomacy initiatives towards Philippines, which are communicated through the popular social networking website, Facebook. This paper argues that the EU exercises its soft power through its social media transmissions it creates. The individuals featured in its online*

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*content, the way that the European Union represents itself, and the issues it highlights in its posts are all geared towards shaping the perceptions of Philippine audiences.*

## **Introduction**

One of the recent developments in diplomatic practice is the shift from a small club of high-ranking individuals negotiating with one another behind closed doors, to one that is more open to public scrutiny and involves a diverse array of actors, which include intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), businesses, civil society, and the media. Thus, contemporary diplomacy is characterized as more of a network, where influence can originate and be exercised in multiple directions by numerous actors<sup>1</sup>. Although states continue to have privileged rights within the international political system, their representatives no longer just interact with one another, they now have to engage foreign publics, and consider how they represent themselves in both online and offline fora. Consequently, Ambassadors can now be found interacting with civil society, academia, businesses, and the citizenry at large.

Globalization has underpinned this transition from club to network. As the confluence of forces that have facilitated the movement of goods, people, ideas, and capital across borders, have made the world much more interconnected<sup>2</sup>. The increase in global ties has not been accompanied with a reciprocal development in institutions of governance. As such, the economic and social realities have overtaken the political ones, and the traditional diplomatic service has had to adapt to changes by becoming more transparent and open to engaging foreign publics<sup>3</sup>.

In the age of globalization, one way that governments have sought to expand their sovereignty was through the formation of regional blocs, such as the European Union (EU) or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). These groupings allow individual states to increase their influence by working in coalition with others. The EU is particularly active in fields, such as trade, the environment, and the provision of development aid. The European Union has also become

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<sup>1</sup> The following book chapter discusses the changing nature of diplomacy, which has shifted from discussions among small groups of individuals, to one in which diplomats now have to engage non-government actors and foreign publics: J. Heine, *From Club to Network Diplomacy*, [in:] A.F. Cooper, J. Heine, R.C. Thakur (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013.

<sup>2</sup> The following work discusses how globalization entails the intensification of connections among localities around the world: D. Held, *Global transformations: Politics, economics and culture*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 1999.

<sup>3</sup> For more on the relationship between globalization and diplomacy, see: A. Cooper, B. Hocking, W. Maley. *Global Governance and Diplomacy*, London: Palgrave Macmillan 2008.

increasingly active in diplomatic activities, since its diplomatic representation, the EEAS, was formalized under the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon. It should be noted, however, that EU diplomats are exceptional because they represent a twenty-eight-member coalition, unlike other Ambassadors who pursue the interests of only one state.

Although much of their work entails negotiations with state agencies, also known as government-to-government (G2G) interactions EU diplomats also engage in public diplomacy, communicating their positions and values to the citizenry of the country in which they are based, with the intention of reshaping the opinions of their audiences. The essential work of diplomacy is representation<sup>4</sup>, and activities of this sort are increasingly done in cyberspace. Connectivity through the Internet has allowed diplomatic representatives to convey their messages directly to publics (G2P) in their host country, or to encourage interactions among the citizenry of their state, and those of their host (P2P).

Researchers have remarked that the United States has been a leader in this field, and has been supportive of digital diplomacy initiatives<sup>5</sup>. In 2002, the country established a Taskforce on e-Diplomacy, which was later renamed to the Office of e-Diplomacy<sup>6</sup>. The agency was strengthened through staff training and an increase in funding, and continues to be active until the present<sup>7</sup>. Since then, other governments have followed suit, with the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office becoming more active in digital diplomacy in 2013, while in 2016, Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs both recognized the significance of information and communica-

<sup>4</sup> For further reading on the contemporary practice of diplomacy, particularly the concepts of G2P and P2P, see the following: J. Pamment, *Digital diplomacy as transmedia engagement: Aligning theories of participatory culture with international advocacy campaigns*, «New Media and Society» 2016, Vol. 18, No. 9, pp. 2046–2062; C. Jönsson, M. Hall, *Communication: an essential aspect of diplomacy*, «International Studies Perspectives» 2003 Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 195–210; P Sharp, *For diplomacy: representation and the study of international relations*, «International Studies Review» 1999, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 33–57.

<sup>5</sup> The following article examines some of the ways that Facebook has been used as a tool for diplomacy: D. Spry, *Facebook diplomacy: a data-driven, user-focused approach to Facebook use by diplomatic missions*, «Media International Australia» 2018, Vol. 168, No. 1, pp. 62–80.

<sup>6</sup> The institutional framework for digital diplomacy in the United States is discussed in: O.S. Adesina, *Foreign policy in an era of digital diplomacy*, «Cogent Social Sciences» 2017, Vol. 3, pp. 1–13.

<sup>7</sup> Further reading on how governments have carries out e-Diplomacy are the following: F. Hanson, *Revolution @State: The Spread of Ediplomacy*, Sydney, NSW, Australia: Lowy Institute for International Policy; C. Hayden, *Social media at state: power, practice and conceptual limits for US public diplomacy*, «Global Media Journal» 2012, Vol. 21.

tions technologies as tools for pursuing foreign policy<sup>8</sup>. Similarly, countries such as Sweden, Russia, Germany, France, Canada, and Israel have strengthened their presence online<sup>9</sup>.

