

# Social Media, International Information and Diplomatic Integrity\*

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## **Abstract:**

This article aims to analyze the changing global governance landscape. It also sets out to describe the dimensions of public digital diplomacy, and explain its impact on information management and diplomatic practices. Finally, it discusses the phenomenon of information disorder and puts forward several policy recommendations to combat it and foster integrity in social digital networks.

## **Key Words:**

Public digital diplomacy, global governance, information management, digitalization, information disorder, fake news, echo chambers.

The dynamics of diplomatic affairs have changed. The line between national and international political activity has been blurred because the major issues of our times transcend the divide. Migration, international trade, public health, digital technologies and inequality are beyond States' political conventions. Diplomatic policy can no longer be interpreted from a lineal, bureaucratic standpoint because its structure is more akin to that of a network than a hermetic, inflexible hierarchy.

The evolution of *global communications* is one of the main reasons States have lost their monopoly over diplomatic affairs. On the one hand, relaying news and information on international affairs is no longer the exclusive domain of foreign ministries. The institutional aspect of government communication has been undermined by the emergence of alternative sources of information that – more often than not – are more trusted

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\* This article was originally written in Spanish. English translation by Alison Stewart.

by journalists and the general public. And on the other hand, today's digital platforms have resulted in the spreading of more so-called *fake news*, whose conflicting narratives and realities have had major repercussions on the information ecosystem, in turn leading to information disorder, the dimensions and scope of which are only just beginning to materialize. Although fake news is by no means a new phenomenon, today's version has some novel aspects that pose a very real challenge to communicators and foreign services that, with varying degrees of success, have implemented digital communication strategies. Digitalization has had a huge impact on the practice of diplomatic communications, which have had to adapt to the ways and means of social media.

## Governance of Global Diplomatic Affairs

We live in changing times and this has radically affected the diplomat's day-to-day activities and the profession in general. The cliché of embassy cocktail parties is an anachronism. These days, the functions and agenda of the diplomat could not be more diverse: embassies, consulates and secretariats are engaged in tasks old and new, from innovation to the environment, not forgetting trade relations and growing demand for diplomatic intermediation.

The list of new actors is lengthy and continues to grow: multinationals, sovereign wealth funds, non-government organizations, citizens acting in their own name and collectively as part of social media initiatives, lobbies, cities, international institutions, digital operators and many others. In the private arena, diplomacy<sup>1</sup> and corporate responsibility<sup>2</sup> are indicators of a new approach to global affairs. It is not that States have lost their prerogatives when it comes to international affairs; rather, these new actors have "slipped into the picture" and are clamoring to play their part on the

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<sup>1</sup> See Juan Luis Manfredi Sánchez, *Diplomacia corporativa. La nueva inteligencia directiva*, Barcelona, Editorial UOC, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> See Frank den Hond, Kathleen A. Rehbein, Frank G. A. de Bakker and Hilde Kooijmans-Van Lankveld, "Playing on Two Chessboards: Reputation Effects between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Corporate Political Activity (CPA)", in *Journal of Management Studies*, 2013, Vol. 51, No. 5, 790-813.

world stage. And regardless of whether or not their actions and decisions fall within the parameters of international law, they have consequences. The digital arena has pushed up the value of intangible assets like reputation, influence and conceptual frameworks.

In today's ever-changing world, the digitalization of *public diplomacy* has acquired increasing importance on official agendas and in academic literature as a branch of the profession essential to achieving the political and economic objectives of actors with international clout. Experts interested in the subject study "how the organization of the foreign service has changed, [...] how relationships are established and maintained with citizens overseas and [...] the redesign of the way diplomacy is practiced".<sup>3</sup> They are interested in the dynamics and scope of processes and the results and challenges of digital activity, especially on social and new media like apps, devices, tablets and wearables. This includes the geopolitical aspect of public diplomacy, *i.e.* the ability to use these media to champion values aligned with the interests of a country's foreign policy, by which we are referring to freedom of expression and economic initiative, values that set a regulatory tone of sorts that promotes freedom on the Internet and social media. On the downside, we have witnessed the advent of a new era of propaganda, information intoxication and censorship arising from the spurious use of these very same tools of digital public diplomacy.

