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THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN CULTURAL RELATIONS: AN
ANALYSIS OF WHETHER THE BRITISH COUNCIL'S SOCIAL MEDIA
STRATEGY COHERES WITH THE ORGANISATION'S CORE PURPOSE

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Abstract

In 2010, in response to the announcement that the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) would be reducing the annual grant given to the British Council, the organisation announced it would increase its virtual presence. This thesis examines the organisation's new social media strategy and evaluates whether it is aligned with the British Council's core purposes.

Using case study analysis, three British Council country office social media channels are reviewed. The analysis is informed by a table of components that are used to evaluate the British Council's social media. These components and subsequent presentation of results were constructed through research carried out on the British Council, social media and the theoretical perspective of Alexander Vuving's soft power currencies.

Through studying the organisation's approach to building trust and making relationships worldwide, and also placing the organisation into the context of a contributor to UK "soft power", this research explores the role this modern means of communication has for a cultural relations organisation.

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I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Glossary: Social Media Terminology

Follow	A way of connecting with users on social media platforms to receive their updates.
Hashtag	Generally used on the Twitter microblogging site, consisting of a word within the message prefixed with a hash sign. Conversations can then be grouped.
Handles	A username on Twitter. Usernames start with the symbol @.
Likes	By clicking the 'Like' button on social media platforms you indicate that you are interested in the post
Pin/Repin	An image or video posted/reposted on Pinterest.
Retweet	A post that has been reposted, these posts then start with the abbreviation RT.
Share	The reposting of a photo or video.
Trending	A topic popular on social media platforms.
Tweets	A post by someone on Twitter
URL	Web address.

Introduction

I. Research Questions

This thesis aims to assess the introduction and use of social media in the British Council. I intend to explore the role of social media in cultural relations and identify if and how the organisation's current use of social media aligns with the organisation's core priority to build relationships and trust worldwide, and also consider how social media could assist the British Council in contributing to the UK's soft power.

Social media, defined as, 'forms of electronic communication (...) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content' (Merriam-Webster, 2015), is a relatively new tool for organisations - certainly for the British Council which, at the time of writing, is embarking on its first global social media strategy.

Using this type of technology is cost-effective (it is free to open most social media accounts), and it is also crucial to the world we live in. The British Council would soon be accused of being out of touch if they did not include web-based programmes as part of their portfolio or were absent from popular social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter (Leadbeater, 2010). A quick comparison of other countries' cultural organisations' Facebook pages would suggest that they are not behind the crowd. To give an example,¹ the Spanish equivalent of the British Council, Instituto Cervantes, has only 82 Facebook pages and the Goethe-Institute from Germany has 87 Facebook pages.² The British Council has 150 Facebook pages.

The value of web-based relationships is yet to be proved, and debates around this provoke a number of questions: can long-lasting relationships really be developed on social networking sites? In terms of personal relationships and communication, there has been

¹ As of 15th January 2014.

² As of 17th May 2014.

much debate on the impact that technology has had on communication. There are those that strongly believe that social media has enhanced our social network, varied our group of contacts and provided benefits that simply weren't there before (Hampton, 2016), there are of course the critics of social media, who believe our dependence on modern devices, the need to check each notification and social media channel several times an hour is leading to a breakdown of real communication (Subrahmanyam, 2008, Rosen, 2015).

For the purpose of this research, social media is viewed as an additional form of communication that a cultural relations organisation can use to reach and engage an international audience. As stipulated in *Capitalizing on the Net: Social Contact, Civic Engagement, and Sense of Community*, digital interaction can enhance existing means of communication, and for a cultural relations organisation, this can assist in building trust as well as communities across the globe.

We find that online social contact supplements the frequency of face-to-face and telephone contact. Online activity also supplements participation in voluntary organizations and politics. Frequent email users have a greater sense of online community, although their overall sense of community is similar to that of infrequent email users. The evidence suggests that as the Internet is incorporated into the routine practices of everyday life, social capital is becoming augmented and more geographically dispersed (Quan-Haase, 2002).

The assumption, and one that needs to be explored in this thesis, is that social media should complement rather than replace existing (more traditional) activity.

Of particular importance to the British Council, in regards of its social media use, is it possible to encourage mutual communications in programmes that are web-based? Is there not the danger that a heavy focus on this type of activity shifts the British Council from a listening organisation to one that simply sends out controlled messages?

While we have no way of knowing whether Facebook, Twitter or social media in general will continue to remain popular forms of communication, in April 2014 Facebook announced that it had around 800 million daily active users (Facebook, 2014) and Twitter has over 255 million monthly users (Twitter, 2014). Social media is, for the foreseeable future, essential for an organisation that communicates with a large foreign audience.

This research will explore current thinking on social media and will look at different examples of how social media can make, and has made, an impact. It will also consider the views those working in diplomacy have towards social media. Further information will be elicited through interviews, corporate reports, internal documents and existing research. The result of knowledge gained on the subject will be used to compile a list of components to test the organisation's social media against its overarching purpose. The British Council's new Social Media Monitor will be reviewed and using the list of components, I will carry out analysis of social media activity on selected British Council social media channels. This will then allow me to make a number of suggestions on how the British Council could use social media to have more impact on its core purpose.

An area I will be exploring is the extent to which social media can replace a physical presence. My assumption is that there is a limit to how much social media could be used to fulfil any cultural relations organisation's purpose. While I believe social media is a good way of reaching a large international audience, I struggle to see how face-to-face activity would be less impactful than social media. Ultimately this will provide insight on the importance that social media may have for soft power but also highlight the risk of over-reliance on digital technology in cultural relations. Social media is best understood as a complementary part of programmes that also give its audience the opportunity to meet face-to-face and build real off-line relationships. The British Council has two main targets: reach and impact. Social media can certainly deliver on reach, but it is face-to-face activity where I

believe the real impact takes place. I aim to determine how social media, within its limitations, can have optimum impact for the British Council.

I.1 Background

The British Council is the UK's cultural relation organisation. The British Council define cultural relations as creating international opportunities for the people of the UK and other countries, and building trust between them worldwide (British Council, n.d.a). In September 2010 it was announced that the British Council was to face a reduction in its grant from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) - the FCO's grant was to fall from £180.9 million to £149 million between 2010 and 2014 (House of Commons, 2013). As part of the organisation's savings, there were to be significant job losses in the UK³ as well as several hundred around the globe. Some projects were to be cancelled and some offices in smaller countries would be closed. At a Foreign Affairs Committee meeting in 2010,⁴ Martin Davidson, Chief Executive of the British Council, suggested that 'there will probably be a number of places where we will have a virtual rather than a physical presence in the future' (House of Commons, 2013). This research was prompted by the FCO's decision to cut the annual grant and in particular by a decision by the British Council to increase its 'virtual presence'. My enquiries into the British Council led me to an area that is being greatly developed which is social media.

The impetus to increase virtual presence reflects a decision to make technology, in particular social media, an important part of the British Council's business. Indeed in the 2010/11 Annual Report (British Council, 2011), the Chair, Sir Vernon Ellis specified that

³ The outsourcing of IT, finance and human resources work to India indicated that 450 people in the UK would lose their jobs (House of Commons, 2013).

⁴ The Foreign Affairs Committee, appointed by the House of Commons, examines the administration, expenditure and policy of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and its associated bodies. The British Council is therefore required to report to the Committee. The Committee set their own enquiries but in general they have a meeting with the British Council once a year after the publication of the organisation's annual report (Parliament.UK, 2007).

they needed to increase their reach and impact through means different to the traditional *modus operandi* and indicated that this was particularly necessary due to the cuts in the core funding: ‘we will need to significantly ramp up our reach through electronic channels’ (British Council 2011, p. 9). Since this announcement, the organisation has upgraded its website and made numerous improvements to their online learning programmes.⁵ While a decision to use more technology in their activity didn’t seem unusual, it provided an opportunity to understand an emphasis on social media could have for an organisation involved in cultural relations. Facing great financial strain and a need to be more commercial would force any organisation to reassess its purpose and strategy. What makes the British Council’s challenge uniquely important is its role in helping to deliver the UK’s foreign policy. The FCO has referred to the British Council as a ‘public diplomacy partner’ that contributes to the ‘UK’s soft power’ leverage (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2011a) and remains the organisation’s main financial contributor (British Council, 2013a).

The purpose of the British Council - founded in 1934 and incorporated by Royal Charter in 1940 - is to ‘create international opportunities for people of the UK and other countries and build trust between them’ (British Council, 2013a, p. 7). By providing the platforms and channels to share the UK’s cultural assets, the British Council believes it creates awareness and an understanding of the UK which in turn encourages people to visit, to study English and to do business with the UK. The British Council also benefits the countries where it has offices by working on programmes that help to encourage growth and stability (British Council, 2013a).

The British Council has three main areas of work: English, Arts, and Education and Society. These are a mixture of revenue-producing activities, now crucial to the organisation’s survival, and other cultural relations activities. The government grant covers

⁵ Author’s observations.

much of the latter - these types of activities include a presence in conflict zones and developing countries as well as working on some international development and international arts programmes (British Council, 2014g).

The British Council calls itself an entrepreneurial public service that (it says) will by 2015 be generating £6 for every £1 of government grant received,⁶ however, the government grant which is used for activities that are ‘in the long term interest of the UK’ are not able to generate income (British Council, 2014g). It therefore seems reasonable to assume that it is the activities where the British Council acts as a public diplomacy partner (this term will be explained shortly) that will decline with the grant cuts and this highlights one of the potential challenges that the organisation faces in its need to be more commercial. That’s not to say that the rest of the British Council’s work isn’t working for the good of the country - research by Chatham House concluded that the English language, education and culture were ‘the top three factors in supporting the UK’s overseas reputation’ (British Council, 2014b). It is fortunate, therefore, that much of the activity in this area can help to generate an income for the organisation.

I.2 The British Council: Making a Contribution to the UK’s Soft Power

According to the FCO, the British Council ‘is an essential part of our international effort to promote British values and interests’ (GOV.UK, 2013). Indeed its first two priorities (out of three) are to keep Britain safe and make Britain prosperous. The British Council believes that its activities contribute to the UK’s long-term prosperity and security (British Council, 2013a).

Exactly how the British Council can do this requires an understanding of Joseph Nye’s theory on soft power which is discussed in more detail in Chapter Two. In brief, Nye

⁶ In 2011 the British Council was earning £3 for every £1 of government grant.

believes that soft power is the ability to attract and persuade (Nye, 2004). Another term that requires description is ‘public diplomacy’ which Nye refers to as the involvement of building ‘long-term relationships that create an enabling environment for government policies’ (2004, p. 107).

The idea, essentially, is that the UK will be in a more favourable position globally if other countries like, understand, admire and respect it. To get to this position the UK requires the ability to convince – rather than coerce - others that it is worthy of this respect and admiration. As previously mentioned, education, the English language and culture are the three main factors said to be able to improve the UK’s reputation and the British Council is clearly well placed to make a contribution as their work is specifically targeted on these key areas.

Furthermore, there is the opinion that people, in general, mistrust governments (Nye, 2004, British Council, 2014b, Demos, 2007) and this is where the British Council becomes useful in the UK’s strategy in soft power.

A 24 hour networked world means that huge numbers of important international connections take place outside traditional state-to-state relations. Our research shows that people trust people more than they trust governments, so connections between people often make a more significant contribution to soft power than government-led activities (British Council, 2014g).

Through its independence from government the British Council⁷ should therefore be able to showcase the UK’s culture, language and values more successfully.

Cultural relations are seen as a way of keeping certain channels of communication open at times of political difficulty and also a way of opening channels of communication

⁷ The British Council’s independence from government will be debated in the following chapter.

with emerging powers (Demos, 2007). It is no accident that the British Council's priority countries and regions⁸ are those where the UK's reputation has suffered or needs to be stronger.⁹ In the FCO's Business Plan for 2011-15, one of their priorities is to 'Use "Soft Power" to promote British values, advance development and prevent conflict' (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2011d, p. 2). As part of the plan to meet this priority, there was a stipulation that the work of the British Council would be aligned with the FCO's soft power strategy but also to 'enhance the impact of the work of the British Council' (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2011d, p. 20). While the FCO has made cuts to the grant they give the British Council annually, the inclusion of the British Council in their future strategy plans suggests that the organisation remains an important British institution with regards to the role it can play in the FCO's soft power strategy. This sentiment is highlighted in the British Council's Corporate Plan for 2011-15: '[T]he British Council is a small investment in a better future for the people of the UK and the world. Our vision for 2015 is to share the UK's best assets – English, the arts, education and our way of life – to make that future even brighter for us all' (British Council, 2011b, p. 6). However, more recently the British Council has made a point of stipulating the contribution it makes to the UK's soft power. On their website¹⁰ they allude to their work in soft power in the main section that describes what they do: '[o]ur work builds the UK's international reputation and attractiveness, contributing to the UK's soft power' (British Council, 2014m).

As discussed further in Chapter Two, Nye believes that soft power will become more important in a global information age, specifically he argues: 'the countries that are likely to be more attractive and gain soft power in the information age are those with multiple

⁸ In the annual report for 2012/13 the priority regions (and where the government grant was allocated) were Middle East, Africa and South Asia (British Council, 2013a).

⁹ This assumption is based on the comments made in the Foreign Affairs Committee report (Parliament.UK, 2007).

¹⁰ Exact date of new webpage created is unknown but author's estimation based on knowledge of when the web pages changed is late 2013.

channels of communication that help to frame issues; whose dominant culture and ideas are close to prevailing norms (...); and whose credibility is enhanced by their domestic and international values and policies' (Nye, 2004, pp. 31-32). His thoughts on this are replicated in a publication by the British Council on influence and attraction (British Council, 2013c). In the foreword to this report, William Hague, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, highlighted the importance of connecting with public opinion through channels outside of government.

It is more important than ever before to tap into these new human networks around the world, using many more channels to do so including social media, and to seek to carry our arguments in international courts of public opinion as well as around international negotiating tables (British Council, 2013c, p. 2).

This line of thought presents a sound argument for the importance of efficient technology including social media in what was previously described as a 24-hour networking society.

I.3 Assessing the British Council's Social Media Strategy

My initial discussions with the British Council were centred on the areas the organisation was planning to invest money in since the announcement of their efficiency savings. Digital platform, area and content were some of these areas (British Council, 2011b) and it was as a result of these discussions that I was introduced to the newly appointed Social Media Manager at the British Council. His position had been created in 2012 to clean up existing social media channels and provide a standardised social media strategy that aligned with the British Council's overall marketing strategy (Interview: Blundell, 2013). Prior to this social media had 'grown organically' and without any central strategy. Some countries, for example, had a number of Facebook pages, there were a number of redundant pages and in

some cases, employees were using their personal Facebook pages to communicate with a British Council audience (Interview: Blundell, 2013).

Since the appointment of the new Social Media Manager, a new social media strategy has been put into place assisted by a bespoke system designed to follow the British Council's social media activities across the globe. This system uses Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of 'engagement' and 'reach' to measure the effectiveness of social media by country and by programme. These KPIs can be used in official documents such as annual reports as a measurement of the organisation's effectiveness by country as the organisation-wide KPIs are 'reach' and 'impact'. In addition two other KPIs were created. These are 'quality' and 'relevance'. The quality KPI is based on whether the social media is in brand, being updated, and so forth. The relevance KPI focuses on whether or not the content added to social media channels is relevant to the audience. There has certainly been thought around how to measure the performance of social media channels throughout the organisation but how exactly does this impact the British Council's purpose and objectives and how important can social media really be for the organisation?

Returning to the earlier quote by Nye brings me to this focus of research. He discusses 'multiple channels of communication' in a global information age and social media is certainly a product of this age. In an article on the NATO website (Ross, 2011), Alec Ross, Senior advisor for innovation to US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, explains that the 'critical innovation' of diplomacy in the 21st century is people to people and that social media provides the means for people from different nations to discuss events and issues with each other: 'social media offers government a powerful tool to engage directly with people in a more local and organic fashion'. Social media on one hand provides the means for people to connect (regardless of their geographic location), the British Council on the other, provide: 'international opportunities (...) between people and peoples all around the world' (British

Council, 2011b, p. 7). This extremely simplified definition would suggest that social media should be able to compliment cultural relations activity.

Every year the British Council seeks to increase its reach and impact and social media is an easy and low-cost way of reaching people internationally very quickly - Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+, LinkedIn are all free and require little more than an internet connection. However, they do require careful management to avoid the scenarios mentioned previously of the British Council's earlier experiences with social media. The social media strategy, one assumes, would need to tie in with any existing communication strategy. To build an audience on a social media channel requires, in the first instance, that the audience wants to participate. I suggest that in the same way Nye describes soft power as the ability to attract and persuade, social media also requires this ability. There is a reason why Justin Bieber has over 47 million followers on micro blogging site Twitter (Twitter, 2013). That is not to say that they all like him but they are certainly attracted to him for whatever reason and are interested in what he has to say. To give some idea by comparison, President Obama has, at time of writing, just over 40 million followers (Twitter, 2013) and David Cameron almost 2.5 million (Twitter, 2013).

I.4 Justification for Research

In terms of original contribution to research, this thesis fills a gap in existing research on two main aspects. Firstly, it is the first major analysis of the British Council's use of social media. To date there has not been any other research paper that has looked at the way the organisation is using social media. The only other available information at this point is what the British Council has published on its website (British Council, 2016).

Secondly, the thesis highlights some of the limitations of using social media monitors to evaluate the success of social media applications within an organisation. Through analysis of

both the social media monitor and the organisations overarching strategy, this thesis is able to identify gaps in where social media activity falls short of its organisation's core objectives.

Focusing on the role of social media within a cultural relations organisation, the thesis suggests that the British Council should introduce an additional stage in its evaluation and exactly what this stage should consider is outlined in *Chapter 4 – An Analysis of the British Council's Use of Social Media*.

The thesis also highlights the need for this means of communication to be engaging thus separating it from the broadcasting activity that currently reaches such a large audience number. The argument for why this is necessary is made throughout the thesis.

The use of social media in business in general is still in its infancy, yet it is quickly becoming a normal means of communication. Observations of job vacancies for social media professionals, the introduction of not only digital roles but digital departments, conferences on how to use social media in business and the drive by market-leading companies in marketing and customer relationship management such as Salesforce to encourage the use of social media in business suggest that this is an area that many businesses and organisations will develop if they haven't started to already.¹¹

This thesis offers a suggestion of how organisations might consider evaluating the use of social media and makes observations of how to increase the efficacy of social media from planning through to execution. While the focus is on the delivery of social media for a cultural relations organisation and my concern throughout is how social media fits into the wider objectives of the British Council, this exercise could easily be adapted for any other organisation or company - work out the purpose and objectives, understand if/how social media can assist and evaluate how this is working with the existing social media channels.

¹¹ These observations have been made while conducting this research but also in the large multi-national companies that I have worked in.

I.5. Literature Review

In terms of locating this thesis within existing literature, the main areas of scholastic quality that were considered, was literature on the British Council and its role in cultural relations/public diplomacy, soft power and social media and the evaluation methods of social media.

While literature on the British Council and its role in cultural relations (that isn't published or by the British Council) isn't vast, historical accounts of the British Council and how it has positioned itself over time to distance from the initial *raison d'être* of the organisation, which was to conduct cultural propaganda overseas (Taylor, 1978), were useful in understanding the deep-rooted significance of the British Council's core purpose include *A Story of Engagement* (Fisher, 2009a) and *Cultural Diplomacy and the British Council* (Taylor, 1978).

Both papers provide a factual account of how the British Council evolved from the idea that it was necessary to enhance British influence overseas and further (British) ideals of international peace. There is a profound shift in thinking from proactive cultural penetration to the approach that is encouraged today – one that encourages engaging with people overseas and listening rather than sending out carefully constructed messages.

In order to place the British Council into the notion of cultural relations, understanding how congruent cultural relations are to international relations is outlined in *Culture and International Relations: Narratives, Natives and Tourists* (Reeves, 2004). While the importance of nurturing cultural understanding is touted by many (Martin, 1997, Nye, 2004, 2010, Rose, 2004), differing views on how to go about this include more propaganda/messaging style communication such as that discussed in the concept of nation branding in *Branding the Nation: Towards a Better Understanding* (Fan, 2010).

Moving on to contemporary issues in cultural relations with the arrival of technology such as social media, Leadbeater outlines his concerns in *Cloud Culture – The Future of Global*

Cultural Relations (2010). In particular, he focuses on how we need to safeguard our culture from the companies that monopolise digital media and have the potential to homogenise world culture.

An understanding of the British Council's role in cultural relations centres on an understanding of mutuality (the British Council's own study, *Mutuality, Trust and the British Council* (Rose, 2004), is helpful to understand the organisation's official view on this). For further explanation on how its core purpose might be achieved, the literature that addresses and challenges this is *Four Seasons in One Day – The Crowded House of Public Diplomacy* (Fisher, 2009b) and *Recreating Trust in the Middle East* (Barakat, 2005). Barakat questions how possible it is to actually put in to practice the British Council's concept of mutuality when the activity carried out is in the interest of the British Council and the stakeholders it represents. Notwithstanding this view, Fisher's description of where the British Council sits on a spectrum of listening-messaging does at least show the British Council to be perceived as an organisation that listens to its audience. How far mutuality can truly be achieved, however, is an area that requires further research. This thesis sets out to explore how far social media activity conducted by the British Council has fostered the mutuality approach which is in line with its core objectives.

Existing literature on soft power was essential to this research and while an overview of the relevant literature is provided in this section, a more expansive discussion takes place in *2.3 Soft Power and Public Diplomacy*. The FCO has adopted the term 'soft power' to describe part of its foreign policy approach and, more recently the British Council has used this term to justify its importance to the UK. 'The UK is recognised as one of the world's most adept soft-power states. In a recent global ranking of soft power by the Institute for Government, the UK came top and the British Council was singled out as 'a tremendous source of British soft power' (British Council, 2014g). The term 'soft power' was coined by

Joseph Nye as an academic term to describe the ability to influence through attraction (Nye, 2010). In his book *Soft Power: the means to success in world politics* (2004), Nye argues for the importance of understanding and applying soft power in world politics providing examples of sources of American soft power and how to use it. Critics of soft power point to the immeasurability and unpredictability of soft power (Ferguson, 2003, Mattern, 2007, Schmidt, 2007). Yet Vuving (2009) who concurs with Nye's theory provides clarification on the components that are helpful to success in soft power citing 'power currencies' that generate attraction. In other words soft power assets that an organisation such as the British Council can help highlight to the world to improve peoples' impression of the UK.

Nye advocates the use of public diplomacy to wield soft power citing examples of where governments have been criticised or simply mistrusted for directly running events to improve public opinion. In a talk he gave at the British Council he further explained the importance of public diplomacy organisations investing in the long-term activities aimed at relationship building claiming that this was their hardest activity to execute but the most important. Key to trusting relationships and success in soft power is mutual communication; the ability to listen as well as send out messages. 'If we degenerate into propaganda we not only fail to convince, we essentially undercut our soft power. Soft power depends upon the understanding of the minds of others and the best public diplomacy is a two-way street' (Nye, 2010). In a report written for the British Council by think-tank group Counterpoint (Rose, 2004), the view is also that mutuality is important. The report argues that mutuality is crucial to encouraging trust and therefore an organisation involved in cultural relations such as the British Council needs to ensure that messaging activity is limited and that dialogue and understanding is to be encouraged.

Alluding to the power shifts and new technologies of the 21st century, Nye's more recent publication *The Future of Power* (2011) states that in a global information age, the

importance of soft power will increase: ‘the Internet’s ultimate impact on the nature of power is a concern shared by nations around the world’ (Nye, 2011, p. i). Nye discusses power shifts, cyber power risk and how to apply smart power to policy making but there is no discussion of social media as a power source.¹² That this has been overlooked is unusual considering the huge number of people using social media channels on a daily basis (The Daily Telegraph, 2012).

The existing research that offers insight on how best to evaluate social media is growing at a fast pace. However, while numerous studies have taken place to evaluate the impact of social media on a wide array of subjects, there is still very little on the impact social media can have for cultural relations. While research such as *Mapping the Great Beyond: Identifying Meaningful Networks in Public Diplomacy* (Fisher, 2010) helped to understand how organisations might better understand the scale of influence, the examples that best assisted in the undertaking of the research for this thesis were in papers written by practitioners. Diplomats across the globe have highlighted the importance of social media in communication strategies and many articles on public diplomacy provide analysis of social media use and offer ways of applying it (Seib, 2012, Sonenshine, 2013, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2013c, Sandre 2012, Sandre 2013).

Essentially, central to social media is the ability to attract and engage with an audience which resonates greatly with the definition of soft power. As an example, in October 2013 500 million people were using Facebook with 250 million logging in daily (Square Melons, 2013). ‘The role of new media in public diplomacy has gone from virtually non-existent to standard practice. (...) This is the beginning of a new era in diplomatic engagement that dramatically broadens global participation’ (U.S Department of State, 2011).

¹² Discussion of social media channels is mentioned as part of the information revolution and the associated risks of cyber power.

(and this thesis explores how social media activity is aligned to the rationale of mutuality fostered by the British Council).

As noted in this chapter's introduction, the government grant for the British Council was to be reduced over a number of years. It was this announcement that initiated an interest into the British Council's purpose and role for the UK today. A review of the official documents of the FCO showed that the British Council was viewed as a public diplomacy partner that worked under a FCO's 'key priority achievement' to use soft power as a tool of UK foreign policy (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2011, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2011). There is the general agreement amongst the FCO, its public diplomacy partners - the British Council and Wilton Park and also other think tanks such as Chatham House and Demos - that cultural activities contribute to a country's stability and economic development (British Council, 2014b, Demos, 2007, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2011, Wilton Park, 2011). In particular, the British Council should be well placed to work in the capacity set for them in the FCO strategy as their main areas of work are precisely the areas where research from Chatham House suggests make the biggest impact for reputation (British Council, 2014b).

If the British Council is sincere in its claim that it is contributing to the UK's soft power then it requires a serious investigation into the most effective way of applying social media to its existing activity. This research aims to show if the British Council's social media is assisting the organisation in meeting its purpose as a public diplomacy partner contributing to the countries soft power. I intend to outline strengths and weaknesses with a view to highlighting exactly what requires improving.

I.6 Methodology

To develop the research question, which is, to provide understanding on the use of social media by the British Council and whether this communication tool aligns with the wider organisational objectives, a theoretical perspective first places the British Council within the context of British soft power. This is explained in *Chapter 2 – Soft Power and the British Council*.

Data collection for this consisted of official documents, such as Corporate and Annual reports, from both the British Council and FCO that are available to the public. These were analysed to ascertain and compare the views held by both the FCO and the British Council as to what the British Council's role is and what its objectives are. Similarly, articles, blogs and other publications written by observers of social media are studied extensively to develop an understanding of social media best practices. I joined a professional forum to develop my understanding of social media in the workplace and followed a number of Twitter, Instagram and Facebook groups and individuals to further cement my understanding of how social media is used in practice.

More importantly, I carried out a number of interviews with people who work for the British Council. The table below provides a list of the interviews that took place.

Interviewee	Date	Details
Simon Chambers (Head of External Relations) & Louis Kennard (Head of Evaluation)	27 September 2011	<i>Discussion on Evaluation and Profiling the British Council.</i> Face-to-face. British Council Office, London
Simon Chambers (Head of External Relations)	16 January 2013	<i>Discussion on Digital Communication in the British Council.</i> Email exchange.
David Blundell (Global Head of Social Media)	25 April 2013	<i>Discussion on Introduction of Social Media in the British Council.</i> By telephone.
Peter Midgley (Social Media Consultant)	19 July 2013	<i>Discussion on the applicability of social media in business.</i> Face-to-face, London.

David Blundell (Global Head of Social Media)	27 September 2013	<i>Social Media Monitor Demo and Interview.</i> By webinar.
David Blundell (Global Head of Social Media)	18 March 2014	<i>Discussion on Social Media Strategy and Monitoring System.</i> Face-to-face. British Council office, Madrid.
Tara Karven (Social Media associate for British Council, Iran)	27 May 2014	<i>Digital Strategy in Iran.</i> Email exchange.
David Blundell (Global Head of Social Media)	24 June 2014	<i>Follow up discussion on Social Media strategy progress in British Council.</i> By telephone.
John Worne (Director of Strategy & External Relations)	6 May 2015	<i>Discussion on the use of social media in the British Council.</i> Email exchange.
David Whitehead (Country Head for British Council, Iran)	19 July 2015	<i>The British Council's Social Media Strategy for Iran.</i> Face-to-face, British Council office, London.

The interviews took place in various formats – face-to-face, telephone, webinar/video conference. They were all planned to be semi-structured in that there were several key questions that defined the areas to be explored, but the conversation could develop naturally in order to elicit more detail from the interviewees. The interviews were not recorded but field notes were taken before and immediately after the interview. Interviews were selected with individuals from External Communication and Evaluation and Reporting to give me an overview on organisational activity against the Corporate Plan and where investment was being made against cuts. It also gave me insight into the evaluation methods carried out by the British Council and how this was communicated internally as well as externally. Interviews with Social Media Management, digital users and Country Management enabled me to have an in-depth view of social media strategy against organisational strategy and a thorough understanding of how social media is used. There were several interviews with the Head of Social Media for the British Council – at the time of my research, the social media monitor was being built and rolled out, so I maintained contact during this period to gain a deep understanding of the organisation's strategy and how the resources being employed (people and the social media monitor) were aligned to the overall objectives of the

organisation. I also interviewed the Board to gain comments on the role of social media in the British Council and the Boards' view on the implications of social media use in the future.

The knowledge gained from a theoretical understanding of soft power and the British Council's role in contributing to the UK's soft power combined with the acquired awareness of social media best practice and the British Council's core objectives enabled the compilation of a set of components that could be used to examine social media in the British Council. These components appear in 3.6 *Table of Components necessary to Social Media*.

Applying explanatory case study method¹³, the table of components were used to examine specific aspects of social media use in the British Council. In order to carry out a full analysis against the chosen components, it was necessary for me to visit the Head of Social Media for the British Council in Madrid. I was granted full access to the system during this visit on 18th March 2014. The case studies were three different British Council Country social media. The first country elected was Iran - this is the only country that has a virtual presence but not a physical presence and this is important considering earlier comments on an increase of virtual presence at the British Council. 'It is possible in the coming years that more offices will close, particularly in Europe, and in these countries the British Council will use social media channels to increase reach and engagement with digital audiences in countries where there is no longer a physical presence' (Interview: Blundell, 2014). Analysing Iran's use of social media will provide insight into how the British Council will operate in other countries in the future.

In comparison, the other two case studies are countries that do have an office/physical presence and, according to the British Council's Social Media Monitor were the top two performing countries at the time of study. It was understood through various conversations

¹³ Explanatory case study method: 'seeks to explain the presumed causal links in real life interventions (...) the explanations would link program implementation with program effects' (Yin, 2003).

with Blundell that Venezuela was considered a good performer in social media activity. At the time of my analysis it was scoring first place on the organisation's social media monitor. As previously mentioned, the British Council has a large number of social media channels some more established than others. My argument for picking Venezuela, the 'top performing country', is that it allowed me to compare my approach for analysis (using the table of components) and the British Council's means of evaluation (reach, impact, quality and relevance) to see if the British Council's interpretation of success in social media meant that there is alignment to the organisation's main purposes. Iran, incidentally was 94 (out of 319 social media country applications) on the day I carried out the assessment. In order to get a fuller picture of the social media activity, I needed to elect another country to assess in addition to the ones already chosen. In lack of a superior method of selection, I decided to pick the country which was scoring second place according to the social media monitor on 18th March 2015. This country was Zambia, which gave the added benefit of seeing how social media activity was working in yet another continent with different regional as well as country priorities.

This part of the study uses a wealth of information not available to the public. Unique, empirical data and information was collected from numerous interviews with the British Council employees. Furthermore, access was granted to the organisation's Social Media Monitor, a governance system that was in the developing stages during my research. This tool tracks all social media activity in the organisation and will be used by the organisation to evaluate the organisations progress with social media. This access, together with discussions with British Council employees, allowed for an overview of social media activity including details of the social media campaign, participant engagement levels and details of updates and posts from social media applications. I was also given copies of the internal publications that the organisation uses in its social media strategy. All of this data

was reviewed against the components previously mentioned to carry out an evaluation of the use of social media. A detailed explanation of this part of the study appears in *4.2 Means of Analysis*.

I.7 Causal Implications of the British Council Using Social Media

As with any kind of communication, there are varying degrees of participation and therefore there must be varying degrees of impact that a social media channel may have. If social media is another way to create relationships between people worldwide then the British Council, with an overall objective of building relationships and trust between people, should not only embrace social media but in meeting its obligations to deliver the soft power priorities of the FCO it should look to providing a best practice model on how social media can work in soft power.

While I have stated that social media is an inexpensive means of communication, it does require an internet connection. I assume therefore, that projects covered by the government grant are less likely to benefit from social media due to fact that these projects take place in some of the poorer and more fragile areas of the world that are less likely to have an internet connection. I suggest that the contribution that the British Council can make to the UK's soft power strategy from a social media perspective in its work as a public diplomacy partner is therefore limited.

From an organisational perspective, buy-in from all the country heads across the British Council network is paramount to obtaining a fully functioning social media strategy across the globe. There are, for instance, countries where only two people are employed in the British Council office (Interview: Blundell, 2013) and these people are responsible for all the activity taking place in that country plus updating and managing their country's social

media. I would anticipate that the quality and effectiveness of social media will vary from country office to country office.

To date, there is only one country which has a social media presence but no office (Interview: Blundell, 2014). This would suggest that as far as social media is concerned, a virtual presence is not being created in places where there is not a physical presence and indicates that Davidson's vision of virtual presence replacing the physical is not yet being fulfilled. It will be interesting to see if there are plans to introduce social media elsewhere.

There are a few research areas which are unfortunately beyond the scope for this thesis. One of these is a comparison of different social media strategies from other cultural relations organisations which would have provided an insight to how the British Council fares in this area compared to another organisation with similar objectives. It would also have shown different examples of what is successful in cultural relations social media as well as, perhaps, examples of what should be avoided.

It was not possible to access the programme managers in the time frame I had to conduct this research, therefore the analysis of how different programmes use social media¹⁴ to understand what aspects of social media are useful and how best to mix the traditional programme delivery with social media was also out of scope for this thesis.

The next couple of years will be telling as to how successful the British Council's social media is and whether or not it gets the buy-in from all the countries offices. This thesis will be completed before this is possible to evaluate. Furthermore, as the social media in the British Council is still in its infancy so it is unlikely that I will be able to see example of how social media might result in a number of benefits such as an increase of visitors to the UK, an increase of English language learners and investment into British businesses. These kind of examples would be able to show that social media used effectively has the potential to

¹⁴ Through questionnaires or surveys sent via social media channels to target the participants who used social media.

improve peoples' understanding of Britain and provide the basis of an argument that social media in the British Council can help to improve the UK's reputation.

I.8 Outline of Thesis

The first three chapters provide background to the British Council, how the organisation fits into the UK's soft power strategy and social media's role in cultural relations. *Chapter 1 - The British Council and its Cultural Relations Activity* looks at the organisation's ideas on building trust and effective relationship building. It considers the argument for mutuality in communication rather than broadcasting. In identifying what makes the organisation successful in cultural relations, this first chapter provides a backdrop to the discussion and analysis in chapter three and four on how virtual communication implicates the way the British Council is run.

Chapter 2 - Soft Power, Public Diplomacy and the British Council explores the theory of soft power and the British Council's perceived contribution to the UK's soft power. I also look at what the FCO expects from the organisation by referring to it as a public diplomacy partner and identify how the British Council aims to be perceived by calling itself a cultural relations organisation. This chapter demonstrates the British Council's importance to the UK in remaining effective in their cultural relations activities. Examples of how the organisation is effective in the area of soft power and public diplomacy will also be highlighted with a view to examining the impact of new technology in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3 - Social Media in Public Diplomacy details how social media can be successfully used in public diplomacy by outlining the necessary components for a successful social media strategy by drawing upon existing examples of social media in diplomacy as well as from commercial and not-for-profit organisations. These components will be used to form a table that will be instrumental in the evaluation process used to evaluate the British

Council's use of social media in the following chapter. This chapter also provides a background to social media and explores the use of these channels as a tool for reaching out to communities for the purpose of public diplomacy or cultural relations. Taking into account what has been discussed in previous chapters, I look at the significance of mutuality and trust in social media and discuss how soft power might be wielded through social media. Through reviewing thoughts from professionals in social media, I explore the importance of social media from the point of view of business in society today. I also discuss how current thoughts surrounding social media such as engagement and control of narrative are important to a cultural relations organisation.

Chapter 4 - An Analysis of the British Council's Use of Social Media presents the table of components introduced in the previous chapter. These components will be used to test the social media strategy of the British Council. Through interviews with the social media manager for the British Council and analysis of the organisation's new social media monitoring tool an evaluation will be made of the direction that the British Council are moving in terms of their virtual presence. To comprehend further the impact of social media and to identify what type of social media activity works best for the organisation I will look at three countries in social media. By pinpointing the exact type of social media that results in engaging its audience, using metrics set by the model of impact, I will be able to make comment on what type of activity and what aspects of social media seem to benefit the organisation most.

Chapter 5 – Causal Implications for Consideration in the Use of Social Media will consider the pressure on the British Council to become more commercial and more efficient. The organisation's use of technology has changed hugely over the past few years with plans initially to increase digital users by 67% by 2015 (British Council, 2011b). The role of technology presents new challenges and opportunities for the British Council. This chapter

uses the findings in the previous chapters to identify what role technology should play in different areas of cultural relations. It also highlights the need to re-think the British Council's role so that more content of the programme is shaped by participants thus moving the British Council further from being broadcaster/coordinator and more towards the mediator that provides the afflatus for people across the globe to convene and learn, understand more about British culture, its language and its people.

In the Conclusion I will answer the questions set at the beginning of the research - how is the British Council using social media and is this communication aligned to the core purpose of the organisation? Additionally, if the British Council's role in UK foreign policy is to act as a public diplomacy partner and help work towards its soft power strategy, is the move towards a virtual presence making this role more or less effective? Finally is social media well suited to soft power and if it is, what does the research carried out on the British Council indicate as being important to effective strategy and management of social media?

Chapter 1 - The British Council and its Cultural Relations Activity

1.1 Introduction

Prior to any consideration to how the British Council is introducing changes to its activities, it is important to understand the purpose of the organisation and what the organisation considers to be the best approach in achieving that purpose. This chapter looks at those aspects and provides an overview of the British Council by discussing the different types of activity it carries out, and how these are currently being evaluated by the organisation. I will first describe the activities that fall under the British Council's work in *1.2 What the British Council do and how it does it*. I will then look at the organisation's views on building trust and effective relationship building and introduce some ideas on what makes the organisation successful in cultural relations in *1.3 Mutuality and Trust*. Finally, I will discuss how the organisation evaluates its work in *1.4 Evaluation of Cultural Relations*. The information provided in this chapter gives a description of how activity is carried out by the organisation with a view to examining in later chapters how social media can fit in to the British Council's work and can complement certain areas of activity.

As the 'United Kingdom's international organisation for cultural and educational relations' (British Council, 2011a, p. 6), the British Council has considerable presence across the globe, with physical presence in 110 countries and territories. In 2011-12, 6.1 million people around the world attended arts exhibitions, performances and education fairs run by the British Council. An additional 500 million people were reached via British Council digital media and broadcasting (British Council, 2011b). The activities are varied, from teaching English to showcasing arts events to raising awareness of climate change to supporting growth and development on emerging and developing countries. Ultimately, the organisation carries out its plethora of activities with the same aim: 'to create "international

opportunities and build trust between people and people around the world”” (British Council, 2011b, p. 7).

The challenge of this is immense, how for instance does the British Council build trust in countries where there is wide mistrust of the UK? Mistrust of the UK can also extend to mistrust of the British Council - trust building for cultural relations involves much more than teaching English and sponsoring arts events. The organisation, aware of this sentiment particularly in the Middle East post 9/11, commissioned a report *Recreating Trust in the Middle East* (Barakat, 2005). The inherent dangers of this mistrust were later realised when a suicide bomber detonated a car bomb outside a British Council office in Kabul in August 2008 (The Guardian, 2011). A year later, the office in Tehran was forced to close due to the unsafe environment for its staff, following accusations of British propaganda¹⁵ (Borger, 2009). The British Council is constantly adjusting to external events that affect the way the organisation works. World events, changes in UK foreign policy, changes in the way we communicate with each other and the importance placed on the British Council in terms of accountability to the UK tax payer means the organisation is constantly reassessing how it works and how it could be more effective. In the last three annual reports, for instance, it is evident that the British Council is progressively working to becoming less and less dependent on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s (FCO) grant - for every pound the organisation receives from the taxpayer, the organisation is earning more and more through other activities year on year (British Council, 2008a, 2010, 2011a).

1.2 What the British Council Does and How

Initially, the organisation was set up to carry out cultural propaganda promoting British values around the world (Taylor, 1978, Reeves, 2004). In 1934 King George declared that

¹⁵ The British Council continue to operate in Kabul from the British Foreign Office, however, cultural links with Iran have been severed until a time when the British Council can re-establish itself there.

the organisation would 'show the world what it owes Great Britain' (Fisher, 2009a). However, the British Council point out in a publication of the organisation's history that it had a different purpose. In the founding Charter, the organisation is defined as 'promoting a wider appreciation of British culture and civilisation [by] encouraging cultural, educational and other interchanges between the United Kingdom and elsewhere' (Fisher, 2009a, p. 1). In 1935, only a year after the organisation began, those involved with the British Council were keen that activity be more mutual and less of 'a one-sided process of indoctrination' (Taylor, 1978, p. 260). However, in 1938 one of the jobs of the press officer for the organisation was to insert positive articles about the UK in foreign press. It seems the activity carried out was still propaganda albeit of a gentler kind, 'we do not force them to "think British"; we offer the opportunity of learning what the British think' (Taylor, 1978).

Its position today seems to have come a long way from the early days of countering 'the detrimental effects of aggressive foreign propaganda' (Taylor, 1978, p. 244). The British Council summarises what it does as 'cultural relations' by which it means creating 'international opportunities for the people of the UK and other countries and (building) trust between them worldwide'. Next to this statement the organisation underlines the independence it has from the FCO and claim it is this independence which enables them to build trust on the ground (British Council, n.d.a).

On its website the British Council says it operates at 'arms-length' from the UK government and does not carry out functions on behalf of the Crown (British Council, 2012i). In comparing the UK government's relationship with the British Council with other nations and their cultural relations organisations, John Worne, Director of Strategy for the British Council, believes the UK has got this approach right, 'governments can't control culture and their direct intervention creates suspicion' (Worne, 2013a). However, while the British Council receives income through teaching, exams, partnerships and contracts, it does receive

a grant from the government each year which forms 27 per cent of its turnover.¹⁶ The FCO is ‘the British Council's sponsoring department and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs is answerable to parliament for the policies, operations and performance of the British Council’ (British Council, 2012i). The board of trustees are the guardians of the British Council’s purpose and are ultimately responsible for the organisation. The Executive Board is responsible for overall strategy and management.