Other actors in global politics are still developing their diplomatic capabilities in cyberspace<sup>10</sup>. The European Union can be described as one such entity. Although it recognizes the importance of having a strong and cohesive online presence, the European External Action Service (EEAS), the EU's diplomatic representation abroad, has only provided very general guidelines on how to go about pursuing its foreign policy online. In their *Information and Communication Handbook for EU Delegations*, the EEAS recognised that, 'Digital age communication tools and platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Youtube and blogs allow us to engage a wider audience in the work of the EU's foreign policies'<sup>11</sup>. The term 'digital diplomacy' itself is not mentioned within the manual, but the document recommends measures for pursuing foreign policy objectives via online platforms. It states:

EU Delegations are invited to follow and 'like' the existing EU accounts as well as promote them among their contacts and especially EU funded projects. Delegations are also invited to be active on social media either in opening a social media account or in contributing to the blogosphere.<sup>12</sup>

The lack of specific direction with regard to digital diplomacy provides individual Delegations the freedom in crafting the form and content of their messages.

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<sup>8</sup> The following work discussed how Japan and Australia have created government institutions to conduct digital diplomacy: D. Spry, *Facebook diplomacy: a data-driven, user-focused approach to Facebook use by diplomatic missions*, «Media International Australia» 2018, Vol. 168, No. 1, pp. 62–80.

<sup>9</sup> A discussion of how various governments have applied digital diplomacy can be found in the following: O.S. Adesina, *Foreign policy in an era of digital diplomacy*, «Cogent Social Sciences» 2017, Vol. 3, pp. 1–13.

<sup>10</sup> For further elaborations on the nature of digital diplomacy, see the following: M.D. Dodd, S.J. Collins, *Public relations message strategies and public diplomacy 2.0: An empirical analysis using Central-Eastern European and Western Embassy Twitter accounts*, «Public Relations Review» 2017, Vol. 43, pp. 417–425; J. Melissen, *Public Diplomacy*, [in:] A.F. Cooper, J. Heine, R.C. Thakur (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013; S. Park, D. Chung, H.W. Park, *Analytical framework for evaluating digital diplomacy using network analysis and topic modeling: Comparing South Korea and Japan*, «Information Processing and Management» 2019, Vol. 56, pp. 1468–1483.

<sup>11</sup> The EEAS' manual for using information and communications technologies can be found in the following: European External Action Service (2013). *Information and Communication Handbook for EU Delegations in Third Countries and to International Organisations*, [http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/delegations/ghana/documents/press\\_corner/20121231\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/delegations/ghana/documents/press_corner/20121231_en.pdf) (22.01.2020).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*.

At the time of writing, little has been written about how EU Delegations translate the EEAS guidelines into practice, and none of them focus on relations between the European Union and a host country in Southeast Asia. This paper hopes to contribute to the lacuna in the literature through its content analysis of the Facebook transmissions of the EU Delegation in the Philippines. It is argued that the EU exercises its soft power in the country by representing itself as a reliable partner, and by encouraging its local audiences to accept the norms that the European Union promotes.

### **Theoretical Underpinnings: Soft Power, Digital Diplomacy, and the EU**

Researchers in the field of International Relations distinguish two types of power that states can employ in the pursuit of their foreign policy goals, which are hard and soft power. The former is usually associated with coercion, and entails either the threat, or actual use of, military action or the application of punitive economic sanctions<sup>13</sup>. Soft power, in contrast, employs influence or attraction in order to get states, ‘to want the outcomes that you want’<sup>14</sup>. This necessitates the use of persuasion in order to shape another country’s preferences. In the post- Cold War context, soft power has gained precedence in the diplomatic toolbox, since the competition between states has been less military in nature, and is now about attracting tourists, raising public attention, selling goods and services, and attracting foreign investment. Consequently, states need to promote themselves to foreign governments, businesses, and even ordinary citizens<sup>15</sup>.

With state priorities having shifted from issues of high politics to include other fields, diplomats need to learn to engage both their counterparts in host governments, but also with non-government actors including business confederations,

<sup>13</sup> For more information on the concept of soft power, see the following: J. Nye, *Soft power*, «Foreign Policy» 1990, Vol. 80, pp. 153–171.

<sup>14</sup> In this work, Nye elaborates on how soft power can be defined as influencing the policies and actions of other states: J. Nye, *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*, New York, NY: Public Affairs 2004.

