

# External communication of international organisations: theoretical and practical aspects in the context of public diplomacy

 Halyna Palamarchuk<sup>a</sup>,  Kostiantyn Polishchuk<sup>a\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Ivan Franko National University in Lviv, Ukraine

## Abstract

*No matter what objectives International Organizations pursue, they gather and disseminate data, act as a platform for cooperation and information exchange, project specific norms onto member states and international community, establish and supervise the compliance with certain rules and constantly communicate with different actors. Communication is a process that is vital for the existence and functioning of IOs, as well as for their public diplomacy. The essence of public diplomacy is to communicate directly with foreign audiences, to influence public opinion and perceptions of specific problems or events. This article provides descriptive qualitative analysis of International Organizations' communication process in Political Science, Public relations, and Communication Theory. The main goal is to understand how different elements of communication are defined and explained in various schools of research, how the communication of IOs is different from other types of communication and to provide new definition of Communication of International Organizations.*

**Keywords:** communication, International Organization (IO), public diplomacy, target audiences

## Introduction

In modern international relations, two types of entities can be referred to with the term 'International Organisation': Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) or International Governmental Institutions. The latter ones will be the subject of analysis in this article and the term International Organisations (IOs) will be used to describe international governmental institutions. The working definition for this article is the definition by Karen Mingst, who defines International Intergovernmental Organization as an institution drawing membership from at least three states, having activities in several states, and whose members are held together

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\*Corresponding author: Kostiantyn Polishchuk, Associate Professor at the Department of International Communications and Digital Diplomacy at Ivan Franko National University in Lviv, Ukraine; e-mail: Kostyantyn.Polishchuk@lnu.edu.ua.

by a formal agreement (Mingst, 2020). International Organisation is an entity that acts like a wholesome structure, which activities reflect goals and principles set by the member states. Contemporary IOs may execute various functions that are determined by their objectives, aims and legal capabilities.

Margaret Karns and Karen Mingst developed the following classification of the IO's functions: informational - gathering, analysing and disseminating data, and IOs collect information and monitor trends; forum - providing place for exchange of views and decision making, and IOs provide forums for international bargaining and disputes settling; normative - defining standards of behaviour; rule-creating - drafting legally binding treaties; rule-supervisory - monitoring compliance with rules, settling disputes, taking enforcement measures and operational - allocating resources, providing technical assistance and relief, deploying forces (Karns & Mingst, 2004).

Informational and communicational functions of organizations are closely related to public diplomacy as a form of change management, which refers to ways of engaging the target audience in interaction, by conveying a specific message, opinion or image of their own policies. This old/new direction of diplomacy, rooted in the key concept of Joseph Nye's soft power, involves the use of modern information and communication technologies, especially digital platforms, social media networks and the power of influencers (people with large audiences on social media, that can influence people, create social and media trends) to fulfil foreign policy tasks and goals, to influence or put pressure on other actors in international relations, to strengthen diplomatic relations, to establish new contacts and maintain existing contacts between subjects of international relations, to communicate directly with citizens and maintain a positive image of organization in the international arena, to raise awareness of the world community about the international organization and its goals and core values.

All of these functions and activities of IOs require some sort of informational exchange and communication. Even though different IOs have different objectives, they all execute informational function, at least by gathering and disseminating data, just that the kind of data and the target audiences for dissemination are different. Among many, we can consider the example of the UN, that regularly provides reports on the number of different subjects, that targets various audiences from governmental institutions to general public or the example Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) daily reports, that target the OSCE participating states, however being fully open to the general public (Dag Hammarskjöld Library, OSCE).

International Organisations are the platforms for cooperation; they provide opportunities for formal or informal communication between representatives of sometimes rivalling states for whom it might be the only opportunity to settle disputes or reach an agreement. Many IOs provide coverage of meetings that are open to the general public, for instance you can access the working program of UN

Security council, watch their meetings live or in recordings on their website, study the written statements of the participants or check out the summaries of official meetings - "Meetings coverage" provided by UN (United Nations).

