

Twiplomacy by Indonesian Ambassadors and Embassies

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Abstract. Twitter has been strategically used by many countries in the world as part of their digital diplomacy or known as Twiplomacy. The current pandemic highlights the pivotal role that Twiplomacy has to offer. Aside from being free to use, this approach is fast in terms of disseminating information that can improve a country's international image. It also serves as an excellent tool to ensure protection for diaspora communities worldwide by providing updates to those in need of support. The Indonesian government is fully aware of these functions, hence almost all embassies and ambassadors are now on Twitter to push forward Indonesia's international agendas. Our paper introduces a dataset which consists of key information from all Twitter handles owned by ambassadors and embassies as of 12 March 2021. The descriptive analysis offers a novel empirical exploration of how Indonesian Twiplomacy fares during pandemic times. Our data suggests that embassies have a substantial role in Twiplomacy and every effort to improve their digital contribution should be highly encouraged. As for digital reach, we found that the total number of embassies' Twitter followers is less than a quarter of those of ambassadors. Yet, Indonesian embassies tweeted three times more than the ambassadors. We also find that embassies with longer existence in the Twitterverse have more followers, hence greater digital contribution to Indonesia's overall Twiplomacy performance.

1 Introduction

A growing body of research on digital diplomacy suggests that social media can effectively support countries in improving their international public image through interaction and communication [1]. States are increasingly able to connect with both domestic and international audiences concurrently in an attempt to mold their online views and change, or preserve, their viewpoints on certain policy concerns. According to the 2018 Twiplomacy report, 97 percent of UN member states have Twitter accounts, reiterating Twitter's dominance as the most widely used digital diplomacy medium [2]. Twitter's features distinguish it from other social media platforms for a variety of purposes, including political participation and conversation, as well as two-way communication [3]. Therefore, the use of Twitter for diplomacy, or Twiplomacy in short, is highly suitable in a crisis such as the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Information and communication technologies (ICT), unquestionably, has been an integral part of civilization for several decades now and, undoubtedly, for more decades to come. The Internet's emergence as a part of the exponential growth of technological innovations have not only impacted people's lives, but also many areas such as public diplomacy [1, 2]. The significant role of social media in expressing people's aspirations and affecting public policy in a variety of ways naturally has been the central focus of states and diplomats. Diplomatic missions around the world complement their traditional approach to diplomacy with this digital

technology to expand networking capacity [3]. Specifically, the role of a diplomat, also at its core, is to gather information about how foreign audiences view his or her government's policies [4]. Consequently, a social media network is an excellent instrument for diplomacy, as social media, a natural ideal medium for interaction, can easily help the diplomats to monitor and analyze public sentiments in their respective posts [1]. With this being said, countries are eager to utilize Twiplomacy to improve their diplomacy effectively, including Indonesia [5].

Indonesia is one of the top 20 countries in the world in terms of Internet usage. In January 2020, Indonesia had 175.4 million Internet users. This number is an extra 25 million compared to the previous year, with internet penetration sitting at 64%. In relation to social media use, Indonesia ranks fifth in the world, accounting for 15% of total tweets in the world. Indonesia is home to 160 million active social media users, an increase of 12 million users from April 2019 [6]. Avail of this, Indonesia has provided its diplomats with diplomatic training which include a broad range of information about recent developments in cyberspace [7]. Additionally, the training includes strategies to utilize digital diplomacy to improve interactions with the wider public [8]. Furthermore, Indonesia's Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi has urged diplomats and embassies to embrace the digital era for supporting their diplomatic duties.

However, it is important to note that the influence of a technology in and of itself does not always depend on

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the amount of usage. Rather, it depends on how well public diplomacy organizations and diplomats take advantage of these resources to reap the benefits ([3], [9]). And as there are still no specific standardized procedures for Twiplomacy, the utilization of social media remains dependent on individuals. With this background, this paper aims to provide a descriptive analysis regarding Twiplomacy by Indonesian ambassadors and embassies. In particular, we are interested in asking how many ambassadors and embassies are actively applying Twiplomacy?