The British Council acknowledges that it is challenging to describe the work it does. This is made harder by the fact there is no international recognised definition for terms such as cultural relations and public diplomacy despite the fact that they are widely used (Culligan, et al., 2010). The organisation’s objectives, highlighted in the Annual Report (2010-11), as set out in their Royal Charter, have remained unchanged since 1940. These are to:

- promote a wider knowledge of the UK
- develop a wider knowledge of the English language
- encourage cultural, scientific, technological and other educational co-operation between the UK and other countries, or
- otherwise to promote the advancement of education.

Yet despite these clear objectives, explaining what the British Council does is complicated because of the size of the organisation, the varied approach of its activities and the number of projects it is involved in. Restructuring of the organisation in 2010-11 to a simpler model evidenced an attempt to address this issue. The organisation is continuing to work on simplifying the structure, website and reporting lines by departments. The areas in which the organisation works have been replicated in their organisational chart and the organisation is also in the process of recruiting staff to make website improvements to reflect the new simpler organisational structure (Interview: Chambers, 2011). Sir Vernon Ellis,

¹⁶ 2010-2011 figures.

Chair of the British Council, remarked that these changes assist in making the organisation more efficient and effective, improve clarity and allow for a better understanding of what the British Council does (British Council, 2011a).

The British Council's new focus is on English, Arts and Education and Society (British Council, 2011a, 2011b).¹⁷ Within these new departments, the British Council is working to the following outcomes:

- Arts - To provide new ways of connecting and seeing each other through the arts.
- English - To provide more widespread and quality teaching and learning of English worldwide.
- Education and Society - To enhance UK leadership and shared learning from international education. For societies whose citizens and institutions contribute to a more inclusive, open and prosperous world.

The above priorities appear in the Corporate Plan for 2011-2015 and all fall under a heading reminding the reader that the British Council's principle aim is to create international opportunities for people of the UK and abroad and build trust between them worldwide. Creating international opportunities and building trust is what the British Council mean by cultural relations.

Comments on influencing people by sharing culture and values appear frequently in many British Council statements and publications (British Council, 2012j, 2013c) yet while it is easy to spot how the organisation promotes UK culture (arts, education and, education and society), the definition of what the UK's values are is less obvious. Through using the British Council website search engine, I found reference to what these values are on the organisations ESOL webpage.¹⁸ The values and principles of the UK are outlined in training material, developed by the Home Office, created for those taking exams for UK citizenship

¹⁷ Previously, there was also focus (and departments) on sports, science, climate change and sustainability.

¹⁸ ESOL is an acronym for English for Speakers of Other Languages.

and explain that British values are based on history and traditions and are protected by law, customs and expectations. These values are defined as democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs and participation in community life (British Council, 2014c). More recently the organisation has put more of an emphasis on ‘drivers of UK attractiveness’ and commissioned a study to identify what makes the UK attractive to others (British Council, 2014j). This study is closely linked to the concept of soft power, a theory which is now heavily used by the British Council in its justification on the importance of cultural relations (British Council, 2012k, British Council, 2013c). Compared to the minimal information available on how the British Council promotes British values, conducting cultural relations for the purposes of increasing soft power certainly seems to take more of a focus, at least for now. The theory of soft power and the British Council study on ‘As Others See us’ will be discussed in greater detail in *2.3 Soft Power and Public Diplomacy*.

The British Council targets groups of people overseas and in the UK to work with from the younger candidate in education or at the start of their career up to, what they categorise as leaders whose relationship is: ‘essential to enable educational and cultural policy change and [grant them] permission to work with wider groups in many countries’ (British Council, 2011b, p. 34). Logically, it is through face-to-face activity where leaders, influencers, teachers and other aspirants are targeted and where we would expect long-term relationships to be developed. However, face-to-face activity only accounts for 1.2% of the total amount of people that the British Council work with or reach on an annual basis.¹⁹ Other activity categorised as exhibitions, festivals, fairs and performances, digital and broadcast and publications have a total of 500 million participants compared to the 6.1 million of face-to-face participants.

¹⁹ Calculations made using 2011-2012 figures (British Council, 2011b)

The British Council has a view of where it appears on a spectrum of international relations. The diagram below was given to me in one of my initial interviews with the British Council to discuss profiling and evaluation of the organisation. This diagram shows what type of activity falls under headings of ‘access’, ‘influence’ and ‘messaging’. It also shows where the British Council believes cultural relations fit into this scale with public diplomacy, traditional diplomacy/soft power and hard power.^{20 21}

The bulk of cultural relations activity is shown to fall under the headings access and influence. However, only a small part is shown to overlap the messaging section.

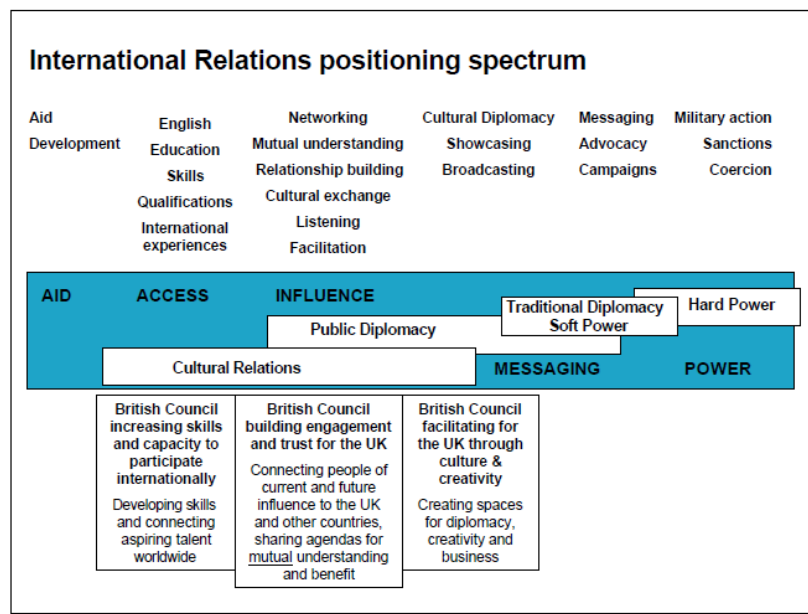


Figure 1: International Relations Positioning Spectrum (Internal Document: British Council, 2008b)

Messaging is undeniably a larger part of the British Council’s activity considering the audience figures and plans are to reach another 100 million people through broadcasting by 2015 (British Council, 2011b). The above diagram is perhaps an idea of where British Council activity should be and the reasons for this will be explained in due course.

²⁰ Theories of soft power and public diplomacy will be discussed in the next chapter.

²¹ I am not in agreement with where soft power has been placed on this spectrum. Reasons for this will be given in *Chapter 2 –Soft Power, Public Diplomacy and the British Council*.

Appendix 1 shows a list of projects with a brief description of how projects are run.²²

To illustrate the type of activity that the British Council carries out I have placed these British Council programs in the diagram below using the categories from the British Council's International relations spectrum. I determined which category a project fell under by the method of delivery. For example, if the project consisted only through information provided on the website, this would have been labelled 'messaging', projects which bring people together both face-to-face and through online social networking were placed under 'relationship building', projects which provided access to courses, qualifications, etc (online or in person) were placed under 'access'.

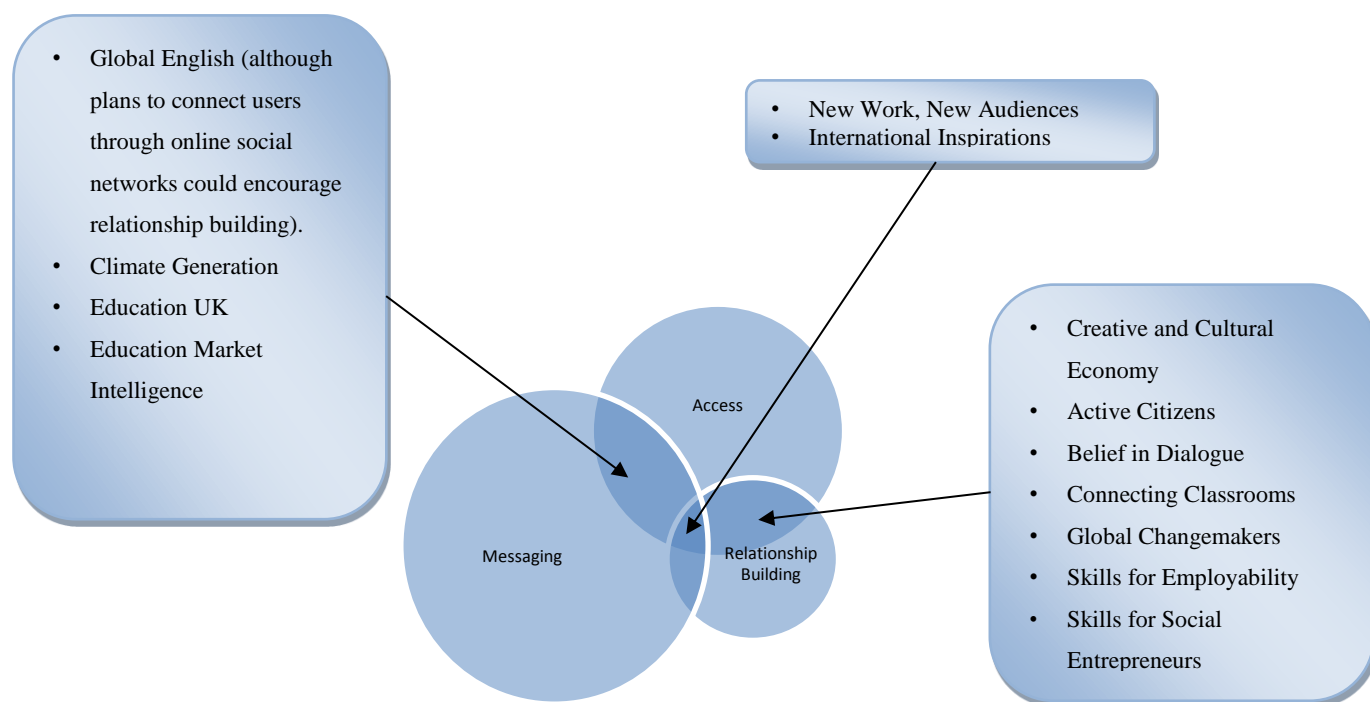


Figure 2: Diagram to show how British Council activity fits in to Access, Messaging and Relationship Building. The size of the circle is not to scale but is indicative of the audience numbers of each category provided in the Corporate Plan 2011-15.

²² I have included projects which British Council representatives have indicated are likely to continue (Chambers, 2011). A description of these projects is available in Appendix 1.

What this shows is that much of the activity carried out by the British Council overlaps in terms of categorising activity into the areas of access/relationship building and messaging. The varied work of the British Council is what makes it so hard to define, however, it is also this varied approach that contributes to reaching, impacting and influencing more people. The lower right-hand box shows programmes which have a relationship building and access element to them whereas the left-hand box shows programmes which involve messaging and relationship building. Each programme, however, has elements of all three categories. Global Changemakers, for instance, has its own website providing *access* to information on all the latest events, how to apply for grants and so on. There are also blogs and links to social network sites that encourage involvement on a virtual basis. Similarly, the British Council has a webpage that acts as a messaging platform providing access to information on the programme and links to the relevant websites and video clips. Also events such as the Euro-Africa summit 2012 brought together 60 people from all over Europe and Africa together to encourage relationship building (Global Changemakers, 2012).

Another programme, the UK and India Education and Research Initiative (UKIERI), is promoted on its own website (messaging) which includes a brochure of the programme, success stories and information on how to get involved (access). Since 2006 the programme has encouraged many opportunities to build relationships including: 182 UK/India partnerships; 55 PhD scholarships/fellowships; India/UK exchanges and work placements; partnering and mentoring between UK and Indian ministries, and; 40 Events in policy dialogue and networking (relationship building/access) (British Council, 2012g).

My interpretation is that messaging activity is a greater part of what the British Council does than is suggested in its spectrum of cultural relations. This, however, should not be viewed entirely as a negative observation as much of the work requires messaging i.e. websites, broadcasts, publications to provide and encourage opportunities to create and

develop relationships. Considering my earlier comment that face-to-face activity accounts for a small proportion of people who experience the British Council, the British Council's efforts in the face-to-face activity are of course disproportionate to the numbers of people reached (compared to the numbers that can be reached through a website or broadcast for example). The British Council is not putting the majority of its efforts into messaging activity but through the very nature of messaging activity, the majority of people experience the British Council through this form of communication.

Considering that the British Council's main purpose is to build relationships and trust between people in the UK and abroad, the fact that messaging is a large part of what the British Council does perhaps sits uncomfortably with the idea that effective relationship building requires two-way communication. However, branding activity as messaging does not always tell a complete picture. For example, a project which employs mostly messaging techniques is the Education UK project which is a British Council brand with a website purposefully designed to promote the UK and encourage overseas students. However, in turn, this website provides *access* to courses and exchange programmes which ultimately encourage opportunities for relationship building. The British Council recognises that education promotion is difficult to mutualise, stressing that the participants' experience does not start and end with the actual promoting element 'the mutuality of what we do with this part of our work must be judged by what we do with our students when they are in the UK; and the unrealised potential for mutuality by all' (Rose, 2010, p. 21). It is not easy to pigeon-hole cultural relations activity.

It is understood that the role of the British Council is a complex one and, because of its links to government and its alignment with long-term FCO strategy, there will always be suspicion that the image the British Council projects of Britain is a controlled one. Control is an important factor to consider in messaging activity and it is important to stress the British

Council's independence from government²³ who state 'we maintain that our ability to build trust is based on our independence of government (and is potentially damaged by perceptions of our closeness to government)' (Rose, 2010, p. 52). Fisher (2009b) comments that a wide range of British Council activities may be based on building a network and developing relationships but they also have the purpose of promoting a certain position (such as the work on Climate Change) 'some audiences may feel that dialogue with a predetermined purpose is not a genuine dialogue but persuasion by another name' (p. 255). Ultimately, audience-led activity will give an impression that the British Council is inclusive and certainly not under control of government.

There is an opportunity for the British Council to consider how social media can assist in engaging audiences in activity that has traditionally been more at the messaging end of the spectrum. In the age of social media there are different ways of reaching huge audience numbers while still maintaining a level of mutuality. This is not to say that social media is a satisfactory replacement for face-to-face activity but it could be used to enhance activity that has been typically more one-way. It will therefore be interesting to examine in *Chapter 4 – An Analysis of the British Council's Use of Social Media* to see if there is a focus on increasing a 'social' aspect to the organisation's work.

1.3 Mutuality and Trust

The report carried out by Counterpoint,²⁴ *Mutuality, trust and cultural relations* (2004) outlines the importance of mutuality and trust in cultural relations and more specifically, how a relationship based on mutuality will be more likely to encourage trust. 'If it takes two to tango, it is essential to know who your partner is' (Rose, 2010, p. 46). Subsequent research carried out on mistrust of the UK in the Middle East further asserted the importance of

²³ The British Council's relationship with government will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

²⁴ Counterpoint is the cultural relations think-tank for the British Council.

effective communication but points to the practicalities of this approach for an organisation involved in so many different activities, some of which are in collaboration with the FCO.

It goes without saying that such an approach is as much aspiration as reality: it expresses very well the quality of conversation and relationship that many in the British Council see as essential to effective work in cultural relations; it also tends to overlook some of the political constraints that hedge about the Council's operations, so there is a constant dialectic at work (Barakat, 2005, p. 26).

The British Council's connection to government is clearly a factor in how the organisation is perceived and this is a topic that will be returned to in 2.4 *Perception and Trust*. The ability to carry out mutual conversations under such constraints is certainly an aspect that should be considered.

In *Mutuality, Trust and Cultural Relations* (2004) a model is used to suggest how relationships can be created and developed using principles of mutuality. The report explains that relationships that are built on mutuality will travel up this scale which it calls 'the index of trust' (Rose, 2010, p. 45). This model has been recreated below.

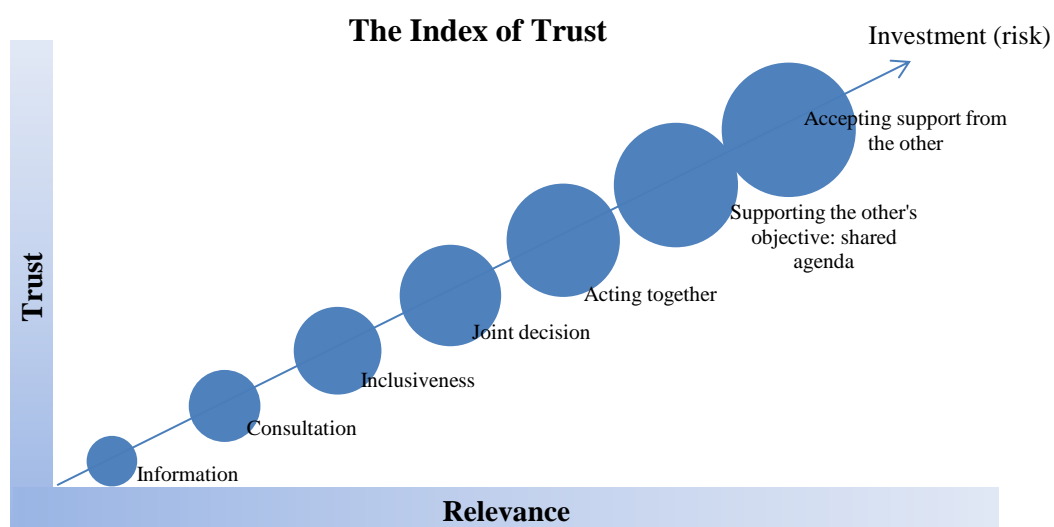


Figure 3: The Index of Trust

‘Information’ appears on the lower level of trust and relevance. This is activity which is one-way; information which is provided rather than exchanged. Information may be interpreted as message-driven and it may or may not be relevant to its receiver. What this model illustrates is that while providing information is part of what the British Council does, trust and relevance are increased (and the organisation’s work more effective) when activity moves beyond messaging and becomes more mutual.

Understanding the different activities of the British Council and the concept of mutuality enables a clearer understanding of why particular programmes are used in certain countries. It is no accident, for example, that Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Libya and UAE²⁵ have a heavy focus on activities that encourage relationship building. This is a response to mistrust of the West. The British Council states its priority with these countries is to ‘listen first and provide opportunities for people to be heard’ (British Council, 2011b, p. 29). It is in these countries programmes such as Connecting Classrooms, Skills through Employability and Global Changemakers take place (British Council, 2011b).

The British Council has also outlined its priorities for the United Kingdom and there is a heavy focus too on relationship building. This is partly a response to ‘concerns about how internationally ambitious young people in the UK are’ (British Council, 2011b, p. 32) and limited opportunities due to the current financial climate. The importance of relationship building is linked to developing young peoples’ prospects and achieving the ‘greatest possible cultural relations impact for the UK’ (p. 32).

The point is also made that the British Council needs to ensure that there is significant benefit to the UK in everything it does, including return on investment. This statement leads to the final part of this chapter which discusses how the British Council measure its success.

²⁵ These countries are priority countries for the region Middle East and Africa (British Council, 2011b)

1.4 Evaluation of Cultural Relations

Joseph Nye and his theory on soft power will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, however, it is worth discussing at this point his views on evaluation and the challenges of being able to prove the benefits of soft power or indeed an organisation working in cultural relations. Nye indicates that an area of consideration is the timeframe in which soft power needs to take effect or have impact and this point is echoed in a recent Wilton Park report on soft power (2012). As an example, Nye cites an exchange programme organised in 1958 between the U.S. and the Soviets (Nye, 2004, 2010). He comments on the difficulty of arranging this during the Cold War as both sides were suspicious of the other and expected spies to be sent over in cohorts. Indeed, there was a KGB agent in the group, Oleg Kalugin, who became a high official in the KGB. Years later after his defection he commented on his experience ‘exchanges were a Trojan Horse for the Soviet Union...They kept infecting more and more people over the years’ (Nye, 2004, p. 46). Seemingly, the exchange programme was a success even among its unwanted participants in providing a positive experience of US values.

Another of the Soviet students studied in Columbia University with Professor David Truman, a supporter of pluralism. Inspired by his experience, Aleksandr Yakovlev returned to USSR and two decades later Yakovlev was an influential figure in Gorbachov’s government. Nye argues that it is impossible to know who will be affected by soft power activity and it may be decades before the benefits are realised but that nevertheless it is important to invest in long-term strategy.

The British Council appears to have given great consideration to evaluation despite it being an area that is difficult to measure. Various evaluation systems are in place to build what the organisation calls its ‘Corporate Scorecard’ (see table overleaf). In its annual reports for instance, success is measured mainly in numbers of people engaged in face-to-face

activity, and, people reached through media, television and radio. *Engagement* and *reach* have become keywords in the British Council’s evaluation process. The engagement numbers are those people who the organisation has ‘[worked] with or [brought] together in cultural relations activity, face-to-face or online’ (British Council, 2011a, p. 49). The reach numbers are those people ‘who access information and British Council content through broadcast, print and digital channels such as radio and television broadcast, publications and websites’ (p.49). Considering the categories used earlier to describe British Council activity, engagement is used to measure the numbers of people involved in relationship building activity and reach to measure the numbers of people in access and messaging numbers activity.

Corporate Scorecard		
What is being evaluated?	Name of evaluation procedure	Description
Impact	Evaluation of Long-Term Outcomes (ELTO)	Influential participants of cultural relations programmes are interviewed to determine whether their engagement has led to a) significant personal growth and change b) significant organisational change or institutional changes c) significant new or strengthened ties with the UK.
	Heads of Mission Survey	Survey sent to heads of UK diplomatic missions in the countries where the organisation operates. The heads of missions are required to rate the British Council's effectiveness in delivering impact in English, Arts and Education and Society. They also rate on a scale of 0-100 the extent the organisation has provided value for money for the Foreign Office grant.
	Programme Evaluations (Project Logic Model)	Programmes are evaluated throughout the year to determine the impact the programme has on its participants.
Scale and Scope	Engagement and Reach	The numbers of people who the British Council work with or bring together in cultural relations activity (engagement) and the numbers of people who access information and British Council content through broadcast, print and digital channels (radio, television broadcasts, publications and websites) (reach).
Quality	Customer Satisfaction Indicator	Surveys to collect feedback from participants of programmes (in 2010-11, 250,000 people provided feedback). Satisfaction, Reputation and Advocacy scores provide a view on whether participants perceive the British Council as a leader in their field and whether or not the participants would recommend others to work with the British Council.
	Reputation Indicator	
	Advocacy Indicator	

Figure 4: Table showing the current evaluation methods of the British Council

In terms of measuring the impact of programmes and projects, the organisation's main evaluation procedure called 'Project Logic Model' is used on all major projects (Interview: Chambers, 2011). The purpose of this is to monitor the impact projects are having on individuals or companies at various stages of the project and also after the project. It also helps to demonstrate the value for money of investment not just in different projects but at different stages of the projects. The British Council's information on the model explains that it is an established practice in many UK and international organisations that use it to evaluate investment (2009).²⁶ The purpose of the model is to inform how the organisation plans, monitors, evaluates, reviews and reports. According to the Evaluation Officer for the British Council, using the model is also supposed to encourage consistency across the organisation (Internal Document: British Council, 2009). At different stages of the projects, different aspects are evaluated. In the early stages, resources and expertise are evaluated, during the projects the organisation reviews whether they are working with the right people and using the right type of activities and if events are considered to be of value. After the project, monitoring continues to measure the impact that the project has had on the individual or group (British Council, 2009). It is worth noting however, that while every effort may be made to continue monitoring beyond the end of a project, evaluation naturally gets harder to carry out the further removed individuals or companies became from initial project (Chambers, 2011). Long-term impact would therefore seem to be an area which can largely only be hypothesised upon.

However, in addition to the Project Logic Model, the organisation also use an external research agency with a specific aim of carrying out research to evaluate long-term outcomes,

²⁶ Organisations cited as using the model include: DFID, BP, BT, HSBC, TSB, BBC, BUPA, Defra, NHS. The document also explains that the methodology was adapted from ROI Institute, a US-based company, and abdi Ltd both of which work with other companies to evaluate and measure their programmes. The basic chart for evaluation can be purchased from the University of Wisconsin's online Learning Store (<http://learningstore.uwex.edu/Planning-a-Program-Evaluation-Worksheet-P1034.aspx>)

this is called ELTO (evaluation of long-term outcomes).²⁷ One thousand participants taking part in cultural relations programmes are interviewed with an aim to finding out if their experience has had any significant bearing on: personal growth and change; organisational or institutional changes, or; new or strengthened ties with the UK (British Council, 2011a).

Vinter and Knox's paper *Measuring the Impact of Public Diplomacy: Can it be Done?* (Vinter, 2008) also discuss the difficulties in measuring public diplomacy activity as much of the impact is long term. Vinter and Knox's suggestion for evaluation, however, uses a range of trackers to measure different types of results created as a consequence of public diplomacy activity such as media coverage, changes of opinion and observable changes. These trackers are designed to measure over different time frames to counter the aforementioned challenge in evaluating longer term impact.

In *Mutuality, Trust and the British Council* (Rose, 2010), the paper highlights the challenge the organisation face in needing to show value for money and prove that the activity undertaken makes a difference. The paper explains the difference between more short-term activities with quantifiable outputs that are easier to evaluate with typical cultural relations activities. 'There is a danger that under this pressure to be measurable of our activities we gravitate too far towards the more easily measurable of our activities. But in fact the creative challenge is quite the opposite: to devise tools for measuring the impact of true, mutuality-based cultural relations' (p. 49). This seems a logical observation, the numbers I have used previously to demonstrate the difference between relationship building activity and messaging activity are massively imbalanced - it is simply the case that it is easier to reach more people through broadcasts, publications and the internet than it is through face-to-face activity. However, it is worth noting that the Project Logic Model and

²⁷ In previous years, the organisation has used different research agencies in different regions, however, from 2012, to reduce costs and also to improve standardisation in research, a single agency will be used. There will also be an attempt to use more online questioning to obtain answers (Chambers and Kennard, 2011).

ELTO do attempt to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the organisation's activities that are difficult to measure such as the degree of influence the organisation has over its audience.

The research that the organisation has sponsored, for example the report on trust and mutuality shows that the British Council has and is looking at how effective it is as a cultural relations organisation not an organisation that simply provides information or relies on messaging to meet their objectives. Having these evaluation processes in place is essential to providing the organisation with an understanding of what it is doing but the British Council also needs to prove to its major stakeholders, the FCO and ultimately the tax-payer, that they are getting value for money. Considering Nye's comments on impact taking potentially decades to occur, it could be argued that there is no way of measuring the true impact of the British Council's activities due to the long-term nature of its objectives, yet, its evaluation of long-term outcomes (ELTO) attempts to tackle this challenge and ultimately helps to provide a picture of how effective the organisation is in the realm of cultural relations.

1.5 Conclusion

Cultural Relations covers a wide area of activity. It is true that the main aim of the British Council is to build trust and engagement between people worldwide through the exchange of knowledge and ideas yet explaining how it does this is best defined by discussing the types of projects the organisation is involved in. Further analysis shows that activity within these projects is often a mixture of face-to-face activity, web-based programmes and informative output such as websites, broadcasts and publications. This activity can be grouped into categories of messaging, access and relationship building.

The British Council's view on activity type gives the impression that only a small part falls under messaging yet due to the large audience numbers reached through messaging activity, I argue that messaging is actually a large part of the British Council's work. I

believe that key to the British Council's success is its ability to employ a range of activities targeting different people at different levels and social media presents the possibility to connect with audiences and insert a social element to traditional messaging activity.

This chapter has also looked at how the British Council's ideas on trust are closely related to mutuality. *Mutuality, Trust and Cultural Relations* was a report intended for circulation within the British Council and I have used the theory in this report in my study of the British Council's current activity. The report outlined the importance of mutuality in the British Council's work and it also highlighted the importance of different means of communication ' [a]ccommodating a range of communication styles is extremely important in building a capacity for effective trust-building' (Rose, 2010).

Activity that falls under the messaging category is not mutual, however, I point out that while not all of its activity is mutual, nearly every programme contains activity that is mutual and those programmes that don't, for instance programmes specifically designed to promote the UK and attract students to study in the UK, provide information and access to the opportunity for mutuality based relationships - messaging may be the means by which to first attract attention which can then follow to activity that could involve more relationship building. The high numbers of people that the organisation reaches through its websites, broadcasts and publications also shows that many people find these resources useful. Traditionally this has been an important part of cultural relations and without it, it is difficult to see how the organisation would have reached as many people as it has. Producing independent, high quality information and access to resources or events that the audience see as beneficial is an important part of cultural relations, however, to be more mutual with its audiences is one of the organisation's aims therefore the organisation should look for ways of being more engaging and social media may be part of the solution.

Proof of the British Council's success is heavily reliant on its own reporting which is published in their Annual Reports which give an indication of numbers of people it has worked with or reached through exhibitions, broadcast, publications and web-based programmes. However, its Corporate Scorecard also attempts to look at the quality, effectiveness and the long term impact of its projects. The British Council is accountable to the FCO and the tax payer for its actions so it is understandable that it is under pressure to provide the statistics that justify its grant. The organisation can of course show how many people it reaches through its broadcasts, publications and events yet these don't actually tell us anything about relationship building. The different methods of evaluation employed by the British Council are an attempt to provide a picture of the impact cultural relations can have and of course go some way in satisfying the FCO and the taxpayer of its effectiveness.

Evaluation takes place on all main projects mainly on face-to-face activity (Interview: Chambers, 2011). This in itself suggests that it is the face-to-face activity where the organisation believes the highest impact can occur. However, the difficulty facing the British Council over the next few years as it carries out the aims laid out in their latest Corporate Plan is to run a leaner business model and 'to engage with more people to greater effect than ever before' (British Council, 2011b). As a virtual presence takes more of a role in the British Council, the organisation will have to also consider how to evaluate that activity and this will be discussed at length in *Chapter 4 – An Analysis of the British Council's Use of Social Media*.

Chapter 2 - Soft Power, Public Diplomacy and the British Council

2.1 Introduction

An obvious starting point for this chapter might be a definition of the work that the British Council carries out. However, the definition that the British Council gives is different to how the Foreign and Commonwealth (FCO) defines the organisation - the British Council calls itself a ‘cultural relations organisation’ and the FCO calls the British Council a ‘partner in public diplomacy’ (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2011a).²⁸ While terms such as cultural relations and public diplomacy are widely used, neither has internationally agreed definitions. ‘The international community has not agreed the lexicon for activity broadly related to civil society’s role in international affairs and diplomacy. Even the most commonly used terms do not have internationally recognised definitions, and therefore, subcategories add a further level of complexity’ (U.S. Center for Citizen Diplomacy, 2010). A term, however, that is currently used by both FCO (to describe how they wish to pursue their purpose (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2014)), and the British Council, to describe how it contributes to the UK’s influence and attraction, is soft power (British Council, 2014m).

In 2012 Great Britain was voted the most influential nation by Monocle in its annual soft power survey (Monocle, 2012).²⁹ The Golden Jubilee, the Olympics/Paralympics, smash hit James Bond film Skyfall and popular music (22 albums topped the charts in countries outside of UK) are said to have all contributed to the UK being ‘the country with the most cultural clout’ (The Week, 2012). Research carried out by Ipsos Mori for the British Council³⁰ showed that the big events in 2012 had a direct positive impact on the UK’s

²⁸ The British Council define ‘cultural relations’ as the sharing and communication of culture internationally (Demos, 2013).

²⁹ Monocle is a global magazine reporting on international affairs, business, culture and design (Monocle, 2014).

³⁰ 8,000 adults in 11 key overseas economies – including the US, China, India and Russia were interviewed.

reputation abroad (British Council, 2012j). Commenting on these results, John Worne - The British Council's Director of Strategy - said 'to know us is to love us and this year the UK has got everything right in turning some great national moments into global celebrations of excellence (...) we need to keep on finding smart new ways to share our soft power assets: English, our education system, our vibrant arts scene and our entrepreneurial spirit to name but a few' (British Council, 2012j).

This chapter examines the UK government's current agenda to use soft power as a tool in foreign policy. The first section, *2.2 The Strategy of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office*, reviews the position of the British Council according to the FCO strategy and looks at how the FCO expects the British Council to assist in using soft power as a tool of foreign policy. *2.3 Soft Power and Public Diplomacy* considers the theory of soft power and definitions of public diplomacy and defines how the British Council contributes to the UK's soft power. The final section *2.4 Perception and Trust* considers how the British Council's alignment with the UK government affects the image that others have of it. Ultimately this chapter demonstrates the British Council's importance to the UK in remaining effective in its cultural relations activities. Examples of how the organisation is effective in the area of soft power and public diplomacy will be highlighted with a view to examining how social media can be used in cultural relations in *Chapter 3 – Social Media in Public Diplomacy*.

2.2 The Strategy of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The FCO's annual report (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2014) outlines its main priority themes as: prosperity, security and consular. Its other main priority is purpose and indicates that in order to achieve its purpose, it will '[u]se soft power as a tool of UK foreign policy; promote British values and human rights; build capacity to tackle terrorism in line with UK security requirements; and contribute to the welfare of developing countries and

their citizens’ (p. 22). In the year 2013-14, 47% of the spending contributed to the FCO’s purpose. As shown in the diagram below, 53% of this spend went towards ‘international institutions and soft power’ and 16% went to the British Council (a gross expenditure of £652,168,000 and £162,400,000 respectively).

Spend by Foreign Policy Priority

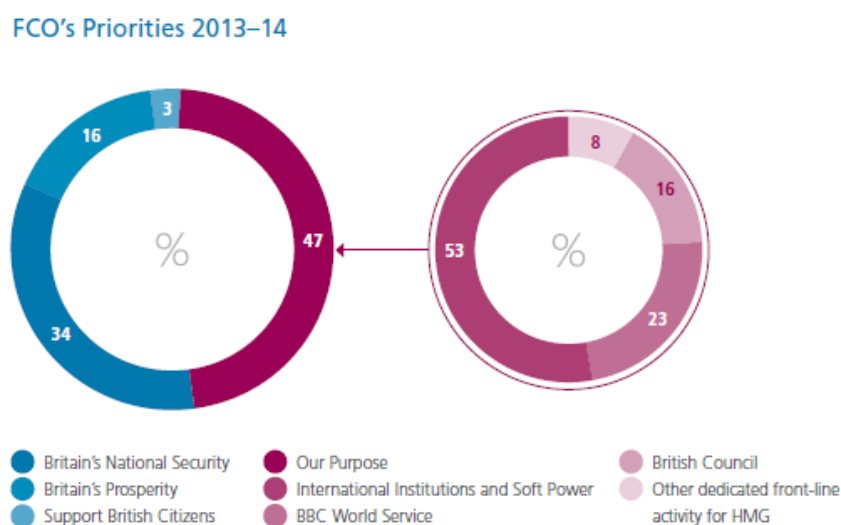


Figure 5: FCO’s Priorities 2013-14 (screen shot from: Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2014, p.22).

In the latest annual reports, the FCO has referred to the British Council as a ‘public diplomacy partner’ (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2011, 2012). In the most recent annual report (2014), the British Council is also referred to as a ‘stakeholder’, and an ‘Arms Length Body’. In all reports, the FCO describes the British Council remit ‘to build mutually beneficial cultural and educational relationships between the United Kingdom and other countries, and increase appreciation of the United Kingdom’s creative ideas and achievements’ (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2014, p.55). The British Council’s Corporate Plan (British Council, 2011b) points to its alignment with the FCO’s priorities. It states that by sharing the UK’s assets with other countries (arts, English and education),

people from both the UK and other countries will understand each other better and this will help to ‘secure our collective prosperity and security’ (British Council, 2011b, p. 7). On the organisation’s website, the British Council declare their contribution to the UK’s soft power is by building trust between people worldwide and by building the UK’s international reputation and attractiveness (British Council, 2014m).

The role of soft power in international security is summed up by Wilton Park: ‘soft power plays an increasingly important role in security. Cultural activities, media, language and education all contribute to stability, human development, innovation and new technologies. These in turn promote economic development, freedom of expression and civic rights,’ (Wilton Park, 2012, p. 7). Considering the activities that the British Council is involved in (discussed in *Chapter 1 – The British Council and its Cultural Relations Activity*), the organisation is theoretically well placed to contribute to the UK’s foreign policy strategy.

One of the assumptions at this point is that the British Council has to carefully balance the relationship of accountability with government with its position of independence. On the one hand, it has to prove to government and the general tax-payer that the organisation is an asset to the UK, providing value-for-money and that its objectives are in the best interests of the UK. On the other, it is acknowledged, not just by the British Council, but by other institutions, think-tanks and academics world-wide, that it is crucial to their success that they remain free of any perceived government manipulation (Demos, 2007; Nye, 2004, 2010, Wilton Park, 2012). This topic will be discussed in the section *2.4 Perception and Trust*.

2.3 Soft Power and Public Diplomacy

To facilitate an understanding of the British Council's role in UK foreign policy according to the FCO, we are required to understand two terms: soft power and public diplomacy.

2.3.1 Soft Power

Soft Power is an academic term that has crept into popular usage coined by Professor Joseph Nye. Nye describes power as the ability to influence others to get what you want and describes three main ways of doing this: the first, through coercion (sticks), the second, through payments (carrots), and the third, simply by getting others to want what you want through attraction. This third method is soft power,³¹ Nye explains that effective use of soft power can save a lot of carrots and sticks (Nye, 2010).

He explains that while he invented the term soft power, it is not a new concept. The power of seduction is universal and is not unique to a government or international relations - soft power is ubiquitous to human nature.

This liberal view of power contrasts with, as Gallerotti describes, the traditional vision of power. Power, he suggests, is largely a realist vision, centred on nations using material resources to influence other nations. Gallerotti argues that this view is 'poorly suited to understanding the modern cosmopolitan world system where there is a pronounced need for a more cosmopolitan theory of power in world politics' (Gallerotti, 2011, p. 27). He argues that theory has been influenced by events and that ultimately the world is becoming 'softer'. Schmidt's reflections on realism and facets of power concur with Gallerotti's statement that the concept of power is closely related to the theory of realism but also remarks that the realists' view of power is not in alignment when it comes to issues such as how: 'states acquire additional power, how power utilised to attain desired ends, how power should be

³¹ Nye also comments that a clever combination of all three is what Hilary Clinton refers to as 'smart power'.

measured, and how-if at all-the pursuit of power can be managed within acceptable limits' (Schmidt, 2007). He writes that classical realists, for instance, believe that the drive to acquire more power and to control others is an intrinsic part of human nature, whereas the structural realist believes it is the structure of the system that obliges states to seek more power. The neoclassical realist argues that the quest for power is also influenced by variables located at the individuals' level as well as that of the state.

The other point of contention amongst realists, and indeed other critiques of power, is how power converts into influence. Schmidt writes that the realist view of power is defined by material resources and this contrasts greatly with the theory of soft power which hinges on the ability to influence through the much less tangible resource of attraction (Schmidt, 2007).

The intangibility of soft power is where many critics (Ferguson, 2003, Mattern, 2007) find fault with the theory of soft power. The power of attraction of course is fragile - just because you have it now does not mean that you will always have it. Nye cites the decline in public favour towards the US following the invasion of Iraq as having a direct effect on US soft power resulting, for example, in the Turkish government refusing to allow US troops to pass through Turkey in 2003. Similarly, Saudi Arabia was reluctant to allow the US use of its air bases, whereas in 1991 the US had used these bases. When it came to peacekeeping and reconstructing in Iraq, the countries that did agree to participate in peacekeeping in Iraq did not come cheap - it was estimated that the US would have to raise \$250 million to help underwrite its participation. Compared to the 1991 Gulf War where the US bore 15% of the reconstruction and peacekeeping costs, the post-intervention security system in Iraq is estimated to have cost \$1,000 per US household (Nye, 2004). Nye acknowledges that sceptics of soft power do not give much relevance to any loss in soft power as countries will cooperate out of self-interest, however, he points out that cooperation 'is a matter of degree, and that degree is affected by attraction or repulsion' (Nye, 2004, p. 29). The argument is

that while there is no guarantee that soft power gets you what you want, you have a better chance of getting whatever it is if you are admired, respected and liked.

Mattern rejects the idea of natural attraction as a power resource and criticises Nye's lack of definition on the universal values or how to acquire them. Without understanding what these are, she argues, it is difficult to know how to 'amass soft power' (Mattern, 2007). Her interpretation of soft power lies in communication - if hard power is physical then soft power is socio-linguistic. Her argument with soft power is that it isn't so soft. She writes

[T]he type of communicative exchange through which a 'reality' of attractiveness is likely to be produced in world politics is a competitive form called 'verbal fighting'. Since verbal fighting is characterised by representational force, attractiveness tends to be suffused with coercion. Soft power is not soft (Mattern, 2007, p. 106).

It seems, rather than to reject entirely the theory of soft power, Mattern has instead rationalised it by exploring where power exists in a non-physical representation in world politics. However, her view is that the attractiveness and coercion (at least in world politics) are intertwined. While representational force is important, the line of argument that the force needs to be 'hard power' is one that needs to be explored.

In comparison, another critic of soft power is Ferguson. Whereas Mattern argued that soft power was in fact coercive, Ferguson's criticism by contrast, is that it's 'well, soft'. He writes that the most Anglicised of the indigenous populations of the British Empire were also the sites of nationalist movements 'the archetype was the Bengali babu—better able to quote Shakespeare than the average expatriate Brit—who worked for the British by day but plotted their overthrow by night. Stone-throwing Palestinians in Nike trainers are today's version of the same Janus-faced phenomenon' (Ferguson, 2003). Ferguson's interpretation of soft power is in the product or brands produced by a country.

Nye's response to this criticism is that while popular culture may be a 'resource that produces soft power', culture is also spread by other means such as personal relationships, exchanges, visits and government policies at home and abroad (Nye, 2004). In light of Mattern's comments, there is clearly a multitude of channels by which to communicate soft power. Personal relationships, for example, are not built on representational force or implied coercion. Additionally, the products of a nation such as the US - Coca-Cola, Britney Spears and MacDonald's - are not a definition of US soft power. In Nye's lecture at the British Council (Nye, 2010) he referred to this misunderstanding of soft power as the 'vehicle fallacy' and explained that there is a difference between power as a resource, something you can use, and power as behaviour. He then reiterated Ferguson's point that because someone enjoys a US product does not mean they like the US.