The study of digital public diplomacy also takes in the topic of infrastructure. For example, ownership of the media used (operators), technological developments that result in technological dependence and the protection of fundamental rights threatened by the development of new technologies. In this regard, artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, information geo-location, digital geo-strategies and big data have all opened up new avenues of research.

Deserving of special mention are the citizens who are on the receiving end of diplomatic activities and central to the concept of diplomacy as a public service in democracies. The presence of citizens on the international

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<sup>3</sup> J. L. Manfredi Sánchez, "La transformación profesional de la diplomacia en red", in J. L. Manfredi Sánchez and Consuelo Femenía Guardiola (eds.), *La diplomacia española ante el reto digital*, Madrid, General Technical Secretariat-Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, 2016, 102.

arena, whether as active participants in protests and social movements or as occasional travelers, has increased and with it, demand for consular services.

These theoretical considerations have practical consequences for the organization of diplomatic and consular missions, training programs for diplomats and the drawing up and dissemination of official communications. More than a superficial modification of guidelines, this reengineering of the profession needs to be based on the principles of transparency, instantaneousness and real-time interaction. For these reasons, digital public diplomacy will be a key factor in the growth of diplomatic activity.

There are four variables that need to be taken into account in an analysis of the digital component of diplomacy. The first of these is the functional aspect, *i.e.* how digital tools and social media have affected the dynamics and scope of diplomacy. As forums for public debate on matters of common interest (exercising the right to vote, how to go about getting a visa, etc.), Facebook pages document migration, while Twitter messages keep expat communities up to speed with relevant news, rather like an extension of citizen consultations. Likewise, mobile phones are being employed to perform consular tasks, such as raising the alarm in the event of a contingency. The use of these digital tools by the diplomatic profession allows for the building of closer, albeit more demanding relationships with citizens.

The second variable, the digitalization of diplomacy, is related to regulations and values. This is because, firstly, digitalization is associated with modernization and innovation, with their resultant positive impact on the efficiency of public services. It also creates a sense of proximity, which contributes to public perception of diplomacy as a diligent actor on the international stage. And secondly, the digitalization of public services tends to be associated with positive values: individual freedoms, training, the empowerment of citizens and autonomous decision making.

The third variable is of an analytical nature: in that it refers to the various criteria used to evaluate the results of digital public diplomacy, *i.e.* the drawing up of digital agendas, relationships with the conventional media, the expansion of a digital presence and the generation of digital conversations.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See the model developed by Corneliu Bjola and Lu Jiang in "Social Media and Public Diplomacy. A Comparative Analysis of the Digital Diplomatic Strategies of the EU, US and

The fourth and final variable is of an institutional bent and is all about how the ways in which citizens relate to their foreign ministries, embassies and consulates have changed. As we have already mentioned, digitalization breaks down institutional barriers, putting the administration and the subject of said administration on an equal footing. It also alludes to the changes taking place within foreign ministries, like, for instance, the redesign of knowledge management.

## The Impact of Digitalization on the Practice of Diplomacy

*Digital public diplomacy* is about putting digital instruments that influence public life to the service of diplomacy. These may contribute to the success of a mission, depending on how well political, social and/or economic goals — which are necessarily more transparent and visible than ever — have been defined. There can be no such thing as a digital strategy disconnected from the goals of a country's foreign policy. The second, digital skin fits neatly over the analogical one, meaning technological tools cannot be conceived of outside the conceptual framework of the State's foreign action. As such, digital diplomacy is but one of the many tools at the disposal of States as they strive to attain their foreign policy goals.

The digital component of diplomatic activity cannot be dissociated from its public nature. Social media is the most well-known aspect of digital diplomacy because it has become a natural extension of States' foreign action. Tweets and digital messages are diplomatic communication instruments born as public documents designed to be disseminated. This alone is a novelty in the diplomatic world, epistemologically rooted in secrecy, discretion and confidentiality.