In order to project norms onto the participating states and international community as a whole, IOs maintain constant communication and information exchange with member states, other organizations and general public. They not only create new patterns and rules of behaviour but also work within the previously established norms; all their actions, communication included, must comply with them. Rule-creating and rule-supervisory functions of IOs also require communication and information exchange, especially the control over the implementation of international agreements. In order to supervise or to make sure that agreements are implemented, IOs may communicate with a number of actors from official representatives to NGOs and general public, they may as well monitor media and communicate with political establishment in the country that implements such agreements. At the same time, decisions of some IOs are not legally binding. In this case, the informational work of the organizations is even more important, since they need to communicate their goals in a way that participating states would want to achieve, even though they do not have to.

Adequate informational exchange and sufficient communication will play a great role in persuading member states to comply with IO's rules and regulations and to meet the organisation's standards. Operational activities of IOs are also accompanied by the informational exchange, mediation and communication, for example OSCE SMM monitored the situation near the contact line of conflict (in Donetsk and Luhansk region), and they gathered information not only by observations but also by communication with the local citizens. In addition, they help with the humanitarian situation in the region (mediation) organize events to spread the information about their work. They have not simply observed and reported, but also communicated and exchanged information with audiences on the ground and worldwide.

The clear connection between communication and the implementation of IOs functions can be observed. Since the majority of IOs require communication and information exchange with different actors and audiences to exist and to be able to operate, it is important to understand what the communication of the IO is and how it occurs. Effective communication is prerequisite for effective work of IO. The definition of IO's communication and the analysis of the main communication elements will be the base for further research of communication and information exchange of IOs and their impact on their performance and effectiveness.

## **1. Communication: conceptualisation and key theoretical approaches**

In modern social science there is no unified definition of communication, since there are different approaches and schools of thought. The notion of communication

appears in many fields of science that address different problems. Understanding the communication process that comes from communication science is particularly relevant to this research, since the communication perspective is the most appropriate when studying IOs that operate in complex international environment, where diplomacy and politics define the character and level of interaction. At the same time, there are different traditions within the communication science realm that also can provide different understanding of communication. However, if we take a broader approach we can observe certain communalities in understanding of communication across different fields and perspectives. It can be studied as a phenomenon, in which message, cultural context or other variables play an important role. Communication is a process, not a single event; its messages have effects and outcomes. In order to understand communication, we need to understand its interlocutors. Measured or theoretically described regularities in messages, cultural devices, speech modes, audience responses to messages, or individual responses to messages are crucial in understanding of communication. The context of communication has substantial impact on the message perception and the communication itself. The focus on communication channels that the communicator or audience chooses and the reason they prefer one channels to the other is also one of the communalities among a number of communication science researchers (Krcmar et al., 2016).

For the purpose of this research, let us observe the broadest definition of communication, developed in the framework of communication science, which reflects the majority of the outlined above communalities in communication perception and research. Communication is the process of sending a message from a source to a receiver over some channel, through the use of symbols, in order to share meaning between two entities (Trenholm, 1991). This definition is really broad, can be applicable to any type of communicational interaction and may seem too simplistic. However, if we break it into separate elements, analyse each one of them from the perspective of IO and distinguish what shapes and characterises these elements, we will come closer to a better understanding of the complex process of IO's communication and will be able to provide a more precise explanation. Thus, the above-mentioned definition of communication can be divided into the following elements:

- two actors: sender and receiver;
- process of communication;
- channels of communication;
- message and its meaning.

Let us proceed to the definition and the analysis of these elements and their peculiarities in communication of IOs.

