The Impacts of Twitter (X) Diplomacy on Contemporary International Relations

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Abstract

There is no gainsaying that social media has become a primary conduit of diplomacy and an arena for government-to-government interactions. In a Twitter diplomacy study conducted in 2018 and published by Burson and Wolfe, at least 97 percent of all 193 UN member states are currently active on Twitter (now rebranded as X), and they are increasingly eliciting public interest. The attention the public gives to world leaders' tweets illustrates not only the political power of Twitter but also how Twitter challenges conventional diplomatic practices. In formal assemblies, social gatherings, unofficial meetings, and other state-to-state interactions, government officials and policymakers now use Twitter to communicate, transforming diplomacy over time. While it is a fact that social media especially Twitter is rising in popularity as a foreign policy tool, the political impacts of Twitter on international relations need to be interrogated. Thus, this paper analyses the impacts of Twitter (now X) diplomacy on contemporary international relations.

Keywords: Impact, Twitter (X), Diplomacy, Contemporary, International Relations

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Introduction

Contemporary diplomacy is characterized by a greater frequency of communication and a wider dispersal of information through social media (Duncombe, 2017). States have been employing social media as part of a more interactive engagement with foreign publics, thereby changing the space within which diplomacy unfolds (Duncombe, 2017). Over the past couple of years, social media, and Twitter most of all, have become an increasingly prominent means of political and diplomatic communication (Drew, 2020). Although Twitter is now rebranded as X, this paper uses Twitter more because it has become a household name. Twitter served as a versatile form of the political public square for domestic and world affairs (Radhika, 2020). A Burson-Marsteller study found that two-thirds of the world's leaders have joined Twitter and gained huge followers (Babb, 2012).

For example, during Donald Trump's first term in office, he was the most popular leader on Twitter with roughly 60 million followers as of 2019 (Wang, 2019). Trump garnered by far the most interactions and his tweets averaged more than 20,000 retweets (Burson and Wolfe, 2018). When Twitter banned Trump indefinitely from the platform on 8 January 2021 citing fears that Trump would incite additional violence following the deadly storming of the US Capitol building, his handle @realDonaldTrump had over 88.9 million followers. Although Donald Trump later launched his own social media app, called Truth Social, he returned to X (formerly known as Twitter) in 2022, "firing off his first message in 2023, more than 2 1/2 years shortly after he surrendered at an Atlanta jail on charges, he conspired to overturn his election loss" (Colvin, 2023). In July 2023, Trump posted a photo of his mugshot and the words, "Election interference. Never surrender!". It was his first post since he was suspended in 2021, and after his account was reinstated by Elon Musk took over the company, and rebranded it as X. During his campaign in 2024, Kafka (2024) noted that Trump was running a Twitter ad that looks like it comes from his account. On August 12, 2024, a message (below) tweeted from Trump's account received more than 14 million views on that day.

> Are you better off now than you were when I was president? Our economy is shattered. Our border has been erased. We're a nation in decline. Make the American Dream

AFFORDABLE again. Make America SAFE again. Make America GREAT Again! #TrumpOnX

— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) August 12, 2024 (Kafka, 2024)

According to Kafka (2024), this campaign post was another time a post was seen from Trump's account on Twitter after July 2023, when he posted his mugshot. Before and since that, Trump was confined to his trademark rants to Truth Social, the Twitter clone he launched in February 2022 (Kafka, 2024). While Trump agreed not to post on any other social media platform for at least six hours after Truth Social was launched, it is unclear [at the moment] if that agreement has changed (Kafka, 2024). What is known is that "Trump upon his reinstatement refrained from tweeting stating that he was happier on his own Truth Social site "(Colvin, 2023). It is also a fact that Trump, during his election campaign, was strongly backed by Elon Musk, who bought Twitter in 2022, and there is a possibility that given the support he received from Musk, he will make use of X in his second term as President of the United States. For now, only time will tell. Having assumed office on January 20, 2025, as the 47th President of the United States, the world awaits what Trump's second term holds concerning the use of social media (X or Truth Social) as a diplomatic tool of communication and interactions with foreign publics. It is on record that Donald Trump posted the most retweeted tweet of any world leader (Burson and Wolfe, 2018) during his first term in office, and made the biggest impact on Twitter as a world leader at the time.