The FCO reiterates Nye's definition of soft power stating that it is 'the ability to get what you want through attraction, rather than through force or payment' (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2011a). We can assume then, that the FCO's achievements in soft power work towards the greater goal of strengthening the UK's impression around the globe, or in the FCO's words 'to promote British values, advance development and prevent conflict' (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2011a, p. 13). The wording used here would suggest that soft power is to be delivered to others - or in other words that soft power is a way of distributing British values and outlook to other countries and using the nation's influence to improve other environments (through, for example, enhancing development or thwarting conflict). Interestingly, there is no mention that soft power can provide opportunities to the UK to better understand different cultures, values and viewpoints. One of the points that Nye stressed is that crucial to the success of soft power, particularly in today's information-age, is two-way communication, highlighting the importance of mutually beneficial relations for any

organisation involved in cultural relations. ‘Soft power is a dance that requires partners. Hard power...not always’ (Nye, 2010). This echoes what has been said in *Chapter 1 – The British Council and its Cultural Relations Activity*, that activity which is more inclusive has more impact on its audience and will be more likely to encourage recipients to trust them.

The FCO’s annual reports and web pages note that a soft power approach in its foreign policy is indicative of a belief that it is important to give a good impression of the UK to other countries. Nye writes that Europe has a strong cultural attractiveness and that the UK in particular has a number of soft power resources that are recognised internationally from its Nobel Prizes, high life expectancy and the number one country to seek political asylum (Nye, 2004). Another scholar, Vuving, questions why there is widespread misunderstanding of soft power amongst the lay public and scholars in international politicians alike. He suggests that it is because the concept of soft power is largely under-theorised but also offers another explanation, ‘the culprit is the popular view that equates power with power resources’ (Vuving, 2009, p. 4). Vuving calls these ‘beauty, brilliance and benignity’. This theory explains why cultural relations organisations such as the British Council are so important to the UK’s soft power. Vuving’s concept is that soft power works through power currencies rather than power resources. Power resources could include products of popular culture and economic strength but power currencies are that which generates attraction. Looking at the description of Vuving’s Power Currencies below, the interpretation of soft power held by Mattern would fit the category of ‘brilliance’, the other two areas provide a view of other areas that can achieve soft power.

Power Currency	Examples	Result
Benignity	Being generous, supportive, and protective. Paying attention and listening to others. Respecting the rights, interests or self-esteem of others.	Gratitude and sympathy and willingness to cooperate. ‘To produce soft power (in international relations) it is usually embedded within a complex of protective mechanisms employing both hard and soft power currencies’ (p. 10).
Brilliance	Success: A strong military, vibrant economy, rich culture or a peaceful, well-run society.	Admiration leading to imitation, emulation, respect or fear, or reverence. ‘Other countries may adopt part or whole of

	Advanced science or technology.	the capable or successful country's practices, policies, ideology, values or vision' (p. 11).
Beauty	Jointly pursuing shared ideals, values, causes or visions. Championing a cause or vision.	Credibility, legitimacy and moral authority. 'If others perceive you in this role they will look to you for guidance, example, encouragement, and inspiration' (p. 12).

Figure 6: Vuving's Power Currencies: Benignity, Brilliance and Beauty. Table created by Author using information from How Soft Power Works (Vuving, 2009).

As a British institution, the British Council is a soft power vehicle, it highlights what the British Council's Director of Strategy would call the United Kingdom's 'soft power assets' and what Vuving would call soft power currencies. Specifically, the British Council's mutual approach falls into Vuving's description of benignity 'paying attention and listening to others'. Connecting Classrooms is one example of how the British Council's programmes are delivered in a way that ensures that people experience the British Council are paid attention to and have their views respected. Connecting Classrooms is a two-way project that gives all sides the opportunity to learn about each other (British Council, 2015). Similarly, many programmes such as Belief in Dialogue provide the support to give participants the opportunity to engage in discussion (British Council, 2011b). The Education and Society area of the British Council arguably fall under Vuving's 'beauty' category. The British Council are champions for many causes outlined in projects such as Climate Generation, Global Changemakers, International Inspirations, Skills for Employability and Active Citizens.³² Finally, the British Council draws the world's eye to the UK's brilliance in arts, science and technology, the English language and its teaching institutions, its successful entrepreneurs and so on.

[C]ultural events, exchange programmes, broadcasting, or teaching a country's language and promoting the study of a country's culture and society are often seen as a tool of soft power. However, these activities do not produce soft power directly. Rather what they can do is promote understanding, nurture positive

³² Project descriptions can be found in Appendix 1.

images, and propagate myths in favour of the source country. In doing so they provide a first but important step in the translation of benignity, beauty, and brilliance into soft power (Vuving, 2009, p. 13).

As the quote above suggests, the activity carried out by the British Council assists in the UK's soft power, whilst not necessarily producing soft power, the organisation can be the link to highlighting the soft power resources the UK has to the rest of the world.

Closely linked to the concept of soft power is that of nation branding. Fan defines this notion as 'the total sum of all perceptions of a nation in the minds of international stakeholders, which may contain some of the following elements: people, place, culture/language, history, food, fashion, famous faces, global brands and so on' (Fan, 2010). Fan places soft power as one of the interpretations of nation branding. However, in terms of applicability, Fan indicates that branding through using soft power is difficult compared to say a visual symbol, strapline or ingredient brand. Fan writes that nation branding campaigns can help to create a more favourable image of the country thereby enhancing its soft power.

His description of what nation branding can achieve, mirrors that of soft power in that successful nation branding enables a country to enjoy favourable image and reputation. The main difference is that nation branding is a one way process focused on transporting a 'single message or message to different audiences' (Fan, 2010, p. 101). One could assume that nation branding may assist to highlight, in Vuving's terms, the brilliance of a country and its assets, however, this one way marketing and communication approach does not fit with the view mentioned earlier that two-way communication is crucial to the success of soft power. Dr Shashi Tharoor, member of India's parliament adds to the argument that soft power cannot be so easily engineered. In a talk on 'Why nations should pursue soft power' he explains that soft power arises partly because of governments and partly in spite of governments. He describes how the 'incessant diet' of multiple channels of communication are what a global

audience judge a country on. These of course include stories that the countries concerned would not necessarily want people to hear. Ultimately he argues that in an information era people will see a country for what it is (Tharoor, 2009).

Nye also argues that in a global information age the importance of soft power will increase. He remarks on the fact that virtual communities and networks are not restricted by national borders and that we can expect transnational corporations and nongovernmental actors to play a larger role, 'the ability to share information - and to be believed - becomes an important source of attraction and power' (Nye, 2004, p. 31). These remarks indicate a view that the UK government should look at ways of strengthening soft power - as more and more people become influenced by other groups, parties, companies, individuals, the influence governments have over public opinion will diminish further if proactive action is not taken to build soft power. The reduction in the government grant - as discussed in the Introduction (section 2.1) - would therefore seem short-sighted.

The British Council has embraced the perceived role of the organisation in contributing to the UK's soft power. This isn't only obvious on the main website, where it is clearly signposted how cultural relations benefits the UK's soft power (British Council, 2014), the organisation has also tackled the intangibility issue of soft power by sponsoring research into understanding the factors that make a country more attractive.

The research points to a publication from The Institute of Government where five components are identified as contributing to soft power: culture, government, diplomacy, education and business/innovation. The study then consisted of a global survey of over 20,000 participants from 20 different countries (Demos, 2013). The findings were that out of a broad number of factors, the following were the most important in terms of a country's attractiveness:

1. Cultural and historic attractions

2. Countryside and landscape
3. People
4. (joint position) Arts (and) Cities

In particular, the following were what the participants found most attractive about the UK:

1. Cultural and historic attractions
2. Cities
3. (joint position) Arts (and) Countryside and landscape
5. History

The foreword to the research explains that the study was carried out due to a need to understand what underpins, and could therefore enhance, the UK's soft power. This study interestingly identifies what people find attractive about another country. The study also helps to qualify the British Council's role and assists in the argument for continued investment in the organisation, 'the UK would be well advised to continue to invest and support successes in areas where it has distinctive appeal as well as those factors that generally contribute to a country's attractiveness' (Demos, 2013, p. 27). The gaps in this study are in how the British Council can deliver this attractiveness to the rest of the world.

The study provides a view on what the content might be but does not outline the approach needed to be taken to appeal most effectively to a global audience. Vuving's comments on benignity may help to resolve this issue: pay attention and listen to others (Vuving, 2009). This of course mirrors Nye's view of communication being a 'one-way street' (Nye, 2004) or suggestions from the British Council that communications should be mutual (Rose, 2004). Coupled with this view is a required understanding of communication in the modern world and Tharoor's earlier comments that a global audience uses multiple communication means on which it may judge a country, strengthen my view that cultural relations should be delivered through a multitude of channels.

Nye suggests that ‘multiple channels of communication that help to frame issues; whose dominant culture and ideas are closer to the prevailing norms (...); and whose credibility is enhanced by their domestic and international values and policies’ (Nye, 2004, p. 32) will help a country be more attractive and gain more soft power in the information age. In *Chapter 5 – Causal Implications for Consideration in the Use of Social Media*, the point on virtual communities will be addressed to consider how the British Council can capitalise on the global information age to assist in strengthening the UK’s soft power by using social media to promote the use of virtual communities in their projects.

2.3.2 Public Diplomacy

In an article on public diplomacy, Kelley (2004) comments on different viewpoints of public diplomacy: the ways it is executed, the role it should play in government and, the lack of agreed definition. Kelley cites remarks from a Wilton Park conference that ‘public diplomacy has entered the lexicon of 21st century diplomacy without clear definition of what it is or how the tools it offers might best be used’ (Kelley, 2004, p. 73). However, commenting on the thoughts of scholars Joseph Nye and Mark Leonard, Kelley draws a parallel with their thoughts that key to public diplomacy is strategic communicating and relationship building. I will return to this observation throughout the chapter.

Mark Leonard’s definition of public diplomacy is that it is ‘about building relationships: understanding the needs of other countries, cultures and peoples; communicating our points of view; correcting misperceptions; looking for areas where we can find common ground. (...) public diplomacy involves a much broader group of people both sides [than traditional diplomacy], and a broader set of interests that go beyond those of government today’ (Leonard, 2002, p. 8). Nye believes that policies in public diplomacy can enhance soft power (Nye, 2004). His view is in line with Mark Leonard’s definition and he

goes on to remark that it is a misconception to think of public diplomacy as public relations ‘conveying information and selling a positive image is part of it, but public diplomacy also involves building long-term relationships that create an enabling environment for government policies’ (Nye, 2004, p. 107). Again, the importance of building relationships comes to the fore, however, we see that messaging needs to be done strategically and by understanding what content is suitable for the target audience.

Both Leonard and Nye discuss three dimensions of public diplomacy that largely relate to the time the public diplomacy activity takes place and the amount of government involvement. The first dimension is daily communications. This refers to the way government officials handle the communication of day-to-day events and their reactions to crises and countering attacks. Nye indicates that government has the most control over the impact of their messaging in this dimension. Strategic communication is the second dimension involving a set of simple themes to be developed over the course of months or years to strengthen government policy. The third dimension, which fits best with the British Council’s definition of cultural relations, focuses on relationship building with individuals over many years through activities such as scholarships, training exchanges or an audience who attend a reading with a British writer or a workshop with a British artist. Nye mentions that the third dimension is the hardest to measure. It is also the dimension which the government has least control over. Nye argues that in many ways it is this dimension that is the most important and states that it is critical to invest heavily in ways to build lasting relationships (Nye, 2010, 2004, Leonard, 2002).

The FCO’s annual report also suggests that public diplomacy policies can enhance soft power. Their list of achievements in soft power relates more to the systems it has in place rather than specific events and includes: the approval of the British Council’s corporate plan; the continuing service delivered by the BBC World Service; conferences run at Wilton

Park; Chevening scholarships; events that draw the world's attention to the UK, such as the Pope's visit to the UK; the run up to the 2012 Olympics, and; the FCO's work in tackling issues related to human rights, largely through working with both International Government Organisations (IGOs) and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs). A review of this demonstrates that the FCO's soft power reaches a range of audiences and operates across all three dimensions of public diplomacy.

A Demos report on cultural diplomacy (Bound et al., 2007) remarked on the fact that there is no set method of public diplomacy and that all countries develop their own models depending on their unique global outlook. It describes the UK's approach to using culture in public diplomacy as an 'arms-length, distributed system'. Demos argues that the UK should have a more hands-on and structured approach to public diplomacy. Demos has similar views on public diplomacy as Nye

it is through culture that we find points of commonality and difference, and the means to understand one another (...) Indeed, one of the most important contributions that culture can make to a country's public diplomacy is its ability to showcase a diversity of views, perspectives and opinions, breaking down persistent national stereotypes and challenging the perception that a country's political leaders and their policies are identical with the views of their citizens.

(Bound et al., 2007, p26).

The report argues that the UK could be more effective in its use of culture in public diplomacy by the government being more organised in the various areas where public diplomacy is deployed. This is a view shared by Fisher, who believes that an understanding of what each group is doing would enable potential collaboration and reduce overlap (Fisher, 2009), thus making British Public Diplomacy more effective.

Fisher also explains that Public Diplomacy activity can be placed on a scale where listening is at one end and direct messaging is at the other. Interestingly, he indicates that the British Council should be placed towards the listening end of the spectrum. The argument in this thesis thus far is that cultural relations have more effect if an approach is mutual and inclusive of its audience. Fisher goes on to explain that the organisation carry out a number of activities that can be placed at various places along the listening to telling scale and this corresponds with the description of the British Council’s work in *1.2 What the British Council Does and how it does it*. The idea of listening is interchangeable with the views on mutuality - the activities that provide the opportunity for those involved to interact and provide their own opinion result in dialogue that is two-way and any activity or agenda-setting resulting from this has more chance of being a joint effort.

At a conference in 2010 at the British Council, Nye used a series of diagrams to highlight the communication flow between governments, societies and international government organisations (IGOs). The diagrams have been recreated below.

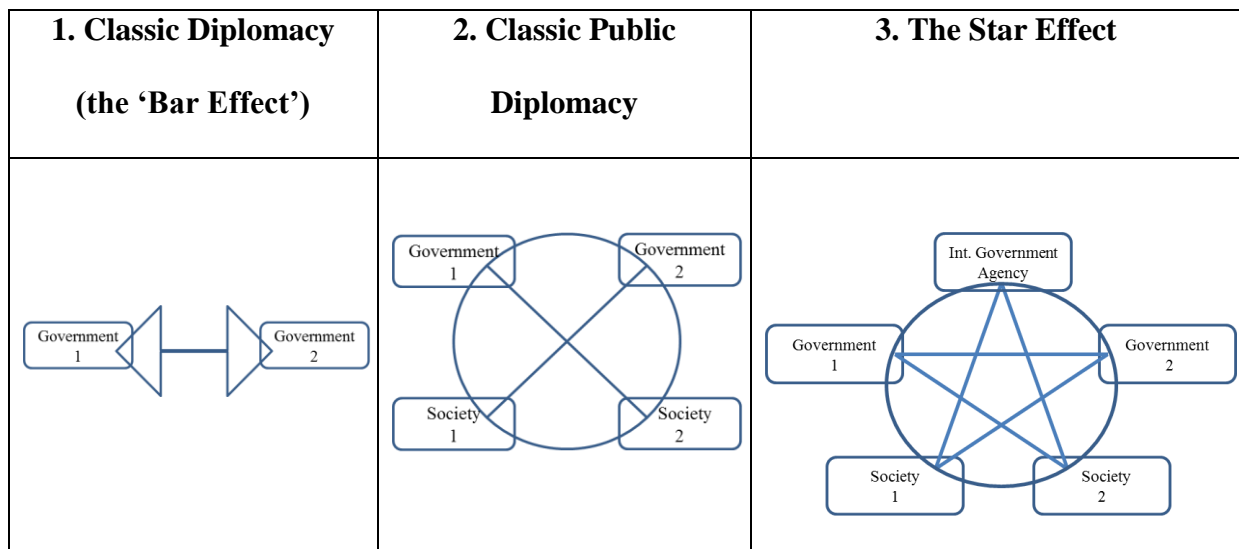


Figure 7: Nye’s Diagrams of Public Diplomacy

The first is called the ‘Bar Effect’ and illustrates, in Nye’s opinion, the communication style of classic diplomacy - communication is shown as a linear, two-way flow between one

government and another. The second, Nye calls 'Classic Public Diplomacy' and this diagram demonstrates the idea of how governments influencing foreign societies to influence their governments. This also touches on an FCO statement on Public Diplomacy in its reference to public diplomacy partners working with groups and individuals in the public arena to achieve strategic objectives (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2011b). Nye's 'Star Effect' illustrates the more complex relations between governments, societies and international government agencies (IGA's). He claims that it is crucial to consider the role different groups can have in order to be effective in conducting public diplomacy. The Star Effect takes into account the influence of other players in international relations such as IGAs and also highlights the relationships between one society and another, which is much more prevalent in the internet age.

According to the organisation's corporate plan (2011-2015), the British Council works with a wide range of partners in the UK and abroad.³³ If we believe the concept of soft power and public diplomacy and look at the relationships the British Council can garner on all these levels then there is a convincing argument that the British Council is a strong actor in the FCO's strategy to secure the UK's collective prosperity and security.

Considering the above, it is worth revisiting the Spectrum of International Relations shown in *Chapter 1 – The British Council and its Cultural Relations Activity*. As this chapter has determined thus far, there is no formula for soft power but a good place to start is to look at the soft power currencies available and the type of behaviour that is seen as more attractive to others. The diagram below therefore shows soft power to be present throughout most of the spectrum but having greater impact for activity that is centred around mutual

³³ These include: NGO's, CBO's, leaders, volunteers, entrepreneurs, governments, institutions, representatives of civil society, faith based institutions, young leaders, policy makers, students, teachers, academics, education policy makers, English language teachers, teacher trainers, learners of English, UK English language institutions, artists and cultural leaders, ministers of culture and local government.

understanding and relationship building. Cultural Relations should only be part of messaging for broadcasting, cultural diplomacy and showcasing.

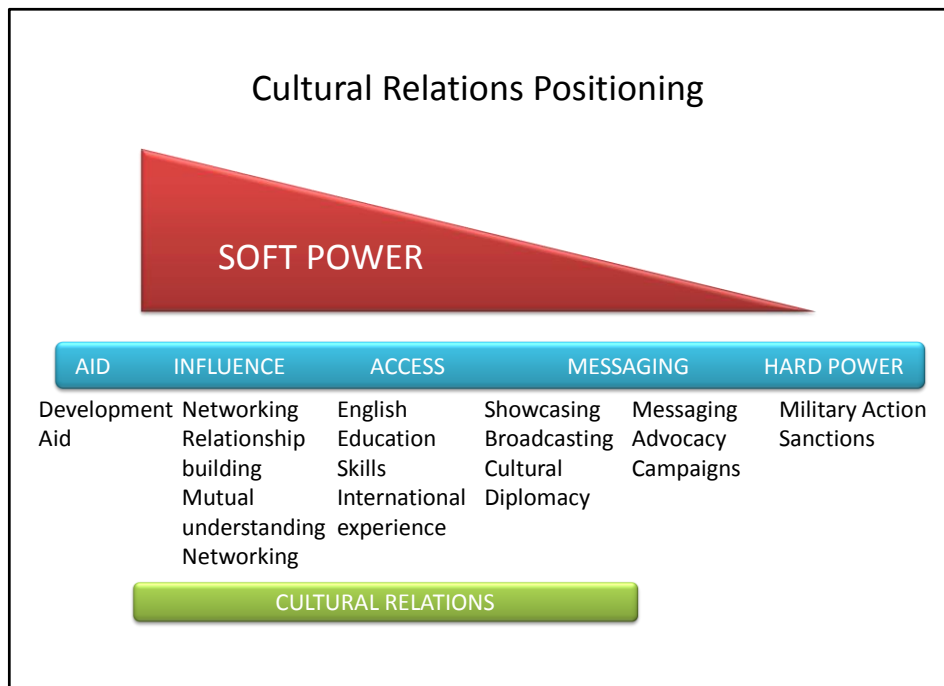


Figure 8: Diagram of Cultural Relations Positioning

Aid and Development, an example of a ‘carrot’ remains at the far end of the spectrum. Arguably it also an example of benignity in that it is an act that protects, helps and supports. Nye believes that the military (typically a hard power resource) can be used in peacekeeping or in relief situations to improve soft power, which somewhat confuses the carrot/stick/attractability categories. An example he gives for this is the image ratings of the US over a four year period due to military action - in 2000 75% of Indonesians had a positive image of US, after Iraq invasion this dropped to 15%. In 2004 after US had supplied Tsunami relief through the US Navy the figure went back up to 45%. It was the utilisation of the military that had shifted public opinion in both cases and reputation improved by showing kindness and generosity when the country most needed it.

2.4 Perception and Trust

The FCO's definition of public diplomacy discusses the different actors involved in the 'process of achieving the UK's international strategic priorities through engaging and forming partnerships with like-minded organisations and individuals in the public arena' (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2011a). The difference between public diplomacy and cultural relations is the involvement of government: 'public diplomacy is the work we do as an agent of government in close partnership with the FCO and other departments of State. Cultural relations is the work that is based upon the fact and perception of our independence' (Rose, 2004). This shows another complication in profiling the British Council. Maintaining independence from government when the British Council acts as a partner of government in some activities blurs the distinction as an independent organisation.

To get an idea of the extent of which the British Council is accountable to the UK government requires an understanding of any control the FCO have over decision-making and also what it means for the British Council to have a strategy that is 'aligned with the long term objectives of British foreign policy'. This section will specifically look at the foreign affairs committee, priority countries and the organisation's programmes which work with government.

Certain projects are carried out as a partner of government and looking at a summary of their main projects for 2010/11 (British Council, 2011b) two out of thirty-five specifically mention being a partner of government. These projects fall under the Education and Society category.

Global Partnerships for the Knowledge Economy: Developing global knowledge economies through partnerships between governments, universities and business.

UKIERI: UK/India education research initiative bringing universities together to revitalise links between Europe and the US.

Distinguishing the British Council as separate to government has its advantages in building trust as publics are often sceptical of authority and government (Nye, 2004, Rose, 2004, Leonard, 2002). Many cultural organisations such as the British Council receive funding from their governments. Due to this relationship, cultural relations are often seen as synonymous with ‘cultural propaganda’. Furthermore, the *raison d'état* of the British Council was originally to conduct cultural propaganda overseas on behalf of the British government (Taylor, 1978). Taylor calls the creation of the British Council ‘the most constructive peacetime response to the growing realization that more positive measures were required to counter the detrimental effects of aggressive foreign propaganda upon British interests and prestige’ (p244). This was of course before the term ‘soft power’ was used in foreign policy but the need to present a good impression to the world was understood.

In addition to the money received from government, the British Council earns an additional £500 million (which include revenue producing activity such as language courses and examination services) and while this figure is predicted to grow to £800 million by 2015, according to the latest corporate plan, the public money received each year is predicted to decline (British Council, 2011). This does not mean that the organisation is under any less pressure to prove that the UK tax-payer is getting value for money. Indeed the latest annual report and corporate plan constantly reminds the reader that the organisation is being run more and more efficiently while still achieving its objectives and, is using various evaluation processes to evidence this. It is this pressure that could cause the British Council to lose its impact in cultural relations if, for example, it relies too heavily on less expensive options such as web-based programmes over face-to-face programmes. This is a topic that will be discussed in *Chapter 5 – Causal Implications for Consideration for the Use of Social Media, – Hypothesis of the Use of Social Media in the British Council.*

Ahead of a U.S. summit and initiative for global citizen diplomacy the British Council carried out research in collaboration with YouGov³⁴ to look at the question of trust and the importance of cultural relations in building trust between different cultures. The outcomes showed a distinct increase in trust and willingness to engage among people who had been involved in some way with cultural relations. The research focused on trust in people and government from the UK but showed that trust is an important factor in soft power. For instance, only 40% of Indians not involved in cultural relations indicated they trusted people from the UK while 59% of people who were involved in cultural relations said they trusted UK citizens (2012j). This research provided confirmation that organisations which work in cultural relations are useful to a nation's soft power. This next section looks at areas that can impact the trust people have in a cultural relations organisation such as its relationship to government - while government's financial support is crucial to the British Council, misconceptions over the relationship with government can harm its image.

As previously mentioned, the organisation began as a propaganda machine to give a favourable image of the UK abroad (Taylor, 1978). Today's message from the organisation is that it facilitates building trust between people and peoples around the world (British Council, 2011a) yet its history of being official propagandists for Britain, one would expect, surely makes it difficult to build relationships of trust.

The British Council does not try to hide its past as a propaganda tool for Britain and gives a detailed account in publications on its history which can be found on the website.³⁵ What is surprising, however, is that references that the organisation is still involved in propaganda today are used in the pages describe the British Council and what it is, 'throughout almost seventy years of activity, the Council has proved that cultural propaganda,

³⁴ An international market-research agency. For more information see: <http://research.yougov.co.uk/about/> (accessed: 15/05/2012)

³⁵ Including: *Propaganda?* (Prof N.J Cull), *Selling the UK in the 21st Century* (R.Weight) and, *Cultural Imperialism* (Prof P.Taylor).

sensitively managed, can help to create international understanding, and with it, a more peaceful world' (Weight, nd). Being perceived as propagandists is detrimental to the British Council's image and its impact in soft power 'If we degenerate into propaganda we not only fail to convince, we essentially undercut our soft power. Soft power depends upon the understanding of the minds of others and the best Public Diplomacy is a two-way street' (Nye, 2010). Mutual communication and independence from government are both important to the British Council's image and both present the challenge for the organisation to direct communication to be both mutual and also strategic, particularly if that strategy needs to focus on delivering objectives that could be perceived as one-sided or involves a high level of messaging. While the FCO states that its 'public diplomacy partners' are an important part of its soft power strategy, the British Council do not exactly repeat this in its literature choosing to focus instead on the importance of relationship building and using words such as 'mutual' and 'trust' when describing the way these relationships are built.

[T]he British Council (...) [has] to dance to two tunes at once: on the one hand they must be message-orientated, focusing on national profile and export promotion; on the other, dedicated to dialogue and to eliciting partners' needs. Handling both tasks at once, with integrity, is at best difficult, and can probably only be managed, in the early 21st century, with much more explicit honesty than we are used to allowing ourselves (Rose, 2004).

The key here is to be transparent in programme delivery and to find new ways to connect with the audience to allow for a communication style that moves away from message-driven broadcasting.

The fact that the organisation receives hundreds of millions of pounds from the FCO rings alarm bells for some who perceive the financial link between the organisation and the FCO as proof that the organisation is some kind of PR tool for government in its promotion

of British values. One critic of the British Council's relationship with government is journalist and broadcaster Frances Stonor Saunders: 'I'd rather see culture to be left to its own devices, as spontaneous, unfettered energy that goes where it will and on its own terms (...) and not consciously working to become juggernauts of an official British Culture' (Stonor Saunders, 2011). This gives the impression that the British Council is not simply under the auspices of the FCO but being controlled by it.

In Stonor Saunders' broadcast on BBC4 radio on Cultural Diplomacy (2011), Professor Timothy Garton-Ash explained that cultural diplomacy is how culture³⁶ is projected to others. He describes how this is part of a country's soft power which in the 21st century is more important than ever. He claims that Terry Pratchett and J.K Rowling probably influence the world more now than the whole of the Royal Navy. This quote taken alone would be an example of what Nye (cited earlier) would call the vehicle fallacy- it may be true that both authors mentioned have many fans but the extent to which these books could influence people into shifting their perception of the UK is questionable. Garton-Ash in another source, however, gives a different example of soft power: '[Europe's] soft power is demonstrated by the fact that not only millions of individuals but whole states want to enter it. Turkey, for example' (Nye, 2004, p. 78).

Stonor Saunders goes on to argue that if culture does so much for UK's influence as Garton-Ash claims, it is understandable for the Foreign Office to be interested in cultural diplomacy to be strategically deployed in the same way as hard power is. Her main argument is that culture and diplomacy are not a natural hybrid and questions the appropriateness of: 'foreign policy and culture to be linked by an umbilical cord of gold'. There is a misconception here that the grant-in-aid translates to government control. While there are

³⁶ Prof. Garton Ash defines culture as a country's universities, art, drama, society and way of life.

indications by Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles,³⁷ that some diplomats would prefer more control over the British Council (Stonor Saunders, 2011), the FCO and the British Council have to follow certain protocols to ensure that they cannot be accused of being under government control. Neil Kinnock, for example, resigned as Chair of the British Council when his wife was appointed Minister of State in the FCO (British Council, 2010) to avoid a conflict of interest.

Nye comments that a government could retain control while giving the impression of not doing so by covert funding through intelligence agencies. He cites an example from the Cold War where the Central Intelligence Agency was secretly funding the budgets of cultural organisations. In today's information age, he comments that it would be difficult to keep this secret and: 'the price in terms of lost credibility may be very high. It is generally better to be open about funding and establish an arms-length relationship' (Nye, 2004, p. 115). Transparency is therefore a must and what the British Council needs to be clear of in its communication with everyone including its partners is that it is involved in different types of activity and it should be particularly explicit when working in activity that is public diplomacy: 'as a minimum, clarity about which we are 'doing' – whether at any given time we are 'doing' public diplomacy or cultural relations – is vital. It may not be sufficient, but it is certainly a necessary, precondition of success at trust-building' (Rose, 2004, p. 5).

Part of the misunderstanding about the British Council's relationship with government stems from not realising all the activity that the British Council is involved in and different people will have a limited view of the British Council depending on how they have personally experienced the organisation. Stonor Saunders for instance suggests culture should be: 'left to its own devices'. While it is certainly true that the British Council exhibits art in many different forms around the world it is unfair to say that this is all it does. A

³⁷ Former ambassador to Israel, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan

breakdown of its expenditure, shows that 23% is spent developing a wider knowledge of the English language, 62% encouraging educational cooperation and the advancement of education, 8% building capacity for social change, 6% encouraging cultural cooperation and 1% on governance costs (British Council, 2011a). This shows that the work Stonor Saunders is referring to only accounts for 6% of the British Council's expenditure. Furthermore, it is important to reiterate that the British Council fulfils a role that a government department would never be able to do and it does this because it is independent from government. However, without the grant-in-aid and support from government the British Council would be forced to run more and more commercially and focus would be potentially shifted away from the cultural activity to the activity which earns more revenue.

As previously mentioned, more confusion over the British Council's relationship with government arises because the British Council carries out projects as a partner of government and the differences between cultural relations and public diplomacy are not fully understood. Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles states that the British government like many others have the belief that 'if we succeed in propagating, broadcasting and promoting British values then others will subscribe to things we believe are in our national interest' (Stonor Saunders, 2011). This quote does not fit comfortably with the best practice public diplomacy that Nye described nor would it suffice as a definition for cultural relations or indeed soft power. His following statement could actually be damaging to an organisation that is keen to demonstrate its independence. Referring to the fact that the British government has spent a lot of money subsidising the BBC World Service and the British Council, he describes their activities as a 'semi-covert way of promoting UK and Western liberal values (...) I much prefer soft power to hard power. If we want to make the world a better place, better to do it through the British Council or World Service rather than by landing the parachute regiment or the commandos. We can be very, very proud of British Cultural Diplomacy (Stonor Saunders, 2011)'.

Cowper-Coles may be praising the British Council yet the description he gives of them and their purpose leans towards messaging activity rather than activity that is centred on building relationships (which require a mutual approach).

Furthermore Cowper-Coles suggestion that it is possible for the British Council to be used to promote British values on a target audience is debatable. In a recent Wilton Park conference on soft power one of the findings was that ‘evidence suggests that publics hold on to deeply ingrained perceptions of states that are very difficult to change positively’ (Wilton Park, 2011, p. 1). It is behaviour and actions that can assist in shifting public perception - the international audience needs to see for themselves how good a nation is not be told how good a nation is through an orchestrated public relations campaign. In connection with this argument, in an article on ‘nation branding’³⁸ (Fan, 2010), one of the main points is that the only way a nation can change its reputation is to first change its behaviour and then inform all the ‘people in the world’ (p. 102) about it. No matter how clever the PR strategy is, the audiences cannot be told what the truth is, they have to come to that conclusion by themselves.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the theory of soft power and public diplomacy and considered the British Council’s own definition of what it does in terms of cultural relations. The British Council forms an integral part of the FCO’s strategy which has an overall aim to keep Britain safe, make Britain prosperous and support British nationals overseas.

We may call it 'soft power', but there's nothing soft about the economic dividends that sharing culture can bring. Our own British Council research shows that English, education and culture - the UK's prime soft power assets - are helping to

³⁸ The author, Ying Fan, describes nation branding as the ‘image and reputation that a nation enjoys in the world’ (p. 100).

build trust for the UK worldwide and that trust translates into people wanting to study in the UK, visit and do more business with us (Worne, 2013b).

The British Council is important to the UK in both its work as a public diplomacy partner as well as in cultural relations,³⁹ however, this chapter has shown how misconceptions can arise because of a misunderstanding of what the British Council does and the relationship it has with government.

The British Council calls itself a cultural relations organisation and by focussing on culture and relations it can avoid the connotations of being a government agent or working in an official political capacity that the term ‘public diplomacy partner’, the FCO’s term for the organisation, may indicate. As theorists suggest (Fisher, 2009, Nye, 2004, Leonard, 2002, Rose, 2004), a focus on culture opens up doors to different levels of society, areas which it may not have success in if seen to be acting as a promoter for the British government. Perhaps for many, terms such as those mentioned above are interchangeable, however, the success of the organisation depends largely on how others perceive it. It is certainly in the FCO’s interest to have a strong public diplomacy partner to help execute priorities in foreign policy, however, the activity that the British Council conducts is not public diplomacy but rather cultural relations is also important to the UK.

Interpretations of the organisation as a propaganda machine for the British government could have a negative effect on the British Council and ultimately the UK’s soft power. The definition of what the organisation does is important and while the British Council is aware that the language it employs and the strategy and actions that it implements all play a part in the organisation’s credibility and success as a cultural relations organisation, it would be more beneficial if the FCO were more explicit in its publications of the British Council’s work in cultural relations as well as acting as its ‘partner’.

³⁹ Rose (2004) defines public diplomacy as the work the British Council do as an agent of government and cultural relations as the work carried out independently.

The definition of soft power and how to achieve it is harmonious with the views of mutuality. Engaging international audiences requires exactly that – engagement. This isn't accomplished by one way communication. This means that the British Council has to seek out activity that encourage feedback and interaction and, conversely restrict the amount of one-way information being delivered to its audience.

Nye believes that soft power has always been essential but in today's world it is an area that cannot be overlooked in foreign policy.

Winning hearts and minds has always been important, but it is even more so in a global information age. Information is power, and modern information technology is spreading information more widely than ever before in history. Yet political leaders have spent little time thinking about how the nature of power has changed and, more specifically, about how to incorporate the soft dimensions into their strategies for wielding power (Nye, 2004, p. 1).

This is an important comment in light of this thesis's aim to examine how social media or a 'virtual presence' can be employed in cultural relations and it is this line of thought that will be continued in *Chapter 3 – Social Media in Public Diplomacy*.

Overall, the effectiveness of the organisation relies on being relevant to today's society and reacting effectively to the pressures (particularly financial) facing the organisation: '(the) UK's great cultural and educational institutions and brands will need to keep on finding new smart ways to share those soft power assets (...) Spending more public money isn't the answer' (Worne, 2013b). This chapter has shown why the organisation is important to the UK's soft power and the next chapter will look at how social media can be a part of cultural relations and connecting with audiences in a way broadcasting cannot. This will provide a backdrop to *Chapter 4 – An Analysis of the Use of Social Media in the British*

Council which evaluates the social media strategy and looks at how cultural relations is incorporating this new communication into its activity.

Chapter 3 - Social Media in Public Diplomacy

3.1 Introduction

The significance of this chapter within the thesis is that it assists in drawing together my understanding of effective communication in cultural relations as well as effective social media used for the main purpose of attracting and engaging an international audience.

The statistics of social network sites in *3.2 Facts and Figures* provide the substantiation for why a cultural relations organisation should invest in social media. The next section, *3.3 Social Power: can Social Media be a Tool in Soft Power* outlines some key components necessary to using social media effectively in public diplomacy, in particular, Sandre's Rules of Engagement for public diplomacy social media. In sections 3.4-3.7 I explore social media best practice using existing examples of social media in diplomacy as well as from commercial and not-for-profit organisations. I will then use these findings to modify Sandre's Rules of Engagement to crystallize the necessary components for a successful social media strategy for the British Council. This new table of components appears in *3.8 Conclusion and Table of Components*. The Table of Components will then be used in the evaluation of the British Council's social media in the following chapter.

3.2 Facts and Figures

Social media may no longer be new (NATO Review, 2011), yet the example at the start of this chapter shows that there are those who are still experiencing teething problems '[t]he State Department has embraced the wide outreach made possible through social media, but is still developing guidelines for how sites such as Facebook and Twitter should be used in the world of diplomacy' (Telegraph.co.uk, 2013). For public diplomacy, its popularity, particularly with the young (Pew Research Centre, 2013), and the potential to reach this

group of people easily on an international scale make it easy to see why the State Department would want to be involved in social media.

Recent data shows that 42.3% of the world's population use the internet (Internet World Stats, 2014) and almost one in four of those use social media (eMarketer, 2014).⁴⁰ In addition, the social media user spends on average, 3.2 hours each day on social networking sites (The Cultureist, 2014). Social media is clearly an area which has huge reach. Below are some statistics on the biggest social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Instagram, Pinterest and LinkedIn) to date:

- Facebook has 845 million monthly users⁴¹ with a year-over-year growth of 39% (Sandre, 2013).
- Most Facebook users (80%) prefer to connect with brands on Facebook (McGrail, 2013).
- 23% of Facebook users check their accounts at least five times a day (McGrail, 2013).
- Twitter has an estimated 500 million users (Sandre, 2013).
- 69% of Twitter follows are suggested by friends (McGrail, 2013).
- 56% of tweets to companies are ignored (McGrail, 2013).
- 625,000 people join Google+ every day (McGrail, 2013).
- Websites using the +1 button (for Google+) increase page traffic by 325% (McGrail, 2013).
- On Instagram more than 5million photos are uploaded every 24 hours (McGrail, 2013).
- Pinterest has over 10.4 million users with 12 million unique visitors per month (Jobstock - Freelance Marketplace, 2012).
- LinkedIn is the world's largest professional networking site with over 200 million members in 200 countries (LinkedIn, 2013).

⁴⁰ Using 2013 figures.

⁴¹ Includes anyone who has logged in once in the last 30 days.

- 87% of LinkedIn users trust the site as a source of information that affects decision making (LinkedIn, 2013).

These statistics show the importance of social media in modern communication, it is clear to see why organisations and businesses are looking for ways of tapping into this wide audience by creating their own virtual presence.

3.3 Social Power: can Social Media be a Tool in Cultural Relations?

In May 2013, the U.S State Department's independent watchdog, the Office of the Inspector General, released a report which included heavy criticism of the department's use of public money to generate more Facebook fans. The Bureau of International Information Programs, which acts as the State Department's hub to engage with foreign audiences online and face-to-face, had reportedly spent more than \$630,000 on two advertising campaigns launched in 2011 and 2012. The drive certainly worked in increasing fans - on the English language pages, the number of fans increased by over two million on each page and the foreign language pages saw an increase of 400,000 fans. The criticism lay in the fact not only that so much money had been spent during a time of austerity but also because these fans had become fans through advertising campaigns, not because they actually had an interest in the State Department. It was reported that fewer than 2% of the fans actually engaged with the Department of States' Facebook pages (Telegraph.co.uk, 2013, Killough, 2013).

The questions that arise from this example can be applied to other organisations working in public diplomacy or cultural relations: is it really worth having these social media sites? Can social media be effective in public diplomacy? Is there a way of controlling the way users interact with these sites? And, to use technical jargon,⁴² how does an organisation get its target audience to *like*, *friend* or *follow* them? Arguably the first question has already

⁴² See appendix 1 for social media terminology

been answered - social media sites can attract a huge following and are free to set up.⁴³ The other questions require further understanding of how social media works.

In the previous chapter the FCO's aim to 'use soft power as a tool of UK foreign policy' (Office, Foreign and Commonwealth, 2011a, p. 6) was cited. Former Foreign Secretary, William Hague, outlined in his speech on Diplomatic Tradecraft (Hague, 2012) precisely how the FCO needs to be operating to be effective in soft power. He explained that the FCO needs always to be a 'strong and flourishing institution' capable of attracting the best talent, generating the best possible ideas and analysis. He also discussed the importance of having diplomatic presence in all areas of the globe with diplomats who are highly skilled in forging relationships of trust. Imperative to their skill-set is knowledge of the local culture, geography, politics and language of the country they are posted in. In terms of diplomatic skills he says that diplomats are required to be highly competent in negotiation and traditional diplomatic skills but also 'they must be well-versed in modern communication including now, very often, social media' (Hague, 2012). In discussing what he believes is essential to effective global impact, Hague clearly cites the importance of social media in modern communication but also the importance of demonstrating the right approach. His description of how to be effective in soft power is a view that is not dissimilar to Vuving's power currencies discussed in *Chapter 2.3 Soft Power and Public Diplomacy*. The approach outlined above is one that echoes with Vuving's description of benignity 'paying attention and listening to others. Respecting the rights, interests or self-esteem of others' (Vuving, 2009, p. 8) and similarly, there is a focus on 'brilliance', another of Vuving's soft power currencies, in addressing the need to attract the best people to the FCO.

Focusing on soft power, I suggest that Vuving's power currencies can be applied to social media strategy for a cultural relations organisation. I do believe, however, it would be

⁴³ Currently, popular sites such as twitter, Facebook, Pinterest and Instagram are free to join/set up an account.

difficult to enter any boardroom and advocate the applicability of benignity, beauty and brilliance in social media strategy. For this reason I argue that more pertinent terminology, in this case, would be *approach*, *administration* and *content*.⁴⁴ Firstly, the approach, as described above, could achieve benignity through respecting the voice of the audience and through simply using social media for what it is designed - to communicate with others but most crucially to listen to them. It is what is sometimes referred to in social media terms as ‘tone of voice’. Secondly, brilliance could be accomplished by good administration of social media sites - hosting well-run sites that provide high-quality information and resources. Brilliance could also refer to aspects that might be considered ‘brilliant’ by its audience, Andy Murray winning Wimbledon in 2013 for instance or a new breakthrough in a blood test to diagnose cancer in the University of Bradford (ITV News, 2014). The final currency is beauty and under Vuving’s definition of this, I suggest the British Council demonstrates ‘beauty’ in the content on its social media sites by being relevant, interesting and championing causes that are of public interest. In the book *Social Media is a Cocktail Party* (Tobin, 2008), social media is likened to a cocktail party - a guest at a cocktail party is not going to win any friends by talking constantly about subjects that are not of interest to anyone else, being impolite and, not listening to others. The terms ‘approach’, ‘administration’ and ‘content’ will be revisited in *Chapter 4 – The British Council’s Use of Social Media* where I review the British Council’s social media against the organisation’s purpose.

Andreas Sandre, Press and Public Affairs Officer at the Embassy of Italy in Washington DC,⁴⁵ has contributed a number of articles on ‘digital diplomacy’ (Sandre, 2013, 2012) and has used his observations on how diplomatic interactions work on social media to

⁴⁴ The renaming of Vuving’s terms is not intended to be interpreted as a new analytical strategy but rather using words that would be more relevant in a conversation on social media.