## 2. International organisation as communication actor

In the communication of IO, the first actor, namely the source of communication will be the IO itself. The founding documents that condition the existence of IOs define their goals and rules of procedure, create bodies that reflect the status and identity of organization, provide norms for future policy and possibility for interaction - features that can be the attributes of the complex system. Willetts argues that if we accept the fact that IOs are politically significant and can have an impact in international relations, we can view them as systems (Willetts, 2001).

If we put the notion of systems in the framework of communication science, the Cybernetic Tradition, one of the seven traditions of communication theory defined by Robert Craig, will provide the broadest explanation of IO as an actor. According to this tradition, an organization can be viewed as a system comprised of different interdependent parts that form networks. "Communication in this case is theorized as information processing" (Craig, 1999, p. 141). The system - the core concept of the Cybernetic Tradition can be defined as a "*set of elements in dynamic interaction, organized according to a goal*" (Devlin-Couvert, 2017, p. 3). The international organization is a wholesome structural entity that consists of numerous interconnected elements bound together by a common goal. It can communicate with external audiences either as a single actor or separate organizational representatives and bodies can communicate on behalf of IO. Since each element of the system reflects the goals and aims of the organization, their communication will do that, too. Thus, when separate elements (people, bodies) communicate with audiences individually, their interactions are viewed as part of the organisational communication.

Another notion that should also be considered in the analysis of IOs as actors of communication is that systems are sets of interacting components where any part of the system is always constrained by its dependence on other parts. Separate bodies of IO cannot (unless it was previously established by an organization otherwise) independently make decisions regarding the organisation's communication policy or develop separate communication strategies. Other characteristics that are inherent to the systems include self-regulation and control. "System, like IO is always monitoring, regulating, and controlling the actions of its elements, members/personnel, in order to remain stable and be able to achieve its goals" (Littlejohn et al., 2017, p. 42).

Communication in terms of public diplomacy is perhaps the largest niche in the soft diplomacy of IOs. Organisations are constantly looking for new ways to build an effective dialogue with the target audience through the Internet and Web 2.0 tools and mainly through social media networks, which are the most effective tools of interaction within the modern arsenal of public diplomacy. Organizations such as the UN and the OSCE have an extensive network of contacts among international non-governmental organizations, public opinion leaders, and

celebrities who support the organization and can reach an even larger target audience. A broad outreach can help organisations fulfil their goals and objectives. International organizations actively use social media networks, through which their messages reach a wide audience, encouraging action and participation in global and regional change. Strategic decisions on the use of social networks to achieve the goals of public diplomacy and the success of the results largely depend on the Secretariat of organizations and teams working on publishing news on networks, generally in many languages.

### **3. Audiences in IO communication**

International Organisations will communicate with a broad spectrum of different external actors that will be the receivers of the message - in other words audiences, they will also target audiences or the key public. Audiences are groups of people that have common interests, identities or values. Dewey defines them as a group of people who are facing a similar problem, recognize the problem, and organize themselves to do something about it (Dewey, 1927). Audiences possess five important characteristic features that help us in their identification and analysis. They are distinguishable; it is a recognizable group of individuals. The audience is homogeneous, its members share common traits, features and can be treated as a group. The target audience is an important group of people that can significantly influence an organization; other identifiable groups that have no influence on organization can be overlooked. The audience should be large enough to attract the organization's attention and get it to use its strategic communication resources; at the same time, if a small group of people is vital to an organization, personal communication will be more preferable. The audience is reachable, it is a group of people with whom the organization is able to communicate and interact (Smith, 2005).

The effectiveness of IOs in the field of public diplomacy is determined by three key aspects - setting the agenda, expanding the presence and generating dialogue. The analysis of information and communication activities of effective modern organizations showed that they have a wide structured network of contacts and followers. They continuously update their online content, improve and disseminate it among users. In addition, they stimulate discussions on important topics and constantly call to action on global development goals (SDG), which helps their implementation.

For the communication to be effective IOs, they should first of all define their key audiences, then determine their preferences and main characteristics and finally try to understand their actions and the reasons behind those actions. Different publics require different approaches to the communication and have some limitations in terms of what communication goals can be achieved in the interaction with the specific audience.