Indeed, the use of Twitter largely propelled by the prominence of [digital technology] in the current environment for the discharge of diplomatic functions has become an integral part of contemporary international relations (Radhika, 2020). The power of Twitter emerges through how it challenges conventional diplomatic practices (Duncombe, 2017). From the President of the United States taking jabs at his counterparts, to India's former External Affairs Minister using Twitter to assist Indians across the world [during the Covid-19 pandemic], social media has brought a paradigm shift in the craft of diplomacy (Radhika, 2020). Twitter, undoubtedly, is among the top social media tools used in the diplomatic sector, although Facebook is still the world's foremost dominant social network, for both mobile and desktop users (Sandre, 2013). Lufkens (2018) asserts that Twitter is the key channel of digital communication [among foreign

ministers]. It has been embraced by ninety-seven percent of United Nations member states (Burson and Wolfe, 2018) since its inception in 2006. Although the governments of six countries, namely Laos, Mauritania, Nicaragua, North Korea, Swaziland, and Turkmenistan do not have an official presence on the platform (Cohn and Wolfe, 2018), it is important to note that the Chinese government, which is famous for blocking western social media networks behind "the Great Firewall," is opening to social media engagement (Burson and Wolfe, 2018). According to Duncombe (2017), two important aspects of Twitter stand out in facilitating the shift from face-to-face engagements to [digital] social interactions. First, the public nature of tweets means that an initial exchange between Twitter users can be shared with a much larger audience. Second, the speed of communication means there is much less time to digest and evaluate information, which can lead to a slow realization of change.

While Twitter is seen as the most common e-diplomacy tool, it is only one of the many ways foreign ministries around the world are engaging in the most viral and exciting new development in modern diplomacy. As Wheeler (2013) noted, if diplomacy is the "art of communication", then there is another platform for dialogue between states, which is social media. Twitter challenges traditional notions of diplomacy. Diplomats are increasingly relying on social media platforms in their daily practice to communicate with their counterparts. These exchanges occur in front of a global audience, providing an added level of scrutiny that is unique to this form of communication (Duncombe, 2017). In the words of Sandre (2013), the initial one hundred and forty characters (increased to 280 characters in 2017) have changed how foreign policy shapes itself and how it responds to new international challenges. Since its founding in 2006, Twitter, now X, has become a prominent hub for sharing thoughts and viewpoints in the ever-evolving realm of social media (Times of India, 2024). It facilitates connectivity through tweets. Notable leaders such as Joe Biden, Barack Obama, and Narendra Modi (India's Prime Minister) are popular on Twitter. The prominence of these political figures on X underscores the platform's role in shaping public discourse, policy advocacy, and international relations (Times of India, 2024).

In a 2013 study, Sandre (2013) pointed out that the best-connected world leader is the President of the European Council, while the most followed was US former President, Barack Obama (@BarackObama). Although a former president,

Barack Obama remains a towering figure on X with over 131 million followers, using the platform to advance social and political issues. When Elon Musk began to make changes to X, especially to how it hands out the coveted blue checkmarks, previously given to noted individuals, journalists, executives, politicians, and establishments after verifying their identities, the Vatican, while referring to the new changes initiated by Musk, noted that the Pope had more than 53 million followers on Twitter (Malik, 2023). As of 2021 when US President Joe Biden took office, his Twitter account had only 30.59 million followers, maintaining a steady rise to the extent that he became one of the top followed leaders during his time in office. In 2024, Prime Minister Modi became the most followed world leader on X, crossing 100 million followers, followed by the then President of the USA Joe Biden, with over 38 million followers (Times of India, 2024). Twitter diplomacy is forcing its way onto the foreign policy agenda as a consolidated e-diplomacy tool to rethink objectives and respond to changing global dynamics.