<sup>15</sup> The following works elaborate on the concept of soft power, and explain its importance to governments in the post-Cold War context: R.H.K. Vietor, *How Countries Compete: Strategy, Structure, and Government in the Global Economy*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press 2007; P. Kotler, D. Gertner, *Country as brand, products, and beyond: A place marketing and brand management perspective*, «Journal of Brand Management» 2002, Vol. 9, No. 4/5, pp. 249–261; S.J. Page, R. Hardyman, *Place marketing and town centre management: A new tool for urban revitalization*, «Cities» 1996, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 153–164.

civil society, political interest groups, and ordinary citizens<sup>16</sup>. Public diplomacy refers to an instrument used by states, or groups of states, to understand local cultures, attitudes, and behaviour, build and manage relationships, and influence thoughts and mobilize actions to advance their interests and values<sup>17</sup>. Its use coincides with a shift in thinking about the nature of diplomacy from one of competition among states to one of collaboration. Governments now realize that they can better pursue their interests abroad when local populations are receptive to their messages and actions<sup>18</sup>. It is also an inexpensive method for building up a sense of goodwill between countries.

Whereas in the past, diplomatic representatives only communicated with state actors, contemporary diplomacy necessitates visibility to others as well<sup>19</sup>. As such, ambassadors are now often seen making speeches at business and civil society functions, or going to academic institutions to give lectures or participate in panel discussions. Nowadays, embassies also make use of the Internet and social media platforms to communicate their policies and positions to an anonymous virtual audience. World leaders, such as the American President, the Canadian Prime Minister, the German Chancellor, and the French President all maintain social media accounts that they use to communicate with their followers. Researchers believe that public diplomacy is a new and worthwhile research area, but they also challenge scholars to expand the theoretical and empirical literature on the subject<sup>20</sup>.

Nye<sup>21</sup> suggests that there are three dimensions of effective public diplomacy. These are: (1) daily communications, (2) strategic communication, and (3) build-

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<sup>16</sup> In the following, emphasis is placed on governments' need to engage non-governmental actors as well: J. Nye, *Public Diplomacy and Soft Power*, «The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science» 2008, Vol. 616, pp. 94–109.

<sup>17</sup> The work by Melissen provides a definition and overview of public diplomacy. J. Melissen, *Public Diplomacy*, [in:] A.F. Cooper, J. Heine, R.C. Thakur (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013.

<sup>18</sup> In this work, Nye discusses the importance of making local populations receptive to their messages: J. Nye, *Public Diplomacy and Soft Power*, «The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science» 2008, Vol. 616, pp. 94–109.

<sup>19</sup> The following work emphasizes the importance of visibility in diplomatic practice: J. Welsh. D. Fearn (eds.), *Engagement: Public Diplomacy in a Globalised World*, London: Foreign and Commonwealth Office Books 2008.

<sup>20</sup> The following papers articulate the importance of public diplomacy as a significant research area: E.J. Wilson, *Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power*, «The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science» 2008, Vol. 616, pp. 110–124; O.S. Adesina, *Foreign policy in an era of digital diplomacy*, «Cogent Social Sciences» 2017, Vol. 3, pp. 1–13.

<sup>21</sup> See this work for an examination of the theoretical relationship between soft power and public diplomacy: J. Nye, *Public Diplomacy and Soft Power*, «The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science» 2008, Vol. 616, pp. 94–109.

ing lasting relationships with individuals. He argues that the first is essential because information is readily available at present, while attention span has become a commodity. Consequently, in order for governments to remain relevant, they should be visible across various forms of media. The second, facet refers to the deployment of messages, images, and symbols that would reinforce foreign policy objectives. Finally, the third is exemplified in people-to-people exchanges through scholarships, exchanges, training, conferences, and others. Over time, states that emphasize building relationships will have a pool of individuals who are sympathetic to their causes.

Another conceptualization of public diplomacy is to categorize public diplomacy initiatives into three types, which are termed layers: monologues, dialogues, and collaboration<sup>22</sup>. The first refers to one-way communication, in which country's representatives make statements without receiving feedback from their audiences. This may be likened to propagandistic communication, and it has long been employed in diplomatic intercourse. Dialogues refer to exchanges of information, and these are beneficial in order for country representatives to better understand the citizens of their host country. Collaborations, for their part, are exemplified in cases where coalitions of actors work together to achieve a common goal. The authors state that each of the three has its own respective advantages and setbacks, and that none of them is necessarily superior to the others. Diplomats need to understand the various layers, and be aware of when they should be used.

Digital diplomacy is a particular form of public diplomacy, which employs information and communications technologies to pursue foreign policy objectives<sup>23</sup>. It is a relatively new area of research, and researchers have remarked on the existence of significant gaps in the research<sup>24</sup>. Advancements in information and communications technologies have created new possibilities for diplomatic engagement for both state and non-state actors. For example, the Internet has spawned a medium that can be utilized by diplomatic agents for collaboration and dissemination of information<sup>25</sup>. Other research discusses how both intergovern-

<sup>22</sup> The following work provides a framework for categorizing different forms of public diplomacy: G. Cowan, A. Arsenault, *Moving from monologue to dialogue to collaboration. The three layers of public diplomacy*, «The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science» 2008, Vol. 616, pp. 10–30.

<sup>23</sup> The following work discusses how new forms of information and communications technologies have transformed the way that diplomacy has been practiced. D. Copeland, *Digital Technology*, [in:] A.F. Cooper, J. Heine, R.C. Thakur (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013.