Using a quantitative approach, this paper is the first of its kind that observes the utilization of Twitter by Indonesian diplomatic corps around the globe. Our data suggests that most embassies established their Twitter account between 2013—2015 which indicates digital diplomacy is a rather recent strategy adopted by Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Kementerian Luar Negeri/Kemlu). As for digital reach, we found that the total number of embassies' Twitter followers is a quarter of ambassadors. Yet, Indonesian embassies tweeted almost three times more than the ambassadors. The remainder of the study is as follows. The data and method section presents the variables and coding strategies. In the subsequent part, we discuss the findings from the data analysis. Conclusion and recommendations are concluding this article.

2 Literature review

2.1 Digital diplomacy in developed and developing countries

Twitter is notable for requiring less time from users, as well as faster engagement speeds and the ability to broadcast information to a wider audience. In comparison to the much more youth-oriented Facebook, this makes Twitter a "comparatively mature form of engagement". This modelling strongly implies its significance as a political tool, with the benefit of achieving real-time communication for public diplomacy [10-12]. Utilizing Twitter by government departments and public officials has several advantages, including enhancing the accessibility of existing online messages; forming relationships with intended audience, stakeholders, and influencers; providing a casual "human" voice to promote engagement and comprehension of messages; and allowing the public to interact easily with departments and officials [13]. Therefore, it is not entirely surprising if most of the governments in the world are improving their digital diplomacy through Twitter.

Twitter and Web 2.0 technologies are being used by federal, state, and municipal government agencies and officials in the United States. Web 2.0 technologies have been implemented by the US federal government in several agencies. The digital diplomacy of CEE and Western embassies was studied, and it was shown that these institutions had a weak but substantial relationship with public diplomacy subjects and public relations messaging techniques. Western embassies, on the other hand, focused on advocacy, whereas CEE embassies

focused on cultural diplomacy [13-15] investigated the impact of the US Embassy's microblogging in China that has changed and bolstered the communication between the US Embassy and Chinese individuals. Finally, [16] analyzed how the US invests in public diplomacy to influence opinions and build trust in the Middle East.

In the previous decade, many studies have been conducted on digital diplomacy but mostly in American and European settings in terms of participation and discourse; and few scholars have focused on developing countries' efforts in digital diplomacy. According to [17], studying East Asian countries can provide non-Western viewpoints and insights into the present discussion on digital diplomacy. This viewpoint is supported by [18], who viewed non-western perspectives as comparatively brand new and thus allowing scholars to investigate more diverse digital diplomacy approaches around the world.

In terms of non-Western perspectives on digital diplomacy, [17] found that Korean digital diplomacy is successful in not only improving its soft power through social media, but also in developing transnational networks among the foreign public. Korean public diplomacy groups systematically monitored and improved the communication threads conveyed by users, acting as both a discussion initiator and a real-time moderator. In contrast to Japan's digital diplomacy, which is still in its early stages and provides minimal information that is primarily only on tourism assets [17]. In China, [19] discovered that CPC propaganda and censorship had an impact on China's public diplomacy. To project a tolerant, democratic, and responsible online persona of a rising global power, Chinese public diplomacy follows a polyphonic pattern in which practitioners deliberately incorporate multiple viewpoints into their Twitter content while still adhering to the government's internet restrictions [19]. Furthermore, [20] discovered that Chinese exchanges are generally one-way, and that Twitter diplomacy was utilized effectively as a 'crisis messaging tool' and as a tool to fight back against an anti-CCP narrative during the Covid-19 Pandemic. In India and Pakistan, [18] concluded India has a more institutionalized and structured digital diplomacy than Pakistan, however there is no digital engagement and dialogue between government departments and the public via social networking sites.