There are different ways to classify or divide target audiences into definite groups. Most of the time those groups will overlap since each classification reflects only one of the many features that can be attributed to different audiences. One way to classify publics is to divide them into the following groups of categories: primary, secondary and marginal. Primary publics can influence the IO the most, and communicating with them is vital for the organization. Secondary publics are less important than primary; however they also expect interaction with IO. Marginal audiences are the least important of all - publics that have little interest in the activities of organization and little or no influence on it. Traditional and future audiences: traditional audiences are the ones with whom the communication interaction has already been established; future publics represent the audiences that can have an impact on the activities of the organization in the future. Proponents, opponents and the uncommitted mean: proponents - those who support the activities of IO, require the communication that will reinforce their beliefs; opponents - those who oppose the activities of IO, require persuasive communication to change the public opinion; uncommitted - neutral audiences whose attitudes may change because of communication or the lack of it. (Seitel, 2001).

Another classification, developed by James Grunig divides publics into four categories based on the level of their activeness. Non-publics - are not affected by, nor affect the organization, can be ignored and are often not identified. Latent publics are groups that are affected by the activities of organization, but fail to recognize it. Aware publics are groups that realize that they are affected by the activities of organization but don't do anything about it. Active publics are groups that realize that they are affected by the activities of organization and act on it. Active publics can be further broken down into three categories. All-issue publics are active on all issues affecting an organization. They can be opponents, fully supporting the IO, or proponents, who oppose and disrupt all activities of the IO. Single-issue publics are active on one issue or a small set of issues. They may be broadly supportive of an organization, but totally opposed to one particular activity, or vice-versa. Hot-issue publics are those involved in an issue that has broad public support and usually gets extensive media coverage (Gregory, 2010, p. 100).

As we can see, there are different ways to classify, hence to define target audiences; the main challenge for IO is not to fail in the definition and the recognition of its important publics. Each of the above-mentioned audiences require a different communication approach and channel choice, which requires a lot of resources; however at the same time, the communication with the broadest spectrum of audiences is relevant to the IO's success.

#### **4. The process of communication**

The next thing that should be considered in the research of IO's communication is the process of communication. For a better understanding, this complex and

multidimensional operation is simplified into three models that represent the various aspects of a communication: transmission, interaction and transaction models. The transmission model of communication describes communication as a linear, one-way process in which a sender intentionally transmits a message to a receiver. The interaction model of communication describes communication as a process in which participants alternate positions as sender and receiver and generate meaning by sending messages and receiving feedback within physical and psychological contexts. The transaction model of communication describes communication as a process in which communicators generate social realities within social, relational, and cultural contexts (An Introduction to Interpersonal Communication: A Primer on Communication Studies).

The first model is the only one that views communication as a one-way process that focuses mostly on a sender and a message and does not take into account the feedback from the receiver and the impact the receiver may have on the sender. In the modern world, the one-way communication will not be effective, if not impossible to conduct by IOs, especially with regard to the developments in information and communication technologies and social media. Therefore, the interaction and transaction models should be considered in researching the IO's communication, particularly if we research the communication of IO in the framework of the Cybernetic Tradition that views the communication process as a self-regulating system in which people act on feedback, adjust their messages, gradually eliminate distortions, and arrive at intended meanings (Wrench & Punyanunt-Carter, 2012).

According to the interaction model, communication is a two-way process in which feedback plays an important role. There are two parties of communication and both of them can be senders and receivers of the messages: they receive feedback from each other and conduct their communication in response. Physical and sociological contexts can have an influence on communication in a way that may enhance or impede it (An Introduction to Interpersonal Communication: A Primer on Communication Studies).