<sup>24</sup> See the following for a literature review on digital diplomacy: H. Almuftah, V. Weerakkody, U. Sivarajah, *E-Diplomacy: A systematic literature review*, ACM 2016, pp. 131–134.

<sup>25</sup> The following work examines one of the ways that digital diplomacy has been studied. It also emphasizes that digital diplomacy is a new phenomenon, and encourages scholars to try to fill the lacuna in the literature: M. Holmes, *Digital Diplomacy and International*

mental organizations and global civil society have engaged in their own forms of digital diplomacy, using it as a way to pursue their respective agendas<sup>26</sup>.

There is also an apparent lacuna in the actors selected for study. The majority of research on both public diplomacy and digital diplomacy has been about the United States<sup>27</sup>, which has been actively trying to shape perceptions about it online. Despite the U.S.-centric nature of the literature on public and digital diplomacy, researchers have begun investigating the ways that different governments have pursued their foreign policies online. There have been studies on the United Kingdom<sup>28</sup>, comparisons between Japan and Korea<sup>29</sup>, and Israel<sup>30</sup>.

Some research has been done on EU initiatives. Davis Cross<sup>31</sup>, for example, discussed that not all of the organisation's communication is directed at foreign publics. It also needs to legitimize itself to European citizens who sometimes question its value. For their part, Manners and Whitman<sup>32</sup> emphasize the role of

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*Change Management*, [in:] C. Bjola, M. Holmes, *Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*, London: Taylor and Francis, 2015, pp. 13–32.

<sup>26</sup> The following academic works provide overviews of digital diplomacy: C. Bjola, *Introduction: Making sense of digital diplomacy*, [in:] C. Bjola, M. Holmes, *Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*, London: Taylor and Francis 2015, pp. 1–12; J. Pamment, *Digital diplomacy as transmedia engagement: Aligning theories of participatory culture with international advocacy campaigns*, «New Media and Society» 2016, Vol. 18, No. 9, pp. 2046–2062.

<sup>27</sup> Examples of academic literature covering American digital diplomacy include the following: L. Khatib, W. Dutton, M. Thelwall, *Public Diplomacy 2.0: A Case Study of the US Digital Outreach Team*, «Middle East Journal» 2012, Vol. 66, No. 3, pp. 453–472; B.E. Goldsmith, Y. Horiuchi, *Spinning the Globe? U.S. Public Diplomacy and Foreign Public Opinion*, «The Journal of Politics» 2009, Vol. 71, No. 3, pp. 555–585; P. Van Ham, *Place Branding: The State of the Art*, «The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science» 2008, Vol. 616, No. 1, pp. 126–149.

<sup>28</sup> The following work explored how the United Kingdom has begun exercising soft power in cyberspace: J. Pamment, *British Public Diplomacy and Soft Power: Diplomatic Influence and the Digital Revolution*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2016.

<sup>29</sup> See: S. Park, D. Chung, H.W. Park, *Analytical framework for evaluating digital diplomacy using network analysis and topic modeling: Comparing South Korea and Japan*, «Information Processing and Management» 2019, Vol. 56, pp. 1468–1483. Their study compared how Japanese and Korean diplomats used information and communications technologies to promote their countries, and connect with audiences abroad.

<sup>30</sup> I. Manor, R. Crilly, *Visually framing the Gaza War of 2014: The Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Twitter*, «Media, War and Conflict» 2018, Vol. 11, No. 4, pp. 369–391. This study examined how the country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs used Twitter to legitimize its actions in the Gaza War of 2014.

<sup>31</sup> The following work discussed how EU public diplomacy is directed at both foreign publics and European citizens alike: M.K. Davis Cross, *Conceptualizing European Public Diplomacy*, [in:] M.K. Davis Cross, J. Melissen (eds.), *European Public Diplomacy: Soft Power at Work*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2013, pp. 1–11.

<sup>32</sup> See: I. Manners, R. Whitman, *The "difference engine": constructing and representing the international identity of the European Union*, «Journal of European Public Policy» 2003,



norms in EU external relations. Many of its activities entail the advocating of the values that its member states consider important, such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Related to this is the research of Vadura<sup>33</sup>, who discussed how the EU advocated for human rights norms in Asia. The article by Michalski<sup>34</sup>, for its part, explains that EU public diplomacy is constrained by the regional organisation's Common Foreign and Security Policy, which requires consensus on an issue before diplomats can officially make statements. This is similar to findings of Collins and Bekenova<sup>35</sup>, who examined the European Union's activities in Kazakhstan, by comparing the topics of EU social media posts, with those of other embassies in the country. Unlike their study, however, this article takes an in-depth look at the individuals featured in the EU's online content, the way that the European Union is represented in its social media transmissions, and the issues it highlights in its posts. This paper argues that these are three elements for the exercising of soft power, which are geared towards representing the organisation as a reliable partner for the Philippines, but one whose norms should also be internalized by the country.