Despite the claim of [17] that claimed South Korea have employed digital diplomacy with a systematic guideline and planning, numerous scholars [21, 22] have observed that many countries are not fully utilizing social media. Most countries still have a stronger diplomatic presence offline than on Twitter, and they use it without a clear strategy, guidelines, or policy objectives in mind. Although embassies are transparent, employ positive sentiment, and provide essential information to their stakeholders, they rarely participate in direct interactive and personal engagement, and only communicate with a small number of people. According to [23], the use of social media by US embassies reveals a lack of consistency. These embassies do not utilize Twitter to promote diplomatic events or to keep the public up to date on the ambassador's or other staff

members' daily activities. Instead, the U.S. Embassy Twitter feed is only providing short-cut access to U.S. government websites and documents. Furthermore, evidence reveals that diplomats are hesitant to use social media because they value the traditional technique of cultivating personal, face-to-face interactions with their peers [21].

2.2 Centrality and listening

Power no longer depends on the ability to control information, but rather by the process of communication and relationships within a network [11]. Technology has spawned a new diplomatic strategy in which nations can and should strive to become connected nodes in networks in order to boost their diplomatic influence [21]. The states who share and acquire the most information are rewarded in these networks since they are the ones who attract other states and have the capability to become the central node. As a result, a node's centrality serves as a barometer for popularity, salience, and influence. High centrality in a network based on co-occurrence refers to an entity's prominence, visibility, and even having the capabilities to set agenda in online and offline discussions ([9], [17], [24-25]). In a cyclical manner, states then can gather more information by becoming central nodes in diplomatic networks, which helps them further in boosting their popularity [19].

On a more individual basis, the government of a country must engage in dialogue and collaboration with the international public to foster positive relationships and become a hub of information. Scholars ([7], [11, 12], [14-17], [22], [24]) argued that interactive two-way communications of views, values, and opinion leaders are more important than traditional media relations strategies that are non-transparent and one-way messaging. Furthermore, governments need someone with the personality to manage interaction with a more diversified public via social media [15, 26]. As an important aspect of diplomacy, ambassadors might be the ideal individual to provide the required personality. These people, when combined with a medium like Twitter, produce "an informal human voice" that contributes to the development of social presence, interpersonal trust, credibility, and relationships with the audience. Ambassadors can easily become the nodes of the online network by relying on their legitimacy as representatives of governmental entities ([12, 13], [22]).

It is now up to embassies to customize public diplomacy messaging to the specific characteristics of foreign audiences and to use digital platforms as a tool for obtaining information that can help with policy formulation. As power shifted to the embassy, it shifted to the ambassador as well [4]. The ambassador's stance toward digitalization influences how the embassy uses digital platforms. Digital platforms are more likely to be used in public diplomacy operations by embassies led by ambassadors who see them as an asset. Ambassadors who see digital platforms as a burden, on the other hand, are likely to remain inactive online. As a result, ambassadors are becoming digital gatekeepers. Because they are perceived as an expert, competent, and in a

position within their local community to apply social pressure and social support/social embeddedness, ambassadors can play an important political role [15]. In summary, the ambassadors may significantly expand their embassies' digital reach and contribute to their public diplomacy efforts. [4] calculated the amount of Twitter followers that embassies and their ambassadors attract to see how much they contribute to their embassies' digital reach. In a similar vein, [27] looked at the frequency with which representatives used Twitter to assess the digital impact of their accounts.

In the case of Indonesia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia's, or Kemlu, diplomacy policies and implementations can be seen on its website and other social media channels, demonstrating its strong commitment towards using digital diplomacy in organizing its foreign relations in the internet era [8]. For example, Kemlu's main website has been up and running since 2002. Aside from improved displays and a more user-friendly menu, ongoing improvements are being made, such as merging the websites of Indonesia's foreign missions, which include 95 embassies, 3 permanent missions, 30 consulate generals, and 3 consulates. Aside from Kemlu's engagement, there are several Indonesian accounts. According to statistics, Indonesian embassies in several countries have actively participated in these networking sites. Many Indonesian ambassadors and diplomats have used social media channels as one of the instruments to introduce and promote Indonesia overseas on a personal basis. Even though their accounts were initially put up for personal use, some of the feeds disseminated components of Indonesian values, cultures, and ideas, contributing favorably to Indonesian diplomacy, notably economic and cultural diplomacy [7]. Based on this research, the authors of this report are interested in learning more about Indonesia's ambassadors and embassies' Twitter activities. We wanted to provide a descriptive analysis of the Twiplomacy activities of Indonesian ambassadors and embassies by analyzing the pattern of number of tweets followers, following, and joined date.

