



International Relations in the Digital Age: The Role of Social Media in Public Diplomacy

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Abstract

In the digital age, social media has become an important tool in public diplomacy, allowing countries to communicate directly with a global audience. This change has significant implications for international relations strategies, facilitating transparency, real-time interaction and rapid information dissemination. This research explores how social media is used by countries to support their public diplomacy objectives and the impact it has on international relations. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data was collected through content analysis of social media posts from official government accounts and diplomats from several countries over a period of time. The purpose of this research is to understand the role of social media in public diplomacy and identify strategies used by countries in managing their international image. The research also aims to examine the effectiveness of social media as a public diplomacy tool in influencing international public opinion and building relationships between countries. The results show that social media plays an important role in public diplomacy, allowing countries to effectively convey their messages to a global audience.

Keyword: Social Media, Public Diplomacy, Digital Age.

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has transformed many aspects of human life, including how countries interact with each other on the international stage. This transformation encompasses various fields, such as economics, politics, culture, and especially communications. Social media, as an integral part of the digital revolution, has become a highly effective tool in supporting public diplomacy. Public diplomacy is the attempt by countries to influence international public opinion in order to achieve their foreign policy objectives (Cull, 2009). Social media offers a platform that allows countries to reach a global audience quickly and efficiently, making diplomacy more dynamic and interactive than traditional methods.

Social media, or often abbreviated as Social Media, is an online communication tool where users can participate, share, and create content such as blogs, forums, and other social networks. In line with the definition in the McGraw Hill Dictionary, researchers argue that social media is a means of communication conducted online using platforms such as Twitter,



Facebook, and other social media accounts to exchange information without being limited by distance and time. The number of social media users continues to increase from year to year along with the increasing number of devices that can access it. Data shows that of Indonesia's total population of 274.9 million, the proportion of internet users in Indonesia reached 73.7% in 2021. This confirms that social media now plays an important role in our daily lives, including in the field of diplomacy. In the beginning, diplomacy was synonymous with relations between states and other entities, and in the political context, the practice of diplomacy involved official representatives acting peacefully in government-to-government relations. However, today diplomacy has evolved as a form of communication for governments to respond to changes in the global order, especially with the development of technology and communication. Diplomacy is no longer just about the negotiation process that involves the participation of certain actors in decision-making. The involvement of civil society in diplomacy activities through social media technology shows that diplomacy is not only the exclusive domain of state actors, but also involves non-state actors (public diplomacy).

The role of social media in public diplomacy is becoming increasingly significant as it allows direct interaction and active participation from the wider community. Governments can now use platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to disseminate information, respond to global issues and build a positive image more quickly and effectively. As such, social media not only facilitates communication between governments, but also enables public engagement in diplomacy, expanding the scope and impact of diplomacy efforts in this digital age.

Traditional diplomacy that relies on direct communication between diplomats and negotiators is now further strengthened by the presence of digital diplomacy. In this modern era, social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram are used by governments and diplomats to disseminate information, build a positive image and respond quickly to crises (Bjola & Holmes, 2015). For example, the official Twitter account of the United States government, @StateDept, and the personal accounts of diplomats such as @AmbJohnBolton, are often used to convey foreign policy, answer public questions, and address international issues in real-time. This allows states to communicate directly with the global community, provide necessary explanations, and address any rumors that may arise.

However, despite its great potential, the use of social media in public diplomacy also presents challenges. One of the biggest challenges is the spread of misinformation and fake news, which can quickly damage a country's reputation and create diplomatic tensions (Howard & Parks, 2012). For example, the spread of inaccurate information about a country's foreign policy or diplomatic actions can fuel distrust or even conflict between countries. In addition, other challenges include managing a consistent image and narrative across multiple platforms as well as cybersecurity associated with official government accounts.

Therefore, it is important to examine how countries use social media in public diplomacy and identify effective strategies and challenges that may be faced. This research will not only provide insights into how social media affects the dynamics of international relations, but also provide recommendations on best practices in digital diplomacy. A deeper understanding of the role of social media in public diplomacy can help countries develop better communication policies that are responsive to the challenges of the digital age. Thus, countries

can be more effective in building strong and positive international relations, as well as enhancing more harmonious global cooperation.