The transaction model sees communication as a process that conveys meanings; the purpose of such communication is not only to exchange messages but also to create connections and relationships. According to this model, all participants are communicators that are simultaneously senders and receivers. Communication is a force that shapes realities and creates new meanings before and after the actual interaction. That is why the concept of context, in this model, is more complex - because it is important to understand how social, relational, and cultural aspects that can frame and influence communication (An Introduction to Interpersonal Communication: A Primer on Communication Studies). International Organizations operate in international environments with certain established rules and implicit norms of interaction. Some countries within one IO may have better history of relationships and some worse. International Organizations may interact with other



IOs and establish deeper connections with ones over the others. Members of IOs come from different nationalities and cultures; in addition, they operate in different countries that have their own cultural differences. All these contexts should be considered by IOs while planning and conducting communication.

Both interaction and transaction models will work in IO communication research. Interaction model of communication is well applicable for the formal structures, such as IO, that do not communicate with their audiences directly, use multiple channels of communication and take some time to respond to the audiences' feedback. The transaction model on the contrary helps better understand environments, meanings and relationships that are created during communication. Shaping and changing social realities is on the agenda of the majority of IOs that operate in socio-political environments. While the interaction model may be good in research and the characterization of IOs communication, because it recognizes that two actors have an equal role in the process of communication, values feedback and context, it fails to keep up with the modern technological advancements. They have made all types of communication more interactive and consequently made the step-by-step communication less common and the transaction model more suitable. In addition, IOs operate in peaceful and conflict environments and interact with people from different cultures and with different backgrounds, where mere message transmission may not be effective, in terms of achieving organisations' communication goals.

The two-way communication is an effective tool that can help IOs gain knowledge about their audiences, understand their point of view, that in turn will help organizations in spreading their own ideas and messages. Understanding how the actors interact is helpful in terms of making the communication more efficient and thus more effective. Mutual understanding is the ultimate goal of a two-way communication and in order to achieve it, a two-way communication should be symmetrical. Symmetric communication - is "socially responsible communication that considers the positions of the various publics in a free-flow of information is transparent, relational, and long term" (Vieira, 2019, p. 6).

A two-way symmetrical communication is considered to be ideal for many types of organizations and IO is not an exception, however its implementation may have some limitations. The communication of IOs is a two-way process of interaction between the IO and its target audiences, where communication flows to and from audiences in the form of dialogue and the purpose of such communication is mutual understanding (Vieira, 2019). However, considering the nature, multinational membership and the international environment in which the IOs operate, a free flow of information among the organization and all of its audiences might be hard to achieve. At the same time, only a two-way symmetrical communication allows both communication parties interact with each other in a way that can help them achieve mutual understanding. That can be extremely beneficial for the IOs because the more they understand their audiences the more effective their

communication will become, since they will be able to optimize their communication activities to meet the requirements of the public. In addition, if the audiences understand the organization better, it will be easier to conduct communication in a way that will benefit the achievement of organizational goals.

## **5. Channels of communication**

The next element in the proposed definition is the channel of communication. The communication channel is the mean of purposeful transmission of information that an organization can use in its communication activities. The channel gives the message a specific form; thus it could reach the target audiences. Choosing a specific channel instead of another over time could help build stronger relationships with the audience that predominantly uses that channel, at the same time using one communication channel as a main communication tool can limit the organizations' ability to engage in articulate, meaningful, and prolonged conversations (Cobley & Schulz, 2013, pp. 397-410).

If we view the communication channel as a mean of message transmission, it bears two fundamental characteristics: reusability and efficiency. Modern communication channels can carry a large number of messages for an infinite number of times at a minimal incremental cost (Cobley & Schulz, 2013). Usually, IOs use multiple channels to communicate with their audiences.

There are many means through which IOs can transmit their messages, like traditional channels: printed media, television, speeches and reports, public events and meetings, and the modern internet, websites and social media. Communication channels can be divided into several categories: spoken, print, visual, and multiple channels (new technologies and events) (Heath & Coombs, 2006, pp. 303-337).