It is against these backdrops that this paper analyzes the impacts of Twitter diplomacy (also referred to as Twiplomacy here) on contemporary international relations. The paper makes use of secondary sources of data including journal articles, relevant books, and online materials, among others. The paper has five sections. The rest of the sections proceed as follows. Section II examined the concept of Twitter diplomacy or Twiplomacy. Section III examined the changing nature of diplomacy – from traditional diplomacy to Twitter diplomacy. Section IV analyses Twitter diplomacy and its impacts on contemporary international relations. Section V contains the conclusion.

The Concept of Twiplomacy or Twitter Diplomacy

The term "Twiplomacy" is coined as a shorter form of Twitter diplomacy. Twiplomacy captures the practice of conducting diplomacy in 280 characters or less by government officials via the internet-enabled social medium called, Twitter. Twitter is a free microblogging social media website, "estimated to have as of early 2025 over 600 million monthly active users" (Duarte, 2025). Twitter diplomacy is a form of digital diplomacy used by foreign ministers, government officials, and heads of state or representatives to conduct public diplomacy and manage international relations. According to Wang (2019), Twitter diplomacy is

when world leaders and government agencies issue foreign policy-related statements and reactions over Twitter.

Over the years, Twitter has become the preferred social media platform for public officials and governments to engage in diplomatic communication or to communicate their foreign policy decisions. In a digital world with great advancements in information technology, social media is increasingly been used for diplomatic practices. The general name applied to social media diplomacy is e-diplomacy or digital diplomacy (Sandre, 2013). Digital diplomacy is the general term for the use of the web, information and communications technology (ICT), or social media tools to engage in diplomatic activities and carry out foreign policy objectives (Sandre, 2013). However, Twitter diplomacy is specifically applied to the use of Twitter as a diplomatic tool (Arke Marketing, 2017). According to Radhika (2020), Twidiplomacy or Twitter diplomacy is the coming together of traditional, digital diplomacy and Twitter. The Twitter platform has been transformed into a sociopolitical hub where states and non-state actors as well as the international public converge for the exchange of information on global issues (Dumčiuvienė, 2016). There is a difference between traditional diplomacy and Twitter diplomacy. While traditional diplomacy is generally bound by decorum and formality; Twitter diplomacy is not (Radhika, 2020). Twitter allows government officials to broadcast their views on pertinent issues without following the formal diplomatic channels.

Twiplomacy breaks through the limitations of traditional diplomacy, which is hinged on a top-down bureaucratic approach when it comes to negotiation and the dissemination of information (Radhika, 2020). Having in mind that public diplomacy is aimed at interacting with the international public on matters of international relations, twitter diplomacy comes with its nuance. Twitter as a social media network is harnessed by government agencies and personnel, public individuals, and establishments to publish specific narratives that are intended to essentially influence the perception and outlook of the international audience concerning certain issues (McClellan 2004; Popa and Popescu, 2016). Indeed, Twitter has become a significant channel of diplomacy, given its frequent usage by state leaders and government agencies to conduct diplomacy.

From Traditional Diplomacy to Twitter Diplomacy

The ability to practice diplomacy is one of the defining elements of a state. Diplomacy has been practiced since the first city-states were formed millennia ago (around 5th BC). As the relations between states flourished, interactions were being held regularly. This interactive process is often conducted by diplomats who are usually sent abroad to act on behalf of their states (London Metropolitan University, 2009). Hence, the use of diplomats as representatives of states/heads of state became institutionalized. In its traditional form, diplomacy was conducted mostly on a bilateral basis, and the whole process was commonly shrouded in secrecy. The maintenance of secrecy was made possible due to the limiting nature of diplomacy to a bilateral level (London Metropolitan University, 2009), and the limited digitalization of the world at the inception.