## Methodology

Content analysis was employed in order to understand the nature of EU digital diplomacy messages on social media. The choice of method dovetails with previous work done by researchers who have also studied social media<sup>36</sup>. This entailed the examination of text, images, video, and audio and categorizing them

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Vol. 10, pp. 380–404. Therein, it is discussed that norms are an integral part of EU public diplomacy.

<sup>33</sup> An example of how the EU uses its soft power to spread its norms in Asia is the following: K. Vadura, *The EU as "norm entrepreneur" in the Asian region: exploring the digital diplomacy aspect of the human rights toolbox*, «Asia Europe Journal» 2015, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 349–360.

<sup>34</sup> The following work discussed the constraints faced by EU foreign policy agents in their exercise of soft power: A. Michalski, *The EU as a Soft Power: the Force of Persuasion*, [in:] J. Melissen (ed.), *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2005, pp. 124–144.

<sup>35</sup> A case study of EU public diplomacy in a third country is exemplified in the work of: N. Collins, K. Bekenova, *Digital diplomacy: success at your fingertips*, «Place Branding and Public Diplomacy» 2017, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 1–11.

<sup>36</sup> The authors of the following articles outlined a variety of methods for coding data that is found in online social networks: H.A. Schwartz, L.H. Ungar, *Data-Driven Content Analysis of Social Media: A Systematic Overview of Automated Methods*, «The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science» 2015, Vol. 659, pp. 78–94; L. Furquhar, *Performing and interpreting identity through Facebook imagery*, «Convergence: International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies» 2012, Vol. 19, No. 4, pp. 446–471.

in a systematic manner<sup>37</sup>. Although the EU Delegation has accounts on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, data gathering for this paper was focused only on the last, since it is the medium where it is most active, and has the largest audience. The content analysis was done on the Facebook page of the EU Delegation in the Philippines, which is called *European Union in the Philippines*.

In order to get as broad a picture as possible about the individuals featured in Facebook posts, the way that the EU is depicted online, and the issues highlighted in social media transmissions, the data will include posts made on the page from the 30th of June, 2016 to the 30th of December, 2017 when the data collection process ceased. The start date was selected deliberately because it coincided with the election of Rodrigo Duterte as the president of the Philippines. The election of a new leader represented a new beginning in Philippine politics, but it also marked a transformation in EU-Philippine relations. During his administration, the diplomatic relations between the two have become strained due to the alleged use of extrajudicial killings in conducting the president's war against drugs. The EU insisted on the respect for human rights, while President Duterte countered with a combative tone, which involved the articulation of invectives against the European organisation. The strained relations between the two have influenced how the EU conducted its digital diplomacy. Consequently, the data collected for this study represents the context in which it was produced.

The method of categorizing information follows procedures used in previous research that employed content analysis<sup>38</sup>, but this study focused its data gathering on individuals that were featured in EU Facebook posts, the way that the Union was represented in its social media transmissions, and the issues that are highlighted in its posts. The analysis of the data was done both qualitatively and quantitatively. The coding scheme employed allowed for both qualitative and quantitative data to be recorded, and the findings below contain both types

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<sup>37</sup> For a more detailed understanding of the different approaches that can be used in performing qualitative content analysis, see: H-F. Hsieh, S.E. Shannon, *Three approaches to qualitative content analysis*, «Qualitative Health Research» 2005, Vol. 15, No. 9, pp. 1277–1288.

<sup>38</sup> The manner of analyzing frames in online content that was used in this study follows the procedure described in the following works: S. Valenzuela, M. Piña, J. Ramírez, *Behavioral Effects on Framing on Social Media Users: How Conflict, Economic, Human Interest, and Morality Frames Drive News Sharing*, «Journal of Communication» 2017, Vol. 67, pp. 803–826; P. Pond, J. Lewis, *Riots and Twitter: connective politics, social media and framing discourses in the digital public sphere*, «Information, Communication, and Society» 2017, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp. 213–231; M.R. Culley, E. Ogley-Oliver, A.D. Carton, J.C. Street, *Media Framing of Proposed Nuclear Reactors: An Analysis of Print Media*, «Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology», 2010, Vol. 20, pp. 497–512. A.O. Salvador, M.R. Enverga, L.A. Lopez, *Orientalism Reversed: Images and Perceptions of the EU in the Philippines*, [in:] N. Chaban, M. Holland, P. Ryan (eds.), *The EU Through the Eyes of Asia Volume II: New Cases, New Findings*, New York: World Scientific 2009, pp. 19–51.

of information. Descriptive statistics will be used to indicate the frequency that individuals appear, the ways that the EU is represented in Facebook posts, and the variety of issues that the social media transmissions are about. Qualitative information was also recorded to provide illustrative examples both sets of data.

The methodology employed in this study also complied with the standards of ethical research. The data gathered from the EU Delegation's Facebook page is visible to any individual using the social network. As such, it is part of the public record, and can legitimately be used for content analysis. No classified documents were examined during the course of preparing the paper, and the EU Delegation in the Philippines was aware that their social media transmissions were being used for this study.