⁴⁵ Andreas Sandre holds this position at time of writing.

produce his ‘rules of engagement for social media’. Below is Sandre’s diagram that shows two paths on how to carry out and plan for social media in diplomacy.

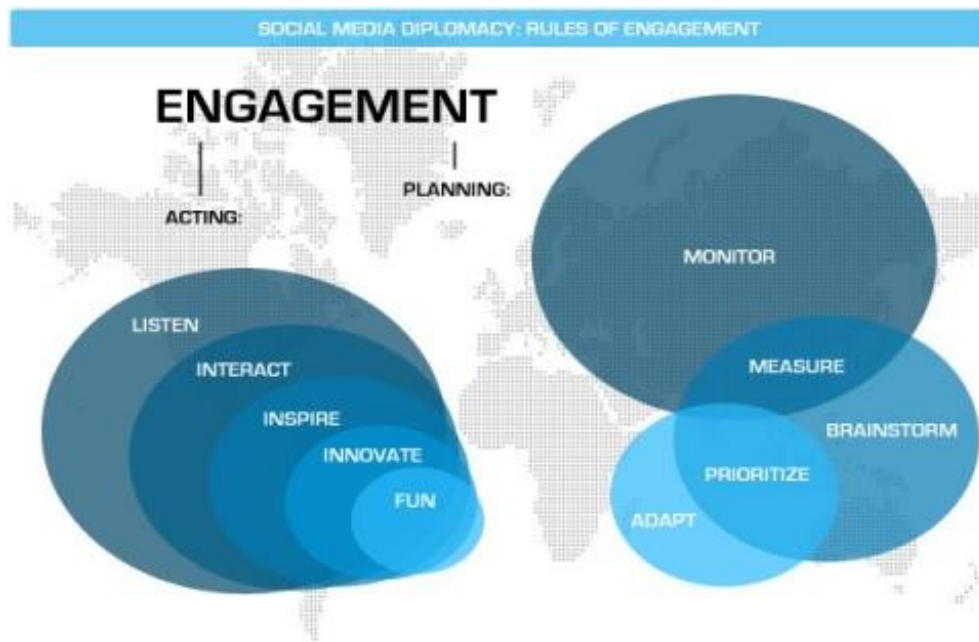


Figure 9: Andreas Sandre’s Social Media Diplomacy: Rules of Engagement (Sandre, 2012).

It is Sandre’s rules of engagement that I will use and expand upon to create a table of necessary component for the British Council to consider in its social media. Below is a table that further explains Sandre’s steps in the rules of engagement.

Acting	Planning
Listen both online and offline	Monitor activity and that of network
Interact with all relevant stakeholders and the public in general	Measure the level of engagement and influence
Inspire others in making your message theirs and thus expanding your reach	Brainstorm and analyse findings. Include staff from all levels as the best ideas might come unexpectedly
Be innovative in the message you are broadcasting and in the ways you use social media tools	Prioritise and identify what message better circulates so that you can empower your social media tools with a deeper engagement level
Fun - have fun and be personable as it’s easy to lose the reader’s attention when the message becomes boring and doesn’t reflect your personality.	Adapt and embrace new ways to communicate foreign policy agenda.

Figure 10: Created by author using text from Sandre, 2012.

In Sandre’s acting section, he highlights the importance of listening and interacting suggesting that it is important to follow as well as be followed and he criticises the fact that almost half of the world’s leaders from the Twitter accounts do not follow a single one of

their peers (Sandre, 2013).⁴⁶ Listening and paying attention to others is not only a definition of Vuving's benignity soft power currency but also an approach encouraged by the British Council. Effective social media would therefore align, in theory, to effective cultural relations or soft power.

At a European Union conference in Brussels in 2012 the US Secretary of State's Senior Advisor for Innovation, Alec Ross, stressed the importance of social media in public diplomacy (Esser, 2012).⁴⁷ Tara Sonenshine, former U.S Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy concurred with these comments adding that social media is an important and useful tool in today's society, however, she also highlights the importance of remembering it is a tool and cannot replace real interaction, 'engagement does not end with digital interactions - as is the case with our traditional shoe-leather diplomacy, relationships that begin online must be nurtured away from computers, through real-world interactions' (Esser, 2012). This is an interesting observation in light of the British Council's intentions to replace some physical presence with a virtual one and one that would suggest that the British Council's influence and impact will undoubtedly be lost in the countries where this is going to happen. Sonenshine articulates the point that social media needs to be part of the overall communication package. If the same is true for the British Council's social media, channels should, where possible, endorse local events or provide opportunities for face to face interaction.

Considering that public diplomacy works most effectively on a many-to-many basis (cited in *Chapter 2 – Soft Power, Public Diplomacy and the British Council*), modern communication enables more people from different backgrounds to engage in current affairs often in real time. Peter Cranston (2013) goes as far to claim that traditional diplomacy behind closed doors does not exist anymore and because of modern communication, even if a

⁴⁶ Analysed in research carried out by Burston-Marsteller

⁴⁷ Alec Ross held this position at time of writing.

meeting takes place ‘behind closed doors’ and is not communicated in real time then it most likely will be communicated as soon as the meeting is over. Public diplomacy it would seem has no choice other than to accept social media. Communication in real time, however, comes with the expectancy of the audience to get almost instant feedback on a comment or query. As an example in recognising how important prompt responses are on social media, KLM Airlines now displays response times to customer enquiries on Facebook and Twitter (Tnooz.com, 2015). Maintaining social media channels to ensure that they are current and keep communication flowing is an important aspect that has not been covered in Sandre’s Rules of Engagement but one that I believe any organisation who is seriously considering having a social media presence needs to take into account. Sandre notes that it is easy to lose the reader’s attention and this would certainly be the case if an account is abandoned. It is not only short-lived marketing campaigns where this takes place but often when the initial purpose for driving a social media strategy has passed ‘politicians seem to embrace Twitter during election campaigns but tend to abandon it almost completely once elected’ (Sandre, 2013, p. 24). In planning a social media channel there clearly needs to be resource to maintain the site in the long-term.

As a reminder, Nye’s definition of soft power is the ability to lead or influence through persuasion or attraction by co-opting people rather than coercing them (Nye, 2004). Reiterating an earlier point, social media is about people wanting to connect with each other. A channel or site which is not beneficial or appealing is unlikely to be popular. The example given at the beginning of this chapter shows the U.S. Department of States’ commitment to social media but where they got it wrong is that they invested money into advertising campaigns that did not clearly denote a link to the U.S Department of States to increase their fans. Their millions of fans were not there because intentionally ‘followed’ or liked the U.S

Department of States. It was therefore not surprising that only a small number of people that were reported to have engaged with its Facebook sites.

The key for social media is not the number of ‘friends’ or hits/likes that a post or channel has but how engaged that audience is (Cranston, 2013). This is advice that clearly the US Department of State did not follow before they spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on increasing the number of fans. To understand if a social media account is engaging the audience, it is worth looking at how many comments have been made on an update or a tweet and whether that has resulted in further dialogue from the original contributor or others. If the original contributor tends to respond to comments and questions, it confirms to the audience that they are listening as well as messaging (Interview: Midgley, 2013). To give an example from the commercial world, maintaining that conversation with fans appears one of the important tasks for those involved in social media at Coca-Cola. Coca-Cola responds to every tweet, around 1,500 a day, that mentions the Coca-Cola brand (The Coca-Cola Company, 2012). While social media sites may be free to create or run the cost for the British Council is employing the people with the right skills to contribute, maintain and manage social media channels. The following sections explore more best practice examples as well as highlighting some limitations of using social media.

3.6 Engaging or Broadcasting?

In *Chapter One – The British Council and its Cultural Relations Activity*, there was reference to a diagram (Figure 4) called the Index of Trust which appeared in a report by the British Council’s think tank,⁴⁸ Counterpoint, on the importance of mutual communication in building trust in cultural relations. However, in the British Council’s Corporate Plan for 2011-15, forecasted figures showed that the biggest increase was to be in broadcast and publications

⁴⁸ Counterpoint was called the British Council’s think tank at the time of the report (2010).

audience (400 million to 500 million). 100 million more people would learn about the British Council through broadcasting as opposed to mutual communication. As well as forming an essential part of communication in leveraging soft power, mutuality is a crucial approach to building trust and relationships. Considering this, steps to embrace newer forms of communication such as social media would encourage interaction with the audience.

While social media is a useful tool to get a message out, there is nothing ‘social’ about broadcasting and those using social media need to be aware of this. Peter Cranston of DiploFoundation argues that engagement is the essence of social media (Cranston, 2013). Andreas Sandre, also a member of DiploFoundation, agrees with Cranston and explains how social media can be utilised to engage audiences. Listening - an aspect that has been discussed significantly in this thesis - is an obvious requirement to change messages from broadcasting to audiences to engaging with them.

‘[L]istening has become a key element in what we call digital diplomacy. Social media made the point loud and clear to all politicians, policy makers, and diplomats around the world: we need to listen and engage with our publics to be more efficient, transparent, effective, and to better respond to new challenges. Engagement has become a key element in terms of influence and reach’ (Sandre, 2012).

Sandre is a keen advocate of being personal in social media. This was a point raised in a webinar hosted by DiploFoundation. As one of the key speakers, Peter Cranston, made the observation that engagement requires personalised communication, but also that the majority of institutions do not allow their staff enough freedom to communicate personally (Cranston, 2013). Similarly, the Ambassador to Jordan, Peter Millet, remarks that the audience will switch off if it doesn’t think whoever it is listening to is genuine. ‘An occasional touch of humour or a photograph also help to show that there is a real person behind the tweets’

(Millet, 2013). This also marks the difference between a website which represents the organisation or company and a social media channel that is led by a representative of an organisation or company.

For a partner of public diplomacy for the UK government with an aim to make relationships and build trust worldwide, social media would appear be a useful tool for the British Council in their communication, particularly, as the people they most want to build relationships with are a young international audience. Effective communication as discussed in previous chapters is a crucial part of building that trust, it is therefore logical that the British Council also has to be skilled in the tools of modern communication. Millet explains that the key is to know your audience so that the message you are giving them is appropriate and authentic: ‘you have to avoid simply repeating the official line. Engaging in dialogue is valuable. The default mode should be to interact, not just to transmit’ (Millet, 2013). It is therefore important that when the British Council use social media channels to provide updates that the posts sound personable and not institutional.

Websites or indeed, social media sites that are used for broadcasting with little thought about how to engage the audience would appear in the first circle on the Index signifying a low chance of generating trust. The aim for social media should be to encourage engagement. I suggest that the diagram helps to identify the limits that social media has in communication. While social media platforms can provide the forum to consult, to chat, to answer queries and possibly at most effective, help build relationships anything above the ‘inclusiveness’ bubble requires a more tangible relationship with the audience. That isn’t to say that social media cannot continue to be a form of communication through joint decision-making and agenda sharing but it is difficult to see how this could happen without also employing more traditional activity as well. This touches on an issue discussed in more detail in *3.5 Increasing Impact through Social Media* - it takes seconds to like, share or

comment on a status yet committing to a cause that requires having to show up in person is something else. The impact social media can have on its own is limited, however, I argue that as an integral part of a project or to assist a British Council country office with its objectives, social media is a necessity in today's society. The use of social media in broadcasting activity can incorporate an aspect of audience participation and encourage mutual understanding, networking and relationship building. Arguably this will mean that the British Council will have more influence if it has a social element in its broadcasting activities and this will position the British Council better when it is required to carry out tasks further up the Index of Trust.

In an article published on the Ministry of Defence for the Republic of Albania's website, Professor Seib from University of South Carolina urges NATO to embrace social media. He sums up why its ability to reach new audiences through engaging communication can lend itself to soft power. 'The essence of soft power is communication – listening to target audiences and responding honestly, and then continuing the conversation. A degree of political intimacy can be attained by social media that bring their users into a cyber-community' (Seib, 2012). Seib's comments on the communication that can be achieved through social media echoes the role that the British Council sees itself as fulfilling in cultural relations in order to gain influence with its audiences. Included under the heading 'influence' in *Chapter 1 – The British Council and its Cultural Relations Activity* of the British Council's International Relations Positioning Spectrum, are networking, mutual understanding, relationship building, cultural exchange and facilitation. Social media can arguably assist in each of these areas as a means of communication and a way of exchanging ideas.

While engagement may be the key way of getting most impact from social media there are many examples of organisations that use social media as a way of broadcasting and

therefore failing to capitalise on the potential impact they could have on their audiences - one such example is the FCO.

Seib explains the importance of engaging with an audience

[D]iplomacy that relies on social media has its rewards but involves considerable effort. Maintaining interactive venues requires funding and personnel. As publics around the world become increasingly empowered by the access they have to newer forms of media and broader information flows, they will expect this connectivity as a matter of course (Seib, 2012).

The FCO's Facebook page is not personal, engaging or interactive - updates are from 'Foreign Office' which I suggest creates a distance between the public and the FCO. Fisher (2010) wrote that FCO is too restrictive on its staff resulting in an obvious lack of genuine conversation. While the FCO appears to have embraced social media - this certainly seems the case when one reads through its social media guidelines, which will be discussed shortly - it does tend to use these channels to "broadcast", resulting in a lack of engagement. By contrast, individuals such as William Hague, have taken a personalised approach with social media, sending out messages and responding to comments personally.

The FCO online guide for using social media stresses the opportunities offered by social media to deliver FCO objectives such as: being transparent and accountable; allowing for ideas to be crowd sourced in the formulation of new policy; being able to manage a crisis better through being more engaged with the public, and; enabling messages to be delivered directly. As such, all members of staff would seem to be encouraged to use social media to listen, monitor and engage. In terms of freedom allowed to FCO staff, the guidelines are simply that employees: 'should not say anything on social media that [they] would not say on any other public channel' (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2013b). The guide also includes useful instructions for users, such as the importance of updating sites, 'you should

update social media channels regularly or it is not worth doing at all – tailor frequency, length and type of updates to audience needs and expectations’. There are a few rules on clearance, for example, when announcing ministerial movements and changes of policy, employees are requested to seek guidance from their head of team and/or the Press Office & Digital Department. However, the guide indicates that the FCO trust its people to be appropriate and professional allowing them freedom to use social media channels.

Peter Cranston comments that the FCO’s main Facebook site’s updates are generally all announcements rather than comments to encourage engagement (Cranston, 2013) and this is certainly true. The FCO’s Facebook page has over 21,000 followers. The 51 posts⁴⁹ are announcements on ministerial movements, appointments and current affairs such as ‘Foreign Secretary William Hague has urged Serbia to continue its progress towards EU membership, during a visit to Belgrade’ with a link to a news article. There is one post designed to elicit a response from the public such and this asks for Facebook followers to put forward questions they have on foreign policy. This example is the only one out of 51 posts where posters may expect a response (and, one month later - none of the questions asked on the Facebook page were answered). In every other post the FCO does not respond to comments made by a member of the public indicating further that the FCO Facebook page is largely for the FCO to broadcast updates rather than specifically to engage with the public.

The table below shows an analysis of ten consecutive posts from the FCO’s Facebook page. I have indicated the type of post and the details of the activity produced.

Date	Type of post	Number of Likes	Number of shares	Number of people who make comments	Number of comments made
June 1st	FCO’s opinion on news story	73	57	13	26
May 31st	Ministerial movement	19	2	4	5
May 31st	Invitation for public to ask questions on	27	1	13	32

⁴⁹ As of 31st May 2013

	policy				
May 30 th	Link to Human Rights Advisor's blog	21	3	8	3
May 30 th	Ministerial movement	21	3	5	5
May 29 th	Share of photo from UN site	57	33	2	2
May 29 th	Ministerial movement	13	6	11	2
May 29 th	Update on initiative	30	25	4	3
May 29 th	Appointment	11		5	5
May 28 th	Ministerial movement	40	26	15	12

Figure 11: Created by author using information from FCO's Facebook page May 28- 1st June 2013.

At first glance, there appears to be lots of comments on the posts. However, further analysis shows that the comments are quite often by the same people; sixty-two out of the ninety-five comments made are by the same three people. These posters are not entering a conversation but rather use the page repeatedly as a channel for their own opinion. This is another indicator that the FCO Facebook account is not really engaging the public as the comments they elicit are generally more broadcasts from largely three people.

In terms of what grabs public interest, it is the subject matter rather than the type of post that is important in the FCO's Facebook page. This of course can be used to see what is important to the public. In the table above the post that gained the most interest out of the ten analysed was the FCO's official opinion on the protests in Turkey.

We are concerned by reports of violent clashes between protesters and police across Turkey. We urge the Turkish authorities to exercise restraint and not to use tear gas indiscriminately to disperse protesters. We encourage the Turkish authorities to respect the right to peaceful protest and freedom of assembly, which are fundamental human rights in any democratic society (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2013a).

The wording of this post was the exact same wording used in press releases on the subject augmenting the argument that the site is another platform for the FCO to broadcast prescribed

headlines, which begs the question ‘where is the human voice behind this post?’ The subject clearly struck a chord with its audience and provoked a lot of ‘likes’, ‘shares’ and comments. The role of the FCO post is seemingly to initiate a dialogue that it will not become a part of it.

The second most popular was a post that shared a photo of the UN Peacekeepers asking followers to share the picture to show support for ‘the brave men and women playing a crucial role in keeping and building peace’ (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2013a). This post encouraged interaction by requesting followers to do something with it. After the post had been shared, however, there was no more interaction.

The FCO’s posts are not interactive nor do they present a personal feel to them but they do provide headlines to more than 21,000 people who are interested in receiving them. One of the purposes of the FCO use of social media is to deliver messages directly to the public. In this regard it has succeeded. By not engaging with its audience, however, it is not making the impact it might otherwise be able to. The FCO Facebook page does not demonstrate that it is listening to its audience but rather suggests that it keeps a detached position from the audience. The FCO representatives who post on this site do not use their names so the page has an institutional feel. If the FCO does use this channel to ‘crowd source ideas’, one of the FCO’s purposes for social media in its guidelines, it does so without entering dialogue with its followers.

In an interview conducted with Peter Midgley who delivered courses to individuals on how to use social media for business purposes, he commented that previously, new businesses would want a website but there is now a trend for businesses to opt for social media over a website. ‘Social media is a great way for businesses to respond to customer requests quickly, this facility can make the difference in a customer using your services or going to a competitor’ (Interview: Midgley, 2013). I argue that the FCO uses its Facebook

page for broadcasting a constant stream of information, which means it is fulfilling the same role as a website with the added benefit of information going straight to its fans on a daily basis. By contrast, William Hague's approach to social media is more interactive. When he was the UK Foreign Secretary, William Hague's preferred social media channel was Twitter (Sandre, 2013) and he used it to interact with his political counterparts and also his followers. When questioned by Sandre, the author of *Twitter for Diplomacy* 'How do you see digital diplomacy changing foreign minister role day-to-day?' he responded by saying that it is 'a good way of finding out what issues matter to people in foreign policy – with the ability to respond directly' (Sandre, 2013, p. 32). As in the case of the FCO's Facebook site, the Foreign Secretary also received a lot of tweets from followers who made comments that did not warrant a response, yet Hague seemed adept at filtering through the tweets. Hague sent 2,993 tweets since setting up his account and had over 150,300 followers.⁵⁰ There appeared to be a clear difference between the function of the FCO Facebook page and William Hague's Twitter account; the latter being a way for the public to follow, access and understand the foreign secretary. Hague's approach to social media would fit in the top section of image 3.2.

Another advocate of using social media in British public diplomacy, Peter Millet, British Ambassador to Jordan,⁵¹ comments that diplomats need to use social media.

The cold fact is that we have to play the latest game. Old methods of communications don't work. Press releases, staged interviews and even the official op-ed don't make the impact they used to. Social media: Facebook, Twitter and blogs are now the more effective way of communicating (Millet, 2013).

⁵⁰ As of June 20th 2013

⁵¹ At time of writing.

He goes on to explain that radio and television might suit some audiences but if you have key messages that you want to communicate then this can be done more frequently through Facebook and Twitter. The most important element of this statement, however, is the understanding of the ‘social’ aspect of social media. If this is not applied then there is no differentiation between social media and broadcasting or providing information through a website.

3.4 Control of Narrative

When questioned about soft power’s role in cyberspace, Joseph Nye responded that soft power was ‘well suited to the cyber domain’ he went on to explain that ‘in an information age, soft power and control of narrative will become increasingly important’ (e-International Relations, 2013). As discussed in the previous chapter, I argue that soft power is an integral part of what makes social media effective for the basic fact that people will only connect with someone through social media if they want to. Also, the ability to interact and communicate through social media enables dialogue that is not possible through television broadcasts or publications. However, I also argue that with social media, it is not a case of being ‘in control of the narrative’ but ensuring that you are part of the narrative.

While it has been suggested that Hague used Twitter effectively to engage with the public and the media (Sandre, 2013, Flanagan, 2013), criticisms have been made when politicians don’t use social media in an interactive and engaging way.

The instinct of a lot of politicians is to broadcast and they like the fact that they can use social media to get the word out. What they like less is that social media is a two-way street, and they’re opening up to engagement. (Flanagan, 2013).

The control of narrative, or lack of it, can make social media seem like a risky communication platform for those who are concerned about sending out careful, prearranged

messages, yet using social media channels to communicate openly and honestly gives out an even more powerful message - it shows that there is an interest in what other people think. As I have discussed in previous chapters listening to one's audience is important in soft power and cultural relations. This is also been shown to be important in social media.

While it is important to allow followers and friends to make comments freely on social media channels, subject of course to the rules imposed by Facebook, Twitter and so on, disparaging comments can be an unwanted consequence of social media.



Figure 12 Screenshot from FCO's Facebook page, May 28 2013.

The above screenshot shows comments from a post about terrorist attacks in Baghdad. This post attracted a lot of criticism against the UK government and William Hague. It serves as an example of how difficult it is to control the narrative on social media. Once the message is out there, it is out of anyone's control. Italian Foreign Minister Giulio Terzi is quoted as saying 'our message must be clear and strong enough to undergo the direct checks by thousands and thousands of individuals that are not familiar with diplomatic etiquette and say it as they see it' (Sandre, 2013, p. 30). It is no surprise that many are uncomfortable with the

risk of bad publicity on social media. There have certainly been social media blunders. For example, The Telegraph newspaper in 2009 decided to invite readers to comment on the Budget through Twitter using a budget hashtag in their tweets. Comments were displayed automatically and users soon became aware of the fact that the page was unmoderated (Tran, 2009). This resulted in a number of unwanted and profane posts. The page was closed the same day but not before a number of tweets had made the page and the media had caught wind of the debacle (Tran, 2009).

Speaking on this subject in an interview, Midgley agreed that one of the risks is that once something is on the Internet it is essentially there forever. This of course includes any mistakes an organisation may have made online - those using social media do 'open themselves up for criticism which can be difficult to contain once it has gone viral' (Interview: Midgley, 2013). Midgley went on to confirm that the best approach to mitigate this type of risk is to encourage the same professional outlook that you would expect in the work place.

My advice would be to apply all the rules and policies that you would elsewhere throughout your business. Most businesses would already have communication or IT policies in place which can be applied or be easily adapted to include social media. And always remember to keep it professional and treat it like any other promotional tool you would use (Interview: Midgley, 2013).

There are certainly risks involved in using social media, Peter Millet explained in his blog 'Twiplomacy' that it is important to be personal yet he also warns against 'becoming part of the story'. As an example of the risk involved in diplomacy he notes 'Embassies have been criticised when their host government disliked what they were saying on the social media' (Millet, 2013). It is important to get the tone right but to also remember the organisation you are representing. Millet goes on to explain that if you get it wrong, it is recorded and your

audience will not only hold it against you but also the organisation you represent. This point is perhaps the main inhibitor to companies and organisations using social media so those employed to use social media need to be professional and skilled so that their employers can be confident that content placed on social media sites is not only engaging and interesting but also relevant, inoffensive and in line with the organisation's values.

3.5 Increasing Impact through Social Media

Midgley also explained that most business get involved in social media because it is fashionable without thinking how they are going to use social media or how they will evaluate its effectiveness 'It is a classic example of herd mentality. Everyone else is doing it so I need to do it too, even though I might not fully understand it' (Interview: Midgley, 2013). This is a challenge for any organisation, particularly as social media is used differently according to different organisations reasons for using it. There are tools such as Klout (Klout.com) which gives a score on how influential an individual or organisation is in social media. It does this by monitoring how many people respond to information shared with them. Klout made the headlines in January 2010 by publishing its list of most influential social media accounts. The results showed that singer Justin Bieber was more influential in social media than the Dalai Lama or Barack Obama (Rushe, 2010).

In reality, measuring the impact of social media is not as straightforward. As I said previously, different businesses will have different objectives. A corporation such as Coca-Cola will obviously have more commercial objectives than a cultural relations organisation. Wendy Clark, Senior Vice President of Integrated Marketing Communications and Capabilities at Coca-Cola, commented in an interview that consumers rate and rank opinions of their friends over corporations which is why the consumer can do more for Coca-Cola's marketing than Coca-Cola can alone (The Coca-Cola Company, 2012). Clark explained that

a third-party survey revealed that Facebook fans were twice as likely as non-fans to consume Coca-Cola and ten times more likely to buy. These are clearly good key performance indicators for a commercial company and show that social media, when used effectively, is a good marketing tool for boosting sales.

The Red Cross provides a non-commercial example of how social media can be used. At times of disaster people contact the Red Cross directly through social media to provide information, ask for help and, to volunteer their services.

After the earthquake in Haiti, a hospital ran out of supplies and a local ‘tweeter’ contacted the British Red Cross via Twitter identifying the hospital’s needs and location with GPS co-ordinates. We then contacted Rapid UK who were able to respond quickly to the situation (British Red Cross, 2011).

The Red Cross now use social media as a way of reaching people who need advice in emergency situations and they say this has life-saving consequences (British Red Cross, 2011). This again is an indication that a social media audience expects responses to its updates almost immediately bolstering the view that social media channels should be checked regularly and be maintained continuously.

Organisations that can’t offer a service through social media often look for new, innovative ways to use Facebook and Twitter to engage with their audiences. In 2010, Coca-Cola used social media to pick three individuals to take part in Expedition 206, where the winners got to travel the world updating Coca-Cola fans through Facebook and Twitter updates (The Coca-Cola Company, 2013). To promote its new Five Beanz product, Heinz created a Facebook quiz application for its fans to discover what bean they were by their personality traits. Five winners were picked every hour and sent a personalized bean and those that got 10 of their friends to install the application received a goodie bag. As such, Heinz’ Facebook fans made another 30,000 fans (Moth, 2012). In another example of a more

direct approach to increase the number of fans, Heineken blew up one green balloon for every 'like' they received (Moth, 2012). Social media will have numerous innovative ideas but ultimately they all need one thing to succeed; to be liked. If their target audience likes them it is logical that people may be more inclined to buy their products, use their services or be influenced by what is being said; ultimately social media needs soft power.

The most engaging type of social media is the type that provides a service and becomes useful to its audience, in the case of Red Cross's use of social media in disaster response it is has been indispensable. However, it has to be acknowledged that although this can have a great impact on peoples' lives, it is likely to be one-off. Another use of social media for this segment that is more long term is through support groups. Having access to a group of people who have the same issues can be a great support. A study by University of Minnesota, for example, found that smokers were twice as likely to stop smoking if they had web support (Holderman, 2010). To help pinpoint the value of support groups to its members, I posted a couple of questions in a group created to help people get fit. Within a couple of hours I had several responses suggesting its members either check this page regularly or have set up alerts so they know when there is a new post. They all commented positively on the social media group experience explaining that it provided a sense of community to connect with people with the same aims and objectives. The purpose of the example is to articulate the benefits of small groups that could be created for target audiences of the British Council.

In the book *Social Media is a Cocktail Party* (Tobin, 2008), the authors explain that traditional marketing pushes while social media is meant to pull. They explain that the mistake made by people in communications-type roles is often that they try using social media in the same way as traditional media. Traditional media relies on the junk mail theory - most people will have no interest in it or want it yet a few might pick it up and read what it

has to say ‘push to a large audience and a fraction will respond’ (Tobin, 2008, p. 126). In contrast, the audience ‘pulls’ on items of social media. They actively search out items, groups, pages, blogs and so on that are relevant to them. ‘As you shape a social media community, understanding how to embrace pull is one of the core techniques. In social media, people are in control of their conversations, not the pushers’ (Tobin, 2008, p. 126). Embracing the pull technique requires an understanding of the different ways to engage the targeted community. As Midgley points out, just because the infrastructure is in place it doesn’t mean that people are going to follow it. ‘Nevertheless engagement can be achieved easily by making things as interactive as possible. For example using multimedia, designing polls, creating discussion topics or providing links to other suitable sources’ (Interview: Midgley, 2013). This is advice that could potentially be applied to the broadcasting activity in the British Council.

3.6 Activists in Our Lunchbreaks

If 23% of Facebook users are checking their accounts more than 5 times a day (McGrail, 2013), social media is clearly an effective channel to raise awareness and garner interest on issues or events. The protests in Brazil in June 2013, for instance, appeared on my Facebook page before I had read or heard about it on the news. Furthermore, when your Facebook ‘friends’ are discussing newsworthy events that they are witness to or involved in, it is more likely to grab your attention than an article in a newspaper reported by and about strangers.

In *The New Digital Age* the author’s comment on the fact that activism is a prominent feature of social media ‘the mix of activism and arrogance in young people is universal. They already believe they know how to fix things, so, given the opportunity to take a public stand they won’t hesitate’ (Schmidt, 2013). Notably, in the same way only half the number of our Facebook friends are purportedly our actual real friends (Quinn, 2011), social media

activism is also argued to be superficial. ‘Once being a revolutionary entailed total personal commitment, but today, and even more so in the future, multifaceted technological platforms will allow some to participate full time and others to participate on their lunch breaks (Schmidt, 2013, p. 124). This has to be highlighted as a limitation of social media. Support on social media does not necessarily represent a genuine support on behalf of the follower.

Taking an example from social activism, Mark Kersten cites the hype created by social media during ‘Iran’s twitter revolution’ where only 0.00025% of the Iranian population actually use twitter. The hype, he argued, was happening outside of Iran.

When, in 10 or 20 years time, we look back on the Arab Spring, will we attribute the causes and dynamics of the revolutions to Twitter, Facebook or blogs or will we respect that the upheavals and gains were achieved because of real people, in real communities, in real-time, with real grievances working to affect real change?

I think it will be the latter’ (Kersten, 2012).

Kersten explains that social media is a great tool for gaining international awareness very quickly, however, it has its limitations in social activism. The re-tweeters and Facebook sharers may grow in their masses in support of a cause yet hitting a button or two does not make these people real activists and are not necessarily going to turn up in person to make a stand.

Sharing and re-tweeting KONY2012 was a symbolic action, the merits of which we can debate. But it was symbolic action taken almost exclusively by people who were never activists in the first place. This helps to explain why Invisible Children’s campaign to “Cover the Night” – which required real activists – was such an epic flop (Kersten, 2012).

In the same way that campaigners cannot rely on the number of their Facebook and Twitter fans, other organisations cannot cite their large number of social media followers as proof

that their marketing and communication strategies are effective. It also highlights the need to remember that social media is only one tool in the toolbox. It needs to be backed up with real communication and interaction. In the same vein, at a conference on Leveraging Culture and Diplomacy in the Age of Information (Sonenshine, 2013), Tara Sonenshine, U.S Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, remarked on how useful social media is proving in providing links between people worldwide. She argued, however, that social media was ‘no substitute for face-to-face encounters’ and proceeded to highlight actions carried out by her department which had created a positive impact for the people involved. Her point was that these actions are more likely to have impact and to build relationships, understanding, prosperity and strengthen the United States’ national security. Social media has its limitations.

A study conducted to evaluate the impact and effect of digital communication on everyday life. It considered how this form of communication could both enhance life and business (such as augment productivity) but also prove to be a poor substitute for ‘real’ communication to such an extent that the authors call it asocial activity. ‘Face-to-face and even telephone communication among friends, family, and colleagues, are as much about affect as information. (...) [digital communication] misses the eye contact, body language, facial expressions, vocalization, hugs, tears, embraces, and giggles that are the fundamentals of our socio-emotional evolution’ (Nie, 2004).

There is no evidence from William Hague’s comments that social media will replace face to face encounters, in fact his quote from earlier suggested the opposite and that the FCO needed the best people on the ground. Social media is a tool that should be used to supplement existing activities and help to communicate with people. One of the British Council social media channels that will be evaluated in the next channel is the country Facebook channel for British Council Iran. The significance of this channel is that there is no

country office in Iran, so this channel will be assessed with a view to understanding how social media might work in isolation of any other activity.

3.7 Table of Components Necessary to Social Media

The argument throughout this chapter is that more engagement and more interaction on a social media application results in more success; the audience is going to pay more attention to whatever it is the organisation is saying if they feel part of that conversation and if they feel their views are considered. This will result in the organisation:

- having more influence on its audience
- having a better idea of what is important to its audience, meaning that the organisation and its audience will, as a result, understand each other better and there will be more opportunities created for new relationships to be made. To use the language of the British Council Key Performance Indicators (KPI's), effective social media will result in greater *reach* and greater *impact*.

An organisation like the British Council needs to consider what it can do to make its social media applications encourage a high level of engagement. In designing a suitable strategy that attracts its target audience to its social media applications it is using the pull (rather than push) approach. The organisation brings people together from different countries with the main aim of earning their trust, '[t]he British Council's work builds trust because it is founded on an interest in other cultures and people and it is done in a manner which is reciprocal, mutual and professional' (British Council, 2012i). I would expect the British Council to be considering how it can use social media in a way that is 'reciprocal, mutual and professional' and provide content which highlights its interest in different culture and people.

Using what has been discussed in this chapter on social media and in previous chapters on the British Council and soft power, I have developed Sandre’s Rules of Engagement that appeared previously in this chapter to create a framework to use when evaluating the British Council’s use of social media. The components in the table have been organised into the categories entitled planning, content and, ongoing. As this is a sum of what has been said previously, I will not describe each point, however, the components in this table will be discussed and analysed in more detail in the following chapter, *Chapter 4 – An Analysis of the British Council’s Use of Social Media*.

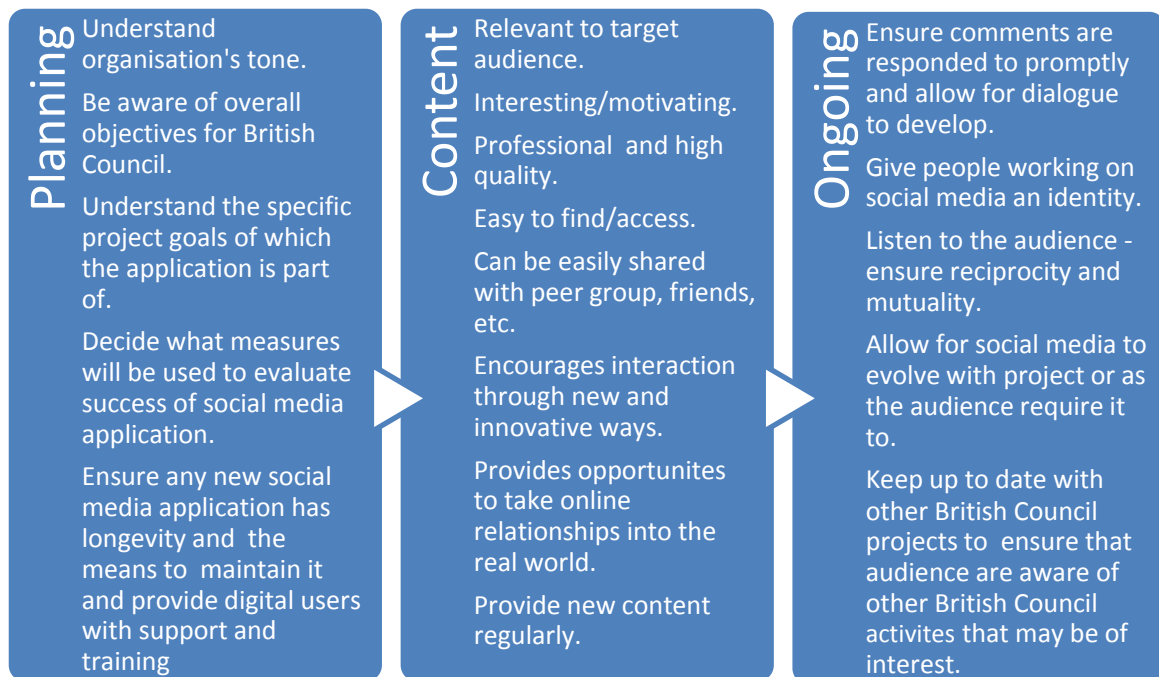


Figure 13: Table of Components

Some of the criteria in the table above will be easy to assess when the British Council’s social media is examined. It will be apparent quite quickly for instance, if comments are responded to in a timely manner. However, other criteria such ‘understanding the organisation’s tone’ will require more in-depth understanding of the social media strategy through interviews. In the next chapter, this table will be developed to show how social media is assisting the

organisation in meeting its main objectives but this framework will serve as an initial examination of how the British Council's social media.

3.8 Conclusion

There is clear evidence that social media is a useful tool for organisations and individuals yet it is important to understand its limitations. Along with the argument that social media is a useful tool, particularly for an organisation in public diplomacy which can use it to facilitate communication and disseminate to an international audience, share ideas and collaborate, it is important to remember that it cannot replace real activity- that is face to face communication and actions. It takes less than a second to like, share or re-tweet a message and as mentioned in this chapter, our friends on social media are not all genuine friends. Sonenshine's comment on there being no substitute for face-to-face encounters echoed a conversation I had with a British Council representative in a discussion on the planned increase in digital visitors of the organisation who remarked 'our USP is our face-to-face activity' (Interview: Chambers, 2011). I argue that the British Council should embrace social media to supplement the work they are already doing.

The digital age has forced us into ever closer intimacy. Our modes of communication are no longer constrained by geography or cultural divisions. More and more people converse, operate, trade, invest, interact, and take decisive and groundbreaking action - with social media as their central tool. So, more people than ever are accessing and sharing information about their cultures - virtually and in real space (Sonenshine, 2013).

Digital communication if used effectively could assist the British Council in increasing their impact and reach, as suggested by Sir Vernon Ellis in the Foreword to the 2011 Annual Report (British Council, 2011c). It should, therefore, consider carefully how it is going to

present what it does to the rest of the world through social media channels and this is what will be examined in the following chapter.

Chapter 4 - An Analysis of the British Council's Use of Social Media

4.1 Introduction

This chapter details how the British Council is using social media and takes into consideration the areas identified in *3.6 Conclusion and Table of Components Necessary to Social Media* as being important to the British Council's social media. The methodology for this case study analysis is laid out in *4.2 Methodology*. I then review the British Council's strategy for social media in *4.3 The British Council's Social Media Strategy* and then analyse the use of the social media from three different British Council country channels to outline what is happening in practice and whether or not social media is aligned to the organisation's main purpose (sections 4.5 – 4.7).

Social media is a relatively new focus for the British Council. The new digital strategy, as laid out in the Corporate Plan 2011-2015 and led by Harriet Green and Myra Hunt (Digital Directors of the British Council), has largely involved developing and implementing the new website (Interview: Blundell, 2013a). In November 2011, it appointed David Blundell (previously Marketing and Communications Manager at British Council in Spain) as Head of Social Media. Prior to this there was no social media department. However, while there had previously not been an official department for social media, numerous British Council country offices had dabbled in social media. An abundance of channels had sprung up across the British Council network, many without any planning or management and as such, Blundell's first task was to remove over 130 dead or duplicate sites (Interview: Blundell, 2013a).

The British Council's social media profile is as following:⁵²

- 150 Facebook sites
- 110 Twitter sites

⁵² At time of writing, (18th March 2014)

- 20 blogs
- 1 linkedIn corporate site
- A handful of Flickr sites
- (In China) Renren and Sina Weibo
- Pinterest is currently being reviewed as another potential social media outlet

As Facebook and Twitter account for 90% of social media activity at the organisation, my focus of analysis is on these channels.

4.2 Means of Analysis

The methodology for this research was determined by the level of access I was given to British Council internal documents and numerous interviews with the Social Media Manager, the Digital Country Manager for Iran, the Digital Regional Manager and the Country Head for Iran. I was also given access to the organisation's newly created software that monitors social media activity on British Council. I was given a demonstration of this tool in its early testing stages and I was also given a link that gave me access to the monitor during my research. I had this access before the monitor was implemented across the organisation or used by senior management. This not only allowed me to examine the British Council's social media against the areas more comprehensively but gave me invaluable insight into the direction the British Council is heading in terms of digital communication.

Prior to the collection of the data, a pilot test on the British Council's UK social media channels was carried out (on 5th March 2014) with the aim of identifying how to organise the information available and how I was going to find it (by reviewing social media channels accessible to the public, the social media monitor which I required access to and through interview). The completed pilot test is in Appendix 2.

The pilot test involved making observations (using the British Council's main Facebook site) against the components listed in *Chapter Three – Social Media in Public Diplomacy*. Completing the pilot highlighted a number of concerns in the simple methodology of recording observations. Firstly I realised that observations recorded on a number of spreadsheets was not the optimal way to present the results. I also realised that I needed to consider a way of presenting my findings that would offer an evaluation of social media performance against those components.

In addition to analysing social media performance I also wanted to be able to define how far social media in the British Council was aligned to the organisation's overall aims. Throughout Chapter 1 and 2 I draw on a number of views on how cultural relations should be carried out. Many of these views mirror theories on how social media should be used to be more effective such as mutuality in communication and the importance of sharing information but not broadcasting. I wanted to be able to use what I had learnt from these theories to demonstrate whether or not there was an alignment to the British Council's overall objective to build relationships and trust between people of the UK and overseas despite the obvious limitations of social media.⁵³ In light of my findings from the pilot study, it became apparent that the study required a three step process.

4.2.1 Step One

The first step reviews the British Council's use of social media against the Table of Components. As a reminder, these components were largely adapted from Sandre's (2012) ideas on 'Social Media Diplomacy' and then added to using specific knowledge of the British Council and through exploring other social media examples, all of which are outlined in *Chapter 3 The use of Social Media in Public Diplomacy*. One of Sandre's suggestions,

⁵³ Some of which are outlined in *3.10 Activists in their Lunch Break* and others will be discussed in *5.4 The Role of Social Media in Different Areas of Cultural Relations*).

which is included in the Table of Components, is for companies to identify the measures that will be used to evaluate successful social media application. I therefore used my knowledge of the British Council’s ‘Success Criteria Framework’ (British Council, 2014e) to include these measures within my study. These include, for instance, targets for response times, the frequency of posts and the use of links to other British Council activity. This does not imply that I will use the same measurement to gauge success but rather to evaluate adequacy of the existing success criteria.

4.2.2 Step Two

To define areas of strength and weakness I opted to use RAG analysis⁵⁴ as a way of grading the results of each component reviewed.