As time progressed, certain features in the structure, process, and agenda of traditional diplomacy became outmoded (London Metropolitan University, 2009). One of the notable changes is the state's sharing of the international stage with other non-state actors. In addition, the advancement in information technology brought significant transformation in diplomatic practices. In international relations, what was once done behind closed doors is now in the open (Burson and Wolfe, 2018). Before the digital transformation of diplomatic space, diplomacy in its conventional form had, arguably, a different character from e-diplomacy. Traditional diplomacy was conducted by well-qualified diplomats and foreign ministers in a closed circle, but with the advent of social media like Twitter, several state officials now express their perspectives, opinions, and intentions concerning global issues via social media platforms such as Twitter. The 2014 Twidiplomacy report from Burson-Marsteller revealed Twitter's influential role in global politics and diplomacy. The holders of Twitter accounts, among world governments are not only leaders from developed nations or great powers but leaders from regions of the world, engaging in active conversation on Twitter (see the figure below based on the 2014 Burson-Marsteller report).

Most conversational world leaders
PERCENTAGE OF @REPLIES

95%	87%	81%	75%	74%

@AmamaMbabazi
Prime Minister of Uganda

@PaulKagame
President of Rwanda

@MashiRafael
President of Ecuador

@LMushikiwabo
Foreign Minister of Rwanda

@Erna_Solberg
Prime Minister of Norway

Source: Arcand, Rob (n.d). Top World Leaders Use Twitter to Broadcast Messages.

For many world leaders, Twitter has become a huge diplomatic tool for real-time international relations. Twitter has become an influential diplomatic tool, with more than "half of the world's foreign ministers and their institutions" and 83 percent of the 193 UN member countries present on the site (Arcand, n.d). The culture of Twitter diplomacy features extensive public inclusion in the current affairs of international relations. State ministries are also expanding their networks, as shown in the number of embassies, ambassadors, and consulates growing remarkably on Twitter and the great number of followers for foreign ministries such as the UK foreign office. Hashtag, one of the main instruments of Twitter diplomacy, has also helped to create digital awareness of global issues. For example, Nigeria's #BringBackOurGirls [after the kidnap of over 200 school girls in Chibok] and Slovenia's #ENDViolence campaigns have shown the remarkable potential [of Twitter] for global outreach and awareness of human rights issues; garnering millions of tweets, retweets, likes, posts, and shares across the world (Arcand, n.d).

This new diplomatic practices through social media (Twitter), not only keep the public informed on matters of global politics but allows for public reactions and opinions. To a certain extent, public reactions and opinions influence the formulation and implementation processes of foreign policy (McClellan, 2004). While diplomacy was originally the preserve of foreign ministries in direct communication with other foreign offices following a distinct diplomatic protocol,

and without, to a large extent, the knowledge of the public; nowadays, it is practiced differently (in an open social media space) and sometimes without well-informed public, sharing ideas in matters that they lack expertise. As noted by Popa and Popescu (2016), diplomacy [now] goes beyond the sometimes rather narrow politico-strategic conception.

Twitter has expanded and enhanced diplomacy, beyond the traditional meaning of diplomacy. It has no doubt facilitated worldwide public representation and participation in matters of global concern. Although Twitter diplomacy rivals traditional diplomacy in the speed of effects and immediacy, state officials and representatives still have to travel to negotiate, sign agreements, and attend meetings, conferences, summits, and conventions. The place of negotiation as core to traditional diplomacy is still respected. Presidents and other key State officials still maintain the privilege of making foreign policy decisions, and choose what to communicate online and what not to communicate, depending on the personality of a leader. Twitter is a powerful tool for diplomats [foreign ministers and heads of state], but it has not [totally] replaced traditional diplomacy (Babb, 2012). Nonetheless, dismissing the role of social media, particularly Twitter (now X) as a diplomatic engagement tool means ignoring potential openings for a transformative change that might well pass before they can be acted upon (Duncombe, 2017).