## Findings

The EU Delegation in the Philippines has public diplomacy initiatives that are carried out both online and offline, and which utilise different media to communicate with Filipinos. For example, the Ambassador and members of the staff organize public events, make statements in the print media, and make television appearances. However, the Embassy's most consistent public diplomacy initiatives are done online. The Delegation maintains an active page on Facebook, a Twitter account, and shares images on Instagram. These media allow it to engage with its followers online, though the bulk of its activity occurs on Facebook, which is the most popularly used social networking site in the Philippines.

During the time period when data was collected, the EU Delegation in the Philippines made a total of 670 posts on their Facebook page. All of them contained text, but 573 of them, roughly 86%, also had accompanying images, which were mainly used to supplement the text of the post. For example, one transmission commemorating the inauguration of newly elected President, Duterte, was accompanied by a photo of Ambassadors from EU Member States and the incoming Philippine leader. Another image showed a view of Rijeka, Croatia, which was included in a post announcing the city as one of the European Capitals of Culture for 2020. Although studying the images would certainly be a worthwhile endeavour, doing so would go beyond the scope of this particular paper, and as such, pictorial data will not be presented here.

The page was updated regularly, and the account would frequently make several posts in one day. There were some posts that continued in a series, such as the 'Thursday Trade Treat' and the 'Letter from the Ambassador'. The former was content that would appear every Thursday, which would highlight an aspect of the EU-Philippine trade relationship, such as the success of Philippine exports to

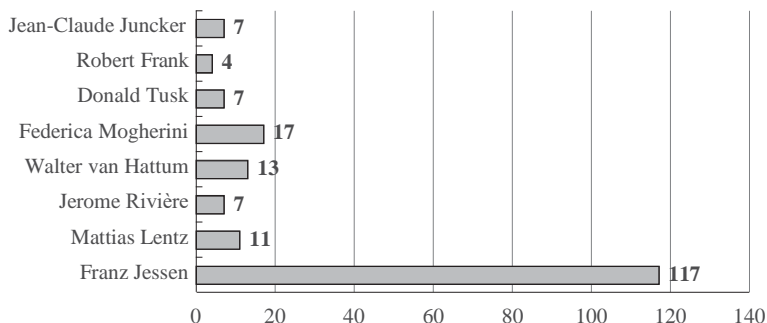
the EU, the amount of capital that EU businesses invest in the country, or bilateral agreements covering specific products, such as weapons. These posts emphasise the benefits that the Philippines obtains from its partnership with the EU. The 'Letter from the Ambassador', for its part, is a lengthy post written by the Ambassador himself, which recounts his activities during the week, including meetings with government officials, or moments engaging in leisure activities, which serve to humanise the EU's chief representative in the Philippines.

All of the Delegation's activities online represent the European Union to its Philippine audiences on social media. They do this by making decisions with regard to the actors, timing, agenda, and framing of their posts. The trends in the social media transmissions between June 2016 and December 2017 are presented in the succeeding sub-sections.

### **Individuals Featured in EU Facebook Transmissions**

The most prominently featured individuals in the Delegation's social media posts serve as symbols or 'faces' of the EU to Filipino audiences in cyberspace. There were many actors who were featured in social media transmissions, but the eight individuals with the highest frequencies are represented in the graph below (figure 1).

**Figure 1.** The Most Frequently Featured Actors in Posts (In Absolute Numbers)



Source: own study.

By far, the EU Ambassador to the Philippines, Franz Jessen, is the most frequently featured personality. This is partly a result of his series of letters, which he posts on social media. The other explanation for his prominence is that his activities are the most visibly reported, whether he is making speeches in events, giving lectures at academic institutions, or having meetings with government officials. As the head of the Delegation to the Philippines, the Ambassador is the highest

ranking EU official in the country, and as such, his statements and activities are the clearest representation of EU policy.

A distant second to the Ambassador is the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini. As the organisation's *de facto* foreign minister, her statements and activities are also significant. However, given that she is responsible for EU foreign policy as a whole, her visibility in the Philippines is relatively limited. Posts that feature her tend to be about statements she has made about global issues, though she was also featured in numerous posts during her visit to the Philippines during the summit meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Other EU officials, such as Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, and Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, have appeared sparingly in posts. Officials from the EU Delegation to the Philippines have also been featured on social media due to their participation in activities around the country. Among the most frequently mentioned are Walter van Hattum, Head of the Economic and Trade Section, Jerome Rivière, First Secretary, Mattias Lentz, Minister Counsellor, and Robert Frank, Regional Cooperation Officer for South-East Asia.

Each of the individuals featured in Facebook posts perform representative functions depending on their areas of competence, but it is noteworthy that of the eight listed above, four of the individuals are based in the Philippines, while the others are among the highest ranking EU officials. In terms of frequency, the Ambassador is featured in content far more than any of the others, and he is the highest ranking EU envoy in the Philippines. These trends indicate the significance placed on the activities of Philippine-based actors over Europe-based ones in the EU's social media transmissions to Filipinos. Audiences on Facebook are made aware that the European Union is actively implementing projects to fortify its relationship with the Philippines.

