



T W I P L O M A C Y:  
How Twitter Affects  
Contemporary  
Public Diplomacy

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## ABSTRACT

Currently, the world as we know it is going through a lot of progress on the development of information and communication technology. People are getting away from old habits like reading news on a piece of paper such as magazines or newspapers. Now we are getting used to access social networks on the internet, along with the presence of modern gadgetry like Laptops, Smartphones, PC Tablets, or any other sophisticated gadgets. These technology developments have allowed us to access any information anywhere, anytime, and communicate with anyone. The netizens (internet citizens) can also directly contribute our personal opinion regarding the issues we are talking about on our social networks, and participate in the creation process of public opinion. The emergence of these social networks has been eradicating the barriers between countries around the world, and brings international netizens closer to understand each other's issues. The influence of social networks is very effective, because people usually use them every day and everywhere on their gadgets. One of the most influential social networks around is Twitter.

Twitter is considered as the one of the most popular social network around. People prefer Twitter rather than other social networks like Facebook because of its efficacy and efficiency. We can only write 140 words for each Tweet in Twitter. At the beginning, nobody realized how 140 words could change the way people see things. But at last, it's becoming a huge phenomenon since US president Barack Obama joined the Twitter in 2007, and followed by other world leaders and government representatives around the world. Twitter has also been proven as an effective media for the government as a state actor to interact with their citizens, or even citizens from other countries. Twitter is also an effective media for the other non-state actors such as NGOs and private citizens to contribute their aspirations regarding the government's policies. International public opinions from the government and the people is completing each other, sometimes molded or even backlashes through Twitter.

This paper will give further analysis on how Twitter affects contemporary public diplomacy in general, and how the international actors (both non-state and state actors) have tried to utilize Twitter in order to do a more effective and modern form of public diplomacy.

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. 1. Background

As the information and communication technology keep developing themselves in the past two decades, the pattern of social life between people around the world has changed a lot. Now the numbers of people who read news from printed media such as magazines and newspapers are decreasing. People prefer to read news from the internet, because it's cheaper and easier to be accessed. This phenomenon is also supported by the appearance of various sophisticated gadgetry that is getting more affordable for the society. Things like Laptops, Smartphones, PC tablets, and any other gadgets are becoming a common thing to be owned by anybody. This is one of the main factors that makes information are accessible anywhere, whenever a person is, and by anybody who can afford for the credits to access the internet without any significant hurdles.

We all know that there are also a lot of news networks on the internet. But most of the people chose to read information that is being referenced through their social networks. This is why social networks are a very influential media to create public opinion nowadays. One of the most influential social networks is Twitter. This social network has 645,750,000 active registered users in January 2014. Even 58 million Tweets are published every day, and it only takes 5 days for Twitter to reach 1 billion Tweets<sup>1</sup>. These facts prove Twitter's potential capability in affecting the public opinion of the world citizens who uses it.

This Twitter social network phenomenon is an opportunity and a challenge for various international actors to adapt their way of doing public diplomacy through Twitter. This public diplomacy done by international actors is then called as 'Twiplomacy'. This working paper was inspired from the 'Twiplomacy' research done by Burson-Marsteller, a global public relations and communication firm from New York City, US.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.statisticbrain.com/twitter-statistics/>

## 1. 2. Objects to Question

Based on the theme of this paper, there are a few objects to question regarding the study of Twiplomacy. Those questions are:

1. What are the main factors that made the international actors to use Twitter as a media for their public diplomacy?
2. How is the public diplomacy being done through Twitter?
3. How do the international actors maximize the efficacy of their public diplomacy through Twitter?

## 1. 3. Theory Grounds

### 1. 3. 1. Diplomacy

Diplomacy is based on the Greek word "diploma", meaning 'folded into two'. According to the ancient Greek tradition, 'diploma' is a graduation certificate from a study program, which was usually folded into two. In imperial times of Rome, the word "diploma" was used to call the official travel documents, such as passports and residential permits in a kingdom region, which was stamped by two pieces of metal<sup>2</sup>.

Now the interpretation of diplomacy has gone through a lot of developments. Diplomacy is now defined as profession, activity or skill of managing international relations, typically by a country's representatives abroad<sup>3</sup>. When this paper was written, the world is on the era of multi-track diplomacy. Then diplomacy is not only done by official diplomats or representatives of the government as the state actors, but also by many non-state actors defined by the multi-track diplomacy.

### 1. 3. 2. Multi-track Diplomacy

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<sup>2</sup><http://istayn.staff.uns.ac.id/kuliah-etika-diplomatis/>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/diplomacy>

The concept of multi-track diplomacy was first introduced, developed and practiced by Louise Diamond and John W. McDonald in 1991. Multi-track diplomacy was the extension of the diplomacy theory that was brought Joseph Montville in 1982, about approaches of track one (government officials) and track two (unofficial, non-government) in a conflict resolution<sup>4</sup>. On the multi-track diplomacy, there are nine tracks instead of two.