METHODS

This study aims to explore the role of social media in public diplomacy in the digital age in the context of international relations. The main questions examined include how social media affects the dynamics of public diplomacy as well as the key role it plays in the current transformation of global communication. The literature review will investigate theories related to public diplomacy, the influence of social media in international communication, and the impact of digital technology on the dynamics of interstate relations. The research method will adopt a qualitative approach with a case study design, utilizing social media content analysis to collect and analyze relevant data. The implications of the findings are expected to contribute to understanding the new role of social media in public diplomacy and provide guidance for policy and further research in this area.

DISCUSSION

The importance of social media in public diplomacy is reinforced by its ability to change the paradigm of international communication. Communication theories such as transparency theory (Hocking, 2012) and network diplomacy theory (Kerr, 2016) support the finding that social media not only allows diplomats to interact directly with the global public, but also facilitates rapid and transparent information exchange. Case studies conducted on digital diplomacy campaigns such as #DigitalDiplomacy or #DigitalDiplomacy also illustrate how governments and international institutions use these tools to influence public opinion and shape global perceptions of national policies.

The proliferation of social media has changed the way people interact and communicate globally. Since the advent of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, users can not only share information instantly but also connect with people around the world without significant physical or geographical boundaries. This phenomenon reflects a profound shift in the communication paradigm, facilitating the creation of global social networks that allow individuals to engage in cross-cultural and cross-national dialog (Castells, 2010).

One of the key factors in the development of social media is the increased use of mobile devices. With society increasingly connected through smartphones and tablets, accessibility to social media platforms has become easier and wider than ever before. This not only increases individual participation in online communities but also opens up new opportunities for companies and organizations to interact with their audiences directly and in real-time (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Social media have also brought significant political implications. They have become important tools in political campaigns, human rights advocacy, and social movements. An example is the use of Twitter and Facebook in driving political change during the 2011 Arab Revolutions, which shows how these platforms can mobilize the masses and influence the political agenda at the global level (Howard & Hussain, 2013).

Besides the social and political aspects, social media also play an important role in the digital economy. They are becoming a major channel for marketing products and services, with companies using user data to direct targeted advertising. This creates a new ecosystem where social interactions generate not only social but also economic value, influencing the way

businesses operate and innovate in the digital age (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Despite its many benefits, the development of social media also presents challenges that need to be addressed, such as data privacy, platform sustainability, and the spread of false information. The ethical use of social media has also become a focus of debate, due to its strong influence in shaping public opinion and the behavior of society at large (boyd, 2012).

Digital diplomacy refers to the use of digital technologies and social media by diplomats and governments to expand and strengthen traditional diplomatic practices. The concept emerged in response to the development of information technology that allows diplomats to communicate directly with the global community, avoiding the time and space constraints encountered in conventional diplomacy (Seib, 2012). Digital diplomacy includes not only the use of social media platforms to promote foreign policy and national interests, but also to build a positive image (branding) of a country in the eyes of the international community. For example, through #DigitalDiplomacy campaigns, governments can utilize multimedia content to highlight their cultural, economic and political achievements, creating a narrative that supports national interests (Gleason, 2016).

One of the key advantages of digital diplomacy is its ability to respond to crises quickly and efficiently. By utilizing sentiment analysis and trending topics on social media, diplomats can gauge global public opinion towards an event or policy, and take appropriate action to manage its impact (Nye, 2011). Digital diplomacy also presents the potential to increase inclusiveness in international diplomacy. Through platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, citizens can directly participate in global discussions on international issues, connecting diplomats and policy makers with a wider and more diverse audience (Bjola & Holmes, 2015). However, the success of digital diplomacy is inseparable from technical and security challenges. Protection of sensitive data, cyber security, and the ability to manage widespread information are critical in developing an effective and sustainable digital diplomacy strategy (Sharp, 2013).