## **Representations of the EU in Facebook Posts**

The EU was depicted in numerous ways on the Delegation's social media platform. The three that featured most prominently, however, were: (1) EU as Philippine partner; (2) Supporter of international norms; and (3) United by shared values; Among the three, the most frequently applied representation was that of Philippine partner. One of the primary purposes of diplomatic agents is to maintain good relations between two political entities. The EU Delegation does this through its digital diplomacy transmissions, by emphasising that it is a good partner for the Philippines. The idea of partnership is mentioned in numerous posts,

such as when the Facebook account published a press statement containing the line: 'The EU and the Philippines work constructively and productively together in a close partnership in many contexts and areas'. One such area is trade and investment, with one transmission saying that, 'the EU is traditionally one of the biggest...partners to the Philippines'. In another instance, the status between the two is upgraded from partner to 'friend', with their relationship being manifested through trade ties and development assistance.

The second most prevalent manner of framing the EU is as a supporter of international norms, whether these are in the areas of human rights, trade, and the law of the sea. The last was manifested in a post by the Delegation in which the EU expressed its support for the Philippines with regard to the decision made by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, which declared that China was encroaching on Philippine territory. The text asserted that the EU is, '...committed to maintaining a legal order of the seas and oceans based upon the principles of international law'. Statements on trade are also plentiful, and include one post, which stated that: 'The EU stands for fair, international, rules-based trade based on high standards, cooperation and strengthening of multilateral institutions'. With regard to rights, the Delegation continuously posts statements such as: 'The EU reiterates its full support and commitment for the protection and promotion of the interest and well-being of women from the Philippines and from across the globe', or, 'The EU will continue to stand up for the rights of every child to reach their full potential'. In both cases, the Delegation frames the European Union as a supporter of international norms.

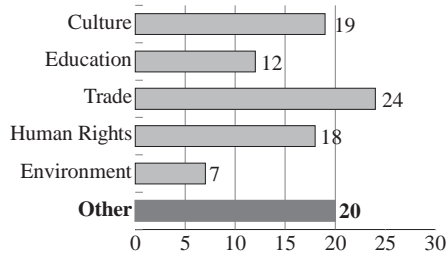
The third category of representation applied to the EU is that it is a coalition that is united by shared values. One post included a quote from the High Representative, which stated: 'In challenging times, a strong Union is one that thinks strategically, shares a vision and acts together'. The idea was also seen in one of the Ambassador's letters to his audiences online. There, he described the EU as 'based on strong values, solidarity, equality and human dignity'. Another letter reiterated the sentiment when he said, 'the EU is built around shared values'.

The three categories of representation presented here are the most frequently used in digital diplomacy transmissions, though there are others, which include the depiction of the EU as possessing expertise, being an interregional partner, and having a global reach, though these were used quite rarely. As such, the broader trend in the EU's posts is to represent it as a partner to the Philippines, a supporter of international norms, and united by shared values.

## Issues Highlighted in Facebook Posts

The EU Delegation to the Philippines highlighted numerous issue areas in its social media transmissions. The findings from the data are depicted in the figure (figure 2) below.

**Figure 2.** Issue Areas Highlighted in Posts [in %]



Source: own study.

The issue that was featured most prominently was trade, which had an ongoing series of posts called the Thursday Trade Treat. Apart from this, content was published on the topic on other days. The second most prominent issue area after trade was cooperation. Posts were often made about the EU's activities in the field of development in the Philippines, as it is one of the largest donors of development assistance in the country, and as such, it is involved in numerous projects. Culture was the third most featured issue area in the Delegation's Facebook posts, and they were usually about the EU's hosting of events involving musicians and artists. It was noted, however, that there was a spike in posts on culture whenever the Delegation hosts the Cine Europa film festival, which is a well-known event in the country. It is held every year, and is the longest running foreign film event in the country. The event's prominence is such that it has been recognised by the European Commission for being a successful form of cultural diplomacy. When Cine Europa was promoted, there was also increased activity among Filipinos who commented on the Delegation's Facebook page, in order to find out more about the event.

Human rights was the fourth most prominent issue area in the EU's digital diplomacy transmissions to the Philippines. Some of the posts commemorate of human rights-related days, such as those celebrating women's, children's, or indigenous people's rights. Others reported about how the EU encourages the respect of human rights through its activities in the Philippines. For example, in one item, it was recounted that an EU Human Rights Expert was included in a monitoring team that was checking conditions in a conflict area in the Philippines. When

news outlets began to report about alleged extrajudicial killings in the country's drug war, the EU maintained its commitment to the international norms, issuing a statement saying:

The EU emphasizes the importance of carrying out the fight against illegal drugs in full compliance with due process, national law and international human rights law.