Impacts of Twitter Diplomacy on Contemporary International Relations

"All the World atwitter" was the summary of the 2018 Twiplomacy study carried out by Burson and Wolfe (2018). Their summary must have been drawn from the increasing subscription of world leaders to this digital tool as a method of communication while carrying out diplomatic functions. The impacts of Twitter diplomacy on contemporary international relations are both positive and negative. On the positive side, Twitter has brought to the foreign public greater access to unfiltered information and worldwide engagement on global issues/politics regardless of nationality or political status (Schwarzenbach, 2015). During the COVID-19 pandemic, Rufai and Bunce (2020) noted that Twitter seems to have been a powerful public health tool for world leaders to rapidly and directly communicate information on COVID-19 to citizens. Twitter as a sociopolitical tool for world leaders to effectively reconstruct international matters into public debates with feedback and opinions being visible to other users worldwide is also well

established. In a study conducted by Rufai and Bunce (2020) titled, "World Leaders' Usage of Twitter in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Content Analysis", they pointed out that in an organization like G7 that has a Twitter account, leaders could use their influence over public opinion to address public health issues. In the United Nations, roughly 78 percent of the 193 member states had some form of official presence on Twitter in 2013, and by 2018, that number increased to 97 percent (Wang, 2019), revealing the huge potential of this social media tool to influence the public. According to Sandre (2023), Twitter [as a tool for diplomacy] is closing the communication gap [and distance] between world leaders and the public. Via the Twitter platform, the global audience allots attentiveness and reactiveness to the messages of world leaders, making it an intensive and extensively interactive public process.

With the majority of global leaders active in the Twitter space today, the use of Twitter for quick diplomatic engagement has been remarkable. One example of the use of Twitter for diplomatic signaling was an exchange in 2013 by then-US Secretary of State John Kerry, who used Twitter to engage with Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif (Diplo Foundation, n.d). In a tweet, Secretary Kerry said:

> Happy Nowruz! Look forward to engaging with you and President Rouhani to find a more hopeful future.
> Zarif responded with a tweet of his own, saying:
> Have a blessed Nowruz. Iran is ready for constructive engagement. #Nowruz.

This exchange was the first step in successful negotiations between two hostile countries. Twitter helps government functionaries bypass complex bureaucratic processes and iterations required in traditional diplomatic practices. With Twitter, government leaders bypass the hassle of formal press releases and announcements to deliver information directly to the public in an environment where they feel comfortable (Henry, 2012). Messages on Twitter are generally faster in communicating the government's policy priorities with foreign audiences. Manor (2014) submitted that Twitter helps world leaders repair, reconstruct, and remold international image and position themselves at a vantage point to the rest of the world.

Indeed, Twitter is transforming diplomatic practices in contemporary international relations. A good example of Twitter's role in transformational diplomacy is the Iran and US engagement via Twitter in the lead-up to the historic

Iran and P5+1 nuclear deal in 2015, which saw sanctions against Iran lifted in exchange for a drawing down of its nuclear program (Duncombe, 2017). Twitter played a major role during this deal. According to Duncombe (2017), Twitter became an alternative platform of official communication through which key stakeholders such as the US Secretary of State John Kerry, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, and Ayatollah Khamenei communicated and 'talked honestly' with one another, helping to develop stronger trust between these counterparts. Twitter also provided an alternative platform through which Iran introduced slight shifts in representations of itself and the US (Duncombe, 2017). Through Twitter, leaders sometimes air their opinions on a particular issue ahead of deliberations. For example, ahead of the June 2019, G20 meeting in Japan, US President Donald Trump tweeted from his account:

> I look forward to speaking with Prime Minister Modi about the fact that India, for years having put very high tariffs against the United States, just recently increased the tariffs even further. This is unacceptable, and the tariffs must be withdrawn! (cited in Radhika, 2020).