*Diplomats* alternate between open and closed-door diplomacy depending on the issue at hand. Sometimes agreement and consensus are voiced openly; on other occasions, caution is preferred and public state-

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Japan in China" in C. Bjola and Marcus Holmes (eds.), *Digital Diplomacy*, Routledge, 2015, 76-95.

ments avoided. The *armed forces* and intelligence services view information as a strategic asset, reason why they have networks of spies whose job is to anticipate the enemy's next move, while *journalists* scrutinize decisions with international consequences, the social media presence of foreign ministries, the emergence of new influencers and the struggle to establish a framework of understanding and rapport. To these three basic actors we can add multinationals, grassroots organizations, lobbies, stateless nations and many other new players interested in redesigning the map of international relations.

Consequently, the greatest impact of digitalization can be seen on an institutional level. Internally, this is related to information management, diplomatic intelligence, communications and all the knowledge generated in connection with a country, mission or diplomatic activity. Work methods and the delegation of tasks have also been adapted to digital opportunities. Externally, digitalization has resulted in the communication of numerous diplomatic activities to the public: these days, the arrival of a new ambassador, the dissemination of consular information, and trade and economic promotion all require expert handling of social media.

We will now take a closer look at two main aspects of digital public diplomacy: knowledge and information management and digital diplomacy's capacity to harness the social capital created by social media to influence audiences.

Firstly, digital diplomacy is a vehicle for informing citizens. In this instance, it consists of putting tangible information at the public's disposal in real time. This might be information on political budgets explaining foreign policy decisions and diplomatic actions. Ambassador Consuelo Femenía points to the importance of this aspect based on her experience at the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation: "Anyone who fails to explain the nature of their activity stands to lose their social legitimacy. The diplomat is in the ideal position to communicate, not just within the confines of the system as has been the case up until now – *i.e.* to his superiors –, but outwardly, to a potentially interested public".<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Consuelo Femenía, "El modelo de diplomacia digital en España", in J. L. Manfredi Sánchez and C. Femenía Guardiola (eds.), *op. cit.*, 21.

Public information can be divided into two categories.<sup>6</sup> The first is of a legal nature and is linked to transparency and governance. Releasing information to the public helps promote the values of a country's foreign policy and create public value by disseminating not just the results, but the procedures of public policies.

The second concerns information related to public services, circulated so citizens can exercise their rights. Freedom of expression and assembly, the right to vote and other civil liberties cannot exist without a minimum guarantee of access to information. In this regard, technology has multiplied the possibilities for innovation.

Then there is the social capital created by social media that public diplomacy can leverage to influence the environment and public attitudes. However, leaning more heavily on digital tools requires the acquisition of new competencies adapted to the digital environment and strong communications designed to marry demand for transparent information in real time with diplomatic negotiations, something Rebecca Adler-Nissen says takes "additional and creative skills as diplomats interact more proactively and informally with a broader transnational public."<sup>7</sup>

Social media platforms like Twitter have undergone a transformation due to their popularity and importance, not just in terms of fostering interpersonal relations, but in keeping a record of events in public life. Salvador Alvidrez and Oziel Franco-Rodríguez note that, because of its speed and scope, Twitter has become the communication tool habitually used by public figures to attract the attention of users.<sup>8</sup>

Among the diplomats deserving of mention are Carl Bildt, former Swedish foreign minister (2006-2014), who has been an active blogger

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<sup>6</sup> See J. Luis Manfredi Sánchez, "Horizontes de la información pública", in *El profesional de la información*, Vol. 26, No. 3, May-June 2017, 353-360, available at <https://recyt.fecyt.es/index.php/EPI/article/view/epi.2017.may.01/35768> (consulted on: December 27, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Rebecca Adler-Nissen, "Diplomatic Agency", in Costas M. Constantinou, Pauline Kerr and Paul Sharp (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Diplomacy*, London, SAGE, 2016, 101.

<sup>8</sup> Salvador Alvidrez and Oziel Franco-Rodríguez, "Estilo comunicativo súbito en Twitter: efectos sobre la credibilidad y la participación cívica", in *Comunicar*, 2016, Vol. 24, No. 47, 89-97, at <https://www.revistacomunicar.com/index.php?contenido=detalles&numero=47&articulo=47-2016-09> (consulted on: December 27, 2017).

since 2005; Alexander Stubb, who kept a personal Twitter account and a *podcast* during his time as prime minister of Finland (2014-2015); Iraqi President Hassan Rouhani (2013-), who used social media to comment on Geneva negotiations; and Vatican diplomacy during the papacy of Francis (2013-), which, together with U.S. President Donald Trump, has the most Twitter followers (see Table 1).