3 Methods

This paper utilizes mixed-method methodology in order to descriptively analyze the current number of tweets followers, following, and joined date of Indonesian ambassadors and embassies' Twitter accounts.

4 Data collection

As we aim to answer the research question posed in the previous section, we searched the Twitter accounts for all ambassadors and embassies of the Republic of Indonesia (Kedutaan Besar Republik Indonesia/KBRI). Indonesian diplomatic missions have a total of 93 embassies. Data collecting processes carried out between 12 February—12 March 2021. In the first stage, we used the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; www.kemlu.go.id to trace the names of ambassadors recorded as of 12 February 2021.

We searched for the names of ambassadors in the search bar of Twitter. Yet, we found it easier to check for the embassy’s account first and followed by searching the ambassador’s Twitter handle. To further verify, the authors check the profile picture and the similarity between the real name and the username of the supposed ambassador’s account. To determine that the account is owned and managed by the ambassador, we trace the list of accounts that they are following. This way we can ensure that the account is accurate and organic. For the purpose of descriptive analysis, we tabulated variables such as year of joining, number of followers, and number of tweets.

5 Results and discussion

All Indonesian embassies have a Twitter account, and most accounts were created in 2013—2015 (52.69%) and only 1.08% of accounts were established between 2007—2009 (see Figure 1). On the other hand, nearly two-third of these accounts were followed by 1,001-10,000 followers. And almost 70% of embassies’ Twitter accounts have tweeted more than 1,000 times. Therefore, these figures indicate a couple of important takeaways. Firstly, it is evident to argue that Twiplomacy is a recently adopted strategy by the Indonesian diplomatic corps. Secondly, although Twitter was created in 2006, it was not until a decade later those embassies were keen to use the medium as a form of communication. Thirdly, the embassies have been relatively successful in gathering audiences or followers despite being just recently adopted, with most of the embassies (88.17%) having at least 300 up to 10,000 followers on Twitter.

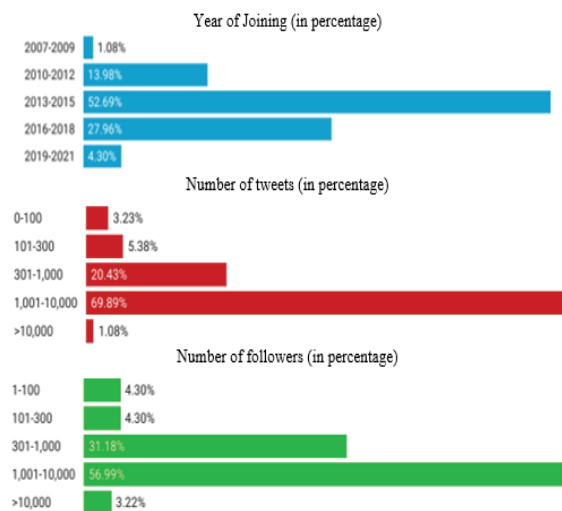


Fig. 1. Indonesian embassies twitter accounts (n = 93 embassies).

Our data suggests that 50 out of 93 ambassadors are Twitterless (53.76%). We continue by analyzing 43 accounts owned by ambassadors. Nearly 21% of ambassadors joined Twitter in 2018, and another 13.95% in 2010. The disparity in terms of number of followers is very contrasting as a few ambassadors are followed by more than 100,000 accounts, whilst others

only have one or two followers. The average number of followers for ambassadors sits at 20,428.

	Number of Followers	Number of Tweets	Average Followers	Average Tweets
Ambassadors	878,394	70,377	20,428	1,637
Embassies	205,040	204,319	2,205	2,197

Fig. 2. Ambassadors and embassies digital contribution.

Figure 2 displays the number of followers of Indonesian ambassadors and embassies combined, which is 1,083,434. Embassies contribute 18.93% of followers, with average followers per embassy sitting at 2,205. However, embassies tweeted almost three times more than the ambassadors. Hence, we argue that although having relatively fewer followers compared to the ambassadors, Indonesian embassies are exceedingly active and play the biggest role in generating tweets and messages as part of Indonesian Twiplomacy.