This tweet by Trump not only revealed what would be Trump's area of focus during the meeting but also helped the Indian Prime Minister to know what to expect during the meeting. Twiplomacy has also played a major role when it comes to governments responding to crises across the world and extending support to citizens in need of help, as seen in India's former External Affairs Minister's use of the platform to discharge duties (Radhika, 2020) during covid-19 pandemic. Apart from government leaders, Twitter helps citizens engage in foreign policy debates and participate in the decision-making process, thereby making policy decisions more participatory.

Notwithstanding its pros, Twitter has its cons when used in diplomatic practices. Traditional diplomacy is generally bound by decorum and formality; Twitter diplomacy is not (Radhika, 2020). In August 2019, a stir over Twitter was created after Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel, acted on Trump's advice via Twitter after the latter tweeted:

> It would show great weakness if Israel allowed Rep. Ilhan Omar and Rep. Rashida Tlaib to visit Israel. Both Ilhan Omar and Rep. Rashida Tlaib are representatives of the Democratic party of the United States and have been vocal in their support of the 'boycott, divest and sanction' movement against Israel. (Radhika, 2020).

> Within hours of this tweet, Netanyahu acted on Trump's advice and stated via his official Twitter handle (@IsraeliPM):

No country in the world respects America and the American Congress more than the State of Israel and both representatives were barred from entering Israel due to their support of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement (Radhika, 2020).

The increasingly common use of Twitter as a platform for diplomatic communication poses the risk of conflicts escalating unintentionally (Drew, 2020) between or among states. According to Arcand (n.d), hashtags can create digital outreach rifts during times of international conflict. For example, the hashtag #UnitedForUkraine gained widespread support from Western countries, but in response, foreign ministries in Moscow initiated their hashtag, #BringBackOurBoys, urging for the release of two Russian journalists captured in eastern Ukraine. This instance called a "hashtag battle" shows the conflicting power of foreign ministries (Arcand, n.d). Twitter can make an already bad situation with unfriendly countries worse.

Trump's tweet in March 2017 that "North Korea is behaving very badly, and they have been playing the United States for years, while China has done little to help!" (Duncombe, 2017) helped to escalate the tension between the US and North Korea, almost bringing the two to the brink of a nuclear altercation in July 2017 (Radhika, 2020). On 3 July 2017, after North Korea launched another nuclear missile, Donald Trump mockingly tweeted: "North Korea has just launched another missile. Does this guy have anything better to do with his life?" (cited in Radhika, 2020). Donald Trump's tweet prompted a response from the North Korean leader, who in his New Year's Day speech said:

It is not a mere threat but a reality that I have a nuclear button on the desk in my office. All of the mainland United States is within the range of our nuclear strike" (cited in Radhika, 2020).

Such tweets and retweets helped to complicate an already fractious relationship that Tillerson once argued was at "an inflection point" (Duncombe, 2017).

Also, Twitter messages meant for domestic audiences may be read differently by international audiences, sometimes attracting negative retweets from outsiders. For example, Donald Trump's threats against Iran were intended to please his home supporters but Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and his foreign minister, Javad Zarif, released escalatory tweets of their own that directly referenced Trump's message (Drew, 2020). Twitter messages (not more than 280 characters) can come with the risk of misinterpretation and the potential for such messages to be taken out of context by the public.

In addition, the proliferation of accounts for government officials could result in mixed messages. For example, during the spike in tensions between the US and Iran following the US drone strike that killed Iran's top military commander Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the US former Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo sent a flurry of carefully crafted tweets addressing his efforts to gain the support of Iran's neighbors. However, the message sent by the US President at the time, Donald Trump were of a very different nature (Drew, 2020). While the cabinet members were targeting de-escalation of conflict, "the President's tweets were typically combative and escalatory" (Drew, 2020). Despite Twitter's large audience connection effects, Twitter diplomacy has increased the risk of diplomatic tensions and conflicts (Wang, 2019). The fact that several world leaders are on Twitter and their followers have increased does not result in better communication flow. Communication via Twitter (in just 280 characters) is sometimes misinterpreted.