Those nine tracks are:

1. Government
2. Professional Conflict Resolution (NGOs)
3. Business
4. Private citizens
5. Research, training and education
6. Activism
7. Religious
8. Funding
9. Public opinion/communication

Considering this paper is going to talk about the role of Twitter as a media of public diplomacy, then we can further deduce that Twitter is classified as the ninth track of multi-track diplomacy, which is a media of public opinion/communication of international citizens as a whole.

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<sup>4</sup>McDonald, John W.. "Multi-Track Diplomacy." *Beyond Intractability*. Eds. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess. Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. Posted: September 2003

### 1. 3. 3. Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy was once defined as “government-sponsored programs intended to inform or influence public opinion in other countries.”<sup>5</sup> But now in the era of multi-track diplomacy, public diplomacy can be practically done by anyone. As we know, public diplomacy deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. It encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy, including the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with those of another, and the transnational flow of information and ideas.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, public diplomacy these days is about how an international actor affects other foreign or sometimes domestic international actors’ perception through interactive, persuasive and attractive way of expressing their stances in many issues through various media. In this case, public diplomacy has adapted itself to the trends of social networks, and frequently found on a popular social network called Twitter.

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<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Dictionary of International Relations Terms*, Washington, D.C., 1987, p. 85.

<sup>6</sup> United States Information Agency Alumni Association, “What Is Public Diplomacy?” Washington, D.C., updated September 1, 2002. Online at <http://www.publicdiplomacy.org/1.htm> (as of August 6, 2004).

## DISCUSSION

### 2.1. Analysis

In a sophisticated era where everything is demanded to be fast, public diplomacy must be done effectively. Seeing the trend of the Twitter social network and its hundreds of millions of active users around the world, the international actors consider it as a very potential media to do their ideal public diplomacy. Whatever we might call this new trend in diplomacy, social media tools such as Twitter have forced diplomats and communicators alike (other international actors or the so-called 'Twiplomats') to rethink and redesign diplomacy while putting it in to a different context.

In a way, it is as if Twitter diplomacy has been altering the DNA of diplomacy: a sort of genetic adaptation to new technologies.<sup>7</sup> So, we can conclude that the main substance, objectives and values of public diplomacy has never been changed.

Now let's examine the development of Twiplomacy itself. First, we see Twiplomacy from the perspective of non-state international actors, which is the citizen of the world. The multi-track diplomacy era we're currently living on has allowed us to have the privilege of being international unofficial, non-governmental diplomats through Twitter. People from all around the world have been working so hard on their Twitter to promote and advocate certain international issues. For example the representatives of NGOs such as Greenpeace, WWF, and Human Rights Watch who are frequently posting their activities on their Twitter to spread their influence over the netizens all over the internet. Sometimes they also criticize the government's policy that related to the issue they're focusing on. These attempts are done so then the people can have more influence and bargaining position in the policy making process by the government. Their campaign successes on Twitter are also supported by the fact that they have the best people working on the promotion of certain issues.

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<sup>7</sup> Andreas Sandre, *Twitter for Diplomats: A Guide to the Fastest Growing Digital Diplomacy Tool*, [www.diplomacy.edu](http://www.diplomacy.edu), 11 Februari 2013

The successes of non-state actors are also supported by their social media team who understands Twitter viral techniques very well. They also try to make every Tweet they post as interesting as possible and connected to the people who see it. The non-state actors also act as a bunch of neighborhood watches that pay attention to any kind of flaws or problems in the government. Their aspirations and suggestions then will be sent through a mention for the government officials' Twitter account, waiting to be responded by the government's account. By posting it on Twitter, the non-state actors will gain more influence and supports from the society who follows them. Hopefully, this will synergize the opinion of the citizens and the policies of the government.

Let's see Twiplomacy from the perspective of state international actors. Since US President Barack Obama joined Twitter in 2007 (which makes him the first world leader to join Twitter), he has inspired many other world leaders and government representatives to follow his path. Even though @BarackObama is the most followed world leader on Twitter with 33,510,157 followers in 2013, but that doesn't make him the most connected and influential state actor on Twitter. This is proven by his lack of response to the mentions given at him by the netizens who followed him, and by the fact that he was only following four other world leaders on his Twitter in 2013.

Now we can put him in a comparison by observing the Swedish Foreign Minister @CarlBildt, who is the best connected world leader on Twitter that mutually following 44 peers<sup>8</sup>. Carl Bildt even has a secondary Twitter account, @fragaCarlBildt that he usually uses for Twitter chatting with his fellow Swedish citizens. Carl Bildt is a perfect example of a state actor who successfully used Twitter as a media for his public diplomacy effectively. Even though sometimes people wonder, do these state actors really Tweet for themselves, considering their busy schedule to serve in the government? But anyway, it comes back to the main idea of public diplomacy. It's the art of convincing people. Whether it's going to be successful or not, it depends on how far the actor can dig and maximize the potentials of his/her media of public diplomacy.