International Organizations resort to spoken channels of communication on press conferences or briefings, where the authorized spokesperson has an opportunity for two-way communication; a dialogue with media. Their representatives conduct different oral presentations and participate in radio interviews or make speeches to an audience on the topics relevant to the organization. Print channels of communication may include newspapers and magazines, often the ones that specialize in the coverage of international affairs but also include worldwide and local media; direct e-mails, that reflect important news or event announcements; media releases, that help spread important information, express the official opinion, draw attention to the activities of the IO or reply to an existing news story; newsletters, brochures, and handbooks to keep audiences informed about the key issues of IOs activities; periodic reports, where IOs review their performance, show their results and achievements. Videos and television exposure are the examples of visual communication channels that comprise visual images that reflect certain ideas and values. Organisations may resort to online or even television commercials in order to spread their mission or communication

agenda to more broad audiences. Finally, yet importantly, IOs often use the multiple channels of communication that are based on the new technologies such as internet and web resources, multimedia platforms and social media networks. Another channel that may lie under this category is an event, since it usually requires the use of multiple communication channels, oral speeches and presentations, printed programs and supplement material, visual aids or online broadcasting. (Heath & Coombs, 2006, pp. 303-337).

In order to understand the outlined above communication channels, we need to evaluate them in terms of reliability, speed and effectiveness. Reliability is a measure of certainty that the channel will function and deliver communicative content. It may depend on the following factors: the nature of channel disturbances, the information available to the sender, the presence of any feedback from the receiver or the communication skills and motivation to use this or that channel and cultural differences that can create communication barriers. Speed measures how fast it is possible to obtain a result from the communication, delivery of information or receiving a response. Contemporary means of communication like web or social networks accelerate the creation and broadcasting of messages. Effectiveness reflects whether the right channel, or a combination of channels were chosen to solve particular problems or to increase organizational development, in other words the communication channel helped to achieve all the goals that were set for the particular interaction. The effectiveness of the channel depends on its high efficiency, reliability and speed of communication. It is defined by the maximum capacity of information that can be transmitted within a certain amount of time and cost of communication (Sanina et al., 2017).

One of the fastest and most efficient ways to conduct two-way communication with the broad spectrum of audiences is the communication through social media networks. The usage of different social media allows the IOs to simultaneously transmit a lot of information in various formats (text, audio, video) at a very low price. Thus communication is quick and effective. In addition, the use of different communication channels leads to receiving a higher number of responses, the reliability characteristic of the channel (Sanina et al., 2017). Safko and Brake define social media as activities, practices, and behaviours among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media. “Conversational media are web-based applications that make it possible to create and easily transmit content in the form of words, pictures, videos, and audios” (Vieira, 2019, p. 19). Some of the most popular conversational media include Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram, and they are broadly used by different IOs. For example, UN is present in all of the above-mentioned social networks, plus Flickr, Pinterest, Tumblr, LinkedIn, Snapchat and Medium, ten social media platforms in total (United Nations). Through those platforms, an organization can reach a great number of people, sharing different types of content, from videos on YouTube, photos on Instagram or Pinterest to job offers on LinkedIn. The fact

that IOs chose to be present on so many social media platforms is also an indicator of how important fast and direct communication with the broad audiences is.

In addition to social media networks, IOs also use crowdsourcing tools, various partnership programs, expert platforms such as TEDx, as well as the “celebrity status” offamous people and opinion leaders. These are unique and extremely effective tools of public diplomacy that help expand audiences, fundraise projects, increase the number of activists and raise awareness of global issues and global solutions.

## 6. Message and its meaning

The final element of the proposed definition of communication is the message and its meaning. In communication studies, a message is defined *as information conveyed by words (in speech or writing), and/or other signs and symbols it is a content of communication process* (Nordquist, 2019). International organisations are created on the basis of principles and norms that define their existence, activities and decisions. All the actions that an IO takes consider the fundamental principles defined in their charter and communication messages are no exception. Messages that IO transmit reflect the principles that the organization adhere to and is trying to nurture in their member states, international community and the publics of the countries that are either the members of IO, or the countries the organization operates in.