A "simple" tweet could trigger unimaginable responses from the targeted audience/party. A clear example was in 2018 when Canada and Saudi Arabia severed diplomatic ties after Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland tweeted, urging the Saudi authorities to release the woman activist, and her brother Raif. Chrystia tweeted:

[Chrystia Freeland ✔ @cafreeland](#)

> Very alarmed to learn that Samar Badawi, Raif Badawi's sister, has been imprisoned in Saudi Arabia. Canada stands together with the Badawi family in this difficult time, and we continue to strongly call for the release of both Raif and Samar Badawi (cited in Express Web Desk, 2018)

On the same issue, the Canadian Foreign Policy Agency also tweeted…

> Canada is gravely concerned about additional arrests of civil society and women's rights activists in #SaudiArabia, including Samar Bawadi. We urge the Saudi authorities to immediately release them and all other peaceful # human rights activists.

These very tweets caused a serious diplomatic row. The Saudi government was furious, and next, expelled the Canadian ambassador to Saudi Arabia, ceasing flights to Canada, and suspending student exchange programs. What started as a frustrated tweet created a deep fissure in Canada-Saudi relations (Wang, 2019). Another example is Donald Trump's tweet on 24 January 2017 concerning the building of the proposed US-Mexico border wall. Trump tweeted:

> Big day planned on National Security tomorrow; among other things, we will build the wall!

This tweet signaled a steep decline in US-Mexico relations leading to Mexican President Enrique Peño Nieta's cancellation of a planned meeting with Trump (Duncombe, 2017). A Mexican writer Jorge Volpi described Trump's use of Twitter as a privileged medium that "favors speed over analysis and depth, and aggression over reflection" (Romero, 2017). In 2018 alone President Trump sent more than 3,400 (an average of nearly 10 tweets a day) tweets; a sizable increase from Trump's first year in office (Breuninger, 2018). Because of the easy access to the internet and convenience, some leaders seem to ignore the rules of diplomatic engagement, while communicating via Twitter. The world learned about President Trump's fire of his Secretary of State Rex Tillerson [during his first term in office] via a tweet (Singletary, 2018). In doing so, President Trump not only deviated from a cardinal rule that says that when breaking up do it in person (Singletary, 2018) but also went against the State Department procedure. Trump's tweet read thus:

> Donald J. Trump ✓@realDonaldTrump
>
> Mike Pompeo, Director of the CIA, will become our new Secretary of State. He will do a fantastic job! Thank you to Rex Tillerson for his service! Gina Haspel will become the new Director of the CIA, and the first woman so chosen. Congratulations to all! (Cited in Singletary, 2018).

With Twitter, leaders sometimes declare their position to the public without proper consulting or expert advice (Wang, 2019). In December 2018, despite US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis' advice to keep US troops in Syria, Trump countered Jim Mattis' advice via Twitter. Trump tweeted a video announcing the withdrawal of 2,000 US troops from Syria, which became the United States' formal position and pushed government officials to frantically clarify the withdrawal details (Wang, 2019). Donald Trump during his first term in office changed the tone of discourse on Twitter, frequently insulting his opponents and lampooning foreign leaders, calling North Korean leader Kim Jong-un "little rocket man," describing the Syrian president as a "gas killing animal," and threatening airstrikes and war via tweets (Burson and Wolfe, 2018). Even long before President Trump started tweeting out foreign policy stances, some other world leader's tweets had already caused controversy. In 2012, Estonian President Toomas Hendrik blasted a New York Times blogger on Twitter for criticizing Estonia's economic recovery, and since 2011, Rwanda President Paul Kagame has been involved in heated Twitter exchanges with the foreign media (Wang, 2019). Unlike a private phone call, Twitter offers adversaries a window into a leader's personal views and positions.