The observations will be colour coded accordingly:

Colour	Specification	Example
Green	Observations indicate that the British Council is successfully meeting the criteria set for this component.	<i>Component: When using search engines for keywords related to British Council projects/interests, do British Council social media channels appear in top ten. Answer: Yes – it is the first entry from Google and Facebook searches.</i>
Amber	Observations indicate that British Council is meeting the criteria set for this component most of the time or regularly.	<i>Component: Minimum response time (3 hours being met). Answer: Average 9 hours – sometimes they respond straight away at other times they take a lot longer</i>
Red	Observations would indicate that the criteria set for this component is never met or does the opposite to what is advised.	<i>Component: Objectives relate to higher business plan. Answer: No planner completed therefore no objectives set for social media strategy</i>

Figure 14

Having completed the spreadsheets by these colours, Microsoft Excel formulas calculate the number of red, amber and green results to give a picture of how well the country was

⁵⁴ Red, Amber, Green. Red to indicate a weakness, amber to indicate fair performance and green to show strong performance.

performing in social media based on my observations. The result of this calculation will then be presented by pie-chart in *4.6 Social Media in Practice* to show proportions of strength and weakness.

4.2.3 Step Three

The final step considers how the components support the organisation's overarching objectives. Success in social media for the British Council would assume that the goal for this technology is aligned to the British Council's goal to build relationships and trust worldwide. How the British Council does this to optimum effect encapsulates the theories on soft power and building trust to gain greater impact all discussed in *Chapter Two - Soft Power, Public Diplomacy and the British Council*. These theories coupled with research on how social media is best deployed in public diplomacy (in *Chapter 3 - Social Media in Public Diplomacy*) help to form an argument that social media could, if used correctly, assist in reaching a wider audience, build trust and facilitate the opportunity for people overseas to make contact and build relationships with people from the UK.

To repeat the argument put forward in *Chapter 3.4 – Social Power – can Social Media be a Tool in Cultural Relations?*, and considering how best to capitalise Vuving's soft power currencies, social media in the British Council social media needs to focus on *approach, content and administration*.

The approach (or in social media language 'the tone of voice') need to consider everything that the British Council wants to characterise as an organisation and a representative of British culture. This should clearly exemplify mutuality and transparency as per the arguments put forward by theorists on the subject (Sandre, 2013, Vuving, 2009, Nye, 2004, Fan, 2010, Rose, 2004).

Content, considering Vuving’s theory on soft power currencies (Vuving, 2009), should present the UK as benign, beautiful and brilliant by sharing information on the treasures of its culture, the competence and advancement of the UK’s economy, science and technology whilst also taking an interest in the different peoples and cultures of its target audience. It also needs to be relevant to its audience and provide a wealth of credible, interesting and useful information. Awareness of world issues targeted by the British Council in their public diplomacy activities alongside, for instance, UNICEF and DFID can also be raised in social media channels.

Social media channels need to demonstrate brilliance, need to be well run, look professional and have dedicated resources that would manage the channels in order to post items frequently and respond to any queries and comments by its audience in a timely manner. Therefore competent administration of social media is an important part in contributing to its success. The text in Figure 19, below, indicates how the components were reorganised by these categories.

Step 3		
Approach	Content	Administration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow for dialogue to develop. Give people working on social media an identity. Listen to the audience - ensure reciprocity and mutuality. Encourages interaction through new and innovative ways. Provides opportunities to take online relationships into the real world. Understand organisation's tone. Be aware of overall objectives for British Council. Understand the specific project goals of which the application is part of. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow for social media to evolve with project or as the audience require it to. Keep up to date with other British Council projects to ensure that audience are aware of other British Council activities that may be of interest. Relevant to target audience. Interesting/motivating. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure comments are responded to promptly Provide new content regularly. Professional and high quality. Easy to find/access. Can be easily shared with peer group, friends, etc. Decide what measures will be used to evaluate success of social media application. Ensure any new social media application has longevity and the means to maintain it.

Figure 15 Step 3⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Note that the category ‘content’ includes different components to the category ‘content’ in the Table of Components step one.

4.2.3 Presenting the Results for Step Three

The example below shows how the results were recorded and calculated. These results can then be converted into a pie chart to show proportions of strengths and weakness within these three categories.

	Results	Red	Amber	Green	Totals
Approach	Transparency		1		1
	Tone		1	4	5
	Mutuality/Engagement		2		2
Content	Relevance	1	2	3	6
	Ongoing evaluation, training and adjustments	1		7	8
Administration	Quality			1	1
	Ease of Access			1	1
	Maintenance and Management	1	2	3	6
	Totals	3	8	19	30

Figure 16: Example of how results in Step Three are calculated (Zambia)

In organising the components under these headings, the intention of the final step of this process is to define areas of strength and weakness in these three areas and theoretically point to the type of improvements the British Council could make in its use of social media to make it more effective for the organisation's aims.

4.3 Limitations of Study

It is worth restating at this point that the British Council social media strategy is at an early stage of implementation. At time this research was carried out, the social media framework documents, that will be discussed in due course, had only been released to the global offices in the previous six months. It is also important to remember that this research provides a snapshot of social media activity in 2013 within a limited timeframe. While I have reviewed many different British Council social media channels over the period of two years, I limited

my actual study to an analysis of posts within a 72 hour, Monday to Wednesday. My rationale for choosing these days was after reviewing analysis on the best and worst days to post on different social media. ‘Decent interaction’ on Facebook during the working week was reported to be on Mondays and Tuesdays (Social Media Today, 2013), whereas the best day for posting on Facebook was Wednesdays at 3pm (Kelly, 2012). Twitter’s best time for posting was reported to be Monday between 1pm and 3pm (Kelly, 2012).

Another limitation to this study is the analysis of tone. While I believe I have a firm understanding of what the British Council hopes to achieve in its social media tone of voice, interpretation of tone is clearly subjective. To get a true understanding of how the British Council’s social media audience is interpreting that tone, the research would ideally have included surveys on the different audience groups from different countries and, conducted in the local language. Another way of understanding how the British Council is being perceived via its social media is through interviews such as those carried out by Barakat and Holt following 9/11 to understand public opinion of the British Council (Barakat, 2005).⁵⁶ These types of study were beyond the scope of this research, however, I have observed the audience reaction to the British Council’s posts and also defined in the tables in Appendix 3 why posts may or may not be achieving the desired tone.

As described in *I.6 Methodology*, three British Council countries’ use of social media was analysed. The countries reviewed comprised the top two performing countries in social media, according to the British Council Social Media Monitor, Venezuela and Zambia and also the only country that currently has a social media presence but no office: Iran.⁵⁷ Considering that many British Council channels are new to social media I wanted to be able to evaluate established channels and look at what the British Council is suggesting is

⁵⁶ More detail of this particular study is discussed in *Chapter 1 – The British Council and its Cultural Relations Activity*.

⁵⁷ At the time I carried out my study (March 2014), this was the case. However, Syria where there is also no British Council office, now has a digital community (Interview: Whitehead, 2015).

successful so I could use my own methods to test those levels of success as well as gauge an understanding of how aligned social media is to the organisation's core objectives. As I have written previously, Iran is an important country to review as it provides an example of the British Council delivering cultural relations through limited means and may provide some insight into how the British Council will engage audiences in other countries that do not have a British Council office.⁵⁸

Taking into account these limitations, I remain confident that the results provide a strong bearing (at the time of research) on the current status of each social media channel studied and provide a sound indication of how different British Council digital teams use social media.

4.4 The British Council's Social Media Strategy

As described in 'Step One' in 4.2 *Methodology*, the strategy of the organisation was evaluated against the criteria outlined in the Table of Components.⁵⁹ This section will conclude with the Table of Components diagram to illustrate which components have been considered in current strategy of social media in the British Council.

4.1.4 The Evolution of Social Media in the British Council

Shortly after starting his new role, Blundell wanted to highlight internally the impact that social media could have for the British Council. He began by alluding to the use of social media in high profile projects. Two of these projects were Education UK and Going Global. Education UK, aimed at attracting overseas students to the UK opened its Facebook page in October 2012. The Facebook site has 66,457 followers which is 550% more than this last

⁵⁸ In the coming years, it is likely that more British Council offices will close (in non-priority countries in Europe). It is these countries that will have an increased focus of social media strategy in compensation for the loss of a physical presence (Interview: Blundell, 2014b).

⁵⁹ Step two and three of the process rely on evaluating social media output and therefore not applicable to review of strategy.

time last year.⁶⁰ One of the reasons Blundell attributes to the site's success is good management; a Community Manager who responds quickly to site users enquiries. Additionally, Education UK is a global site and is hosted by several countries. This means that when the UK closes, the US office, for instance, can respond to users' questions (Interview: Blundell, 2013a). It reflects how the organisation has reacted to the expectation for an almost instant response via this means of communication.

The Education UK Facebook page has made one post per day since the start of 2013. These are on a variety of topics that relate to living or studying in the UK or of a national treasure or event. One post for instance 'Are you interested in finding out how much it costs to study in the UK?' posted on April 15th 2013 provides a link to the UK Council of International Student Affairs (UKCISA). This particular post received 33 likes, 8 comments and 33 shares. 100% of the posts made in 2013 received likes/comments indicating that the posts have relevance to its audience.⁶¹

A screen shot of this page is below.

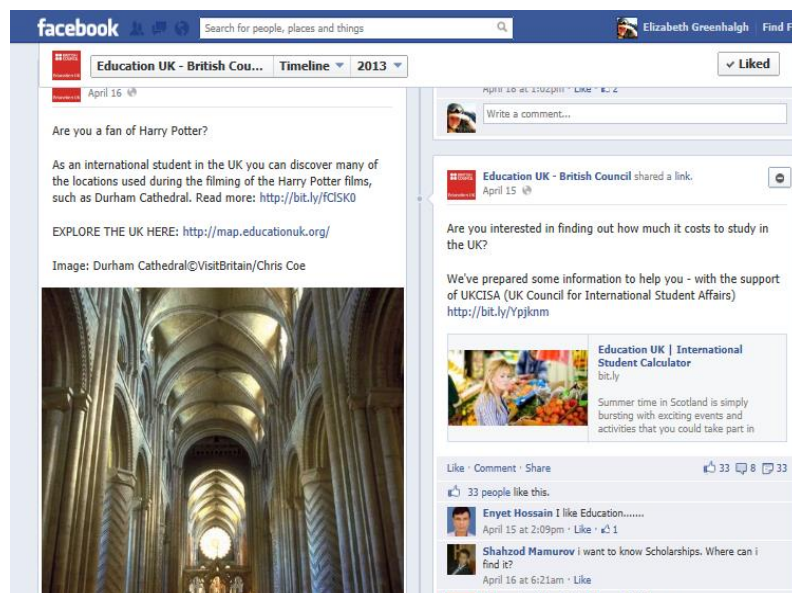


Figure 17 Screenshot of Education UK Facebook page from 16th April 2013

⁶⁰ Authors observations from April 2013 to April 2014.

⁶¹ Authors observations from April 2013 to April 2014.

The success of the example given, however, was not replicated across all sites of the British Council. Following research on a mixture of corporate and non-for-profit groups, Blundell carried out a number of significant steps towards a clearer and managed direction for the British Council's use of social media. This included the creation of the British Council's social media guidelines,⁶² and a social media monitor for the organisation intended to (including identifying the measures to be used) and pulling together a number of individuals that could act as the British Council's social media champions, named Team Social.⁶³

In early 2013, Blundell and Team Social conducted a survey across the organisation to identify gaps in social media. The results of this survey allowed them to develop a standardised method by clearly defining analytics across the group.⁶⁴ This included consideration of how social media will integrate with the organisation's marketing and communications as well as higher business aims (Interview: Blundell, 2013a). This addresses two components in the Table of Components 'Be aware of overall objectives for the British Council' and 'Understand the specific project goals of which the application is a part of'.

Blundell subsequently produced two main documents to assist those working in social media across the British Council network (Interview: Blundell, 2013b). These provided guidelines in planning, implementation and evaluating its success. These are the Social Media Strategy Pack and the Social Voice Framework which also includes the Social Criteria Framework.

To provide a guide on the different personalities of the British Council, Team Social produced the Social Voice Framework (Interview: Blundell, 2013b). It suggests there are eight main different personalities:

- Confident

⁶² The BBC, Nokia, Red Cross and Coca Cola were among these companies.

⁶³ Blundell believes in an organisation as large and multinational as the British Council it is crucial to have a variety of people across the globe pioneering and representing the social media strategy (Blundell, 2014a).

⁶⁴ The author did not have access to these surveys.

- Independent
- Inspiring
- Friendly
- Respectful
- Trustworthy
- Focused
- Engaging

In addition to these ‘personalities’, the document also explains that the posts on social networks should aim to be worldly, inspiring, inclusive, vivid, and authoritative. A quick description explains what this means; ‘We are “worldly”. We are informed and entertained about the world, with expertise and experience in how it works. We understand people and respect them. Our insight and open-minded approach form the foundation of everything we say’ (British Council, 2014e). This document sums up the tone of voice that is encouraged for people within the British Council to adopt when using digital media. It also sums up the image that the British Council hopes to project through its people.

Arguably the people who work for the British Council were employed on the understanding that they possess at least some of these key attributes. In the job application process for the British Council, there is a list of behaviours expected of British Council staff and all of the adjectives used to describe the above personalities (apart from vivid, which perhaps focuses specifically on visual communication) appear in the following behaviours: ‘create a shared purpose’, ‘connecting with others’ and ‘shaping the future’ (British Council, 2011g). It is therefore logical that the British Council’s promotion of a certain organisational culture has the purpose of projecting a positive image to enable it to be more effective in its objectives.

The Social Media Strategy Pack covers important aspects of social media planning and monitoring. As this document is key to understanding social media strategy at the British Council, I have included a more comprehensive description in Appendix 4. In brief, however, it includes housekeeping rules, guidelines for the management of channels, ensuring awareness of target audiences and wider organisation as well as specific country or project objectives. The Success Criteria Framework which is part of the Social Media strategy pack clearly defines the metrics to be used to measure performance. These are:

- a. Minimum fans/followers/unique page visits
- b. Target fans/followers
- c. Minimum actions per day
- d. Frequency
- e. Minimum response time
- f. Target Klout score⁶⁵

These criteria were added to the Table of Components under ‘decide what measures will be used to evaluate success of social media application’ for review in the next section.

In summary, the current strategy for social media at the British Council covers all the main aspects of the category ‘Planning’ in the Table of Components. The one area that had not yet been outlined was ongoing training programmes for social media users within the British Council although a culture of knowledge sharing and indeed encouragement of staff to use internal social media to seek out new talent and ideas was discussed in Blundell’s plans for the year ahead (Interview: Blundell, 2014b).

The diagram below shows how the documents created by Blundell align with those in the Table of Components.

⁶⁵ Klout is discussed in the previous chapter 3.9 *Increasing Impact through Social Media*.

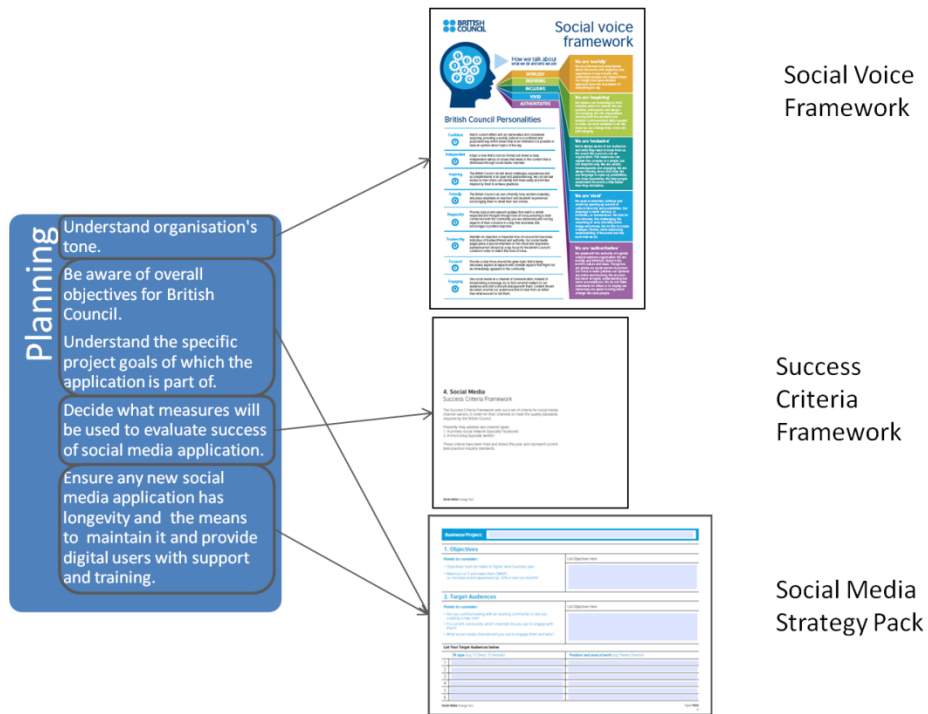


Figure 18: How the British Council’s strategy for social media meets the components in the Table.

4.2.2 In-House Evaluation

In terms of evaluating its own performance, Blundell began developing a Social Media Monitor for the British Council in 2013.⁶⁶ Team Social assisted in testing different evaluation methods and with user testing of the new monitoring system. Blundell explained that in the construction of the system, he would ask five different people in five different locations across the globe for feedback on one of the new functions and within hours have the information required to progress; an example of how efficient and (almost) instant communication can assist in business processes.

The Monitor is a governance tool to keep track of all the different social media presences across the organisation. Through using scoring and heat maps to show activity levels, this tool can provide information, particularly to Heads of Regions who will have access to the Monitor, to see exactly what is happening on social media channels and also to

⁶⁶ For the procurement process of this tool, Blundell looked at various off-the-shelf products and then chose Agile Developers (after a tender was put out to three different suppliers) to build a bespoke system for the British Council.

explore underperformance. These pages also show graphs of activity levels and windows which show actual tweets/updates that have been sent out on these channels. Looking at the activity levels will show spikes when activity has taken place. Looking at the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region for example, there are spikes on every Monday when they host an ‘English Doctor’ session. This is where those learning English can ask questions about the language or get help with any difficulties they are encountering in their learning (Interview: Blundell, 2013b).

Incorporated into the Social Media Monitor is the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that Blundell had established for social media. The social media KPIs, ‘Reach’, ‘Engagement’ and ‘Quality’ were originally suggested. After consideration of the importance of appropriate content, the KPI ‘Relevance’ was also added. (Interview: Blundell, 2014a). Reach relates to the number of fans/followers a channel has, engagement is the interaction between the host and the audience (this will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent sections) and quality refers to the channels using the correct avatar, logos and images that add to its professional appearance. The final KPI, relevance is whether or not the content posted is relevant to its audience. At the time of research, this function on the system had not been completed. I was unable therefore to review this as a KPI.

The Social Media Monitor was particularly useful for gathering the information I required for analysing activity but also in understanding how the organisation was evaluating social media. Through my ongoing discussions, I was able to follow the evolution of the Social Media Monitor and was provided access to it via a link. As this access was given to me prior to the system being rolled out, it ultimately meant that I was able to review areas of strength and weaknesses in the early stages of this drive in social media strategy.

Below is a picture of the heat map for countries using social media in the British Council. This is a screen shot taken on 26th March 2014.⁶⁷ Countries that appear in red are underperforming (according to the British Council’s own evaluation method used in this system). The countries appear greener the better they are performing.

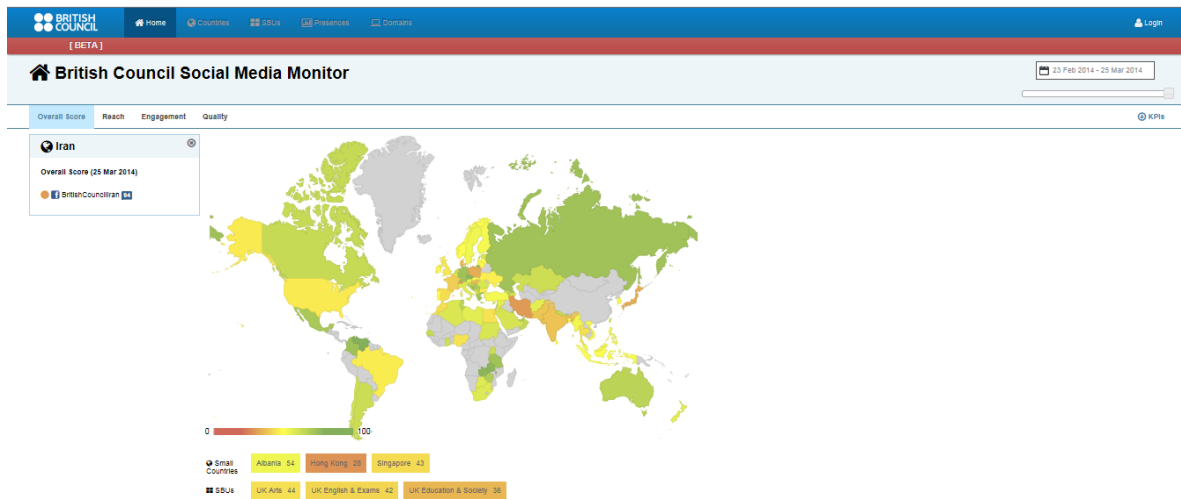


Figure 19: Screenshot from British Council Social Media Monitor from 26th March 2013

When a country is clicked on, a table appears on the left hand side to show a breakdown of scoring by each channel. The example shows Iran has one social media channel (Facebook).⁶⁸ The user can then select the KPI headings to drill down into performance in these areas.⁶⁹

Considering the choice of KPIs I questioned how these fitted into one of the main objectives that the British Council has – to build trust. I wanted to understand how social media could give the impression of an organisation that could be trusted. Blundell drew on various aspects, however, he honed in on the importance of quality as an important factor for raising trust, ensuring that information provided is transparent and of value to its audience. For this reason Blundell believes that Quality is an important KPI for social media evaluation. He also explained that a standardised marketing approach was required: that all

⁶⁷ In the red banner, the word [BETA] appears showing that the system is still in testing mode.

⁶⁸ The digital strategy for Iran now also includes an unbranded Facebook channel.

⁶⁹ Note that the Relevance KPI for the system is still being developed at the time of writing and as such does not appear on the screen shot

users were using the correct avatar and the correct tone; that duplicate and dead sites were removed; and that careful consideration went into planning new ways of using social media to ensure that a new Facebook group, Twitter channel or blog, for instance, was not a ‘random act of marketing’ but rather a long-term commitment with social media channels that present the organisation as an authority on its expertise (Interview: Blundell, 2013a).

4.2.3 Review against Table of Component

In terms of the other components that have been met in the Table of Components the diagram below shows ticks against these components.

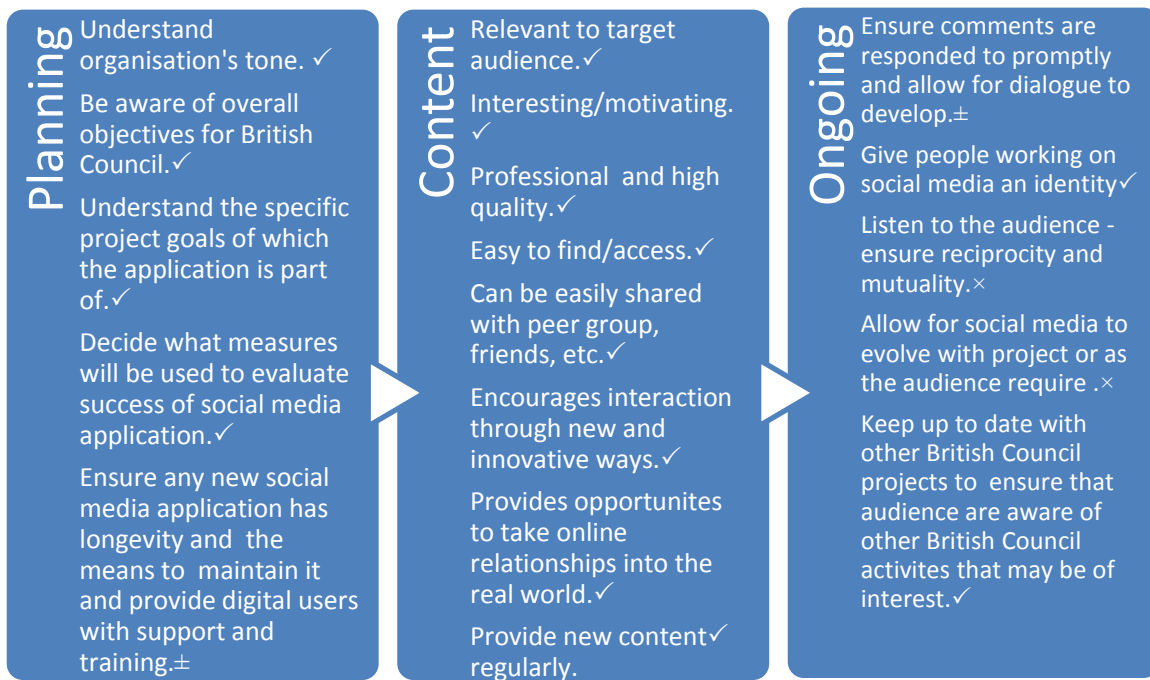


Figure 20: Table of Components – components met by British Council strategy have been ticked.

Closer inspection of the components that have not been ticked suggests there could perhaps be more encouragement for mutual communication and opportunity for dialogue to develop in social media communication. There are of course resource implications, as social media

dialogue increases with more social media followers. British Council staff using social media often does so alongside its other duties (Interview: Blundell, 2013a).

The Social Voice Framework document highlights the need to sound like an individual and not an institution. In *Chapter 3 – Social Media and Public Diplomacy* one of the theorists on social media relates this communication to a cocktail party, explaining that to be a successful guest at a cocktail party requires you to listen as well as talk to your guests and be interesting (Tobin, 2008). Presumably, the same logic applies to what we call ourselves on social media sites – a British Council representative would not attend an event and introduce him/herself as ‘British Council representative’. Part of the challenge for the British Council is for those who use social media to create an identity that fits into the, arguably broad spectrum, of its social media voice guidelines. Millet highlights the importance of genuine communication ‘[f]inding the right style and tone can be tricky, but if your followers don’t regard it as genuine, they will switch off. An occasional touch of humour or a photograph also help to show that there is a real person behind the tweets’ (Millet, 2013); it is important to represent one’s “self” as well as the organisation represented.

Team Social represents the social media face of the British Council; diverse in culture but also in personality highlighting Blundell’s view that the British Council and indeed British Council social media should reflect the people it represents rather than the institution (Interview: Blundell, 2014b). In reinforcing this particular message, Blundell and Team Social created a video of how different personalities should make up the organisation’s social media rather than institutional broadcasting (Interview: Blundell, 2014b). This video was released at a conference on social media in San Diego in 2014. Blundell acknowledges that there are challenges in managing social media for such a diverse global organisation with so many different offerings and while he stresses the importance of a standardised and considered approach, his decision to move away from central control and broadcasting is

resolute. Alluding to an example where a company (Reebok) controls all its channels out of one office, ensuring the message sent out is exactly the same in every language and in every Reebok channel, Blundell emphasised his belief that the individual personalities are what makes social media successful (Interview: Blundell, 2014b). This relates to the component ‘Give people working on social media an identity’, however, there is no suggestion that digital users at the British Council should use their own name as a handle on social media channels.

Earlier in this chapter, *approach*, *content* and *administration* are cited as being important in working towards the British Council’s main purpose. Currently, the British Council’s strategy (including the internal documents produced) has certainly covered these aspects. Apart from the internal documents, there does not appear to be any structured training currently provided on social media. There is, however, a growing network of Digital Managers and Regional Digital Managers and Blundell commented that the Monitor will be helpful to these digital managers to use the results of the Monitor and discuss with users what *is* and what *isn’t* working, share innovative ideas and help to build a support network amongst digital users within the British Council (Interview: Blundell, 2013b).

The British Council may well have underestimated the potential number of people it can reach via social media channels (reasons for this will be explained in due course) and it is important that the people who have the power to connect with the British Council’s audience are digital natives or at the very least digital immigrants; professionals who understand social media and how to connect with audiences through it.⁷⁰ The British Council’s appointment of Blundell, who has extensively researched social media to build a firm understanding of what is effective in social media, reflects an acknowledgement that social media is a part of the

⁷⁰ The term ‘digital native’ refers to a person who has grown up with digital technology whereas a ‘digital immigrant’ is someone who hasn’t been born into the digital world but has adopted digital technology and fully integrated it into their life (Prensky, 2001).

organisation's future. That he is now requested to speak and attend social media conferences outside the British Council is an acknowledgment of his contribution in this field. Similarly, the organisation has also invested in a useful tool to evaluate and track progress of its social media performance. What remains to be discussed, however, is whether this strategy has been implemented successfully; is social media in the British Council doing what it should?

4.5 Social Media in Practice: Step One

On 18th March, 2014 in a session with Blundell to gain extensive access to the Monitor, Blundell and I identified that the top two performing countries, according to the Monitor, were Venezuela and Zambia.⁷¹ It was therefore decided to study the profiles of these countries social media channels as well as Iran.

The office in Iran was forced to close in 2009 following British Council staff being intimidated by Iranian government officials; 16 members of staff were called to the Iranian president's office for a meeting and told to resign. In the two years prior to this, no working visas were granted to any British staff (The Independent, 2009). Iran currently bans Facebook which is the current social media site for British Council Iran (Information Policy, 2014). This signifies that any fans and followers in Iran of this social media channel would need to access it through proxy servers (The Guardian, 2013) other fans and followers would likely be Iranians living outside of Iran (Email correspondence: Karven, 2014). Evaluation of the application of social media in Iran is useful to establish how a virtual presence (without a physical presence) may exist in a country. It also provides examples of social media working in a public diplomacy capacity. The next chapter will develop thoughts around these key points, while this chapter looks specifically at the use of British Council social media targeted at an Iranian audience.

⁷¹ Scores are adjusted daily according to social media activity.

4.5.2 Planning

The measurements set by the British Council are used in the Monitor to score performance of social media. Completed Business Planners would have enabled an understanding of particular countries strategy and any unique objectives that they may have. However, Venezuela and Zambia have not completed a business planner.⁷² This would suggest that those working in social media in these countries have not yet committed to following a defined strategy. The digital strategy for social media channels aimed at people in Iran (or Iranian diaspora) was outlined in information provided by the Digital Manager for British Council Iran:

Through people-to-people cultural relations engagement we will rebuild trust between the UK and Iran. We will do this by creating a better mutual understanding and addressing misrepresentation through our work in arts, education, and language. We will establish and sustain high-value, forward looking partnerships, with mutuality and respect at the heart of our work. We will further the bilateral exchange of knowledge, ideas, and experiences. We will create mutually beneficial opportunities for individuals, communities, and organisations in both countries. Based on our people-to-people approach we use the page for deeper engagement with our audience.

(Email correspondence: Karven, 2014, p. 14)

The objectives laid out for Iran come from a belief that maintaining cultural relations during a time when diplomatic relations are severed can be a powerful tool in supporting the prosperity and security agenda (alluding to the FCO's objectives discussed in *Chapter One* –

⁷² There are therefore gaps in the table of components (part one) for these countries.

The British Council and its Cultural Relations Activity. The key points in the Karven's statement on strategy that will be used for review in the task ahead are:

- Mutual, bilateral exchange of knowledge, ideas and experiences
- A people-to-people approach leading to a deeper engagement with audience
- Addressing misrepresentation through arts, education and language
- Creation of mutual beneficial opportunities

Additionally, the British Council has two Facebook sites for Iran. One of these is an unbranded site dedicated to cultural subjects. At the time of carrying out research this site did not appear on the British Council's Monitor and I was therefore not aware of it. It was through later discussions with the Digital Manager for Iran that this came to light.⁷³

The first noticeable observation is that all three countries have a slightly different approach, and as such, present a slightly different view of the British Council. Zambia's main objective is to encourage more English language learning (Interview: Blundell, 2014b) and this is certainly reflected in their site as the majority of posts are about the English language, courses and teaching seminars. Venezuela provides a broader view of the British Council's activity and posts/tweets cover different parts of the British culture – art, history, national holidays, food and sport as well as more general issues such as climate change.

The aim for Iran's channels to focus on the positive aspects between the two countries (Internal Document: British Council, 2014d) through culture is certainly one strategic objective that is being met through the Facebook channel. Iran also has a focus on learning the English language, however, many posts are also about Iranian culture. The posts on this channel demonstrate the British Council's understanding and respect for Iranian culture.

One aspect that is obvious on Iran's Facebook channel is the absence of local events. Both Venezuela's and Zambia's channels discuss local events taking place providing an

⁷³ The reason for this was queried in emails to both the Digital Manager for Iran and the Regional Digital Manager (in March 2014), however, no response was given.

opportunity to meet face to face but obviously, the absence of an office in Iran means that the social media channels for Iran are managed out of the British Council’s London office (Email correspondence: Karven, 2014). This clearly presents a challenge for the objective that centres on Iran’s digital channels to provide mutually beneficial opportunities.

There are 312 social media channels for the British Council and as mentioned previously, Venezuela is number one in performance according to the Monitor. This means that the country is exceeding its social media targets, it is on-brand (and its social media channels have been signed off by senior management) and that its Facebook engagement score is also high (Venezuela also scores number one for Engagement and Quality, Zambia scored number 9 in engagement and came second in quality) (Interview: Blundell, 2014b).

The British Council uses a formula derived from Social Bakers to score engagement on Facebook and a Klout score for Twitter (Klout was discussed in Chapter 3: Social Media in Public Diplomacy).



The figure shows the formula for Average Post Engagement Rate. On the left is a Facebook 'f' icon. The text reads: Average Post Engagement Rate =
$$\frac{\text{Likes + Comments + Shares on a given day}}{\frac{\text{\# of wall posts made by page on a given day}}{\text{Total Fans on a given day}}} \times 100$$

Figure 21: Social Baker’s Formula for Facebook engagement scoring (Social Bakers, 2012)

The above formula is then averaged out over 7 days to give the score that appears on the Monitor for that social media channel (Interview: Blundell, 2014b). The target for countries’ Facebook engagement is 5 or more. Venezuela currently scores 12 and Zambia 4. Iran scores 2. Venezuela is the only country reviewed that also has a Twitter account. Venezuela score very highly on the Klout score for this channel with 63 (the target is 35).

The Klout scoring has a more complex formula than the one from Social Baker. It is the ratio of reactions compared to the amount of content shared. That may sound simple enough however, the part that makes it difficult to calculate independently is that it also profiles a channel's fans so that a fan who likes/shares/retweets everything that the channel produces does not produce the same Klout score than if it were somebody different engaging each time '[o]ne-hundred retweets from 100 different people contribute more to your Score than do 100 retweets from a single person' (Klout, 2014). In *Chapter Three: Social Media in Public Diplomacy*, it was reported in my study of the FCO's social media channels that there were several people that commented frequently on posts. The Klout score would presumably pick this up so that these people's comments counted for less than new individual's comments. Observations on engagement will be discussed in greater detail in the next section where the content on social media channels is analysed.

Considering the barriers that the digital team for British Council Iran face with its social media channels, it would not be fair to compare Iran in terms of reach numbers (numbers of fans/followers). However, with the engagement score, the size of the audience does not matter. In actual fact it is harder to get a good engagement score with a larger audience (Interview: Blundell, 2014a). A score of 2 would indicate that there is not much interaction between the host and its followers. That Iran is scoring so low for this may well flag concern in how well this channel is performing against its objective to engage on a deeper level with its audience.

The following two components of the table relate to the targets set by the British Council for numbers of fans. This was identified as an area that requires more consideration from Heads of Countries across the globe that set their own targets. The numbers for the target audiences are much lower than the actual number of followers they have. The British Council social media strategy has set the target of 10% of target audience for Facebook and

1.6% for Twitter. In the case of Venezuela the target audience for Facebook fans was 380 whereas the actual number of fans achieved is 8,500. The numbers for the other countries are similarly inappropriately set. When questioned about this, Blundell explained that as social media strategy is still in its early stages, many country heads did not really have a good idea of what number they should put forward. The Monitor, however, provides a picture of how many internet users there are in each country so in future, Country Heads should be able to set targets which give something to work towards while still being achievable (Interview: Blundell, 2014b). It is important that these targets are more realistic otherwise there is little point in having them. The existing process of guessing the number of potential fans for each year by T1 and T2 (direct and indirect audiences) is perhaps more complicated than it needs to be. Ultimately, what these targets demonstrate is that many have underestimated the number of people that they could reach via social media channels.

The next components in the table are minimum actions, minimum response times and frequency. The targets for these are much more realistic. Three actions per day on Facebook and five actions per day for Twitter seem easily achievable even in offices where there are only a few members of staff such as Venezuela.⁷⁴ These analytics show that Venezuela exceeds nearly all the targets for these metrics and is much stronger on Twitter than Facebook. Zambia is achieving lower than the target by only making 1.8 actions per day and the same goes for Iran. Significantly, Zambia is taking much longer to respond to queries (the target for all countries is three hours maximum). The average response time for Zambia is nine hours. There is additional security on Iran's Facebook page in that there is not a box that shows 'posts by others'. This means that the score for response time is not attainable. Shortly after I completed this exercise I spoke to the Digital Manager for Iran, who explained that before allowing posts from others they wanted to 'create a clear understanding about the

⁷⁴ According to Blundell there are 2-3 members of staff working in the Venezuela office (Blundell, 2014b).

type of work we do and our focus on the Facebook page for our audience before having posts from others' (Email correspondence: Karven, 2014). Karven pointed out that the Facebook page is now open to posts from others and that comments on updates have always been open to all.⁷⁵

All countries have a target for links to other British Council activity which is currently set at 1.8 per day. This is to ensure that the content on social media channels frequently highlights different British Council activity. According to the Monitor, the countries analysed are all below target for their links, however, closer inspection of the social media channels show that there are links in posts but countries are using shortened links, in the case of Venezuela, every link has been shortened. The Social Voice Framework (British Council, 2014l) advises against using shortened links stating that people like to see where they are being directed to if they click on it; similarly, research carried out by Buddy Media showed that users were three times more likely to click on a link that hasn't been shortened. The same research showed posts that are 80 characters or less get 66% higher engagement (Slide share, 2012).

The review of the three British Council country social media sites show that currently there isn't a consistent way of using links, furthermore because the links aren't using the correct format they are not being picked up by the Monitor. As such, these countries are scored low for this area which would suggest this is something that needs to be communicated more clearly to social media users in the organisation.

4.5.3 Content and Adaptation to the Social Media Audience

To review content on the social media channels, all posts/updates over a three day period were analysed. What was noticeable about Venezuela's activity from this sample was that

⁷⁵ As of May 2014.

despite the high Klout score for Twitter, there was little engagement from the channel's fans. The tweet that achieved the most engagement was a Noam Chomsky quote.⁷⁶ The same quote was posted on their Facebook channel and it also got a reaction on that site.

The types of posts, however, for these channels were varied and included links to a British Council blog about Korean literature, an announcement about artists, Max Hattler's visit (providing a chance to meet face-to-face with the British Council) and a post about air pollution. Noticeably most posts included pictures and led to something else; a blog, an article, an English language exercise.

My own observation of engagement when comparing Venezuela and Zambia is that Zambia appears to be getting much more of a reaction from its posts. There were several posts that scored double figures in comments and 100% their posts were commented on. The post that had the biggest reaction was an English language quiz.⁷⁷ In addition, despite the slow reaction time to fans' queries, Zambia engaged in conversation with other fans on the channel in a way that Venezuela and Iran did not, as well as 'liking' certain comments made by followers.⁷⁸ Out of the three countries Zambia gives the best impression of mutual exchange in this sample. What is noticeable here is that engagement scores do not measure interaction but rather response to the initial post.

Noticeably both Zambia and Venezuela encourage the social media community to take part in face-to-face activity or highlight what activity the British Council is doing in their country. In Venezuela's case this was a visit by artist Max Hattler and Zambia showed a picture of a recent focus group for the Zambia Commonwealth.

In a conversation with Blundell, he had mentioned that they were beginning to collate a library of suitable pictures they could use on social media channels taking into account the

⁷⁶ 3 people retweeted it.

⁷⁷ 47 people commented on this post.

⁷⁸ Venezuela didn't respond to any fans comments on Facebook, however, did 'like' comments twice in the sample.

need for different types of images and sizes and so forth (Interview: Blundell, 2013a). A picture can help to generate up to 120% more engagement (Pierce, 2012). The drinks company Innocent Smoothie, for example, post photo after photo on its Facebook site, in many cases without any text or just a few words as the photo makes a sufficient statement. It has 200,000 fewer fans than the British Council’s UK Facebook site yet its posts attract many more comments, likes and shares. In comparison, posts regularly exceed 100 comments, 300 shares and 1,000 likes.⁷⁹

The importance of a good picture was also something that was picked up in the pilot test carried out on the British Council’s UK social media channels. On Shrove Tuesday the UK Facebook page put out a post that simply said ‘Did you know today is Shrove Tuesday or Pancake Day in the UK? Find out more about this and other UK festivals, celebrations and public holidays here’ (British Council, 2014i). This post was accompanied by a picture of two heart-shaped pancakes with strawberries and syrup. This post got 473 likes, 365 shares and 16 comments (largely about how tasty the pancakes looked).

There was another post about English desserts on the Venezuelan Facebook channel



Figure 22 from British Council Venezuela’s Facebook page, March 20th 2014

that also began with a question and then led to a link and a picture. The words used were arguably inviting ‘Do you know what the English call desserts? Learn some of the sweetest words from the English language in this fun video. Shared by #KarenneSylvester through Teaching English <http://buff.ly/1hGrpD>’.⁸⁰

Note here the use of a shortened link but also, the

⁷⁹ Observation made during the same time period used to evaluate the British Council’s posts.

⁸⁰ Using Author’s translation.

use of picture which could most certainly have been something more inviting than the screen shot used from the video.

British Council Zambia does not update as regularly as is recommended in the British Council's Social Media Guidelines but it does put out an update daily.⁸¹ It responds to its audience's comments slower than the target and this has been criticised by its audience. In a post on 25th March 2014, a post requested the audience to score the British Council on its performance. There were several comments that mentioned the slow response to Facebook queries. There were also comments about the Facebook page not providing updated information on English courses. British Council Zambia responded to each one of these criticisms to say it would work harder to improve its communication on social media. The transparency of this exercise allowed for the British Council to be publicly criticised but the responses by British Council Zambia showed that it had registered the complaints and were aware that it needed to improve.

Additionally nearly all of the Zambia posts ask for its audience's opinion. All of this gives the impression that British Council Zambia values its audience and wants them to engage. This country uses social media for fun (quizzes, jokes, funny pictures) and gets a good response from these types of light-hearted posts. These posts, however, contrast greatly with the more serious posts; the following example is one that in theory should be well received due to its portrayal of local people at a British Council organised event.