Education was the fifth most prominent issue area found. Many of the posts on this topic promoted the educational exchange programs that are offered by the EU, including the Erasmus Mundus scholarship and the Marie Curie research fellowships. The Delegation hosts an educational fair each year, in which representatives of European universities come to the Philippines to promote themselves, and to encourage local students to take advantage of educational opportunities in Europe. As with the Cine Europa, there was an increase in posting about education when the European Higher Education Fair (EHEF) event was promoted in the country.

Among the six issue areas identified in the data, the environment was the least prominent. The posts on this topic encouraged the respect for environmental norms, particularly on topics such as water and waste management, reforestation, and renewable energy. The EU organizes events on these topics, which are attended by both government officials and NGO representatives. One of the posts recounted a campaign in which ambassadors from European countries to the Philippines had a bike ride together to raise awareness about the environment and sustainability.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

This paper has analysed the content of the Facebook page of the EU Delegation to the Philippines. In particular, it examined the individuals featured in the online content, the way that the European Union was represented in social media transmissions, and the issues that were highlighted in Facebook posts. The findings of the study indicate that these three elements are exercises of soft power, which are geared towards representing the organisation as a reliable partner for the Philippines, but one whose norms should also be internalized by the country. In examining the actors highlighted in the posts, one finds that Philippine-based EU officials, such as the Ambassador and other Delegation staff, are featured more prominently than individuals who occupy higher positions in the bureaucracy, such as the Presidents of the European Commission, the European Council, or the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. By emphasising the former over the latter, the Facebook posts highlight the activities



of EU representatives in the Philippines, rather than those in Brussels. In so doing, the social media transmissions reinforce the idea that the EU is a committed partner in the country, and that its representatives are working to strengthen the relationship between itself and the Philippines.

The other facet of the EU's exercising of soft power has to do with its representations to Philippine audiences. The three most prominent ways of framing the European Union was: (1) as Philippine partner; (2) Supporter of international norms; and (3) United by shared values. It was found that the first was the most frequently applied representation in social media transmissions, which reinforces the message of the EU as a reliable partner for the Philippines.

The third factor examined was that of issues. Trade, culture, human rights, education, and the environment were all topics that were highlighted in the EU Delegation's Facebook posts. Both culture and education were depicted as areas of cooperation between the EU and the Philippines. Transmissions about culture were mainly about events hosted by the EU Delegation, such as film festivals or cultural performances, in order to share aspects of European culture to Philippine audiences. Posts about education stressed the opportunities for study and exchange that Filipinos could apply for in order to pursue degrees in Europe. The topics of human rights and the environment, for their part, were more normative in nature. The Delegation's Facebook posts would state the EU's position on these issues, and encourage the Philippines to follow them.

These attempts to influence policy were not always received positively by Philippine audiences online, who would accuse the EU of trying to interfere in Philippine politics. At the time of when the data was being collected, the Philippines had elected a president, Rodrigo Duterte, who was accused of violating human rights by pursuing a 'War on Drugs', which allegedly resulted in the extrajudicial killing of several thousand drug dealers and users. The new Philippine leader's policy has been criticised by other world leaders, as well as officials from the United Nations and the EU, and his reaction has been to respond with highly inflammatory statements, which have strained relations between the Philippines and his perceived enemies. The EU was targeted with such a statement, and President Duterte's supporters have been active in defending the 'War on Drugs', and have accused the European Union of interfering in local policies.

This context likely explains why the EU Delegation's digital diplomacy efforts have mainly been directed towards reassuring audiences that the organisation remains a reliable partner to the Philippines, though this serves as a potential topic for further study. The EU Delegation's social media transmissions were also made in the context of its seeming irrelevance compared to other Philippine partners. It has been found, for example, that the EU ranked below the United States and China in a study that examined Filipinos' perceptions of their most important

international partners<sup>39</sup>. This relative invisibility could also influence the way that the EU crafts its social media transmissions for Philippine audiences. That said, it may also be worthwhile for researchers to explore the broader relationship between social media transmissions and the context in which they arise.

Viewed from a broader perspective, this paper presents a case study of how EU foreign policy is translated into statements and images online. It indicates how diplomats are beginning to exploit new media in order to pursue their objectives. What is more, this examination of the EU Delegation in the Philippines opens avenues for further research into other EU diplomatic missions around the world. The EU's foreign policy process is unique in that it has to represent twenty-eight member states instead of just one, and this creates constraints on what their representatives can say, and what types of topics they are allowed to comment on. By examining social media posts, one is able to view the results of these restrictions, as they are manifested online.

As an academic undertaking, this work has been valuable in taking the concepts of framing and agenda, and applying them to the empirical phenomenon of digital diplomacy. Researchers can build on this work in order to broaden the field, and provide academic researchers and practitioners more insights into the nature and dynamics of diplomacy 2.0.

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<sup>39</sup>The study being referred to in this note is the following: A.O. Salvador, M.R. Enverga, L.A. Lopez, *Orientalism Reversed: Images and Perceptions of the EU in the Philippines*, [in:] N. Chaban, M. Holland, P. Ryan (eds.), *The EU Through the Eyes of Asia Volume II: New Cases, New Findings*, New York: World Scientific 2009, pp. 19–51.

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