Every message the IO transmits has a specific meaning that is encoded by the author of the message. However, sometimes audiences that receive that message interpret or decode the information with different meanings from those intended by the author. Stuart Hall distinguishes three potential decoding positions that receivers of information can take: dominant hegemonic (the receiver fully accepts the connoted meaning); negotiated (partly accepts the encoded meaning, with a slight variance) and oppositional (the receiver rejects messages and takes an opposing view) (Hall, 1993). Considering the consensus and diplomatic nature of IOs and the universality of their principles, organizations are building their communication activities to fit into dominant hegemonic and negotiated positions of their audiences.

However, not all messages are able to reach the target audiences in the way an organization wants. Sometimes audiences are able to avoid, block or disregard messages that can be explained in terms of selectivity, cognitive dissonance, reactance, cultural factors and information overload (Macnamara, 2018, pp. 8-18).

Audiences can be selective at the following levels: selective exposure (they choose what to read, watch or listen to); selective attention (they decide how much attention to pay to the content); selective perception (audiences interpret information in their own ways) and selective retention (different people remember different information) (Macnamara, 2018). Audiences can simply avoid information that conflicts with their existing views and beliefs. Hence, IOs should consider their backgrounds, when creating messages that are supposed to reach specific target

groups, in order to be sure that they will receive the transmitted information. For example, the language choice can affect the selectivity of the audiences in terms of exposure; people will not read the information if they do not know the language it is written in. As for the attention, even if the audiences understand the language of the message, they may not pay as much attention to them as to the messages written in their native language and perception; in addition, when audiences translate the messages themselves the probability of meaning distortion is higher. A lot of IOs recognize the importance of language in message perception working on site. For example, OSCE's SMM provided their reports in three different languages, Ukrainian, since it is the national language of the country they operate in, Russian, since it is the language that is mainly spoken in the region where the conflict occurred and by the parties of the conflict and English, since it is the language that will be understood by the international community and organization's member states (OSCE).

Cognitive dissonance - the psychological concept that explains the state humans encounter when their attitudes, knowledge and behaviour are not aligned. In order to deal with it, they can employ certain strategies that are not always logical but are rational from their own perspective. The methods people choose to deal with cognitive dissonance to justify their actions, attitudes or beliefs can also impede communication (Macnamara, 2018). IOs communicate in environments where the majority of people have predisposed values and judgments; some of these can be so strong that can cause the negative reaction on the IOs messages if they contradict with their former beliefs. International organisations avoid such contradictory situations in their communication and are trying to limit the effects of collective biases that may distort intended messages.

Reactance is a strong form of resistance triggered when a person feels pressured to accept a certain view or to behave in a certain way, and when they think that their freedom to choose is being restricted. It can cause a person to strengthen a view or behaviour that is contrary to what is intended (Macnamara, 2018). When target audiences of IO feel too much pressure on their public opinion, the communication may have the adverse effect and cause the strengthening of the contrary views or behaviour. In order to avoid that, IOs should demonstrate a great level of flexibility and present the information in a more balanced way, in a less harsh and softer form avoiding any peremptory messages. Motivational and critical messages are less likely to trigger resistance and more likely to inspire audiences to reconsider their opinions or perspectives. For example, the Twitter account of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Ukraine is full of vibrant messages on the actions taken by the programmes that help in Ukraine's development; articles on the main challenges of the country and how to overcome them and the "success stories" of NGO's or local communities, etc. You will not find any messages that directly criticize the government or political establishment, their unsuccessful social or development programs (UNDP).