For example, after winning the 2014 Indian elections, Indian Prime Minister Modi responded to congratulatory phone calls by thanking country leaders over Twitter starting with Canada, while the US had to come later. His public rank order signaled to the world his favoritism and prioritization of foreign relationships (Wang, 2019).

Twitter is also a vector for the intentional and unintentional spread of misinformation and false narratives (Drew, 2020). Donald Trump's wrong claim that the South African government was seizing land from white farmers via Twitter revealed how Twitter could sometimes be used carelessly by world leaders to misinform the public. According to Dwyer (2018), the "large-scale killing of white farmers" which Trump tweeted could not be verified as killings in South Africa have reduced in the past decade (Dwyer, 2018). Although the verification of Donald Trump's tweets helped calm the situation, there was no doubt that "his tweet hit the core of the South African government reminding them of a colonial past" (Masters et al, 2018).

Also, conducting diplomatic functions via Twitter could severely be impacted by cyber security challenges. Cyberspace has been at the receiving end of several attacks over the years ranging from data theft and other disruptions. For instance, the ransomware attack in 2018 that affected over 100 countries is an example of these security threats (Radhika, 2020). In the event of cyber security issues,

"Twitter accounts run the risk of being hacked by state actors including political rivals, and non-state actors such as terrorist groups (Radhika, 2020). Increasingly, the use of Twitter is not limited to world leaders alone, non-governmental organizations have also used Twitter to promote their activities, launch campaigns, and create awareness about social issues. A reference point is the work of Amnesty International on Twitter. While Amnesty uses Twitter to share its work, activities, and campaigns on human rights issues; it attacked Twitter in 2018 on the claims of not enforcing policies in the face of violence, abuse, misogyny, and racism particularly against women (Dickey, 2018). The outcome of this was that a lot of Twitter users began to identify and recognize violence and abuses, causing Twitter to do a purge which allowed it to delete some accounts that were considered to violate their policies or a threat to digital security (Cuthbertson, 2018).

Regardless of the flaws of Twitter, what cannot be disputed is that Twitter has become the platform of choice for digital diplomacy. According to Faris (2010), the communicative power of social media is capable of producing tidal waves of awareness that can lead to real-world results (cited in Henry, 2012) in international relations. While we agree with the general perception that Twitter can be an effective instrument of foreign policy and give the public a better view of how diplomacy is carried out, conducting diplomacy via Twitter is dangerous and should be cautiously done. Twitter can instigate inter-state conflict, and culminate in world battles because of some policy statements crafted in just 280 characters or less (Chimbelu, 2014). Moreover, Twitter does not forget and any comments mistakenly made by any world leader can be retrieved using Twitter's advanced search function (Lufkens, 2018). It is now, more than ever, critical for leaders to get it right on social media networks (Sandre, 2013), particularly Twitter.

Conclusion

In the contemporary world, Twitter has become a formidable communication tool allowing world leaders and high-profile individuals to broadcast short messages to millions of people across the world in just the brink of an eye. Twitter is increasingly changing diplomatic practices from its traditional form that is shrouded in secrecy to openness. However, state officials must learn how to rationally engage in Twitter to achieve the "desired" goal rather than instigate or escalate conflict. A good example is the Canadian Foreign Minister's tweet about Saudi Arabia's arrest of an activist, and Donald Trump's tweets about the North Korean leader that escalated. To avoid a diplomatic row, rules of diplomatic engagement need to be followed. Twitter has its pros and cons. While it can help reach a large audience faster and help citizens lend their voices (though may not necessarily count in certain areas) to the foreign policy initiatives of their country, government leaders sometimes misuse this platform, either becoming more sentimental or sending messages without due consideration of the implications on inter-state relations. The conduct of diplomacy in today's world shows that Twitter (now X) has transformed international relations in significant ways, changing the traditional rules of engagement in diplomatic practice.

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