On 18th March, 2014 British Council Zambia posted a photo and some text about the Zambia Commonwealth Focus Group. It depicted an activity in the local area that the British Council team had been part of. However, considering the earlier comments that shorter posts receive better engagement, this post was over 150 words. There were three parts to this post - the picture and announcement of a recent focus meeting forms part of the post, a question on

⁸¹ They are below the 3 updates a day target.

whether an alumni group should be set up and, information on the annual grant. Considering what has been said to date about keeping posts punchy and direct, a social media user scanning these newsfeeds is likely to miss most of this post.

As the posts are focussed on Zambia and English language learning, the social media channel is showing a limited view of all the activities that the British Council is involved in. This focus is in line with its main strategy (to highlight local offering) but the odd post on other activity across the British Council network may be of interest to British Council followers in Zambia.

I found one comment that highlighted the limitations of social media (and indeed web-based programmes) in a country such as Zambia.



Figure 23: Conversation on British Council Zambia’s Facebook page March 25-27, 2013

The difficulty of access to an internet connection in countries such as Zambia highlights one of the barriers to social media reaching a significant number of people across the globe. This is an aspect that will be discussed in *5.2 Improved Understanding of Social Media Audiences*.

British Council Venezuela do a much better job at championing the British Council in having a ‘worldly’ tone by covering a wide selection of cultural topics as well as touching on the world topics that the British Council has an interest in such as air pollution. Its posts on

Albert Einstein and Shakespeare and quotes from philosophers give a more educational tone. This could be a simple demonstration of the different personalities behind the social media channels but might also be indicative of the interest that each office takes in the various pursuits of the British Council.

4.6 Social Media in Practice: Step Two

As previously mentioned this step is a summary of the evaluation carried out in step one. It shows at a glance what has been identified as poor (red), issues that need to be addressed (amber) and areas of strength (green). The pie graph show the proportion of red, amber and green to give an overall health check of the use of social media in Zambia, Venezuela and Iran. As described earlier in this chapter, the results used to create the pie-charts for Step Two were a calculation of the red, amber and green components in the tables in Appendix 3. I have also summarised the main points in the text boxes.

Step Two: Zambia



Figure 24

As evidenced by this overview of the overall performance of Zambia’s social media activity, there is a lot that it is being done well; in particular, its engagement with its online community appears to be the best out of all three countries; conversations are developing and the content is clearly geared to what the audience will find useful. The country needs to work on response times. This is not just an issue that is highlighted in the Monitor but the audience has complained about it.

The areas that need immediate focus are around target setting. Planning in Zambia requires more consideration, it should complete its business plans and set targets that are more realistic. It could also consider widening the subject matter of the posts to include more about the activity carried out by the British Council or overall interests of the British Council other than language learning.

Step Two: Venezuela

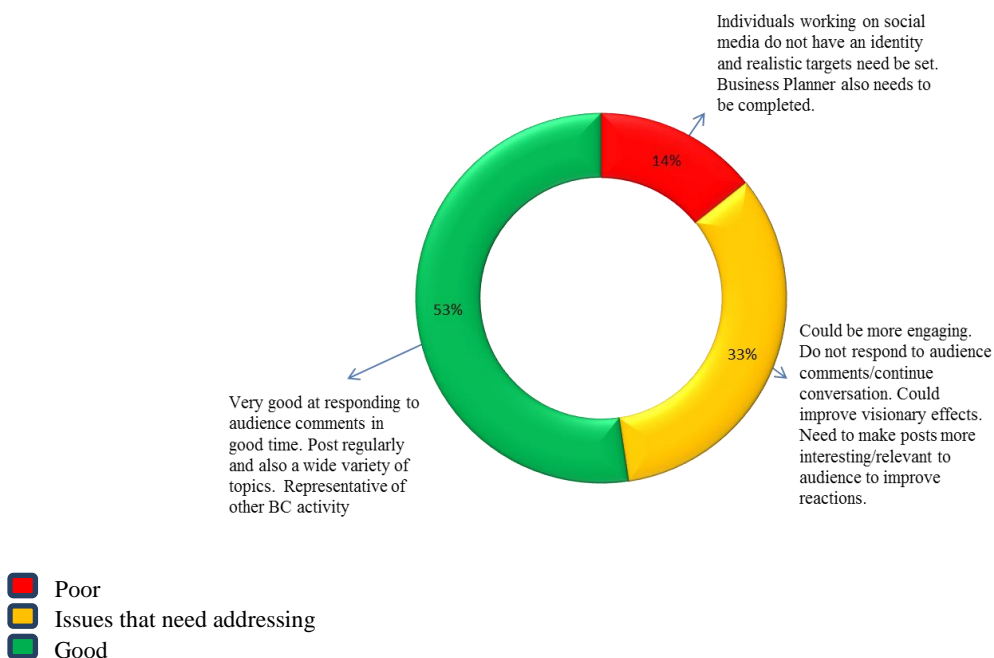


Figure 25

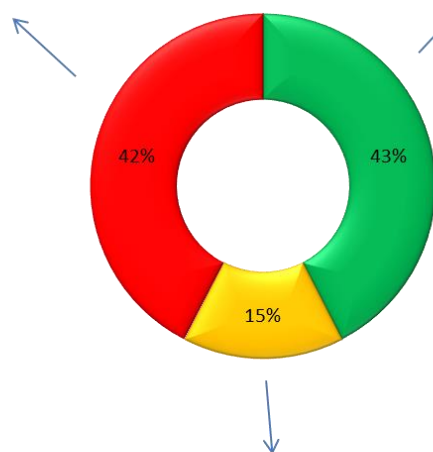
Despite the score in the Monitor showing Venezuela as the best performing country in engagement, my own observations from the sample of posts that I looked at, contradict this.

The completed table of observations in Appendix 2 highlight that there are a lot of posts that do not get a reaction and while an opinion from the audience is often requested, there are many occasions when the audience does not comment at all suggesting that the content is not quite relevant/interesting to its audience. In this research there was not an example of rapport developing between the British Council digital user and the audience giving the impression that the platform is used for broadcasting rather than mutual communication.

Posts made by others are always responded to in good time and what the Venezuelan team does well is the upkeep of the site. It also gives a very good overview of the British Council’s other activity and interests. Planning, again, needs to be addressed. The Business Plan needs filling out and targets need to be much higher to provide an actual goal to work towards.

Step Two: Iran

The posts are lacking personality; most simply provide a title of the accompanying picture and do not ask for an opinion or try to initiate dialogue with audience
 There are a few house keeping issues that could be easily rectified – the logo on branded channel is incorrect. Posts could be more regular. At the moment channels are not really ‘social’ but do showcase art and provide EFL information.



The type of posts use show a respect for both cultures and highlight the riches of both (as per strategy for Iran)

Could improve by responding to comments as well as liking them.
 Could benefit from watching Team Social video to consider how they could develop a rapport with the audience and show more personality

- Poor
- Issues that need addressing
- Good

Figure 26

The biggest criticism of the Iran Facebook channels (both branded and unbranded) is the lack of identity. A review of these sites shows that posts often announce rather than encourage conversation. There isn't much evidence at this stage that the Facebook sites are 'social', but the lifted restriction on the 'posts by others' is a step towards more open communication on these sites. If those operating the British Council Iranian channels are cautious in posting content to provoke dialogue, this is for a good reason considering the history the British Council has with Iran, however, with a more friendly and open approach these sites would arguably be more successful in building bridges of communication. It may be that the channels need to stick to a more restricted range of (and innocuous) topics than other countries' channels but there should be more thought into how to develop dialogue with the online community in order to keep their interest and develop their fan base further. Any attempt to address misrepresentation of the British/Iranians is not obvious from the review carried out.

The Iran Facebook channel is, however, very good at demonstrating the British Council's knowledge, understanding and respect of Iranian culture. This is in line with its current strategy. The Iran digital channels are following a stricter strategy to other channels and those responsible for the updates on these channels have an important job as digital communication is one of the few ways of maintaining cultural relations with Iran (Internal Document: British Council, 2014d). Their challenge is to encourage cultural interchange on the social media channels in order to get the deeper engagement alluded to in the digital strategy for Iran.

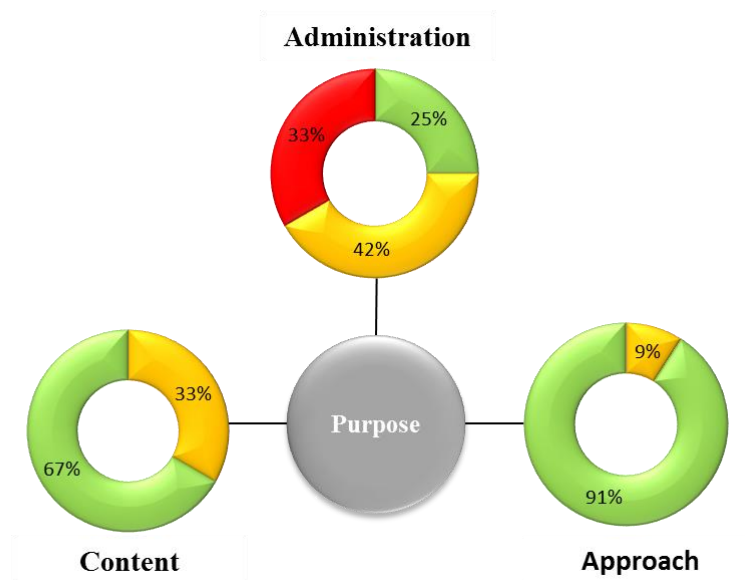
4.7 Social Media in Practice: Step Three

As a reminder, the components were rearranged into the three categories of Administration, Approach and Content. The proportions of red, amber and green ratings were presented in pie charts to indicate how well each category performed. The results of this exercise could in theory be used to define where support/training is required for social media in different offices. All of the comments made on these countries are in direct relation to the observations made in the tables in Appendix 3.

The diagrams below show that while each country has its strong points, currently they all have issues that need to be addressed to make their use of social media more effective. In terms of how each country's social media aligns to the wider objectives of the organisation and its purpose.

Step Three Results

Step Three: Zambia



- Poor
- Issues that need addressing
- Good

Figure 27

The diagram above shows how Zambia performed in each of the categories identified as being important to the overall alignment with the organisation’s purpose. The area flagged as showing any issues in serious need of addressing would be the administration of the site. The content and approach of social media for this country office is either good or with minor issues to address.

British Council Zambia has shown that when it speaks to its audience, it wants the audience to respond. More importantly, when the audience responds, the dialogue then (on occasion) continues. In particular, improvements should be made in response times to audience comments and posts should be more frequent to improve the Administration result. In terms of content, Zambia could vary the content more (as suggested in the British Council’s Social Media Planner) to highlight other work that the British Council is involved in. There could also be more emphasis on British Council activity taking place within Zambia to encourage more face-to-face activity with its audience.

Step Three: Venezuela

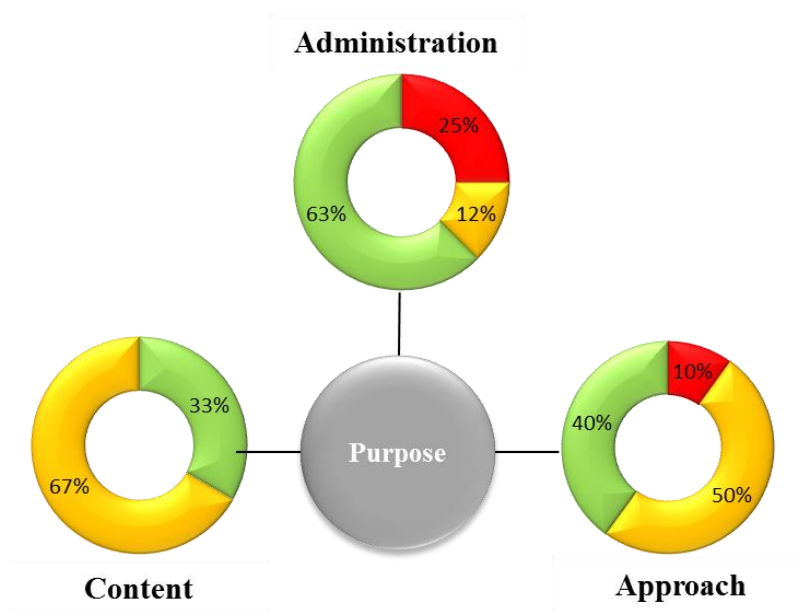


Figure 28

The results for Venezuela show there are two categories where issues need to be addressed. Considering that Venezuela was the country office with the leading social media (according

to the British Council’s Social Media Monitor), it is interesting that my own analysis would in fact suggest that the social media for this country is not as aligned to overall organisational strategy as it could be.

British Council Venezuela runs competent administration of its social media channels. The channels give the impression of a professionally run service and provide lots of information on a number for different subjects. The fact that it has not submitted a plan outlining its objectives and how these fit with wider organisational goals is something that could be addressed to improve the administration category. The results would also indicate that Venezuela needs to work on its approach to incorporate more mutual communication and be more engaging with its audience.

Step Three: Iran

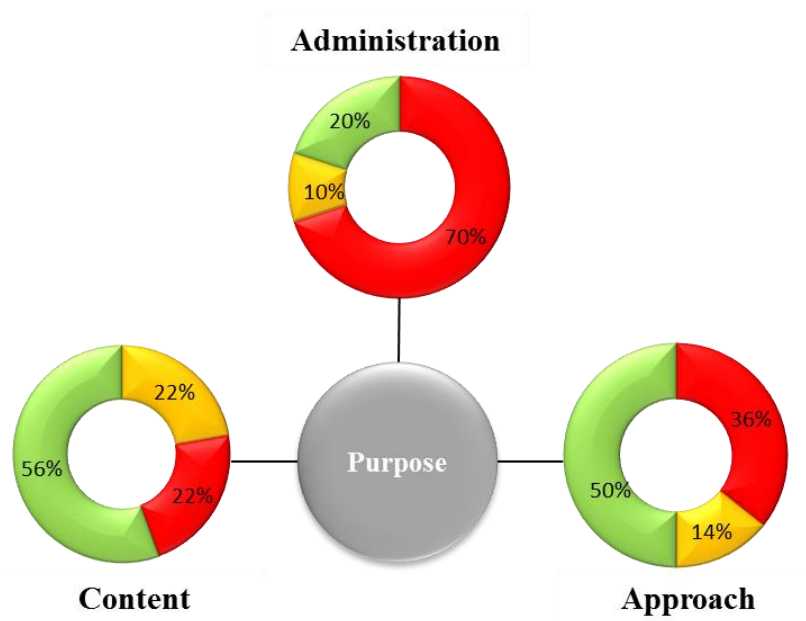


Figure 29

In Step Two, the results showed that Zambia and Iran were proportionally similar. When the results were reorganised to evaluate how well social media was performing in the British Council’s main purposes, the outcome is different. Iran is clearly the country office (albeit that it is in fact a virtual office managed out of London) that has issues in all three categories.

A fact that is surely worth considering in light of the specific digital strategy laid out for this country.

Iran is the country requiring the most support to raise the standard of its social media. As already discussed, it is mainly the lack of engagement that needs to be tackled. In an interview much later with Danny Whitehead, Country Director for Iran, I was informed that engagement from the audience was definitely hindered by a fear of being associated with the British Council. He mentioned that the number of daily visitors to the page contrasted greatly to the number of likes, shares and comments made (Interview: Whitehead, 2015). That being said, it is still my opinion that more could be done to interact with the people who do comment on the site. One of the suggestions in the British Council's strategy for Iran is to focus on positive areas of 'shared cultural richness and interest rather than divisive areas of politics, historic conflict or antagonism' (Internal Document: British Council, 2014d, p. 5). Digital users for this channel should therefore consider how to encourage dialogue within the parameters of 'shared cultural richness'. Without these channels taking on a more social approach they are not fulfilling much more of a role than a website. As identified numerous times throughout this thesis, broadcasting should be discouraged in social media and cultural relations. There were also a few housekeeping issues identified that could easily be addressed to give the site a more professional look.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter tested the three British Council country social media channels against components identified as being necessary to effective social media. These results were then reorganised into categories that I suggested were necessary (based on Vuving's theory on soft power currencies) to align social media use to the organisation's overall purpose to connect with people overseas and build trust. There is no way of testing the true impact that social

media can have on cultural relations but, we can assume that it is an important means of communication for many people in the world, not least the British Council's target audience.

Approach was one of the three categories identified as being crucial to the British Council's social media strategy. In the aforementioned video created by Blundell and Team Social for a social media conference in San Diego⁸² each member (of Team Social) discusses what Team Social is. What is apparent in the video is the different individual personalities; one man seems very sensible, another man eccentric, for instance. They are all from different countries/backgrounds. When I mentioned that the video gives the impression that the British Council is an organisation of diverse people from different backgrounds and cultures, Blundell replied that he saw the British Council as a group of people rather than an institution (Interview: Blundell, 2014b). Team Social serves as an excellent example of Blundell's vision for the British Council's social media approach; it is a fun and interesting mix of personalities who want to create something interesting and captivating to be able to interact across social media channels.

At the time of this research, however, this is a concept that is yet to be embraced by all the different social media users across the British Council network. One of the challenges the British Council has is to give its social media staff the confidence and skills to allow their individual personalities to be more apparent in social media channels. This would theoretically lead to a greater chance of natural dialogue developing on social media channels, as suggested by social media theorists and practitioners discussed within this thesis (Millett, 2008, Sandre, 2013, Blundell, 2014b). The importance of the individual is highlighted in the strategy pack but currently users are not advised to use their own name when making posts or responding to 'posts by others'. The assumption I make here, is that

⁸² The conference 'Social Media Marketing World' 26-28 March 2014, was attended by Blundell who was a speaker on one of the panels. The conference held for 2,000 social media professionals to exchange ideas and discuss techniques (Social Media Examiner, 2014).

the lack of a name is an additional measure that disconnects the audience from the person behind the post.

Content is the second category that I suggest is important to the British Council's social media. As the results from the review process showed, very few conversations are started on posts that simply announce a subject or provide a title of the artwork shown in the accompanying image. The British Council is an organisation with a wealth of diverse talent from so many different areas that appeal to many people. If a company such as Innocent Drinks (mentioned previously in the chapter) can build a big online following (and good levels of engagement) by creating a strong brand selling smoothies then surely the British Council with all the facets of humanity it is involved in should be able generate a great deal of interest from its social media audience. Considering the push-pull theory of traditional marketing vs. social media discussed in *Chapter Three – Social media and Public Diplomacy*, the British Council will undoubtedly, as the social media strategy takes more of a hold across the organisation, consider more and more innovative ways of making people want to be part of the British Council. By following British Council social media, fans are buying in to what the British Council represents as a group of individuals that are worldly, inspiring, inclusive, vivid and/or authoritative.

Similarly, the audience needs to feel valued when it follows British Council social media channels. Part of this involves a focus on listening to the audience, adapting social media techniques to better suit the audience and considering ways of eliciting a reaction from its posts. Successful users of social media are those who engage with other members (Salesforce.com, 2012). Success, if everything that has been said about social media thus far is true, will lie in the British Council using social media not as a way of promoting or selling Britishness or British culture but as a platform to share views and to connect and develop dialogue.

The final category, administration, calls for social media channels to be managed professionally and this includes planning and evaluating channels regularly. Social media, as pointed out by Blundell (Interview: Blundell, 2014a), needs to be 24/7; the expectation for a response on social media is almost immediate, hence the maximum response time target (set by Blundell) of 3 hours. A British Council country office cannot neglect its social media for any length of time without expecting a loss of engagement amongst its social media followers.

At this stage in the evolution of social media in the British Council it is not evident that countries (both new to social media and with several years of experience) have obviously bought into the strategy. Neither British Council Venezuela nor British Council Zambia, at the time of writing, had completed a business planner. When one considers how many people these countries are currently reaching on social media there is certainly a case for taking the time to put together this strategy, and the forms that Blundell has created are very straight-forward for countries to complete.

Implementation of this well-defined strategy will equip the people who work on social media channels with the necessary tools, guidelines and confidence to allow for their individual personality to be evident in posts. Adherence to the strategy would also ensure that digital users are aware of the issues that need to be addressed in their administration of social media channels and encourage thought around the content put out on social media. Should anyone need convincing of the importance of social media, one only needs to be aware of the growing numbers of people who experience the British Council through this form of communication.

The results from the review carried out showed that each country has work to do in making its social media channels more effective and in being more aligned to the overall purposes of the organisation. Iran, in particular, needs to consider its approach. This is

particularly important considering that opportunities to build links with the target audience in Iran are currently largely limited to a digital audience. At the time of writing (March 2014), Iran is the only country that has a virtual presence and no physical presence. It is possible in the coming years that more offices will close, particularly in Europe, and in these countries the British Council will use social media channels to increase reach and engagement with digital audiences in countries where there is no longer a physical presence (Interview: Blundell, 2014b). It is therefore imperative that the British Council gets its social media right as this will be the only way that the part of its audience will experience the British Council and learn about its activities. This examination of the British Council's current use of social media provides foundation to the continued discussion on social media impact that takes place in *Chapter 5 – Causal Implications for Consideration in the Use of Social Media*.

Chapter 5 – Causal Implications for Consideration in the Use of Social

Media

‘Social media sites are just getting started. We’re (...) trying to feel out what’s appropriate, what should be posted, what shouldn’t be posted. It’s all very new in the grand scheme of things and we’re just seeing where it’s going’. Biz Stone, Co-Founder of Twitter (Bird, 2014)

5.1 Introduction

As the quote above suggests, the use of social media is in its infancy. Organisations that recognise the overwhelming popularity and utility of these sites are really only just testing the water on how to use social media to best effect. In 2010 when Martin Davidson, CEO for the British Council, suggested that a virtual presence could replace areas where offices were being closed, the role digital technology would play for the organisation came into the spotlight. This was made more obvious in the 2011-2015 Corporate Plan (British Council, 2011b) when projected audience figures for a digital audience were proposed to increase from 94 million to 140 million people. Comparatively, the smallest increase planned was in face-to-face activities (from 6.1 million to 7 million people). While the organisation maintained that its unique selling point (USP) is in face-to-face programmes and activity, it was hoped that digital options could be used as a way of reaching audiences that might otherwise be lost in the current cost-cutting measures (Interview: Chambers, 2011).

While social media in the British Council is in its infancy, my review of the social media strategy and the use of social media in the British Council showed that significant steps were being taken to consider how to use, monitor and evaluate social media effectively. As a result of my findings in the previous chapter, my set of recommendations for the British Council is as follows:

1. Recognise the usefulness of social media in communicating to wide, international audiences and ensure digital strategy mirrors overall organisational strategy. This has particular relevance to countries where communication is limited largely to social media.
2. Understand who social media audiences are, set realistic goals for audience target numbers and use the Social Media Monitor to improve interaction and engagement levels.
3. Inject personality into social media profiles.
4. Include social media in activities which would typically be purely broadcasting.
5. Encourage support groups/consultancy services on social media.
6. Be open about links to government.

Considering the above points, this chapter suggests how social media should be used by the British Council to maintain a focus on cultural relations that is in alignment with the organisation's overall strategy. In *5.2 Improved Understanding of Social Media Audiences*, I discuss the importance in understanding the social media profile of British Council audiences. This section considers how social media can be incorporated in all cultural relations activity and will look at how the objectives of the organisation has for building relationships and trust could be better met through social media channels. In *5.3 Broadcasting/Approach*, I discuss the need for social media to be more 'social' and look at how social media could be inserted into typical broadcasting activity to get more impact with audiences. In *5.4 The Role of Social Media in Different Areas of Cultural Relations*, focus on some key priorities for the British Council and how social media might be improved in alignment with some of the organisational objectives. The section *5.5 Support Groups*, considers how the British Council could connect with groups interested in certain initiatives

and campaigns through social media. Finally, *5.6 Transparency* looks at the importance of being honest and transparent on social media.

5.2 Improved Understanding of Social Media Audiences

Chapter 4 – An Analysis of the British Council’s Social Media explained how social media in the British Council is now managed more carefully and, through its new monitoring system, the organisation is now better able to understand the social media profile across its network⁸³ and provide more reliable figures on audience numbers. Historically, this has not always been the case. In reviewing the reports for the years 2011 onwards, data on digital audiences has been presented differently and target numbers have been adjusted. In 2011-12, the annual report did not include digital audience numbers (British Council, 2012i). In the annual report for the following year (British Council, 2013a), it was reported that audience numbers grew from 4.6 million in 2012 to 8.2 million in 2013 (British Council, 2013a). The ultimate target of 140 million digital audience had also been reduced to 100 million. In the Corporate Plan for 2014-16 an explanation for this was given; ‘this target was reduced in 2012–13 to account for the introduction of stricter methods to count our digital users’ (British Council, 2014g, p. 42).

The audience numbers for social media in the annual report for 2012-13 was grouped with ‘digital learning’. For the Financial Year 2013/2014 Blundell provided figures for just social media. At 15.3 million the social media audience is clearly growing at a fast pace, in fact Blundell suggests that audience figures increased by 132.8% since the previous year (Internal Document: British Council, 2014d). In July 2014 Blundell visited China to visit the

⁸³ At time of writing the British Council Social Media Monitor only monitors Facebook and Twitter but Blundell has plans to expand this in 2014/15 (Blundell, 2014c).

offices of Renren and Weibo⁸⁴ to understand more about these social media networks and how the British Council can incorporate them into its work (Interview: Blundell, 2014); the British Council’s journey in social media really is just starting. If the audience figure continues to increase at the same rate, the 100 million digital audience target will have been met in just over two years by social media alone.

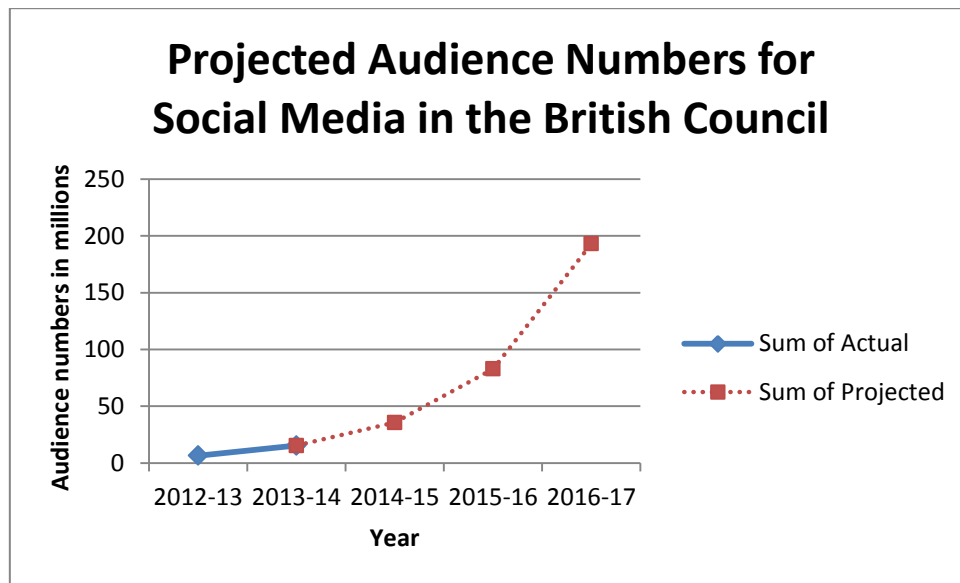


Figure 30: Table to show growth of Social Media year-on-year using information cited in Top of the Digital Pops (British Council, 2014e).

The table shows how the social media audience of the British Council will grow if it continues to increase at the same rate of 132.8%. While it is difficult to predict when these numbers will begin to wane it is highly likely that the organisation will easily achieve its goal of 100 million digital audience by 2015 assuming that the audience figure for digital learning will also continue to grow.

It is, however, worth remembering that using numbers of fans is not enough to give a true picture of how well a social media channel is performing. *Chapter 4 – An Analysis of the British Councils Use in Social Media* showed that the organisation-wide KPIs are not

⁸⁴ Renren and Weibo are popular Chinese social media. Weibo claim to have 130 million users although a study showed the number of actual active users was actually 10 million (Li, 2014). Renren had 51 million unique log-in users in the month of March 2014 (Incitez China, 2014).

always useful in assessing the success of the organisation's social media. Blundell created new KPIs to measure in the system he created for the organisation and these were more relevant to evaluating social media (Interview: Blundell, 2014b). The British Council's Social Media Monitor allows for generic evaluation of reach, engagement, quality (and relevance when this add-on is completed). The strategy encourages digital users to consider how their social media channels can align to a particular strategy of that country but further evaluation of how successful social media is in achieving certain objectives is out of the scope of the Monitor's capability. The process of evaluation in *Chapter 4 – An Analysis of the Use of Social Media in the British Council* allows for specific evaluation of social media use against the organisation's objectives and this exercise, or something similar, is one that Country Digital Managers could carry out periodically when exploring ways of improving specific channels. The numbers provided by the British Council's Social Media Monitor are very useful as a first step but content of posts and approach require qualitative evaluation. In *Chapter 1- The British Council and its Cultural Relations Activity*, the organisation's own evaluation methods were listed in the section *Evaluation of Cultural Relations*. It is unknown at this stage whether social media programmes and participants will be selected to take part in the Evaluation of Long-Term Objectives to determine if social media has had an effect on the audience's perception of the UK for instance. Or, through the Project Logic Model to see if a particular programme is having an effect on participants. Social media could be used to select participants and make the interviews but it would be interesting to see if the organisation also chooses to evaluate the use of social media channels as well.

5.3 Broadcasting/Approach

In the Corporate Plan for 2011-15, forecasted figures showed that the biggest increase was to be in broadcast and publications audience (400 million to 500 million); 100 million more

people would learn about the British Council through broadcasting as opposed to mutual communication. Throughout this thesis the argument against using broadcasting has been made frequently. As well as forming an essential part of communication in leveraging soft power, mutuality is a crucial approach to building trust and relationships. Considering this, there should be steps taken to ensure that the newer forms of communication such as social media that encourage interaction with the audience. In *Chapter One – The British Council and its Cultural Relations Activity*, there was reference to a diagram called the Index of Trust which appeared in a report by the British Council’s think tank,⁸⁵ Counterpoint, on the importance of mutual communication in building trust in cultural relations.

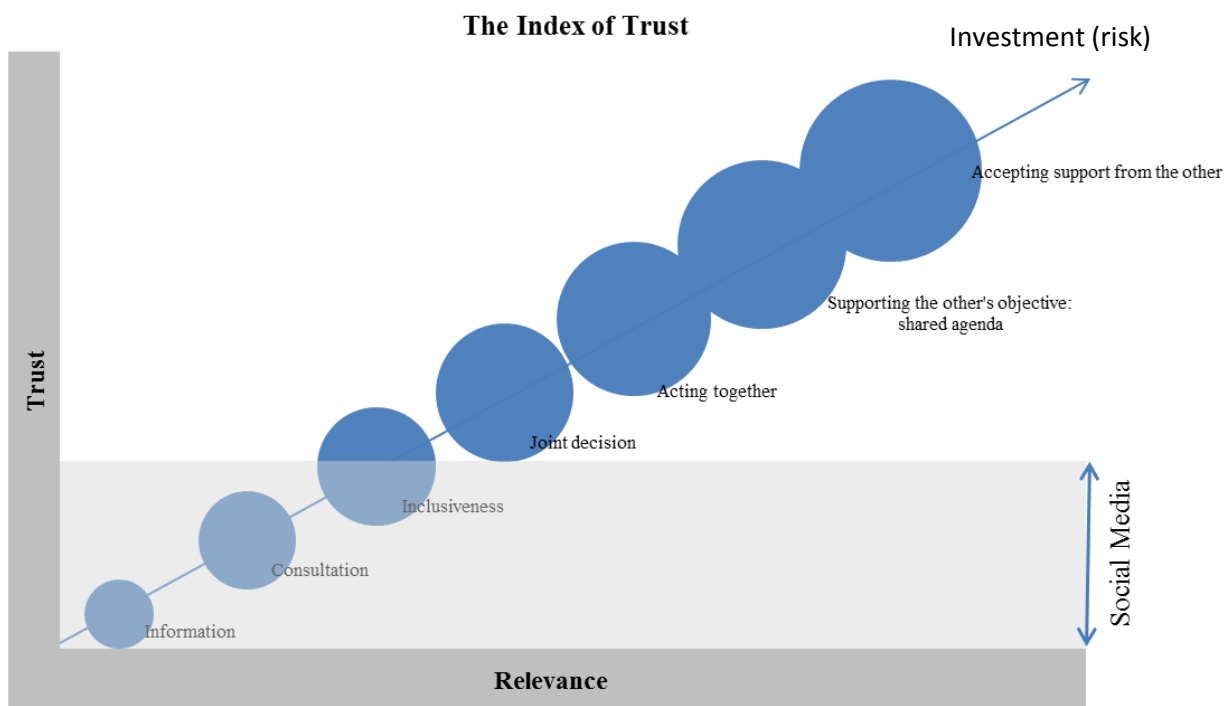


Figure 31

Social media that is used for broadcasting with little thought about how to engage the audience would appear in the first circle on the Index signifying a low chance of generating trust. The aim for social media should be to encourage inclusiveness. I suggest that the

⁸⁵ Counterpoint was called the British Council’s think tank at the time of the report (2010).

diagram helps to identify the limits that social media has in communication. While social media platforms can provide the forum to consult, to chat, to answer queries and possibly at most effective, help build relationships anything above the ‘inclusiveness’ bubble requires a more tangible relationship with the audience. That isn’t to say that social media cannot continue to be a form of communication through joint decision-making and agenda sharing; social media can certainly complement face-to-face activity. This touches on an issue discussed in *Chapter3 – Social Media in Public Diplomacy*. It takes seconds to like, share or comment on a status yet committing to a cause that requires having to show up in person is something else. The impact social media can have on its own is limited, however, as an integral part of a project or to assist a British Council country office with its objectives, social media is a necessity in today’s society.

Research carried out in the previous chapter showed that inclusivity, while appearing in the Social Voice Framework for the British Council, is not an approach being executed in practice across all social media channels. This was most notable for the social media channels targeted at an Iranian audience where one of the key points of the strategy was to ‘rebuild trust between the UK and Iran’ (British Council, 2014c). In a comment by a British Council representative there was acknowledgement that ‘digital engagement brings opportunities/challenges in equal measure. In particular, there’s a need to re-think the British Council’s role, so that more of the content of programmes is shaped or re-shaped by participants. That moves us further from being controller/coordinator and more towards the convener/catalyst end of the spectrum’ (Interview: Chambers, 2013). This aligns with the social media strategy in the British Council that encourages output to be worldly, inspiring, inclusive and vivid and in particular, it highlights the need for the audience to play a role in what that output should be. In the review carried out in the previous chapter, this was covered in the questions appearing under the headings ‘Listen to the audience - ensure

reciprocity and mutuality’ and ‘Allow for social media to evolve with project or as the audience require it to’. When social media sites are used purely for broadcasting and providing information they are missing out on achieving greater impact with audiences. Similarly, if members of the British Council staff posting on social media do not inject some personality into their posts, they will have more of a challenge eliciting interaction from the audience. It is really important that staff have the training and confidence to sound human on social media sites, rather than simply copying and pasting organisational messages. As Fisher comments on the ‘corporate monotone’ FCO blogs, ‘they will only sound human when they empower human beings to speak on their behalf’ (Fisher, 2010).

The foreseeable growth of social media in the British Council comes with a need to explore how it can be more engaging with its digital audiences. Poor approach, content and administration would undoubtedly have an adverse effect on the organisation and as such, social media should be given investment, support and training to raise the standard. If a British Council country office lacks the vision or the capacity to reach the standard required for British Council social media and a social media presence is considered important in that country, then the British Council could consider ways of raising the standards. The British Council clearly has pages that do exceptionally well so could use one of its social media champions to coach others. The Monitor should also be used to pinpoint and communicate to the internal digital network at the British Council, examples of successful and unsuccessful posts and digital initiatives. Used correctly this tool can really assist to raise the standards of social media across the organisation. The British Council needs to ensure that this tool is not simply used to provide audience figures for senior management reporting.

In terms of senior management reporting, social media has, in the past, been grouped with broadcasting. I believe social media audience figures should be separated from broadcasting figures to acknowledge the differences in approach and impact that this media

has on audiences. In identifying clearly the numbers of people that the organisation is communicating with via social media (and indeed, the potential number that this could increase by), the organisation may also appreciate the business need to invest in this area to have more effective impact.

The figures given at the start of this chapter are a worrying hint that broadcasting is still considered the main way of reaching audiences – the aim is for 500 million people to be reached through broadcasting and publications (British Council, 2011b). This signifies that the British Council's intention is to reach the majority of its audience by one-way communication. Clearly these TV, radio and publication pieces could form part of a wider marketing and communications campaign that also involves other forms of communicating with the public but these numbers are possibly not as forward thinking as they could be. Indications amongst social media experts are that even traditional media will take on a more social aspect.

If you find yourself evaluating a media opportunity that has absolutely no social properties to it whatsoever, you probably shouldn't be evaluating it at all. And increasingly, that applies to "traditional" media as well (...). TV, billboards, even print media -- these media plays have to be made with an eye toward the digital realm, and that digital realm is inherently and inextricably social (Hubbard, 2014).

Assuming this will be true, it strengthens the argument on the need to include social media from the beginning of all marketing and communication decisions if not lead with it. As face-to-face events decline in growth with the fall of the government grant, the focus should be on engaging audiences rather than broadcasting to them. The use of social media alongside broadcasting activity can incorporate an aspect of audience participation and encourage mutual understanding, networking and relationship building. Arguably this will mean that the British Council will have more influence if it has a social element in its

broadcasting activities and this will position the British Council better when it is required to carry out tasks further up the Index of Trust. Furthermore, in countries that will lose an office and be replaced with a virtual presence, the organisation should carefully plan online programmes that present opportunities to join online groups as well as use the main country social media channels to attract its audience.

5.4 The Role of Social Media in Different Areas of Cultural Relations

My initial assumption was that the British Council's impact would suffer more in public diplomacy activity as it was this area that the FCO grant was spent. While new efficiencies in the British Council may mean that less money is spent on operating costs, it is difficult to see how these activities will not suffer. In terms of social media, however, I initially proposed that social media would have little use to this area. My opinion on this matter has altered. One of the reasons I first thought this was that in many of the priority countries for public diplomacy activity, internet is limited – this clearly signifies that social media in these areas is also limited. However, a closer look at the activity in the Education and Society department (the area where the majority of non-revenue activity takes place) would show there is already an online element in most of the projects suggesting that a social media aspect could easily be applied if it hasn't already.⁸⁶

The British Council's three main areas of work (English, Arts, and Education and Society) are a mixture of revenue-producing activities, now crucial to the organisation's survival, and other cultural relations activities. The government grant covers much of the latter; it is these types of activities where the British Council acts a public diplomacy partner for the UK by having a presence in conflict zones and developing countries as well as

⁸⁶ See Appendix 1 for more detail.

working on some international development and international arts programmes (British Council, 2014b).

The British Council calls itself an ‘entrepreneurial public service’ that (it says) will by 2015 be generating £6 for every £1 of government grant received.⁸⁷ Research conducted by Chatham House specified that the English language, education and culture were ‘the top three factors in supporting the UK’s overseas reputation’ (British Council, 2014b). In much of what the British Council does, which helps to raise the UK’s reputation, it can also generate an income for the organisation. English schools, courses and exams earn the organisation over £500 million which is over three times more than the annual government grant of £154 million.⁸⁸ However, the organisation cannot be entrepreneurial in the activities where the government grant is used (that are in ‘in the long term interest of the UK’ (British Council, 2014b)). If it cannot generate an income in these areas, then it is where the British Council acts as a public diplomacy partner that will suffer the most.

Focussing on social media, the channels which are most successful are also related to the areas of business which generates the most revenue for the British Council; learners and teachers of the English language. The most popular three Facebook channels in the British Council are all aimed at audiences who are learning or teaching the English language. For the organisation’s Twitter channels, learning or teaching English is also very popular:

Top 5 Facebook Channels	Audience	Top 5 Twitter Channels	Audience
British Council Learn English MENA⁸⁹	2.4 million	British Council	102 thousand
British Council Teaching English	2.2 million	British Council Learn English	83.5 thousand
British Council Learn English	836 thousand	British Council Teaching English	72.2 thousand
British Council (main site)	618 thousand	British Council Film	34 thousand
British Council Egypt	576 thousand	British Council LearnEnglish Kids	20.7 thousand

Figure 32: Table showing most popular Facebook and Twitter channels for the British Council in 2014 using information from *Top of the Digital Pops* (Internal Document: British Council, 2014i)

⁸⁷ In 2011 the British Council was earning £3 for every £1 of government grant.

⁸⁸ Using numbers reported for 2013-14 (British Council, 2014g).

⁸⁹ MENA – Middle East and North Africa

On the Index of Trust, the social media channels for these sites would be largely at the Consultancy circle. The main reason for this is that these channels provide a service and information that its audiences find useful. This fits in well to the main aims of the English and Examinations department which is for its audience to take away ‘improved English skills and enhanced perceptions of the quality of UK resources and materials’. In considering the approach or the tone of the social media channels in this area it is possible to move more towards the Inclusive circle. This can be done with responding to the audience, for digital users representing the British Council to use their own name and in careful consideration of what works well with the audience (and what doesn’t).

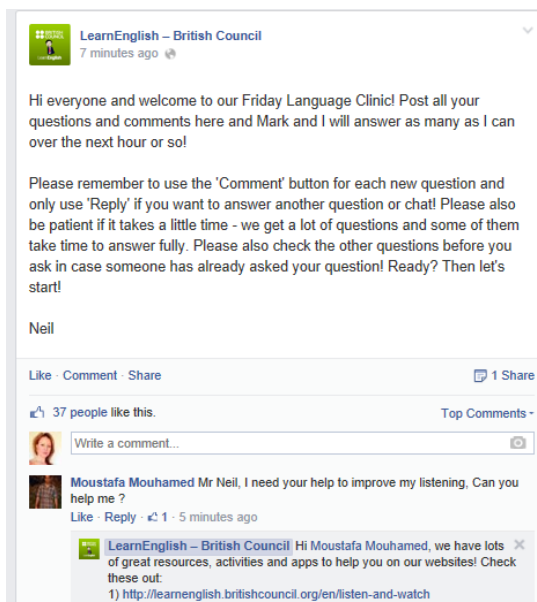


Figure 33: Screen Shot from LearnEnglish Facebook page 24th June 2014.

LearnEnglish – British Council is an example of a channel providing a good service to those in its audience who have an interest in learning and improving their English. It runs an English language ‘clinic’ that occurs weekly and the audience can ask questions related to the English language. The tone of these posts sound like a real person talking. The English ‘doctor’ is introduced by his first name and ‘Neil’ the main poster for this site also signs off using his name.

Within 7 minutes of posting this update it had received 12 comments, 1 share and 37 likes. It is clearly a channel that is followed carefully by its fans. In taking ownership of this particular channel and by talking directly to its audience, the British Council representative ‘Neil’ encourages conversation. Also of note is that conversations are not only instigated by the organisation – comments and posts by this channel’s audience are welcomed as in the example above. This example shows that Neil takes an interest in his audience. This is a

simple yet effective way of taking the social media channel further up the Index of Trust. This practice and approach should be adopted by all channels on the British Council's network.