Digital leadership has an umbrella effect – when one leader participates, other foreign policy actors follow suit. An article on former foreign minister Bildt’s blog or a tweet by Pope Francis have the potential to reach a much broader and more diverse public than conventional international communications channels. The value of digital leadership does not reside merely in the number of followers the leader has, but – more importantly – the ability to coordinate a network for the dissemination of messages and link ideas in support of a given diplomatic position.

**Table 1. Global Leaders with the Most Twitter Followers**

Personal Account	Country	Followers
@realdonaldtrump	United States	39 million
@pontifex	Holy See	39 million
@narendramodi	India	34 million
@rt_erdorgan	Turkey	11 million
@jokowi	Indonesia	8 million

Source: Matthias Lüfkens, “Twiplomacy Study 2017”, in Twiplomacy, May 31, 2017, at <http://twiplomacy.com/blog/twiplomacy-study-2017/> (consulted on: December 24, 2017).

As regards foreign ministries, their social media presence has skyrocketed. Since 2015, over 4,000 Twitter accounts linked to embassies, foreign ministries and similar institutions have been registered.<sup>9</sup> According to Alvidrez and Franco-Rodríguez, Twitter has essentially become a record book of public life.

<sup>9</sup> See Matthias Lüfkens, “Twiplomacy Study 2015”, in Twiplomacy, April 28, 2015, at <http://twiplomacy.com/blog/twiplomacy-study-2015/> (consulted on: December 27, 2017).



Yet the public value of a Twitter account has little to do with the number of followers a political leader has or their interactions, because the anecdotal or sporadic nature of this data renders it irrelevant. The number of followers a leader has may be important when it comes to performing consular tasks, for instance, in cases where preventive action is required or in emergency situations. Yet the source of real political and economic clout lies elsewhere, reason why Miguel del Fresno García, Alan J. Daly and Sagrario Segado Sánchez-Cabezudo emphasize the crucial role played by *social media influencers*, who may be information spreaders that connect different nodes of the network or leaders with the capacity to act on their own behalf.<sup>10</sup> Transferred to the diplomatic world, what we are most interested in is determining whether an international actor aims to spread information and propaganda, create relational capital or unilaterally impose themselves.

Finally we come to the promotion of values projected via social media channels within the context of the new trends we are seeing in international political communications. This idea is tied in with international television networks, which act as intermediaries with large audiences. Clearly diplomatic communications are starting to embrace new platforms and tools.<sup>11</sup>

## The Information Disorder and the Integrity of Social Media

It would be naïve and rash to state that fake news saw the light of day with the presidential campaign and subsequent election of Donald Trump in the United States in November 2016, the alleged interference of Russia in recent electoral processes like the presidential elections in France

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<sup>10</sup> See Miguel del Fresno García, Alan J. Daly and Sagrario Segado Sánchez-Cabezudo, "Identifying the New Influences in the Internet Era: Social Media and Social Network Analysis", in *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, No. 153, January-March 2016, 23-40, at [http://www.reis.cis.es/REIS/PDF/REIS\\_153\\_02\\_ENGLISH1452168193739.pdf](http://www.reis.cis.es/REIS/PDF/REIS_153_02_ENGLISH1452168193739.pdf) (consulted on: December 27, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> J. L. Manfredi Sánchez and F. Cabezuelo Lorenzo, "Nuevos roles internacionales de la universidad en la sociedad digital. Los MOOC como herramientas de diplomacia pública", in *TELOS Cuadernos de Comunicación e Innovación*, No. 101, June-September 2015, 52-61.

and the parliamentary ones in Germany, both in 2017, or plebiscites like *Brexit*. According to certain academics,<sup>12</sup> this phenomenon – which has masqueraded as *pasquinades*, *canards*, *desinformatsiya* and propaganda – is as old as the hills and has simply assumed different guises over the centuries, according to the exigencies of the day.