Ambassadors	Followers	Embassies	Followers
Todung Mulya Lubis (Norway & Iceland)	662,648	Japan & Federated States of Micronesia	21,635
Yuddi Chrisnandi (Ukraine, Armenia, & Georgia)	179,563	United States of America	20,759
Tantowi Yahya (New Zealand & Tonga & Samoa)	10,037	Kingdom of England & Ireland	12,574
Ikrar Nusa Bhakti (Tunisia)	4,651	Malaysia	8,096
Abdul Kadir Jaelani (Canada)	3,787	Viet Nam	7,454
Suryopratomo (Singapore)	2,951	Netherlands	6,718
Shidarto Reza Suryodipuro (India & Bhutan)	2,572	Singapore	5,417
Arif Havas Oegroseno (Germany)	1,678	South Korea	4,976
Hajriyanto Y. Thohari (Lebanon)	1,390	Australia & Vanuatu	4,588
Sukmo Harsono (Panama, Honduras, Costa Rica, & Nicaragua)	1,242	Thailand	4,425

Fig. 3. Top 10 ambassadors and embassies with most followers.

In order to understand the contribution and impact of ambassadors and embassies for Indonesian Twiplomacy, it is crucial to examine their popularity measured by number of followers. Figure 3 shows the top 10 most followed ambassadors and embassies on Twitter. These countries constitute nearly half of all embassies’ followers combined. It is then safe to conclude that these 10 embassies play a significant role for Indonesian Twiplomacy.

One of the most important similarities of these embassies is that most of them joined Twitter in the period of 2009—2011. To be exact, there are 6 countries that joined in the period of 2009-2011, three countries in the year of 2015, and the most recent joined in 2018. The data suggests a connection between early Twiplomacy adoption and the number of followers which help to gauge its digital contribution. Moreover, five of these top 10 countries are related to Indonesia as these five countries (Malaysia, Vietnam, Singapore, Australia and Vanuatu, and Thailand) are close neighbours to

Indonesia. Beside these five, there are also South Korea and Japan who are fellow Asian countries. This indicates that the closeness of countries with Indonesia, which in this case, are close in the geographical sense, are also a key factor for the embassies for these top 10 countries to have a major presence on Twitter. In addition, embassies situated in major powers, such as Japan, the US, and the UK sit on the top three of most followed. Further study is required to examine why these embassies are much more popular than other countries. Does it have to do with the size of the Indonesian diaspora? Does it have to do with the level of technological advancement? Or is there an alternative explanation to this level of popularity?

6 Conclusion

Technology has played a major role in various aspects of life including diplomacy. Every government in the world is trying their very best to utilize technology in order to improve their countries' digital diplomacy. The number of Internet and social media users in Indonesia is among the highest in the world. With this in mind, the country has a huge potential to maximize its international image via Twiplomacy. Thus, the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is urging its ambassadors and embassies to use Twiplomacy as an expansion of the traditional approach to diplomacy [7-8]. In this research, we found that all embassies have an official Twitter account, while only 46% of ambassadors are on Twitter. Our analysis suggests embassies with longer existence in the Twitterverse have more followers, hence greater digital contribution to Indonesia's overall digital diplomacy. On the other hand, embassies that are much later joining Twitter can also have significant digital contributions by actively tweeting and retweeting. Lastly, the current study indicates Indonesian embassies situated in major powers, such as Japan, the US, and the UK garner the most followers. Other countries with significant followers are in Asia. Therefore, we would conclude by arguing the importance of Twiplomacy for the Indonesian government to support its representatives in serving various diplomatic functions.

However, it is also important to note that technology advancement is not always capitalized by decision makers in Indonesia. Female politicians, for example, tend to avoid sharing their campaign activities online as it may instead jeopardize their electability [28]. This indicates social media is not yet perceived as a panacea to end current obstacles faced by the minority and gender groups in politics, for example women in Indonesian parliament [29, 30].

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