One of the main positive impacts of social media is to increase transparency in public diplomacy. These platforms allow diplomats to communicate directly with the global community, providing direct access to government information and policies, which were previously difficult for the public to access (Bjola & Holmes, 2015). Social media has also increased public participation in the diplomatic process. Citizens can interact directly with diplomats and government agencies through online comments, polls and discussions, providing immediate feedback that can shape foreign policy and political decisions (Kraemer, 2011).

Global education and awareness campaigns are becoming more effective through social media. For example, non-governmental organizations and charities can leverage these platforms to disseminate information on humanitarian, climate change and social justice issues, mobilizing international support quickly and efficiently (Chadwick, 2013). Social media overcomes traditional barriers in diplomacy, such as language and geography. Multilingual content and automatic translation features allow diplomatic messages to reach a global audience without linguistic restrictions, while social media platforms that are often available worldwide open up access to people in remote and isolated regions (Merlingen & Schulze, 2012). Diplomats and government agencies can respond to global events in real-time through social media, quickly adjusting communication and diplomacy strategies according to changing political, social or economic conditions at the global level (Seib, 2012).

The role of social media in public diplomacy has changed the way diplomats and governments design and execute their communication strategies. The tradition of more closed diplomacy has shifted to a more open and interactive approach, where transparency and public participation play a key role in building international legitimacy and support (Bjola & Holmes, 2015). Building and maintaining national reputations globally has become even more important in the age of social media. Countries and government agencies must be more careful in crafting messages that portray their national identity, as any action or statement can quickly become widespread and affect global perceptions of them (Gleason, 2016).

Social media provides an opportunity for stronger cultural diplomacy. Through the promotion of national arts, culture and traditions, countries can build closer ties with foreign communities and expand their cultural influence in the international arena (Nye, 2011). However, the success of digital diplomacy also depends on strong information security. Cyber threats such as hacking and information manipulation are real risks for countries that use social media as the main platform for their public diplomacy. Protecting sensitive data and strengthening cyber security are priorities in developing a safe and effective diplomatic strategy (Sharp, 2013). Finally, proper regulation and ethical use of social media are important in managing their influence in international diplomacy. States need to work together to develop a framework that regulates the use of social media in the context of diplomacy, ensuring that national and international interests are respected without compromising the security and integrity of information (Chadwick, 2013).

In this digital age, the role of social media in public diplomacy is crucial in a number of significant ways. First, social media facilitates direct communication between diplomats and the global public without geographical restrictions, increasing the accessibility of information about foreign policy and diplomatic activities. This not only increases transparency in the diplomatic process, but also broadens public participation in political discussions and decision-making (Bjola & Holmes, 2015). In addition, digital diplomacy uses platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to build a positive image of a country through #DigitalDiplomacy campaigns, which highlight national cultural, economic and political achievements to manage global perceptions (Gleason, 2016). Social media also allows diplomats to respond quickly to international crises by utilizing sentiment analysis and trending topics to measure and adjust their communication strategies in real-time (Nye, 2011). In addition to political diplomacy, these platforms also support cultural and economic diplomacy by promoting national cultures and facilitating economic relations between countries through direct interaction between individuals and the global community (Sharp, 2013). Overall, social media not only changes the way of communication in public diplomacy, but also broadens the scope, accelerates responses to global issues, and strengthens public engagement in international diplomacy in this digital age.

CONCLUSION

The role of social media in public diplomacy in the digital era, it can be concluded that social media plays a crucial role in changing the paradigm of international communication. By facilitating direct communication between diplomats and the global public without geographical restrictions, social media increases transparency in public diplomacy and expands public participation in the political decision-making process. Moreover, through campaigns

such as #DigitalDiplomacy, social media allows governments to build a positive image globally, while its ability to respond to crises in real-time gives it an edge in conducting effective diplomacy. By supporting cultural and economic diplomacy, social media is not only changing the way of communication, but also strengthening public engagement in influencing and shaping international policy in this digital age.

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