So how should we interpret what happened in 2016 and its repercussions? The answer is simple: due to events that have transformed the political scene in many Western societies, we have witnessed the extraordinary scope the age-old practices of propaganda and political activism have acquired, and what theoreticians like Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan have dubbed the *information disorder*,<sup>13</sup> all made possible and magnified by social media and digital platforms. This is what is so novel about this turbulent, post-truth world we live in, where a multiplicity of alternative narratives coexist, vying for the public's attention and mutually disqualifying each other as distorted, erroneous versions of reality. In this respect, we might say 2016 pulled back a thick curtain to reveal a world in which, as the Nietzschean *dictum* goes: "There are no facts, only interpretations" and in which all that solid melts into air.<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, some have pointed to a trend – reinforced by digital technologies – toward the generation, transmission and reproduction of communications in so-called *echo chambers*, in which people seek to validate their own opinions by seeking out those of like-minded others, discrediting *a priori* any view or opinion that differs from their own. And if we factor in the capricious algorithms used by the most popular Internet search

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<sup>12</sup> See Robert Darnton, "The True History of Fake News", in *The New York Review of Books*, February 13, 2017, at <http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2017/02/13/the-true-history-of-fake-news/> (consulted on: November 3, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan, *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making*, Strasburg, Council of Europe, 2017, available at <https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-toward-an-interdisciplinary-framework-for-research/168076277c> (consulted on: November 11, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> A study conducted by the Pew Research Center after the U.S. presidential elections revealed that almost two thirds of Americans believe fake news is causing confusion about the facts of current events. See Michael Barthel, Amy Mitchell and Jesse Holcomb, "Many Americans Believe Fake News Is Sowing Confusion", in Pew Research Center, December 15, 2016, at [http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2016/12/14154753PJ\\_2016.12.15\\_fake-news\\_FINAL.pdf](http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2016/12/14154753PJ_2016.12.15_fake-news_FINAL.pdf) (consulted on: November 22, 2017).

engines, the walls of these echo chambers only become thicker and more impenetrable. These phenomena have further poisoned the information environment, resulting in an even greater polarization of opinions.

These days, communications are ubiquitous and contents – traditionally monopolized by the mass media – can now be generated by users. What this means is that “formerly passive groups of consumers have now become creators, exegetes, judges and information channels”.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, these “prosumers” (*producer plus consumer*) tend to distrust unidirectional messages transmitted vertically (from above). Consequently, they attribute more credibility to their peers, to other users “like me”.

In today’s world, it is not enough for the communicator of a message to attract isolated individuals; they must target everyone who forms part of a network node. How successful a communicator is will depend on the extent to which their messages go viral. On this new game board, it is useful to take into account what Nicholas J. Cull calls *information brands* or authorized sources of information, which are quite probably a legacy of the mass media.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, using social media not only increases the potential scope of messages, but it is the nature of these media to facilitate direct dialogue with audiences.

Attributes of Twitter “conversations” include their immediacy<sup>17</sup> and anonymity, which, on the downside, opens the door to fake accounts, identity theft and so-called *bots* and *trolls*.<sup>18</sup> Associated with the above is John B. Thompson’s concept of the separation of interactions in time and/or space. In the case of social media channels like Twitter, because

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<sup>15</sup> C. W. Anderson, Emily Bell and Clay Shirky, *Periodismo postindustrial: adaptación al presente*, s. l., eCíceros, 2013, 13.

<sup>16</sup> See Nicholas J. Cull, “El futuro de la diplomacia pública: implicaciones para México”, in *Revista Mexicana de Política Exterior*, No. 96, July-October 2012, 60.