Out of the top five Facebook and Twitter sites, the only country channel that appears is Egypt's Facebook channel. Egypt is a priority country for the MENA region with the specific aims of connecting English learners through digital content and using art 'to increase understanding, exchange new and challenging ideas, offer channels of expression and explore difficult issues' (British Council, 2014g). This channel is much like the Iran Facebook channel but with an English clinic session. There is no first name term used as in the LearnEnglish page – messages are informative and formal. This channel is one that falls in the Consultative stage of the Index of Trust. According to the British Council Social Media Monitor, its overall score is 43% which is less than Iran.⁹⁰ This is another priority country that is not scoring very highly on social media and therefore the British Council is not having as much impact on its social media audience as it could be. It is important to remember that the number of fans a channel has is not the only metric that should be used in evaluation yet this metric is the main one given consistently in the corporate reports for the British Council. Furthermore, the engagement score on the Monitor does not always give a full picture of how engaging a channel is. Engagement scores for the Monitor are a ratio of response between the British Council and the audience (Interview: Blundell, 2013). This means a very popular site will find it more difficult to get a good engagement score as they would have to respond to more people. Successful sites may become a victim of their own success as there will be a point when a site gets so popular and audience comments are so plentiful that it is difficult to respond or indeed enter dialogue with everyone. At this point, the British Council may need to invest in more resources to meet the demands of the audience.

⁹⁰ The scores from the Monitor were taken on 28th June 2014.

Another assumption I initially made at the start of my research, was that social media has its limitations in areas where the large numbers of people do not have access to the internet. The online population for Afghanistan, for instance, is roughly 5% (Internet World Stats, 2012).⁹¹ The British Council Afghanistan page currently has 3,249 fans which is around 0.21% of the country's internet population. The impact that social media could make here is arguably minimal. However, British Council-sponsored research on how cultural relations can improve trust indicates that the online population of countries of strategic importance to the British Council are those who will benefit most (and benefit the UK's relationship) from the cultural relations experience. 'These young people are not necessarily representative of their entire country populations but they do reflect their respective societies', 'future influencers' and 'young people with potential'. They are also said to be the key group within their societies who will drive long-term international and business engagement' (British Council, 2012j). This being the case, it could therefore be argued that social media has a role to play in public diplomacy, in particular in building trust in countries such as Afghanistan to contribute to strengthening the UK's security.

The research carried out by Ipsos Mori determined that the following involvement in cultural relations contributed to increasing trust in the UK: speaking the English language, having friends in or from the UK and personally visiting the UK (British Council, 2012j). Social media channels managed by the British Council can facilitate all of this.

As discussed in *Chapter 4.2 – An Analysis of the British Council's Use of Social Media*, the digital strategy for Iran is complex considering that the government filters Facebook. The internet population for the country is of 53% penetration (Internet World Stats, 2012), however, and the British Council recognises this, 'Iran has a high number of internet users and Social Media form an important part of people's international

⁹¹ These were the most recent statistics that could be found.

communications. Although many Social Media tools are blocked in Iran, people access these websites using circumvention tools' (Email correspondence: Karven, 2014). As my review of British Council Iran social media channels revealed, there is scope for these channels to be more engaging with its social media audience, understandably, the British Council is exercising caution with all communications in Iran at this moment in time.⁹² The Iran example is an unusual case as it has the added dimension of being a country with no official diplomatic ties to the UK and the continual use of social media in this country highlights how a Facebook channel can be a means of connection with an audience otherwise out of reach. While my personal opinion made from analysis in March 2014 was that the British Council should be focusing more on being more human and engaging their audience on their social media channels it nevertheless gives another example of how social media can work in a delicate public diplomacy role.⁹³

It is understood there are to be more office closures in Europe in countries that are not a priority for the British Council (Interview: Blundell, 2014b). These countries may not pose a political or diplomatic problem for the British Council nor would they be expected to present opportunities for the UK in terms of economic growth otherwise it would be worth keeping an office there. Presumably, however, there is still revenue to be made in these countries in terms of English language learning and encouraging students to study in the UK. Social media in this case is a cost-effective way of keeping communication with the people of such countries. In the evaluation of Iran, one of the observations I made was that no reference was made about local events. When social media channels are managed from another country it is understandable that a distance is created with its online audience with the lack of reference to local events, people and culture. Again, the organisation needs to

⁹² Recent news stories indicate diplomatic progress in Iran (Narji, 2014).

⁹³ I need to acknowledge that British Council social media for Iran has made significant progress since my analysis and this will be discussed in *6 Conclusion*.

consider ways of addressing this, perhaps by eliciting the information from its audience and looking for local people to act as social media champions in the countries in question to participate regularly in social media output. It also reinforces the argument that wherever possible, social media should supplement other activity. There is no substitute for face-to-face interaction and social media should work to complement this activity rather than replace it. As Nie et al comment in their research: '[digital technology can have the] unintended consequence of reducing the number and meaningfulness of emotionally gratifying face-to-face human interactions' (Nie, 2002). Organisations need to be aware of this in their intent to run leaner business models, particularly when, like the British Council, their whole ethos is centre on building relationships and trust between people.

5.5 Support Groups

There are some causes championed by the British Council where social media could be used to build awareness, encouraging petitions to be signed and possibly even fundraising. However, the British Council really needs to think of some innovative content that goes beyond eliciting the occasional like or share from its audience and look at how it could use social media with the target audience of some of these causes. As an example, one of the organisation's ongoing projects is for Women and Leadership in Higher Education (British Council, 2014h), a suggestion here would be to have some live questions and answers by inspirational women that could provide encouragement and support to women in other countries. Social media in this case could also be used to form groups for this type of target audience. These groups could provide real support and encouragement. Online help groups or support groups can be well received via social media. In *Chapter 3 – Social Media in Public Diplomacy* an example of research was cited that showed smokers were twice more likely to quit smoking if they received web support.

Target audiences across all three groups could benefit from this support – learners and teachers of English by different regions, supporters of different causes and followers of certain arts projects are examples of where this could work. The British Council could expand its group of social media champions ‘Team Social’ to lead these groups. As previously mentioned smaller groups are easier to maintain engagement levels. The downside to this from an organisational perspective is that the organisation will lose control of the communication in silo groups, it makes social media harder to monitor and manage if there are numerous channels springing up. For this reason, Blundell commented that he would have fewer social media channels if he could (Interview: Blundell, 2014b). However, if the social media champions in charge of these smaller groups have had the right training, adapt the right approach and employ the correct administration to the channels to maintain the British Council standard as the main channels, the content could be more focused around what the audience wants and relationships in these smaller circles amongst like-minded individuals will stand a better chance of forming than on a platform where one person is one of many thousands of fans. This could be something to consider when the core social media channels for countries and projects are functioning successfully and where this is an appropriate resource to help manage smaller groups.

5.6 Transparency

The author of a book on Cloud Culture suggests that the British Council needs to be aware of the changing face of cultural relations in order to stay current and relevant to today’s societies. In particular, he discusses how technology changes the way culture is delivered.

Cultural relations will be less about delivering culture to and for people and more about doing it with and by them(...). Cultural relations in the era of the pervasive

web and ubiquitous participation will mean thinking, working, creating with other people (Leadbeater, 2010, p. 81).

The shift from pushing information *on* its audience to working *with* its audience echoes Chambers' earlier comments on the need for the British Council to rethink its role so that content can be more shaped by programme participants rather than the organisation.⁹⁴

Leadbeater's concern centres on who has control of the 'new capitalists of cultural relations' which he believes to be Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Google and Salesforce. While he indicates these sites act as 'outlets for mass participation, collaboration, self-expression and social connection' (Leadbeater, 2010, p. 14), he believes there is a risk for individuals, groups, governments to attempt to control and coerce these giants of the internet. Citing an example of Google's ambition to rescue books with no publisher in order to make them available to the world, he highlights concerns that Google would be in charge of which books would be available 'a profit-hungry corporation run by self-confessed software nerds with tunnel vision would not be most people's first choice to act as the custodian of our culture' (Leadbeater, 2010, p. 14). In Leadbeater's view, clearly digital media has the potential to provide a forum for different people and peoples to share their views, however, there is a danger that those in control of these sites have a different reason for providing this information that may benefit them commercially, politically or for something else less altruistic than the desire to simply provide a platform for people across the globe to connect and share the treasures of their culture.

The message for the British Council is to use the outlets that technology provides as a forum to share culture rather than impose British culture on others. The foreword to this report by David Miliband (UK Foreign Secretary May 2010 – October 2010) resonates with this.

⁹⁴ Cited in the section entitled *Broadcasting/Approach*

The British Council (...) has been building partnerships in cultural relations for half a century longer than people have been using the term public diplomacy and for six decades before the internet era. The UK's Foreign Office's financial support for the Council (...) recognises that governments have an important role in facilitating cultural dialogue and disseminating news and knowledge, but they must be aware of the instinct to coerce and control (Leadbeater, 2010, p. 9).

Miliband's comments make it clear that the UK government should not be tempted to use the British Council as a cover for sending out controlled messages. The British Council's approach should always focus on mutual connections and sharing information. Any perception that the organisation's main sponsor (the UK government) is a major player in programme content could have a detrimental impact on the British Council's image and ethos.

The British Council's audience should feel free to participate in the organisation's social media channels without there being a hidden agenda on behalf of the British Council. For this reason the unbranded Facebook site that the British Council has for Iran does not sit comfortably with me. The fact that some of the content was identical to the official British Council Facebook page for Iran does not make it too difficult for someone to guess the connection or wonder about the British Council's agenda here.

In June 2014, a U.S District Judge ruled that LinkedIn customers could 'pursue claims that the social media site violated users' right of publicity' (Mykleseth, 2014) after it became apparent that the site had sent out promotional material to people in its customers' address books. Examples such as these highlight the need for the British Council to be transparent in all its operations including how it will use any data it collects about its audience. The organisation also has a responsibility to ensure any information it has about its audience is

used for ethical reasons, such as to help provide better content and give the organisation a clearer idea of the cross section or demands of its audience.

Similarly, the organisation needs to be aware of outside threats that may attempt to hack into its social media channels. The items that appear under the umbrella of cyber risk are growing all the time. Insurers are providing policies based on speculation of what might be possible because that is the sum of it; we don't actually know what is possible in cyber risk (Deloitte, 2014). It is therefore important that the organisation implements stringent security on its social media to protect its users. Disputes over the freedom of speech and individual's rights to privacy on the internet has brought to light the uncertainty of what stance search engines and social media sites should take on whether freedom of access should rule over certain moral obligations and whether imposing these moral obligations gives more control of content to the likes of Google, Facebook and Twitter. John McAfee, creator of the anti-virus software of the same name is a firm believer that there is a need for internet users to stand up to corporations like Google and Facebook who know too much about their users, 'how did this happen to us? (...) It happened because we allowed technology to run away with itself and because it made our lives easier and more convenient. (...) With the loss of privacy you're losing your freedom' (Muncaster, 2014). The British Council needs to be aware of these concerns, as well as taking steps to protect audiences who use British Council channels from potential cyber threats.

5.7 Conclusion

Success in social media relies on the ability to attract an audience and that attraction can come in different forms: inspirational posts, support groups, providing quality and highly regarded information of interesting, humorous, beautiful or controversial content. As the quote at the beginning of this chapter suggests, organisations (just as everyone else) are really

just cutting their teeth on social media to find out what works and what doesn't work. If anything, the British Council needs to be bolder in its social media to portray an image that Blundell and his Team Social did so well in the video clip described in *Chapter 4 – The British Council's Use of Social Media*; it needs to let the individuals shine on social media platforms as they will help attract the audience figures more than a bland, safe, channel that simply posts a few titbits of information about English courses and the odd nice picture. Different individuals leading social media channels will also give an impression to the world that the British Council is about people, not the institution or the UK government.⁹⁵

Most importantly, the organisation needs to take care that these channels are not simply distributing information. Getting the occasional 'like' or even a large number of fans, is not enough proof that the audience is engaged or that the social media channel is having any impact on its audience. The British Council has a very real opportunity currently to reach a larger number of people and in some cases, as in the case of the target audience for Afghanistan, an audience of people who would help the UK to benefit from cultural relations. That social media in countries such as Iran, Egypt and Afghanistan are not using best practice techniques or employing the best resources in social media to train people to use those country's sites simply signifies that the British Council is missing an opportunity to have a greater impact on the very people they are supposed to be targeting and perhaps highlights the need for the British Council to understand better target digital audiences and how to best to engage them.

One of the main questions asked in this chapter was whether social media could be used in all aspects of British Council work. The answer to this is simple; yes. Social media can be used to connect different audiences with different interests. The extent of how much it

⁹⁵ Part of the intention of the video clip featuring Team Social was to reinforce the message that the British Council is an organisation of different people from different backgrounds. This was in *Chapter 4 – An Analysis of the British Council's Use of Social Media*.

can be used depends on the country or project objectives. In Sub-Saharan Africa where one of the priorities is to address inequality (British Council, 2011b), innovative ways might be explored to identify the different ways social media could share information on how to build skills and professional development and encourage and support its target audience to do just that. The development contracts with the Department for International Development (DFID) to improve capability and accountability in the justice and governance sectors could be bolstered with social media channels that target the next generation of lawyers and professionals in these regions to provide access to international best practice. There is admittedly a limit to the impact social media can have, particularly in areas where the internet is not readily available or is censored by governments. Additionally, in areas of priority for the British Council, social media should be a part of the delivery (not all of it).⁹⁶ Essentially the British Council should be considering how to be more innovative and inclusive in all of its activity particularly activity which would traditionally fall under broadcasting. An over-dependency on social media is something that all organisations in their endeavour to be more productive, efficient and provide value for money need to be aware of. As pointed out throughout this thesis, social media has its limitations. It provides an efficient way of reaching a great number of people across the globe, but the impact this can truly have on its audience is debatable. It is clearly not the same as spending time with people in person and developing relationships beyond the screen.

In countries and regions that are not a priority and do not bring in high revenues for the British Council, it may be more cost effective to have a virtual presence. However, the person or people managing these country sites need to be very well trained and skilled in social media. In the case of Iran's social media presence, there was very little engagement from the audience. This coupled with the fact that there was no evidence of any local British

⁹⁶ Unless there is a reason why there can't be also be a physical presence as in the case of Iran.

Council activity meant that the social media channel served as little more than a website. Countries that only have a virtual presence have to carefully consider the topics and updates that will get its audience interested. English learning and English language teaching sites do well as they provide a lot of information that is useful to these audience groups. In Wider Europe for the year 2011-12, the income generated was £12 million (compared to East Asia, for instance, that earned revenues of £124 million) (British Council, 2011b). It is likely that the country offices that have been earmarked for closure are in this region. If a social media channel replaces the office and is managed from London, in addition to that person being competent in using social media he/she also needs to be familiar or have a good understanding of the country and the local culture to improve chances of connecting with the local people in that country. Furthermore, he or she would need to become an expert in the areas of priority for this region which are to strengthen arts policy and increase the number of English learners (British Council, 2011b).

From an evaluation perspective, the British Council's Social Media Monitor, provides instant information on how different country and project social media channels are doing in various KPI's. The next step to this is to understand what to do with this information. The Monitor provides numbers and scores through arguably sophisticated technology, however, there also needs to be an element of human evaluation to qualitatively evaluate content and styles of posts and to understand what is working, what isn't and what type of content there should be more of. Step Three of the process in *Chapter 4 – Analysis of the Use of Social Media in the British Council* is an example of how the organisation could make this evaluation more complete and define areas that need to improve.

Shaping content to the demands of the audience requires British Council social media users to be adept at listening to customer comments and criticisms and taking account of the type of posts that seem popular as well as learning from examples of posts that have not been

well received. Surveys posted on social media channels with a few simple questions to avoid the exercise being too labour intensive is something that is already in practice and appears to work well.⁹⁷ Another advantage of digital delivery is the ability to build a digital profile of the users of such sites; the amount of people who download material from British Council websites or participate in online programmes, where in the world these people are, and the number of people who click on certain links could all be used to highlight the topics that people want to know more about and the British Council activity that people are interested in. The British Council could also presumably use this information in their progress reports and annual reports to measure digital impact.

Ineffective social media channels need to be given the support and help to raise the standards to avoid putting target audiences off. There is a danger when people who are neither technologically savvy or understand how to be effective in social media are put in charge of managing channels. The British Council needs to consider how it will make sure the best people are recruited for social media work and understand the necessary measures that should be taken in order to understand how social media can work for the British Council.

‘We are now living in a world where the social media is becoming part of everyday conversation in our personal lives as well as in business. (...) It is a classic example of herd mentality. Everyone else is doing it so I need to do it too, even though I might not fully understand it’ (Interview: Midgley, 2013).

The British Council needs to ensure the social media channels it has are engaging audiences, evolving with the audiences demands and not simply existing for the simple reason that everybody else has a social media presence. There is a real chance for the British Council to

⁹⁷ In *Chapter 4 – The use of Social Media in the British Council Zambia* was cited as using customer surveys on the Facebook Page for British Council Zambia.

reach a huge audience with social media. If it can be effective in engaging with those audiences it can also impact on the very people it is targeting.

6. Conclusion

The topic for this thesis was instigated by the announcements of the austerity measures, or efficiency savings, for the British Council outlined in the Corporate Plan for 2011-2015 (British Council, 2011b). I was particularly interested by Martin Davidson's statement that 'physical presence' would be replaced in some areas with a 'virtual one' (House of Commons, 2013) and wondered in particular how effective the organisation would be at creating international opportunities, building trust and contributing to the UK's soft power if its people were no longer on the ground in certain locations abroad. This led to a study of the way the organisation uses social media. I wanted to find out how this form of communication was being used in the organisation and how it fitted in with the organisations' role in society today. In particular, I wanted to understand if social media could benefit the organisation by contributing to the British Council's purpose to build relationships and trust around the world and to be a driver of the UK's soft power. Considering the breadth of activities that the British Council is involved in I also questioned how relevant social media was to the different areas that the organisation operates in.

This research adds to original contribution of knowledge in two main areas. Firstly, it is the first study of the British Council's use of social media. It is also the first study to analyse social media monitor against the core purposes of a cultural relations organisation. It was opportune that the timing of my research mirrored the aforementioned Corporate Plan. I was able to interview the newly appointed Social Media Manager when strategy was being formulated for the first time, I was also granted access to the British Council's Social Media Monitor while it was in its early testing stages and use it to analyse social media activity before senior management at the British Council or indeed anyone else in the organisation began to use it. This gave me a unique insight to the direction the organisation was moving in terms of engaging international audiences through social media.

Since completing analysis of the three countries that were studied (Venezuela, Zambia and Iran), understandably, a lot of progress has been made. The essence of social media is that it is constantly changing. Social media sites need constant attention so as not to fall into decline and similarly, new initiatives, innovative, regular content can make social media sites more successful. At the time of my study, Iran fared the worse. In March 2015, however, the campaign #SpiritOfNowruz, did exceptionally well. The Twitter tour of the exhibition reached the highest number of people compared to all other British Council Twitter tours. In addition, the number of ‘likes’ on the Facebook page has grown by 241% in the last year (British Council, 2015). The Country Director for Iran indicated that even when there is a British Council office in Tehran he will continue the emphasis on social media, simply because of the number of people that can be reached and that positive way it can supplement other activity (Interview: Whitehead, 2015). The digital strategy for Iran that I reviewed in *Chapter 4 – Social Media in Practice*, it would seem, is now firmly in place and it is clear that the organisation recognises the use of social media. Whitehead had a clear view of who the audience was and had introduced programmes accordingly, these are now working alongside more traditional activity – workshops, face-to-face activity with Iranians outside of Iran, meetings with key people in the state apparatus, for instance, the Ministry of Science and Technology (Interview: Whitehead, 2015). The British Council has recently initiated social media for Syria (another country with no official diplomatic relations with the UK), it will be interesting to see how successful the Digital Manager is at engaging with Syrian audiences and if any lessons have been learnt from the organisation’s experience of using social media for an Iranian audience.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ A Digital Manager for Syria has not yet been appointed (Interview: Whitehead, 2015).

6.1 Cultural Relations Positioning

In order to analyse the use of social media in the British Council, my first aim was to articulate what the British Council does and why it is important to the UK. In *Chapter 1 – The British Council and its Cultural Relations Activity*, certain aspects were identified as being important to cultural relations. The British Council portrays itself as an organisation that listens to the people rather than one that distributes information. I demonstrated that the organisation believes that trust and relationships are built on two-way communication and through sharing ideas and views. Therefore the British Council shouldn't be a vehicle to impose British values on others but, rather should serve as the catalyst for providing opportunities for different people and cultures to connect with each other. It was in this chapter that the different types of activity were identified as messaging, access and relationship building. Activity which has the most impact is relationship building which encompasses activities centred on joint initiatives with the target audience, networking and encouragement of mutual understanding. While the British Council acknowledges that messaging has the least impact on its international audiences it is actually through broadcasting that the majority of its audience is reached. The British Council aims to reach 500 million people through broadcasting (publications, radio, and television) by 2015 (British Council, 2011b). Admittedly these broadcasting activities often occur as part of a project or SBU (Strategic Business Unit) that also delivers other non-broadcasting activities to its target audience but nevertheless there is no denying that messaging plays a major part in communications in the British Council. The actual face-to-face activity which is said to have most impact only involves a fraction of the British Council's audience – the plan is for the organisation to involve 7 million people in face-to-face activity in 2015, this is merely 1.1%

of the total audience.⁹⁹ Throughout this thesis the argument that face-to-face activity is the optimum way to build relationships and trust has been made. Social media and indeed, all other activity should complement this or be used where face-to-face activity is not possible.

In an email exchange with John Worne, Director of Strategy for the British Council, I explained that my forecast (using figures I had received on social media figures for 2012-2013, (Internal Document: British Council, 2014i)), was that by 2016 the social media audience could be 100 million. I asked him where the investment would be considering this statistic. His answer was that the investment would be in people; ‘It's people who make great content, great communities and great connections, so supporting them is where the focus needs to be and is’ (Email correspondence: Worne, 2015). The overarching view certainly would appear to be one that focuses on human interaction, which is essential to mutuality and trust. This essential human engagement with others is what shifts digital communication from one that pushes out information into a more collaborative interplay with the audience. Similarly, Worne indicated that the organisation is looking at ways to include social media in all areas of activity; ‘We now build social [media] into our content, arts, media and event strategy and this is increasingly where the focus is and will go alongside the personal and face to face aspects’ (Email correspondence: Worne, 2015). Viewed this way, social media can complement existing efforts and attract a wider audience that would not be reachable by face-to-face work alone.

The significance of a cultural relations organisation for the UK was defined in *Chapter 2 – Soft Power, Public Diplomacy and the British Council*. Considering the FCO’s stipulation to follow a soft power approach to foreign policy, I highlighted Nye’s theory on how soft power is best achieved through communication that centres on listening as well as

⁹⁹ This takes into account projected audience figures for face-to-face, exhibitions, festivals, fairs, performances, digital and broadcasting and publications (British Council, 2011b). It has also taken into account the later adjustment to the digital figure (from 140 million to 100 million) (British Council, 2014g).

delivering messages. This view was supported by Vuving's definition of soft power currencies (Vuving, 2009). Admittedly there are critics that question the concept of soft power (Ferguson, 2003, Mattern, 2007), and there has certainly been much discussion on the immeasurability of soft power; there is no certainty that being liked will ensure a state achieves all its foreign policy goals. In a conversation on soft power with Danny Whitehead, Country Director of Iran at the British Council, he told me that he feels labelling the British Council's work as 'soft power' was unhelpful; he thought that the suggestion that the British Council are trying to influence people is an obstruction to building relations in Iran where 'the level of mistrust of the UK can really not be overstated' (Interview: Whitehead, 2015). That said, the British Council clearly articulate that they contribute to the UK's soft power on their website (2014m) and John Worne, the Director of Strategy has written articles in the press about why he thinks the British Council do soft power so well (Worne, 2013a, Worne, 2013b).

In regard to the focus of this thesis on virtual communication, Nye believes that in a global information age, soft power is even more important as audiences are being influenced more and more by non-governmental entities. This being the case, the British Council's role in soft power is more relevant than ever and a potential social media audience number of 100 million highlights the importance of getting this communication means to a standard where the organisation will engage and interact effectively with that audience.

In the foreword to a report on soft power by the British Council and Demos, William Hague highlighted the importance that the British Council and social media play in soft power.

We have to use new means of communicating with and understanding other countries to make sure our diplomacy remains highly effective in the 21st century... Britain remains a modern day superpower. Staying competitive in

‘soft power’ for decades to come means nurturing these assets and valuing them as much as our military, economic and diplomatic advantages (British Council, 2013c, p. 2).

Hague’s comments sum up the role that social media has to play in the British Council and soft power now and for the future. Whether it is Facebook, RenRen or another new social media site, the organisation needs to be relevant to a modern society and be proficient in connecting with people by responding effectively to new conventions. Assuming that the British Council implements a social media strategy of this nature across its international network then it could increase the impact it has with its audiences by using social media to reach large audience figures rather than broadcasting, or at the very least introduce social aspects to its broadcasting activity. There is certainly an argument throughout this thesis that social media is suited to soft power.

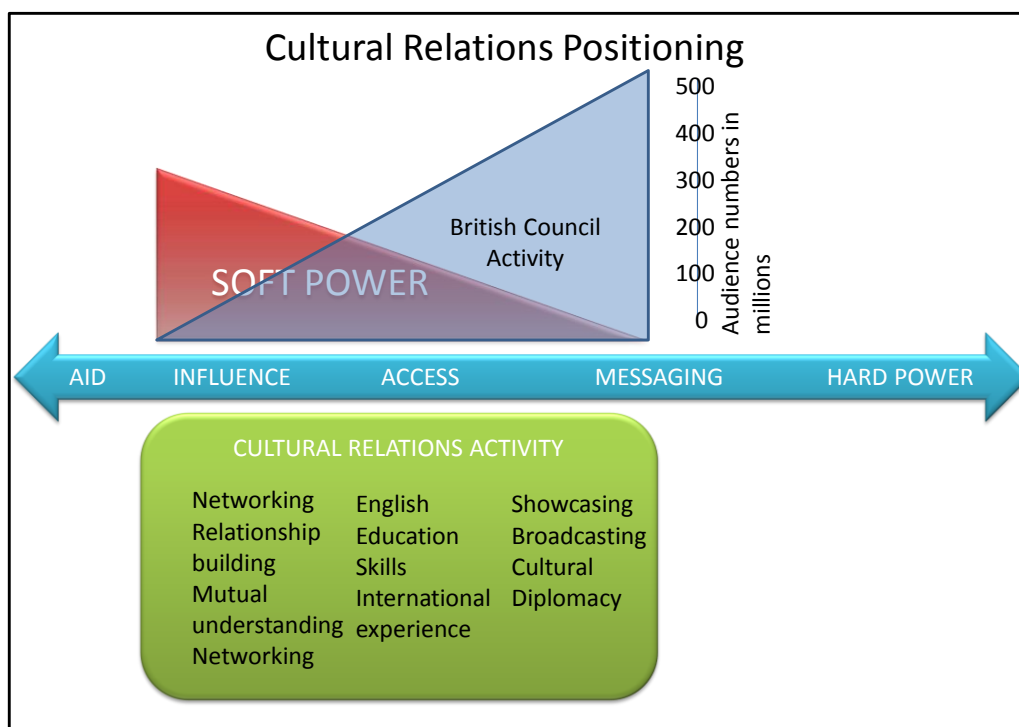


Figure 34: Cultural Relations Positioning Diagram depicting activity carried out by the British Council using audience numbers from Corporate Plan 2011-15 (British Council, 2011b).

In *Chapter 2 – Soft Power, Public Diplomacy and the British Council* I created a new diagram based on the International Relations Positioning diagram created by the British Council. I determined that the British Council had misrepresented soft power by placing it between messaging and hard power. The diagram I created showed that soft power could be part of every part of the spectrum from aid and development up until hard power (defined by military action and economic sanctions). Figure 39 focuses on the activity that could have the biggest impact in soft power (which declines the closer it is to messaging activity). It also shows British Council audience numbers by activity type to exemplify a small audience number is achieved through the high impact face-to-face work. The reduction, in particular, in government grant in the high-impact area has essentially undercut the UK's soft power and questions how much the FCO has actually bought-in to the soft power concept. It also highlights the need for the British Council to focus on how it can have more impact in the work it does in other areas such as social media.

6.2 The Role of Social Media in the British Council

My research highlighted where the social media monitor falls short of aligning to the organisation's core priorities. My own evaluation showed that the three main areas for the British Council to consider in its social media strategy were how social media applications aligned to the British Council's core priorities firstly by approach – specifically the tone of voice that is used mirrors that of the British Council's established views of mutuality. Secondly, that content is relevant, interesting and engaging the audience, and, thirdly, that the applications are managed in a way that presents the Council as a professional, upstanding organisation. The British Council's social media monitor is not a sufficient tool on its own to measure the progress of the British Council's social media strategy.

Chapter 4 – An Analysis of the Use of Social Media highlighted the considerable work that David Blundell, Social Media Manager for the British Council has carried out since he took up his new role. The approach or tone of voice that British Council users should characterise is one area that Blundell has given extensive thought to. This is compatible with my own views on the importance of a mutual and inclusive approach. The Social Media Voice document, created by Blundell and his team acts as a reminder (or informs) on what the organisation should represent on social media channels. The personalities of the British Council are confident, independent, inspiring, friendly, respectful, trustworthy, focused and engaging. These personalities would not be out of place in descriptions of Vuving’s soft power currencies of benignity, beauty and brilliance (Vuving, 2009), discussed in *Chapter 2 - Soft Power, Public Diplomacy and the British Council*.

One of the biggest tasks that Blundell has carried out to date as Social Media manager is the procurement, build and roll out of a system to track British Council social media. There are of course numerous benefits to this system that the organisations did not have prior to its build – the organisation can now see what social media channels exist across the British Council locations as well as have an idea of how well these channels are performing in terms of the typical criteria used to measure social media such as numbers of fans, reactions (likes, comments and shares), numbers of posts made and the time it takes to respond to queries. It can drill down into granular detail to see, for example, the types of posts that have had a high response from the audience. The Board acknowledge the usefulness of this tool and, interestingly, acknowledge the need to encourage the digital users within the British Council to use it to increase their own understanding of what works and what doesn’t rather than be used simply as a governance tool. ‘It sets a standard and gently promotes improvement and comparison. The key to it is transparency and visibility and that it is owned by the digital

community - in this way it is not a management 'stick' but an expert practitioner community 'carrot' (Email correspondence: Worne, 2015).

As previously mentioned, my research highlights a number of gaps in the British Council's current tool for evaluating its social media applications. Extensive work has been carried out in the British Council's strategy to highlight the need for managers of social media channels to consider tone of voice and how channels should align to British Council strategy. The British Council's Social Media Monitor, and indeed any technology in place to monitor engagement, is limited in how far it can evaluate content, approach and whether dialogue is meeting the social media voice guidelines. Similarly, the Monitor cannot evaluate if these social media sites are in fact assisting the country or project objectives and ultimately if they are contributing to the overall objectives of the British Council. With this in mind, my methodology for research of the use of social media involved a three step process to evaluate the use of social media against the British Council's purpose.

The third step of the process organised components into the following categories: administration, approach and content as these were identified in *Chapter 4 – An Analysis of the Use of Social Media* as being crucial to social media being effective to the British Council's purpose. These categories were determined by the components shown to be important to social media in *Chapter 3 – Social Media in Public Diplomacy* and also views on soft power currencies in *Chapter 2 – Soft Power, Public Diplomacy and the British Council*.

While Steps 1 and 2 have the similar aims to the British Council Social Media Monitor – to provide a view on the performance of social media channels - I did identify some issues with the Monitor's evaluation of social media. The first being that target numbers for audiences set by Digital Managers were not representative of the true potential. Blundell explained that this was because Digital Managers did not previously have a true

picture of what internet audiences in target countries could look like. Armed with more information, including the information provided on the Monitor, means that this will be an issue that will be resolved presently (if it hasn't already).

The final step in my analysis is where I believe the biggest flaw in the evaluation of social media in the British Council currently exists. The ability to show that social media can assist the organisation in its purpose and improve the impact it has on this audience will undoubtedly result in this area receiving the attention I believe it deserves, considering the potential audience size of this communication means. In speaking with Worne on this issue, it would seem that the organisation is now considering how social media might assist in working towards the organisation's main objective.

As you know we have done a huge amount to bring consistency, common standards and capacity and tools worldwide - the social media monitor has also gently encouraged rationalisation and upped standards, I think we are now in a phase of moving beyond optimising the channels to connecting them with our core purpose (Email correspondence: Worne, 2015).

It is certainly interesting that the organisation is now considering how social media can align with the organisation's 'core purpose' and I believe the process I have outlined in my thesis gives a suggestion on how to identify areas that could be improved to ensure social media is aligned to that core purpose.

Effectiveness in social media hinges on the ability to attract an audience. For this reason I draw parallels with the definition of soft power in *Chapter 3 – Social Media in Public Diplomacy*. Users follow individuals, companies, organisations, blogs, products and so on through social media channels because they want to; essentially those who succeed in social media generate soft power. Social media users seek out the channels that are interesting and relevant to them personally or the organisation or group that they represent.

The FCO has officially embraced social media with a number of individuals actively seeking to connect with audiences via Facebook, Twitter and blog sites. Certain actors in international relations, notably Hilary Clinton (former U.S Secretary of State 2009-2013), William Hague (former UK Foreign Secretary 2010-2014), Tara Sonenshine, (former U.S Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy 2012-2013) and Andreas Sandre former Press and Public Affairs Officer at the Embassy of Italy in Washington (2013) have all spoken out about the importance of social media in connecting with audiences. Sandre's Rules of Engagement in social media diplomacy were pivotal in the creation of my own table of components which were used to assess the British Council's use of social media. There are various aspects that are crucial to success in social media but perhaps the key point is to remember that social media requires participants to be 'social'. In the same way that the British Council cites activities involving more participation from its audiences as having more impact, social media has more impact the more engaged its audiences are.

As part of the British Council's accountability to government, there is a requirement that the British Council's strategy aligns with the FCO's, part of this means that the British Council will have priority countries which are also areas of concern to the FCO and the government grant will be distributed accordingly. When questioning the British Council on where a virtual presence would exist over a physical presence, it became apparent that it would not be the priority countries which would lose a country office, it will be the countries in wider Europe which are low-priority and earn low revenues (Interview: Blundell, 2014a). A virtual presence will therefore be a way of keeping a connection with the countries of low significance to the UK. However, it is also worth noting that currently there are two priority countries with whom the British Council only engages through digital interaction; Iran and Syria. While the British Council hopes to re-establish itself in Iran sometime in 2015, it is unlikely to have an office in Syria any time soon (Interview: Whitehead, 2015).

Interestingly, Whitehead feels that that the social media campaigns for the Facebook and Twitter site dedicated to Iran as well as his individual Twitter account has started dialogue and established an approach based on mutuality and trust with its audience (Interview: Whitehead, 2015). Understandably, he feels this is beneficial prior to entering an environment where the dominant view of British Council activity may be one of suspicion. This is also contrary to my initial assumption that the use of social media has its limitations in some of the more public diplomacy type activities.

There are certainly benefits in using social media channels; they are generally free to set up and the latest statistics show that through social media, the British Council is reaching more people than ever before. There are currently 312 Facebook or Twitter channels and these are representative of British Council presence across the globe by country, project, SBU, product or teaching centre (British Council, 2013i). However, this does not provide a full picture as the British Council is required to do more than 'reach people' and certainly more than to disseminate information to lots of people; it is required to build relationships and trust. It may be that a well-appointed social media strategy assists the organisation in relationship and trust building that depends on whether or not it uses social media as a broadcasting tool or way to engage with its audience.

In Chapter 5 – Causal Implications for Consideration in the Use of Social Media. Social media was shown to be well suited to groups with a common interest such as those learning or teaching English. Many projects already include an online element so there is every likelihood that in time (if not already) each of these projects will also have a social media element to complement the work currently being carried out. It can then be assumed that social media can be a part of all activity carried out by the British Council. I do, however, see a limit to the impact that social media can have in certain projects and this will be explained in the next section.

6.3 Honesty Really is the Best Policy

There is certain mimicry amongst organisations currently to have a social media presence and this was a point raised in *Chapter 3 – Social Media in Public Diplomacy* – many companies are jumping on the social media bandwagon without much of an understanding of how it works and clearly, opening a Facebook or Twitter account is not enough to have a social media presence. Organisations have to plan social media channels and think carefully how social media can be useful to their audiences and ensure that they have dedicated resources available to these channels in order for them to work to any effect.

The tone of voice outlined in the British Council Social Media Voice document (British Council, 2014h) outlines personalities that are not only expected of British Council representatives using social media but includes representatives working in all parts of the organisation; this is confirmed in the behaviours requirement defined in job descriptions advertised in the British Council (British Council, n.d.). If the British Council is actively seeking a type of organisational culture that promotes this thinking then it is logical to assume that its social media will reflect British Council values. In a lecture on India's soft power, Dr Shashi Tharoor summed up his idea of the role of soft power in today's world. Tharoor believes that the information age we live in means that it is not plausible to attempt to sell an image of a country and rather that the message that will get through will be 'who we are, not what we want to show'. This view strongly suggests that communication needs to be genuine otherwise social media audiences will consider it to be less than credible and consequently this response will dramatically undercut a nation's soft power.

The world in the 21st century will increasingly be a world in which the use of hard power carries with it the odium of mass public disapproval, whereas a blossoming of soft power which lends itself more easily to the information era will constitute a country's principal asset. Soft power is not about conquering others but about being yourself (Tharoor, 2011).

This view also supports the argument that cultural relations as a front for government propaganda or nation branding is not an effective option for governments or organisations looking to sell an image that differs from the truth. Individuals' messages will get through via the likes of Twitter or Facebook despite whatever the official message may be.

Many of the personalities described in the British Council's Social Media Voice Framework are necessary to a mutual approach – being friendly, respectful and engaging all assist in giving the impression that the British Council values its audience and what that audience thinks and says. A positive impression will be further enforced by content which is inspiring, focused and delivered with confidence. The 'independence' personality is important in addressing the issues raised previously and is another reason why the British Council channels should encourage its staff to address its social media audience as it would if attending an event in person, and as such use first names and resist the temptation to reproduce text that has appeared elsewhere by the organisation. In *2.4 Perception and Trust*, a broadcast is cited which defined the British Council as a 'juggernaut of an official British culture' (Stonor Saunders, 2011). This perception is potentially damaging to the reputation of the British Council as it would assume that the government is controlling the content of programmes and messages sent out. The reason that culture can open doors, where typically governments are unable to (British Council, 2014a), is because of the absence of government involvement. For this reason it is crucial that the British Council is transparent about its connections with government. On the issue of transparency, when I questioned the Director of Iran about the unbranded Facebook page, it was clearly an issue that concerned him. The reasons for the unbranded page was to protect users who may be disinclined to be associated with the British Council, he also added that engagement scores of Iran could be attributed to the apprehension of the audience to be associated with the British Council; the number of page visits on the official site contrasted greatly to the number of likes, shares, and comments

received. However, uncomfortable with the lack of transparency of the unbranded site he advised that he was phasing this site out. Furthermore, the official Facebook site is proving more popular (Interview: Whitehead, 2015).

The point of control in virtual communication touches on Leadbeater's concerns discussed in *Chapter 5 – Causal Implications for Consideration in the Use of Social Media*. He discussed the temptation of governments, corporations or other individuals may have to try and control content appearing on the internet to influence audiences. In 2013, the UK Conservative party deleted a decade of speeches from the Conservative party online library including one that ironically David Cameron gave on the importance of transparency and access on the internet 'we need to harness the internet to help us become more accountable, more transparent and more accessible' (Ramesh, 2013). In response to the criticism that the Conservatives were trying to conceal certain shifts in policy, the British Library then announced that it had been archiving the Conservative website since 2004 (Ramesh, 2013). Regardless of the Conservatives' true intentions in deleting the speeches, any attempt to edit, delete or control the information available to us on the internet will most certainly raise suspicion. This may also serve as an example of how difficult it is to control online content.

6.4 Limitations of Study

There were a number of limitations within this research. Firstly the limited timeframe of the case study analysis of the country social media applications. As mentioned, the reason for this was that full access to the social media monitor was limited to the time I spent in the British Council office in Madrid. Secondly, because of the fluidity of social media the two case studies Venezuela and Zambia seem arbitrary - on another day it may have been two other social media channels that were performing first and second place according to the social media monitor. Despite the fact that complete replicability of results would be difficult (no two days are the same for social media), I am confident that the same issues exposed

would appear in different data sets. There is no doubt that issues such as unrealistic target numbers or delay in response to enquiries would have been an organisation-wide issue at the time of research. That said, a project team, rather than one sole researcher, with sufficient access to the social media monitor over a longer time frame, would undoubtedly be able to carry out a more thorough study and perhaps identify if certain issues are occurring with regularity within a country, for instance.

Another method that would allow for a more complete picture of how successful social media in the British Council is in aligning to organisational priorities would be to interview the audience who use the British Council's social media applications. This was a task that would have involved significant cost outside of the budget I had, but would have shed light on a number of aspects – why do people use British Council applications – to improve their English, to find out about Britain, because they want to visit the UK? What do people actually think about the content on Facebook/Twitter and what would they like to see more/less of? Do the social media applications improve opinions of the UK/the British? While this was out of the scope of my research, it is certainly an approach that would develop the understanding of the impact that the British Council's social media has on its audience.

The fact that my research hinges so heavily on the data that the social media monitor provided may raise concern that the organisation's evaluation criteria defined my own. The social media monitor was indeed very useful for providing the data around common metrics for measuring social media – number of fans, shares, likes and so on. This information was useful but it was my overall understanding of social media discovered from the literature, real life examples and interviews with people unconnected to the British Council that influenced my thinking and indeed my list of components. There are other trackers or monitors that exist to measure engagement of social media and provide network analysis. Aside from the inevitable price tag of these systems, they use big data analysis to make judgments. I believe

my approach was a more holistic method that considered a wide range of sources and actually one that required the consideration of a number of elements identified from an understanding gained from the empirical research undertaken prior to the case study analysis.

6.5 Conclusion: Using Social Media to Complement Cultural Relations

This thesis has analysed the effectiveness of the British Council’s new social media strategy in terms of enabling the realisation of the organisation’s main objectives. While I have outlined how the British Council could be more effective in social media, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this communication alluded to already in this conclusion. The Index of Trust that appeared in *Chapter 1 – The British Council and its Cultural Relations Activity* showed the type of activity that encourages trust. I also created a diagram to show the upper end of impact of social media in *Chapter 3 – Social Media in Public Diplomacy*. These diagrams have now combined to show my view on where social media sits in cultural relations and ultimately where it can have most impact and where the limitations of this form of communication are.