Even though, as a rule, IOs are rather careful in their public communication, the global informational environment is unpredictable. It is impossible to 100% control the interpretation of the organizational messages by the international community. Sometimes choosing the appropriate media is not enough and mistakes that can create ambiguity and uncertainty in the message perception are unavoidable. Organisations should be aware of these risks and carefully analyse possible communication channels as well as the context of the message transmission. Only profound understanding of communication channels and the situational environment of communication will help avoid inappropriate interpretation of messages and be truly beneficial for their public diplomacy.

Cultural factors can also create communication barriers. In increasingly multicultural societies communicating globally, organizations face the challenge of meaning creation across cultures with different values, attitudes, beliefs and practices (Macnamara, 2018). In order not to fail in their communication activities, IOs should adapt their communication to the environment and consider cultural differences of their target audiences. It is extremely important to accept that IO's audiences are diverse in order to avoid and if needed, overcome cultural barriers.

Another factor that may interfere with the communication goals of the organization is information overload. When audiences are overloaded with information, especially in the online environment, they begin to filter it more thoroughly or even ignore much of what is available (Macnamara, 2018). International Organizations should carefully plan and schedule the messages they send their audiences and balance the content of the specific messages, so they would be not too long and also appropriate for the chosen medium. Regular but non-obtrusive message transmission in short and accessible formats with good visual elements, photos, videos or infographics will be more effective than a multitude of similar textual messages. In modern communication, where publics are exposed to a great amount of information from different, not always reliable sources, the quality of information is much more important than quantity. At the same time, even though the avalanche of informational messages will have a negative impact on a message perception by the audiences, the irregularity and scarcity of information will have the same effect. The official Twitter account of the World Trade Organization can be a good example of timely, well planned message communication with good visuals in the form of photos, videos and infographics and balanced textual content (WTO).

Even though there is a possibility that messages, but most importantly the meanings IOs are trying to convey will face some communication barriers or transmission problems, recognizing the audiences' peculiarities, cultural features, perception patterns and communication needs will help to avoid those barriers and overcome the message transmission issues.

## Conclusions

International organizations resort to information exchange and communication in their daily activities that reflect their set objectives aims and goals. Successful and effective communication is the base of the effective work of IOs. External communication itself is a rather complicated process that consists of five different elements: two actors of communication; process of communication; channels and the message.

International organization, as an actor of communication, possesses the qualities of the complex system that consists of interdependent networks. Communication interaction of each element of such a system will be perceived as communication of the whole organization, will reflect its aims and goals, will be constrained by dependency on other elements of the system and will possess the qualities of self-regulation and control. International organizations communicate with a broad spectrum of external public; each of them retain specific definite qualities, recognition and understanding of which is a key to successful communication. External communication of the IOs itself is a two-way symmetrical process of interaction or transaction where both organization and their audiences exchange messages, meanings and feedback and base their communication on the former interaction experience. The ideal ultimate goal of such communication is to achieve mutual understanding. International organizations distribute their messages over multiple reusable and efficient, traditional and modern channels that are appropriate for specific messages. Social media platforms and online communication provide the most opportunities for timely and effective reach of vast target audiences. Messages that circulate through these communication channels are trying to transmit meanings that reflect the main principles of IOs, meanings that the organization believes in and is trying to spread among its audiences.

On the basis of the above-outlined analysis of the IOs' communication, we can design a definition of the IOs' external communication. Thus, External communication of IOs can be defined as a two-way process of interaction between international organization and its key audiences through multiple channels with a purpose of message transmission that conveys meanings which reflect the main principles and goals of the organization.

In the context of public diplomacy, external communication of IOs has the potential to influence the global system of international relations beyond the national interests of states, in particular to promote the general interest in international politics, to accelerate the dissemination of information on any significant and resonant global issues and events, to transfer traditional diplomatic actions to cyberspace (especially in the context of a global pandemic), thus making them cost-effective and to acceleratee bilateral and multilateral communication between all participants of international processes.

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