<sup>17</sup> Although tweets are stored in the tweeter’s account and can be consulted by other users at any time, it is estimated a tweet has a lifespan of approximately 18 to 20 minutes in the case of accounts that average 100 followers. See Mike Deon, Answer to the question “What is the Lifespan of a Tweet?”, in Quora, April 13, 2015, at <https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-lifespan-of-a-tweet> (consulted on: November 20, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> See Guillermo Pérezbolde, “Todo lo que necesitas saber sobre los bots en redes sociales”, in Merca2.0, May 15, 2012, at <https://www.merca20.com/todo-lo-que-necesitas-saber-sobre-los-bots-en-redes-sociales/> (consulted on: November 18, 2017).

interactions take place in a digital environment, spatial separation is clearly total (as opposed to, for example, a face-to-face conversation).<sup>19</sup>

So where does digital public diplomacy fit into this web of what might be called a reconfiguration or re-signification of the communication process? There are plenty of famous cases of Twitter interactions between high-ranking government officials and/or institutional accounts whose narratives are not always based on fact and that, subsequently, contribute to the poisoning of the media environment. Take, for example, the tweet by the Canadian mission to NATO (@CanadaNATO), of August 27, 2014, showing a map of Russia and “Not Russia”, *i.e.* the Ukraine. (See Figure 1.)

It did not take long for the Russian Mission to NATO (@natomission\_ru) to reply. The very next day it tweeted a reply with a map showing the Crimea as part of Russian territory (see Figure 2).

This example is by no means trifling, but is perhaps symptomatic of a shift in paradigm as regards the institutional communications model, in this case, between two missions to an international organization. At the time, the Canadian mission’s Twitter account had almost 34,000 followers, while the Russian one had over 639,000. And while this is not the first time communications like this have been recorded between politicians and government institutions on Twitter,<sup>20</sup> this case stands out, not just because of its scope,<sup>21</sup> but because, rather than two divergent interpretations or narratives, it was an open expression of two diametrically opposed and mutually exclusive realities. This raises several questions. For one, how can two contradictory versions of the same fact coexist? According to one party, the Crimea forms part of the Ukraine and according to the other, it

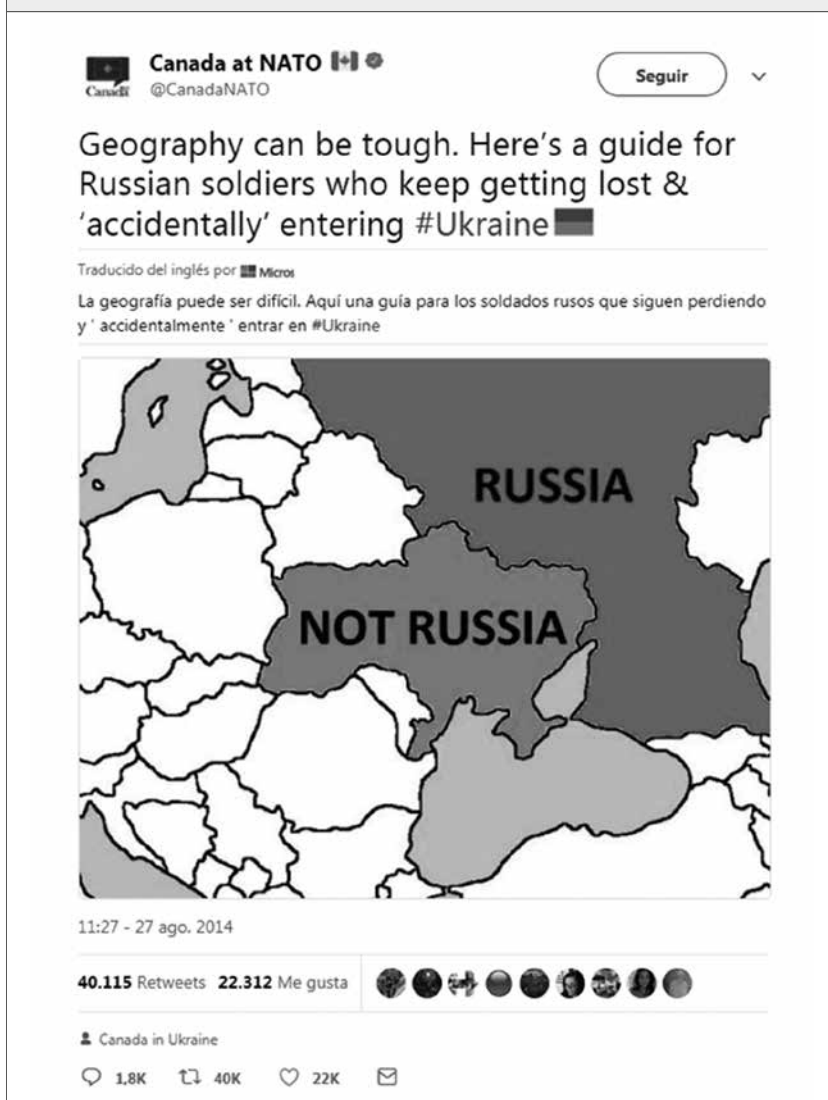
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<sup>19</sup> John B. Thompson, *Los media y la modernidad. Una teoría de los medios de comunicación*, Barcelona, Paidós, 1998, 40-42.