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<sup>8</sup> Twiplomacy: Heads of state and government on Twitter, Burson-Marsteller, July 2013

One of the weaknesses from the state actors' public diplomacy on Twitter is how clumsy and rigid they are on the progress of communicating with the non-state actors. We rarely found an official governmental Twitter account posts and responds to informal conversations. They usually only post official statements and formal press releases, which was pretty much like public diplomacy in the old times. People will feel less interested to believe and get a grip on the Twiplomacy of the state actors, because social networks are generally used for informal purposes. Of course a state actor has to behave according to their reputation as the authority above the citizen, but this doesn't mean they always have to communicate in a formal way. Sometimes governments never take it seriously when it comes to build a good and non-normative communication with their citizen, but actually it is the main core from any kind of diplomacy. So, this is really a new challenge for the state actors in these eras to make a good communication with the non-state actors, by enduring their public diplomacy creatively to keep the public opinion on the right track, along with the policy of the government.

It's like when man first discovered fire. If he doesn't know how to control and use it properly, then it ends up burning him down. The same thing goes for Twiplomacy. If the international actors, whether the non-state actors or the state actors can't maximize the usage of Twitter as a media for their public diplomacy, it can possibly turn against them. Public diplomacy on Twitter is getting serious from time to time. Twitter is now considered as one of the most influential social networks because of certain significant cases related to Twitter happened in the past. For example when Twitter activism was happening in Iran during its election in 2009, the US State Department urged the Twitter company to postpone their scheduled network upgrade for the sake of Iranian people that were using Twitter to exchange important information regarding the election. Also in September 2013, the historic call which was the first diplomatic communication between Iran and US since 1979 was Tweeted by the Iranian President himself, Hassan Rouhani. There are still a lot of influential moments happened between international actors in Twitter, and there are much more to come in the future.

Twiplomacy or any other public diplomacy on social networks is very effective, because of its ability to reach a lot of people in a short time. But this ability can also be a grand weakness of it, because if there's any wrong information made by any Twiplomats, then it will also be reached by the users of the social networks immediately. This fact forces them to be more careful on doing their Twiplomacy. For example, the US Embassy in Cairo has earned a reputation for being awfully active on Twitter, where it often engages critics directly and, at times, even jabs at Egypt's most powerful people and institutions. The embassy's official Twitter feed took a bit of a swipe at Egyptian President Mohamamed Morsi on April 2013, linking to a "Daily Show" segment in which Jon Stewart lambasted Morsi for his government's arrest of Bassem Youssef, a hugely popular TV political satirist who is sometimes compared to Stewart himself<sup>9</sup>. This incident has triggered the anger from Egyptian Presidency's Twitter account who accused the US Embassy in Cairo for doing a farcical chicanery and propaganda against the Egyptian government. Through this case, we can learn the negative fact that Twiplomacy can also triggers a diplomatic spats between countries, if it isn't done accordingly and properly.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2013/04/02/jon-stewart-sparks-twitter-fight-between-u-s-embassy-and-egyptian-presidents-office/>

## CLOSING

### Conclusion

Twiplomacy is not an elusive concept, because it's a form of soft power that is now available for every international actor on Twitter, regardless of their stance as state actors or non-state actors. Twiplomacy is a double edged sword. It could earn positive effects or negative effects to the global society as a whole. That is why every international actors who's involved as Twiplomats should work together to counter any possible misuse of Twiplomacy and maintain a good communication, considering public diplomacy is all about communication and relate with each other.

In the world of Twiplomacy, every international actor has their own reputation and popularity. However, their reputation and popularity is not everything they can rely on. Even a very popular leader such as Barack Obama who has about 33 millions of people following him is still making him the least connected and least influential state actor on Twitter, because his lack of communication with his followers. So, this paper has proven that building a good and non-normative communication with the target of Twiplomacy is very important. The non-state actors have done a good job on taking advantage of Twiplomacy. They have succeeded to reach their objective which is mainstreaming certain issues they're focusing on to the society, through interesting and interactive Tweets. They were able to achieve this because they managed to communicate well with the netizens who follows them. The government officials, as the state actors should learn a lot from the effective Twiplomacy of non-state actors, by engaging and connecting themselves in some more informal and interesting dialogues with other international actors. By doing this, the government officials will be able to convey their messages effectively, and built a closer, luring and responsive diplomacy with the society.

Long story short, even though it's considered as a sophisticated method of public diplomacy, Twiplomacy doesn't really make a revolutionary difference on the basic and substantial values of diplomacy. Of course Twiplomacy has its own advantages and

disadvantages, and it's not the only way to do a public diplomacy. But in this modern era, where speed is counted as the privilege everything, Twiplomacy is a quite good method for the international actors to learn and try.

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