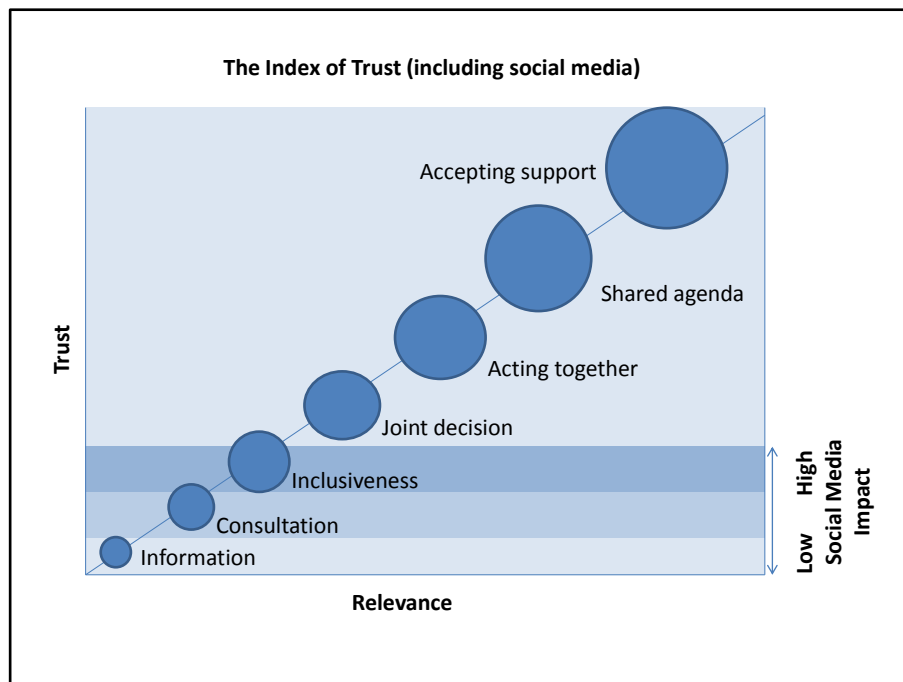


Figure 35: Diagram to illustrate where social media has impact in Index of Trust.

My understanding of social media is that it is very relevant to, and important in, cultural relations and the more effective social media is the more impact it will have on audiences and the more trust will be encouraged. The position of the social media on the Index of Trust shows that social media has more impact and generates more trust if it is inclusive. I do believe, however, that the impact social media has on cultural relations really does end at the lower third bubble; activity beyond this requires more than a virtual presence. A social media presence could be part of every point on this Index yet my view is that it only really complements activity beyond joint decision making. Examples in the *Chapter 3 - Social Media in Public Diplomacy* illustrate how commitment to a cause on social media does not equate to a real dedicated commitment. Therefore relationships need to be developed offline if target audiences are to place enough trust in the British Council to make joint decisions, share agendas and fully accept the organisation's support. While I have suggested that innovative ways should be sought for how social media can have more impact on audiences, particularly in public diplomacy activities, this does come with the caveat that social media can only really support public diplomacy activity or be used to reach and support audiences that face-to-face activity is unable to.

The British Council uses a variety of communication means in their activity: face-to-face, broadcasting, web-based programmes, social networking. This thesis calls for the need for the British Council strategy in social media to be fully ingrained in all social media channels and for periodical evaluations of social media against the specific and organisation-wide objectives with a sound understanding of how approach, content and administration all contribute to the main purpose of the British Council. It also recommends a review of broadcasting activity and to consider ways of introducing social aspects into these activities. While Nye acknowledges the importance of the Internet in today's age he also highlights the importance of other communication means: 'face-to-face communications remain the most

effective, but they can be supplemented and reinforced by the Internet. For example, a combination of visits and the Internet can create both virtual and real networks of young people who want to learn about each other's cultures' (Nye, 2004, p. 112). Ultimately, the British Council has made some important steps in social media, however, any work in social media is a work in progress, the British Council will need to be constantly looking at how it can connect better with audiences and maintain and build interest in what it has to say.

Through constantly evolving with the demands of the audience, the organisation has a better chance of remaining current and relevant to today's societies. That said, we have to remember that social media is only part of the full cultural relations picture and there are limits to the impact it can have on any audience. Cultural relations activity has most impact in the face-to-face public diplomacy work it carries out. By reducing the money available to spend in this area the UK government is reducing the impact of cultural relations by forcing the British Council to be more commercial and focus on the activities that have less influence on its audience. This undercuts the potential soft power the British Council could generate thus undermining the FCO's official line on the importance of soft power in foreign policy.

Reiterating an earlier point, a virtual presence will not become the *modus operandi* of conducting cultural relations activity in the British Council but it will certainly play a larger role than it has previously. Social media is an area that is expanding greatly in the British Council; the figures provided in this thesis show that social networking audiences have increased by over 130% in the last year (Internal Document: British Council, 2014i). To use the organisation's key words of 'reach' and 'impact', it is now time for the British Council to ensure that it is not only reaching that large audience but also impacting it in a way that is true to its main purpose; to encourage trust to grow and to provide the opportunities to build relationships between people in the UK and people overseas.

Appendix 1. British Council Projects with Description of Activity

The table shows a list of projects with a brief description of how that project is run. The description is the one provided in the Corporate Plan 2011-2015 against the project name. I have included an additional column to provide more information on exactly what type of activity takes place.

Project Name	Description ¹⁰⁰	How do they do this?
Creative and Cultural Economy (Arts)	Building skills and leaders in the global economy for creative entrepreneurship, opportunity and economic growth.	Work with creative sectors and cultural institutions in the UK and around the world to develop initiatives and events that share experiences of developing the creative economy. The project has its own website with links to publications and other resources. They also run a global seminar programme. (British Council, 2012a).
New Work New Audiences (Arts)	Presenting new UK work internationally and developing collaborations across all art forms.	This project brings British art work to new international audiences. It promotes joint ventures between artists and arts organisations in the UK and other countries. In addition to the planned events in architecture, music, theatre, dance and literature digital technology is used so young people can access the arts through online social networks (British Council, 2011c).
Global English (English)	Global English consists of three inter-connected programmes: Research and discussion for policy makers on English language teaching and the role of language in cultural relations; Global training and development for teachers, and; Providing online, digital and media resources for learners to	Supports teachers, learners of English and policy makers. Large numbers of learners are met through broadcasting and a lot of learning material is available online. The programme aims to connect more learners by developing online communities (British Council, 2012b).

¹⁰⁰ Descriptions given are from the British Council's Corporate Plan (2011-2015), (British Council, 2011b).

Active Citizens (Education and Society)	improve their English. Supporting community cohesion and global citizenship through social leadership and training and social action projects.	The project's goal is to 'build understanding and trust between communities by establishing an enduring global network of community leaders, who can work together to address the global issues of the 21st century'. Events/activity includes: international seminars, training of trainers, local training of community members, international linking of community projects and international exchange visits (British Council, 2011d).
Belief in Dialogue (Education and Society)	Engaging participants and audiences in constructive dialogue on differences in beliefs and values.	Work with students, the media, faith and community groups and thought leaders to form 'strong, global networks' and to create opportunities for dialogue through events such as conferences and student forums. The Web Hub created in partnership with The Open University provides a number of online resources and media content as well as encouraging online and face-to-face debate of issues. (The Open University, 2011).
Climate Generation (Education and Society)	Increasing understanding of climate change amongst young community leaders, encouraging action on local mitigation and adaption.	A series of projects that provide an understanding of climate change. A lot of information is online although some participants are invited to be 'climate champions' and receive additional training (British Council, 2012c).
Connecting Classrooms (Education and Society)	Building and supporting links between school classrooms in the UK and school classrooms around the world.	There are four areas of this programme: a) Partnership is all about the partnerships between schools in the UK and worldwide. There are over 5,000 schools in partnerships and a further 30,000 schools collaborating online; b) Continuing Professional Development which includes a number of online and face-to-

		face courses; c) Accreditation and Awards which is necessary to complete and achieve in order to receive the Connecting Classrooms grant. d) Policy Dialogue where policy makers participate in exchanges and conferences to develop an understanding of ‘international best practice in general education and global citizenship’ (British Council, 2012d).
Education UK (Education and Society)	Not listed as a main programme.	A British Council brand which uses its own website as a platform to encourage students considering overseas study to come to the UK (British Council, n.d. b).
Global Changemakers (Education and Society)	Providing young people with direct access to world leaders and policy makers to share their ideas and beliefs.	‘Global Changemakers is a vibrant global community of young social entrepreneurs, activists and volunteers. Bringing together people from over 120 countries, (...) Global Changemakers are at the forefront of running innovative projects in their communities, shaping policy and speaking truth to power through access to institutions and platforms such as the World Economic Forum’ (Global Changemakers, 2012).
International Inspirations (Education and Society)	Working with London 2012 partners to leave a lasting international legacy by strengthening and improving access to sport in countries around the world, building the confidence in young people to improve their own lives.	Working in partnership with Unicef and UK Sport the programme targeted 20 countries with the aim of impacting millions of young people in time for the 2012 Olympics. Over 240 schools in the UK were linked with the participating schools abroad. Top sports stars also became involved as International Inspiration Ambassadors. They now have to sustain this programme to leave a ‘lasting legacy’ after 2014 when the programme is due to finish. (British Council, 2012e).
Education Market	Researching global higher	Access via website to

Intelligence (Education and Society)	education agenda through a series of global policy dialogues	‘Intelligence reports and data, summaries from Global Policy Dialogues and conferences, notices about events and updates on international partnerships and collaborations’ (British Council, 2011e).
Skills for Employability (Education and Society)	Supporting skills development and addressing labour market demands and learner needs particularly in countries with large young populations.	Aimed at sharing knowledge and working together to boost skills development worldwide through seminars, events, etc. Also organises competitions for young students that ‘encourage creativity and innovation, and promote and develop entrepreneurial and employability skills’. Partnerships focus on developing education and training programmes (Anon., n.d. c)
Skills for Social Entrepreneurs (Education and Society)	Supporting new employment, growth and development in social enterprise particularly in emerging and developing countries.	‘A social network and online marketplace for social entrepreneurs and the people that support them. In simple terms, that means it’s a place for people and companies to come together to make the world a better place’ (British Council, n.d. d).
The UK India Education and Research Initiative (UKIERI) (Education and Society).	UK/India education research initiative bringing universities, businesses and governments together to promote research and innovation.	Events are run throughout the year such as conferences, summits, roundtables, workshops all with the aim of enhancing educational links between India and UK. A number of grants are given out for PhD scholarships and fellowships and exchange programmes. (British Council, 2012g).

Appendix 2. Pilot Test

British Council main Facebook site. 5th March 2014

Content	Channel	Channel
Channel Names	Bcouncil_NI (Twitter)	British Council (Facebook)
<i># Followers/Fans</i>	600	514,000
<i>#Posts/tweets on 3-5/3/2014</i>	3	4
<i>Average # of posts/tweets per day</i>	1	1
<i>Types of post/tweet</i>	<i>5th March Erasmus application advice</i>	<i>5th Mar Announcement and link to a BC blog (cross-sell)</i>
	<i>5th Mar (Repeat) student safety survey and chance to win prize</i>	<i>4th Mar Picture and link to info on UK national holidays and festivals</i>
	<i>4th Mar Retweet (RT) on webinar fom BC Teaching English</i>	<i>3rd Mar Publishing issues aimed at EFL teachers with link to more info</i>
		<i>3rd Mar Highlighting most popular blog for February (on Shakespeare)</i>

		<i>3rd Mar Picture of young learners at BC centre</i>
<i># Retweet (RT)</i>	0	
	0	
	5	
<i>#Comments</i>	0	1
	0	12
	0	3
		3
		4
<i>#Favourites</i>	0	
	0	
	2	
<i>#Likes</i>		33
		446
		127
		182
		211
<i># Shares</i>		3
		352
		16
		62
		3
<i># of occasions British Council respond back to</i>	0	0

<i>comment made by audience on a British Council post/tweet</i>		
Is content relevant to audience?		
<i>What percentage of posts highlight other British Council activity?</i>	33%	20%
<i>What percentage of actions produce comments and shares?</i>	33%	100%
<i>'Worldly': informed and entertained about the world. Open-minded approach.</i>	<i>Certainly informative, although there is a limit to how entertaining providing information on Erasmus could be. Could have maybe focused on what Erasmus grant is used for to gain interest.</i>	<i>Quote on Lagos values (quoted from two Lagosians) is positive and respectful. i.e. that people from Lagos are work hard to fulfil their dreams.</i>
<i>'Inspiring': knowledge shared positively and enthusiastically</i>		<i>The choice (and use) of picture is important to the interest generated. The comments on the post on Shrove Tuesday with heart-shaped pancakes were all related to the how good the pancakes looked.</i>

<p><i>'Inclusive': Sound like a person (not an organisation). Friendly, direct and clear?</i></p>		<p><i>Yes 'Our most popular blog post of February was with UK actor, author and producer Ben Crystal who told us what it's like to speak the work of Shakespeare around the world.' One of the posts, however, seemed a bit automated and could quite easily have been cut and paste from something else. Engagement on this one was low.</i></p>
<p><i>'Vivid': Entertain, enthuse and excite. Use visionary, surprising, challenging or even shocking word, image or phrase.</i></p>		
<p><i>'Authoritative': All of the above but do not make statements for effect or to display cleverness. Value people.</i></p>	<p><i>Provide information for example on Erasmus application or RT to English language page.</i></p>	<p><i>Agree - most posts generally begin with a question to elicit an opinion from the audience rather than impose their own. Pictures and posts about</i></p>

		<i>different people (picture of young learners for instance) show the importance of BC places on people.</i>
<i>Is handle a name or 'British Council'?</i>	<i>British Council</i>	<i>British Council, although in 'posts by others', responses to queries are signed off with (first) names.</i>
Easy to find/access?		
<i>Are links to social media channels used in other literature?</i>	<i>Not on website</i>	<i>Links to this page are also on organisation's website.</i>
<i>When using search engines for keywords related to British Council projects/interests, does British Council social media channels appear in top ten.</i>	<i>Yes. Google search and Facebook search return with page as first entry.</i>	<i>Yes. Google search and Facebook search return with page as first entry.</i>
Is new content added regularly?	<i>Almost daily</i>	<i>Daily - at least one post per day.</i>
Are there opportunities to take relationships offline?	<i>Not in this selection</i>	<i>Not in this selection.</i>
Ongoing		
Ensure comments are responded to promptly		

<p>and allow for dialogue to develop.</p>		
<p><i>Refer to success criteria for response time.</i></p> <p><i>Consider whether or not dialogue develops.</i></p> <p><i>The British Council's success criteria require a response to queries but do they also enter into conversation? Do they respond more than once to the same person?</i></p>	<p><i>Dialogue doesn't develop. In the majority of these tweets there was no engagement from audience</i></p>	
<p>Give people working on social media an identity.</p>	<p><i>Tweets are from British Council. Mainly providing information rather than trying to elicit information apart from survey which doesn't appear to have gathered much interest judging by 0 RT and favourites.</i></p>	<p><i>Apart from names being used in posts by others, the staff working on this page do not have an identity. We know nothing more about them - not even their job title.</i></p>
<p>Listen to the audience - ensure reciprocity and mutuality.</p>		

<p><i>Is this evident in the way the British Council are talking to their audience?</i></p>	<p><i>Not possible to comment within this selection.</i></p>	<p><i>Yes although conversation rarely lasts more than one response. In response to a complaint BC provide swift advice and complainant responds with gratitude. BC occasionally 'like' a post by someone else. BC are diligent in responding to queries even if it is to someone when it is responding to a comment such as 'what's up?'. Inappropriate comments are ignored.</i></p>
<p><i>Are there examples of new actions that are triggered by something that audience has raised (i.e. an interest in a particular subject)?</i></p>	<p><i>Not in this selection</i></p>	<p><i>Not in this selection</i></p>
<p>Allow for social media to evolve with project or as the audience require it to.</p>		
<p><i>Are there examples of where social media channel has adapted to meet demands of audience?</i></p>	<p><i>Not in this selection</i></p>	<p><i>Not in this selection</i></p>

Appendix 3. Completed Table of Components for Zambia, Venezuela and Iran

Zambia - 18th March 2013

Components	Considerations	Channels	Observations	Colour score
Planning		Facebook		
Understand tone	<i>Consider personalities of the British Council</i>		<i>EFL is a big focus for Zambia and this is reflected in their site. Target audience is well matched as there is a lot of interest on posts discussing courses, teaching seminars etc</i>	
Measures used to evaluate success				
<i>Reach, Engagement, Quality and Relevance scores</i>	<i>2 (out of 319)</i>		<i>Channel is in brand, uses correct logo.</i>	
<i>Fans/Followers/Unique Page Visits</i>	<i>Minimum Facebook: 10% of T2 and T3</i>	<i>(target 1057) Currently 5768</i>	<i>Far exceeds target. Need to set more appropriate goals.</i>	

	<i>Twitter: 1.6% of T2 and T3</i>			
<i>Target Fans</i>	<i>Facebook: 20% of T2 and T3</i>	<i>(target 2114)</i>	<i>Already exceeds target due to low goals set.</i>	
	<i>Twitter: 3.2% of T2 and T3</i>			
<i>Minimum actions</i>	<i>Target for Zambia is 3 Facebook actions per account (original posts, responses to fans) links target 1.8 (sharing a post, linking to global BC content)</i>	<i>Actions 1.8 (links 0)</i>	<i>This is because the links used are in the wrong format</i>	

	<i>5 Twitter actions per day (original tweets, retweets, direct messages) *no more than one tweet per day should directly sell the British Council.</i>			
<i>Frequency</i>	<i>3 x per day</i>	<i>Less than twice</i>		
<i>Minimum response time</i>	<i>3 hours</i>	<i>Average 9 hours</i>	<i>Much slower than target</i>	
<i>Facebook engagement score (shares+ likes +links/total fans)*100 averaged out over 7 day period. Minimum 5 or more</i>		<i>4</i>	<i>Just below target</i>	
<i>Klout score</i>	<i>35+ across all</i>	<i>None given on</i>		

	<i>social media channels</i>	<i>Facebook</i>		
Placing social media within organisation's strategy				
Be aware of wider organisational objectives				
<i>Objectives must relate to a higher level business plan</i>	<i>Maximum of 3 and make them SMART</i>		<i>No planner completed as yet</i>	
<i>How will social media support the British Council brand?</i>	<i>Why should people care about it?</i>		<i>No planner completed as yet</i>	
	<i>What is the brand ideal?</i>		<i>No planner completed as yet</i>	
Understand the specific goals of which the				

application is part of				
<i>Which specific business/ regional/country plan does it support?</i>			<i>No planner completed as yet</i>	
<i>Will it be a shared platform with partners? If so, how do partners fit in?</i>			<i>No planner completed as yet</i>	
<i>How will choice of social media integrate with other marketing and communications around this project?</i>			<i>No planner completed as yet</i>	
Ensure social media has appropriate resources committed for as long as channel(s) is/are expected			<i>No planner completed as yet</i>	

to run				
Resources			<i>No planner completed as yet</i>	
<i>How many people will work on social media platform?</i>			<i>No planner completed as yet</i>	
<i>Will it be outsourced (bloggers etc)?</i>			<i>No planner completed as yet</i>	
<i>Who will manage the social media and be ultimately responsible?</i>			<i>No planner completed as yet</i>	
Schedule				
<i>What is the timetable of social media engagement?</i>			<i>No planner completed as yet</i>	
<i>What is the exit strategy and how will it be managed?</i>			<i>No planner completed as yet</i>	

Content	Observations	Colour Score
Channels	British Council Zambia (Facebook)	
<i># Followers/Fans</i>	5,878	
<i>#Posts/tweets on 18-20/3/2014</i>	3	
<i>Average # of posts/tweets per day</i>	1	
<i>Types of post/tweet (sample of 5)</i>	<i>Pic of Shrek character and quote about no such thing as a stupid question</i>	
	<i>Maths puzzle</i>	
	<i>Short English language quiz</i>	
	<i>Brit Council survey on customer service</i>	
	<i>Info and picture about Zambia Commonwealth focus group</i>	
<i>#Comments</i>	5	

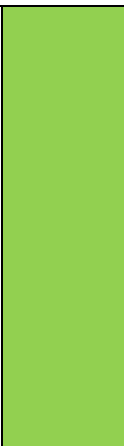
	4	
	47	
	1	
	3	
<i>Ratio of comments per post</i>	12	
<i>#Likes</i>	21	
	1 (from BC Zambia)	
	5	
	3	
	4	
<i>Ratio of likes per post</i>	6.6	
<i># Shares</i>	1	
	0	
	0	
	0	
	0	

<i>Ratio of shares per post</i>	0.2	
<i># of occasions British Council respond back to comment made by audience on a British Council post/tweet</i>	2	
Is content relevant to audience?		
<i>What percentage of posts highlight other British Council activity?</i>	<i>20% Provides regular stream of info to highlight other (albeit language learning) BC activity</i>	
<i>What percentage of actions produce comments and shares?</i>	100%	
<i>'Worldly': informed and entertained about the world. Open-minded approach.</i>	<i>Posts largely focus on Zambia and English language learning. Not much regarding British culture, UK or other work carried out by BC</i>	
<i>'Inspiring': knowledge shared positively and enthusiastically</i>	<i>Yes - photo of Zambia Commonwealth focus group and description of how successful it was is an example of this whilst still posing a question to elicit response from audience.</i>	

<i>'Inclusive': Sound like a person (not an organisation). Friendly, direct and clear?</i>	<i>Using social media for fun and certainly friendly - i.e quote that says there is no such thing as a stupid question. Also 'likes' many other posters comments.</i>	
<i>'Vivid': Entertain, enthuse and excite. Use visionary, surprising, challenging or even shocking word, image or phrase.</i>	<i>Entertaining - using maths quizzes which seem popular (although arguably irrelevant to anything the BC is doing other than making building relationships and getting a audience base on FB established.</i>	
<i>'Authoritative': All of the above but do not make statements for effect or to display cleverness. Value people.</i>	<i>Certainly give the impression that they value people; most audience comments are liked by British Council Zambia. Most posts involve asking for a response or opinion from audience.</i>	
<i>Is handle a name or 'British Council'?</i>	<i>'British Council'</i>	
Easy to find/access?		
<i>Are links to social media channels used in other</i>	<i>Yes - on website.</i>	

<i>literature?</i>		
<i>When using search engines for keywords related to British Council projects/interests, do British Council social media channels appear in top ten.</i>	<i>Yes - is the first entry from Google and Facebook search.</i>	
Is new content added regularly?	<i>Daily</i>	
Are there opportunities to take relationships offline?	<i>Yes- invitations to events, new groups, etc</i>	
Ongoing		
Ensure comments are responded to promptly and allow for dialogue to develop.		
<i>Refer to success criteria for response time. Consider whether or not dialogue develops. The British Council's success criteria require a response to queries but do they also enter into conversation? Do they respond more than once</i>	<i>Lower than target but they do respond and often respond to other guest comments.</i>	

<i>to the same person?</i>		
Give people working on social media an identity.		
Listen to the audience - ensure reciprocity and mutuality.		
<i>Is this evident in the way the British Council are talking to their audience?</i>	<i>Yes, they respond to and like comments and provide further information when there is a noticeable interest in something</i>	
<i>Are there examples of new actions that are triggered by something that audience has raised (i.e. an interest in a particular subject)?</i>	<i>Yes, further links provided to English language learning following comment from audience.</i>	
Allow for social media to evolve with project or as the audience require it to.		

<p><i>Are there examples of where social media channel has adapted to meet demands of audience?</i></p>	<p><i>The maths quiz is one that could be criticized for not being relevant yet it had such a big interest that this could have been why they soon followed up with another. They also do a lot of EFL quizzes so perhaps they are aware that their audience respond well to these sort of posts.</i></p>	
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Venezuela - 18th March 2013					
Components	Considerations	Channels		Observations	
Planning		Facebook	Twitter		
Understand tone	<i>Consider personalities of the British Council. Do posts easily fit into these?</i>			<i>Worldly and informative. Posts are in local language for Facebook and English for Twitter and subject matter includes language learning, English language history, UK history, UK holidays and celebrations, British food and sport (English). As well as more general issues such as climate change.</i>	
Measures used to evaluate success					

<i>Reach, Engagement, Quality and Relevance scores</i>		<i>#1 for engagement and quality. #1 (out of 312) for social media presence</i>		<i>Channel is in brand. Uses correct logo.</i>	
<i>Fans/Followers/Unique Page Visits</i>	<i>Minimum Facebook: 10% of T2 and T3</i>	<i>Target is 380. Actual is 8,500</i>		<i>DB explains one of challenges is for countries to set more realistic targets. However, planner should help countries to get a picture of what is achievable.</i>	
	<i>Twitter: 1.6% of T2 and T3</i>		<i>Target is 60.8 actual is 5696</i>	<i>Unrealistic targets suggest that they do not have an accurate picture of the true audience figures and that impact is actually greater than anticipated</i>	
<i>Target Fans</i>	<i>Facebook: 20% of T2 and T3</i>	<i>At 8,500 this far exceeds the target (760)</i>			

	<i>Twitter: 3.2% of T2 and T3</i>		<i>Target is 121.6.</i>	<i>Targets are far below actual. Need to be revised</i>	
<i>Minimum actions</i>	<i>Target for Venezuela is 3 Facebook actions per account (original posts, responses to fans) links target 1.8 (sharing a post, linking to global BC content)</i>	<i>3.5 daily actions. Links 0</i>		<i>Above daily actions target but below for links.</i>	

	<i>5 Twitter actions per day (original tweets, retweets, direct messages) *no more than one tweet per day should directly sell the British Council.</i>		<i>17.3</i>	<i>Much higher than target</i>	
<i>Frequency</i>	<i>3 x per day</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Check regularly</i>	
<i>Minimum response time</i>	<i>3 hours</i>				
<i>Facebook engagement score (shares+ likes +links/total fans)*100 averaged out over 7 day period. Minimum 5 or</i>		<i>12</i>		<i>Above Facebook engagement score</i>	

<i>more</i>					
<i>Klout score</i>	<i>35+ across all social media channels</i>		<i>63</i>		
Placing social media within organisation's strategy					
Be aware of wider organisational objectives					
<i>Objectives must relate to a higher level business plan</i>				<i>No plan created</i>	
<i>How will social media support the British Council brand?</i>	<i>Why should people care about it?</i>			<i>No plan created</i>	
	<i>What is the brand ideal?</i>			<i>No plan created</i>	
Understand the specific goals					

of which the application is part of					
<i>Which specific business/ regional/country plan does it support?</i>		<i>Country: to support local offering</i>		<i>Only know this through conversations with DB</i>	
<i>Will it be a shared platform with partners? If so, how do partners fit in?</i>		<i>No</i>			
<i>How will choice of social media integrate with other marketing and communications around this project?</i>					
Ensure social media has appropriate resources committed for as long as channel(s) is/are expected to					

run					
Resources					
<i>How many people will work on social media platform?</i>		2		<i>No plan created</i>	
<i>Will it be outsourced (bloggers etc)?</i>		No		<i>No plan created</i>	
<i>Who will manage the social media and be ultimately responsible?</i>				<i>No plan created</i>	
Schedule					
<i>What is the timetable of social media engagement?</i>				<i>No plan created</i>	
<i>What is the exit strategy and how will it be managed?</i>				<i>No plan created</i>	

Content	Channel	Channel	
Channel Names	veBritish (Twitter)	British Council Venezuela (Facebook)	
# Followers/Fans	5696	8,582	
#Posts/tweets on 18-20/3/2014	52	12	
Average # of posts/tweets per day	17.3	4	
Types of post/tweet (sample of 5)	Announcement of visit from artist Max Hattler and link	Irish recipe for St Patricks Day	
	Quote	Noam Chomsky quote (quote in English)	
	English language exercise and link	Link to ESOL English Language page. (NOTE: link not in proper format which is why it isn't being picked up in monitor)	
	Link to blog on Korean literature	Post on Albert Einstein, picture and link to articles and video	

	<i>Post on link of work productivity and time of day and pic of brain scans</i>	<i>Air pollution post, brief para on problem, pic of Notting Hill St and link to BBC article</i>	
<i># Retweet (RT)</i>	0		
	3		
	0		
	0		
	0		
<i>Ratio of retweets per tweet</i>	0.6		
<i>#Comments</i>	0	1	
	0	0	
	0	0	
	0	0	
	0	0	
<i>ratio of comments per tweet/post</i>	0	0.2	
<i>#Favourites</i>	0		
	0		
	0		
	0		
	0		
<i>#Likes</i>		9	
		8	
		0	

		0	
		0	
<i>Ratio of likes per post</i>		3.4	
<i># Shares</i>		2	
		1	
		1	
		1	
		0	
<i>Ratio of shares per post</i>		1	
<i># of occasions British Council respond back to comment made by audience on a British Council post/tweet</i>	4	0 but they do like a comment made by fan.	
Is content relevant to audience?			
<i>What percentage of posts highlight other British Council activities?</i>	21%	17%	
<i>What percentage of actions produce comments and shares?</i>	11%	42%	
<i>'Worldly': informed and entertained about the world. Open-minded approach.</i>	<i>Wide range of topics covered from various aspects for British culture (as well as some that have nothing to do</i>	<i>An example of this would be information given on climate change (in conjunction with the British Embassy and</i>	

	<i>with British Culture but might be in English (Noam Chomsky quote).</i>	<i>COIN (Climate Outreach and Information Network))</i>	
<i>'Inspiring': knowledge shared positively and enthusiastically</i>	<i>Definitely invite audience to learn more about topic by introducing it, asking a question and providing a link and photo.</i>	<i>Same as comments for twitter channel</i>	
<i>'Inclusive': Sound like a person (not an organisation). Friendly, direct and clear?</i>	<i>Yes, using informal form of address (in Spanish). Sounds original rather than cut and pasted from somewhere else.</i>	<i>Staff identified, however, as 'British Council Venezuela'</i>	
<i>'Vivid': Entertain, enthuse and excite. Use visionary, surprising, challenging or even shocking word, image or phrase.</i>	<i>Announcement on 'Beatbox week' in Caracas which the British Council is a sponsor. Picture of a youth dressed up next to graffiti.</i>	<i>Find a way of making a post interesting e.g. food vocabulary post invites audience to learn all the 'palabras mas dulces' sweetest words. Photos not v inspiring.</i>	
<i>'Authoritative': All of the above but do not make statements for effect or to display cleverness. Value people.</i>	<i>Give information but do value opinion of audience and often ask what people think about what they are saying.</i>	<i>Informative about events, topics and provide the links/information to find out more.</i>	

<i>Is handle a name or 'British Council'?</i>	<i>It is British Council. Do not use names. In one example they sign off 'saludos...'</i>		
Easy to find/access?			
<i>Are links to social media channels used in other literature?</i>	<i>On Venezuela website there is a frame with Facebook feeds. Typical 'follow us on' appear at the bottom of the page.</i>		
<i>When using search engines for keywords related to British Council projects/interests, does British Council social media channels appear in top ten.</i>	<i>Yes. Google search and Facebook search return with page as first entry.</i>		
Is new content added regularly?	<i>Yes and exceeds target.</i>		
Are there opportunities to take relationships offline?	<i>Yes - in education/language learning</i>		
Ongoing			
Ensure comments are responded to promptly and allow for dialogue to develop.			

<p><i>Refer to success criteria for response time. Consider whether or not dialogue develops. The British Council's success criteria require a response to queries but do they also enter into conversation? Do they respond more than once to the same person?</i></p>	<p><i>The British Council answer swiftly to queries and conversation will go back and forth between BC and 'Tweeter'.</i></p>	<p><i>They do respond and quickly to comments. However, there is little evidence of conversation starting. It is more of a service to answer queries. Furthermore, there is little take up on questions asking for opinions etc despite there being lots of likes and shares.</i></p>	
<p>Give people working on social media an identity.</p>	<p><i>Tweets are always made by 'British Council'</i></p>	<p><i>No - not one BC member of staff is mentioned by name.</i></p>	
<p>Listen to the audience - ensure reciprocity and mutuality.</p>			
<p><i>Is this evident in the way the British Council are talking to their audience?</i></p>	<p><i>Yes, and responses are always very courteous</i></p>	<p><i>Yes although conversation rarely lasts more than one response.</i></p>	
<p><i>Are there examples of new actions that are triggered by something that audience has raised (i.e. an interest in a particular subject)?</i></p>	<p><i>Not in this selection</i></p>	<p><i>Not in this selection</i></p>	

<p>Allow for social media to evolve with project or as the audience require it to.</p>			
<p><i>Are there examples of where social media channel has adapted to meet demands of audience?</i></p>	<p><i>Not in this selection</i></p>	<p><i>Not in this selection</i></p>	

Iran - 18th March 2013				
Components	Considerations	Channels	Observations	Colour Score
Planning		Facebook		
Understand tone	<i>Consider personalities of the British Council</i>		<i>This is the one example of a country which has a social media presence without an office. The overall score of this social media channel is low but largely due to being off-brand (logo etc). The focus is on EFL but also Iranian culture.</i>	
Measures used to evaluate success				
<i>Reach, Engagement, Quality and Relevance scores</i>	<i>94 (out of 319)</i>			
<i>Fans/Followers/Unique Page Visits</i>	<i>Minimum Facebook: 10% of T2 and T3</i>		<i>Not applicable due to filtering of social media channels in Iran</i>	

	<i>Twitter: 1.6% of T2 and T3</i>			
<i>Target Fans</i>	<i>Facebook: 20% of T2 and T3</i>			
	<i>Twitter: 3.2% of T2 and T3</i>			
<i>Minimum actions</i>	<i>Target for Iran is 3 Facebook actions per account (original posts, responses to fans) links target 1.8 (sharing a post, linking to global BC content)</i>		<i>1 per day below target for links too</i>	

	<p><i>5 Twitter actions per day (original tweets, retweets, direct messages)</i></p> <p><i>*no more than one tweet per day should directly sell the British Council.</i></p>			
<i>Frequency</i>	<i>3 x per day</i>	<i>1xper day</i>	<i>Below target</i>	
<i>Minimum response time</i>	<i>3 hours</i>		<i>9 Below target</i>	
<i>Facebook engagement score (shares+ likes +links/total fans)*100 averaged out over 7 day period. Minimum 5 or more</i>			<i>2 Below target</i>	
<i>Klout score</i>	<i>35+ across all social media</i>	<i>None given on Facebook</i>		

	<i>channels</i>			
Placing social media within organisation's strategy				
Be aware of wider organisational objectives				
<i>Objectives must relate to a higher level business plan</i>	<i>Maximum of 3</i>		<p><i>1. Rebuild trust between the UK and Iran. 2. Addressing misrepresentation and misunderstanding through our work in arts, education, and language (...) with mutuality and respect at the heart of our work. 3. Further the bilateral exchange of knowledge, ideas, and experiences. We will create mutually beneficial opportunities for individuals, communities, and organisations in both countries.</i></p>	
<i>How will social media support the British Council brand?</i>	<i>Why should people care about it?</i>		<i>Through an official Facebook site (there is also an unofficial Facebook site)</i>	
Understand the specific goals of				

which the application is part of				
<i>Which specific business/ regional/country plan does it support?</i>			<i>Iran's country plan</i>	
<i>Will it be a shared platform with partners? If so, how do partners fit in?</i>			<i>No</i>	
<i>How will choice of social media integrate with other marketing and communications around this project?</i>			<i>It is part of digital strategy (website and 2 Facebook sites)</i>	
Ensure social media has appropriate resources committed for as long as channel(s) is/are expected to run				
<i>Resources</i>				
<i>How many people will work on social media platform?</i>				
<i>Will it be outsourced (bloggers etc)?</i>			<i>No but managed from London</i>	
<i>Who will manage the social media and</i>			<i>London team for Iran digital strategy</i>	

<i>be ultimately responsible?</i>				
<i>Schedule</i>				
<i>What is the timetable of social media engagement?</i>			<i>Ongoing</i>	
<i>What is the exit strategy and how will it be managed?</i>			<i>n/a</i>	


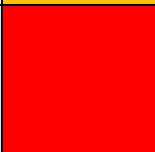
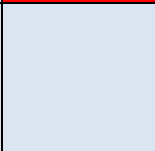
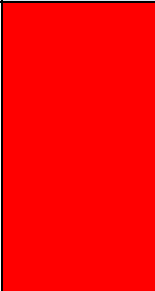
Content	Channel	Channel	
Channel Names	Iran-UK Culture now (unofficial site)	British Council Iran (Facebook)	
<i># Followers/Fans</i>	1674	1,205	
<i>#Posts/tweets on 18-20/3/2014</i>	2	3	
<i>Average # of posts/tweets per day</i>	1	1	
<i>Types of post/tweet (sample of 5)</i>	<i>Video clip of Iranian band</i>	<i>Happy Narwaz' pic by British Council with '80 years of cultural relations.</i>	
	<i>have a great Charshanbe' with pic</i>	<i>have a great Charshanbe' with pic</i>	
		<i>Vocab test</i>	
		<i>Question about Charshanbe rituals and link to article</i>	
		<i>Link to LearnEnglish British Council Nepal site on capitalisation and use of the apostrophe</i>	

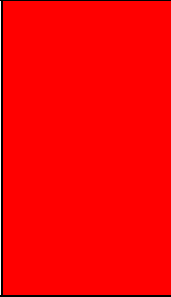



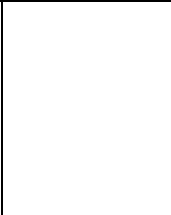
<i>#Comments</i>	0	2	
	0	1	
		2	
		1	
		0	
<i>Ratio of comments per tweet/post</i>	0	1.2	
<i>#Likes</i>	1	94	
	6	27	
		3	
		1	
		0	
<i>Ratio of likes per tweet/post</i>	3.5	25	
<i># Shares</i>	0	14	
	0	1	
		0	
		0	

		0	
<i>Ratio of shares per tweet/post</i>	0	3	
<i># of occasions British Council respond back to comment made by audience on a British Council post/tweet</i>	0	<i>0 but they do 'like' nearly all comments made</i>	
Is content relevant to audience?			
<i>What percentage of posts discuss other BC activities?</i>	<i>n/a as unbranded</i>	25%	
<i>What percentage of actions produce comments and shares?</i>	0	75%	
<i>'Worldly': informed and entertained about the world. Open-minded approach.</i>	<i>This channel is much more focussed on culture and the posts are generally artwork by Iranian artists.</i>	<i>What is obvious is the British Council's interest in Iranian culture. Compared to other social media channels there is very little on British culture other than language.</i>	
<i>'Inspiring': knowledge shared positively and enthusiastically</i>	<i>Most posts only provide a title of the image shown.</i>	<i>knowledge is shared positively and focuses on 'happy' events in Iranian culture for</i>	

		<i>example posts about Happy Nezwar and Charshanbe</i>	
<i>'Inclusive': Sound like a person (not an organisation). Friendly, direct and clear?</i>	<i>Not really- there are no inviting questions. Much more broadcasting on this channel. While being unbranded there is no attempt to personalise the posts. They seem to be showcasing Iran/UK culture from an anonymous position.</i>	<i>Yes, requests viewpoint from audience, likes their comments etc</i>	
<i>'Vivid': Entertain, enthuse and excite. Use visionary, surprising, challenging or even shocking word, image or phrase.</i>	<i>Yes - lots of images and links to rich culture of Iran</i>	<i>Lots of pictures in posts. The post that was bets received was a picture for Nezwar festival which also included a translation into Persian.</i>	
<i>'Authoritative': All of the above but do not make statements for effect or to display cleverness. Value people.</i>	<i>Does not feel like posts are coming from a person, just a stream of pictures of Iran/UK culture and announcements of jobs/events in UK</i>	<i>Value people and value the Iranian culture.</i>	

<i>Is handle a name or 'British Council'?</i>	<i>Neither</i>	<i>British Council'</i>	
Easy to find/access?			
<i>Are links to social media channels used in other literature?</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes - on website.</i>	
<i>When using search engines for keywords related to British Council projects/interests, does British Council social media channels appear in top ten.</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes - is the first entry from Google and Facebook search.</i>	
Is new content added regularly?	Almost daily	Daily	
Are there opportunities to take relationships offline?	No - it is more a showcase of Iran/British culture	<i>Not in this selection</i>	
Ongoing			
Ensure comments are responded to promptly and allow for dialogue to develop.			

<p><i>Refer to success criteria for response time. Consider whether or not dialogue develops. The British Council's success criteria require a response to queries but do they also enter into conversation? Do they respond more than once to the same person?</i></p>	<p><i>n/a - was not shown in Monitor</i></p>	<p><i>Lower than target but they do respond and like comments.</i></p>	
<p>Give people working on social media an identity.</p>	<p>no identity</p>		
<p>Listen to the audience - ensure reciprocity and mutuality.</p>			
<p><i>Is this evident in the way the British Council are talking to their audience?</i></p>	<p><i>No</i></p>	<p><i>Yes, they like comments although the 'post by others box' is hidden on this page so cannot analyse responses to audience comments (why?).</i></p>	

<p><i>Are there examples of new actions that are triggered by something that audience has raised (i.e. an interest in a particular subject)?</i></p>	<p><i>no - there is no evidence that this channel is used to listen to its audience.</i></p>	<p><i>Not in this selection</i></p>	
<p>Allow for social media to evolve with project or as the audience require it to.</p>			
<p><i>Are there examples of where social media channel has adapted to meet demands of audience?</i></p>	<p><i>Not in this selection</i></p>	<p><i>Not in this selection</i></p>	

Appendix 4. Social Media Strategy Pack

The Social Media Strategy pack contains 6 sections, which I summarise below:

1. Top 5 Rules of Engagement. This acts as a reminder of the type of attitude to adopt when communicating via social media channels and includes reminders to be creative and informative while remaining respectful. It also stressed the importance of carefully reviewing anything before it is posted online.
2. Essential Guidelines. These expand and emphasise the importance on the above rules of engagement.
3. Profiles/Channel Matrix. This recognises that the British Council has many different offerings and outlines the channels that are accepted within the organisation to keep social media simplified and standardised across the network.
4. Success Criteria Framework. This outlines exactly what is required to make a channel successful (according to the current strategy). Its criteria are:
 - a. Minimum fans/followers/unique page visits
 - b. Target fans/followers
 - c. Minimum actions per day
 - d. Frequency
 - e. Minimum response time
 - f. Target Klout score¹⁰¹

These criteria were added to the Table of Components under ‘decide what measures will be used to evaluate success of social media application’ for review.

¹⁰¹ Klout is discussed in the previous chapter.

5. Facebook Strategy. This ensures that channels all have the same purpose (depending on whether it is a channel for a country, Strategic Business unit, product or project). It also makes sure that the brand is adhered to by providing the URL conventions.
6. Social Media Business Planner. This is to be used every time a new social media channel is launched. It ensures that various points have been considered including how the new channel will fit in with existing marketing and communication, who will administer and manage the channel, how it relates to the higher lever business plan and forces thought around the target audience to try to guarantee that content will be relevant to the target audience (and that it indeed has a clear target audience). Once this form has been completed it has to be signed off by the Head of Digital and the Regional Director for that country or Head of SBU (strategic business unit) if the channel is for a project rather than a country.

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