<sup>20</sup> For examples of Twitter interactions between heads of state, government departments, foreign ministers and high-ranking UN officials, see Andreas Sandre, “Key Moments in Twitter Diplomacy”, in Medium, at <https://medium.com/digital-diplomacy/10tbanniversary-key-moments-in-twitter-diplomacy-ea60d2131d91> (consulted on: March 11, 2018). For a selection of some of the more memorable Twitter exchanges between the governments of different countries in 2016, see Twiplomacy (@Twiplomacy), “Digital Diplomacy Moments of 2016”, December 16, 2016, 02:02, at <https://twitter.com/i/moments/809444301428183040> (consulted on: November 26, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Total interactions of the two aforementioned tweets — including re-tweets, replies and “likes” — reached almost 70,000.

Figure 1. Tweet by the Canadian Mission to NATO



Source: Canada at NATO, (@CanadaNato), "Geography Can Be Tough. Here's a Guide for Russian Soldiers who Keep Getting Lost & 'Accidentally' Entering #Ukraine pic.twitter.com/Rf3H4IXGSp", August 28, 2014, 10:27, at <https://twitter.com/CanadaNATO/statuses/504651534198927361> (consulted on: March 23, 2018).

Figure 2. Tweet by the Russian Mission to NATO

 **Russians at NATO**   
@natomission\_ru Seguir

Helping our Canadian colleagues to catch up with contemporary geography of #Europe @CanadaNATO

Traducido del inglés por  Micros

Ayudar a nuestros colegas canadienses a ponerse al día con la geografía contemporánea de @Europe #CanadaNATO



14:02 - 28 ago. 2014

1.947 Retweets 799 Me gusta 

 507  1.9K  799 

Source: Russians at NATO, (@natomission\_ru), "Helping our Canadian Colleagues to Catch up with Contemporary Geography of #Europe @CanadaNATO pic.twitter.com/MjzRxpFFfN", August 28, 2014, 13:02, at [https://twitter.com/natomission\\_ru/statuses/505052838184370176](https://twitter.com/natomission_ru/statuses/505052838184370176) (consulted on: March 23, 2018).

does not. And why is international debate on a State's territorial integrity taking place on a digital platform? In a context in which facts are questioned and relativized, as consumers of information we need to ask ourselves if we still ascribe value to the truth, to the veracity of events.<sup>22</sup>

In such an emotionally charged scenario, it is even more important we develop what Corneliu Bjola calls *digital emotional intelligence*.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, integrity on social media takes on a central role.

Additionally, as Wardle and Derakhshan suggest, we need to start understanding communication not as the mere transmission or exchange of information between two people or groups of people, but as a ritual by means of which participants in the process seek to reaffirm their respective positions and world view, reason why most people feel safer in echo chambers.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, the challenge facing digital diplomacy professionals is to come up with alternative narratives that are appealing enough to quiet the din of the information environment and defy the distorted versions of reality produced by the information disorder.

## Conclusion: Diplomacy for a Changing (Digital) World

Diplomacy is like an old dog that is forever learning new tricks. In an increasingly globalized world that is undergoing a digital transformation, we need to rethink how digital diplomacy can employ social media as a vehicle for transmitting international information and embrace the use of tools that foster public debate. It is essential we protect the integrity of information and promote plural debate, while upholding the core values of diplomacy in open societies. This implies promoting evaluation mecha-

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<sup>22</sup> For other examples of conflicting narratives on Twitter, see Ilan Manor, "Digital Diplomacy as a Tool for Contesting Reality", in *Global Policy*, October 4, 2017, at <http://www.globalpolicyjournal.com/blog/04/10/2017/digital-diplomacy-tool-contesting-reality> (consulted on: March 11, 2018).

<sup>23</sup> See C. Bjola, "Digital Emotional Intelligence: A Critical Ingredient of Successful Digital Diplomacy", in *Diplomatic Ruminations from Oxford*, January 13, 2017, at <http://www.cbjola.com/single-post/2017/01/13/Digital-Emotional-Intelligence-A-Critical-Ingredient-for-Successful-Digital-Diplomacy> (consulted on: November 27, 2017).

<sup>24</sup> See C. Wardle and H. Derakhshan, *op. cit.*, 43-44.

nisms that favor said integrity and good governance, and the digital transformation of foreign ministries. We have identified three changes that need to be made in this new era.

The first is to *acknowledge the intrinsic public nature of digital diplomacy*. The diplomat deals in the fragile currency of trust, which is easily damaged by fake news and an overload of propaganda *bots*. Diplomatic trust is earned by defending a concrete position, providing accurate technical data and facts, and making sure our words match our actions. Trust cannot be earned with advertising campaigns or isolated tweets, only by regular participation on the international digital arena.

The second is the *acquisition of new capacities by diplomats*. There is no new form of diplomacy for the digital environment; rather, diplomats need to leverage preexisting knowledge and add new tools to their kits. Addressing the digitalization of public diplomacy therefore requires a change of mentality on two fronts: on the one hand, it is essential diplomats understand what digital leadership is, *i.e.* the disclosure of ideas, the trend toward dialogue and the fostering of credibility. As in the analog world, authority in the digital world is proportional to the quality of the analysis and information furnished, relationships with journalists and opinion formers, and respect for academia and think-tanks. Sending out consistent messages is a tried and tested way of countering the profusion of alternative facts. And on the other hand, diplomats have the power to help educate and improve the media literacy of their audiences. International affairs are complex, so it is advisable to identify reliable sources, provide technical specifics and use accessible language and non-ambiguous layman's terms.

The third change consists of *a renewal of decision-making processes in the drawing up of diplomatic policies*. Trust is a vehicle for establishing a legitimate defense of an international position via policies, procedures and narratives. There are no shortcuts; what is required is a solid framework in order to influence, transform and regulate international policies. It is not about forcing our will on others, but the ability to negotiate and share projects. Reputation is the path to influence, not the imposition of a certain view of history.

Without aspiring to be exhaustive, a plan of action to address the digitalization of public diplomacy should take the following into consideration:



1. Trust is based on credibility. On social media, it takes time and dedication to *fine-tune a voice amid the multitude*, added to which, every country has its own media and channels. All messages transmitted should be in line with foreign policy priorities.
2. An *editorial plan* for the dissemination of political and diplomatic contents adapted to meet social media guidelines and standards should be drawn up. The choice of topics and frequency with which information is published will be key to gaining recognition as a reputable source among audiences.
3. Basic, practical information can be reproduced automatically and periodically using bots and a *FAQ* section created.
4. People excite; organizations do not: it is important to *humanize messages and spokespersons*, and align field work (human contact) with a digital presence.
5. Digital diplomacy is a natural extension of conventional diplomacy, except that the *scope of action needs to be broadened*: contact should be made with bloggers, *Youtubers*, activists and digital journalists who can help mold messages issued by foreign ministries and embassies.
6. The *dissemination of diplomatic information* on the various digital platforms available requires an appropriate and attractive *design*.
7. The *development of new narratives* – infographs, videos, multimedia reports and data visualization – can facilitate a new way of understanding foreign action and foster a rapprochement with citizens.

In conclusion, to paraphrase the philosopher Richard Rorty, the job of the diplomat is to preserve freedom. If we take care of the truth, the truth will take care of itself. In open societies, citizens are entitled to a diplomacy that detoxifies international information sources, one that actively communicates and is not just a passive bystander. There is an agenda for change.