

Digital Public Diplomacy in Latin America: Challenges and Opportunities*

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Abstract:

This article discusses the challenges digital public diplomacy (DPD) poses for Latin America and the ways in which it can be used to improve diplomatic practice. Given that the task of communicating has moved away from the secrecy that conventionally characterized diplomacy, an updated form of diplomacy incorporates the participation of citizens, diverse opinions and non-hierarchical dialogue. The authors conclude with a series of questions that prompt us to reflect on the institutionalization of digital public diplomacy and the involvement of civil society in a matter that used to be the exclusive domain of a small group of public servants.

Key Words:

Digital public diplomacy, Latin America, communications, modernization of the State, civil society.

In Latin America, *public diplomacy* and its digital variant, *digital public diplomacy* (DPD), have been slow to take hold, as the region's foreign ministries have taken very diverse approaches to its implementation. Even though the majority of presidents and foreign ministers have social media accounts, as far as diplomacy is concerned, it is not entirely clear that they are capitalizing on the potential of digital technologies. Therefore, the purpose of this paper, is to broadly analyze, the use of these technologies by the region's countries, focusing on the challenges and opportunities inherent to the transformation of the political and diplomatic cultures and how incorporating information and communications

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technologies (ICT) into the practice of diplomacy fits within the context of State modernization; thereby making diplomacy transparent and accessible to civil society.

We have structured our analysis around two main topics. The first looks at evidence of ways in which the region has approached public diplomacy and its digitalization and the second – of a theoretical nature – reflects upon on what could potentially guide future studies of public diplomacy in our digital era. Although the former focuses on concepts put forward by renowned academics and practitioners in the field, in the latter we offer some original contributions in this respect.

Diplomacy in Our Digital Present

It is worth noting, that the figure of the diplomat as a civil servant is hardly new to world history. Originally as emissaries in periods of conflict, they were entrusted mainly to negotiate with third parties (the enemy or adversary) and, as such, they were assigned certain faculties to call for truces and act as initial interlocutors in trade or peace talks between the two or several parties involved.¹

According to Pauline Kerr and Geoffrey Wiseman,² diplomacy is essentially a profession with roots deep in the history of the international system and whose procedures, codes and practices were established by the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Since its goal was clearly to represent State interests, the profession began to take shape and came to steer diplomatic practice and the expectations of other international agents that adhered to the agreements reached at the Congress of Vienna and conventions signed thereafter by the nation-states of the international system.

¹ For two historic analyses, see a) Harold George Nicolson, *La diplomacia*, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994; and b) Paul Sharp, “Diplomacy”, (2017), in Robert A. Denemark and Renée Marlin-Bennett (eds.), *The International Studies Encyclopedia T. 2*, Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, available at [doi:10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.149](https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.149) (consulted on: March 12, 2018).

² Pauline Kerr and Geoffrey Wiseman (eds.), *Diplomacy in a Globalizing World: Theories and Practices*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2013.

In many parts of the world, diplomacy has since undergone substantial transformations that require more detailed discussion by practitioners and researchers. However, it would not be an exaggeration to say that, while some countries have adopted new practices, adaptation has been slow as whole. Generally speaking, though, in the last decade, diplomacy has received fresh impetus in one of its main spheres of action: communication.³

According to experts, diplomats must develop competencies in three essential areas, given that she/he is required to perform duties in a foreign country and socialize with its citizens. These are *representation*, *negotiation* and *communication*.⁴ We might initially assume these three spheres of diplomatic practice have equal weight, but it could be argued that communication has started to tip the scales and is now redirecting the diplomatic profession and, by extension, the mechanism of diplomacy toward one organized in keeping with communications' parameters of our digital present.

Generally the transition toward the digital context has been received and assimilated by most States without a great degree of difficulty or resistance during this last decade. Indeed, discontent with governments and politicians has been expressed largely via Internet platforms, namely social media that provides an outlet for citizens to at a minimum voice concerns and dissatisfaction with their leaders and governments.⁵ Movements such as those within the Arab Spring⁶ and 15M⁷ are just two of

³ Stuart Murray, P. Sharp, G. Wiseman, David Crikemans and Jan Melissen, "The Present and Future of Diplomacy and Diplomatic Studies", in *International Studies Review*, Vol. 13, No. 4, December 2011, 709-728.

⁴ *Idem*, but they cite J. Melissen's "Introduction" in J. Melissen (ed.), *Innovation in Diplomatic Practice*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, xvi-xvii.

⁵ See Archon Fung, Hollie Russon Gilman and Jennifer Shkabatour, "Six Models for the Internet + Politics", in *International Studies Review*, Vol. 15, No. 1, March 2013, 30-47.

⁶ Refers to the mass protests in the Arab world between 2010 and 2013 in demand for greater democracy and social rights. These began in December 2010 in Tunisia, forcing President Zine al Abidine Ben Ali to flee the country, and then spread to the rest of North Africa. This movement is deemed one of the causes of the civil war currently ravaging Syria.

⁷ Refers to the citizens' movement organized by different Spanish groups who camped out in Puerta del Sol in Madrid on May 15, 2011. It was a peaceful protest in demand for structural improvements to the democratic system and is believed to have influenced other social movements like Occupy that were to follow.

countless examples of how citizens have used social media to organize and stage protests demanding greater transparency and participation, underscoring the need to actively and voluntarily include grassroots actors into the public policy sphere. The foreign service, which is responsible for implementing a country's foreign policy cannot afford to remain on the sidelines and now faces the arduous task of modifying its foundations, cemented on centuries of international law and deep-seated professional codes.

Given the challenges posed by the current context, it would seem that diplomacy should continue to value the past and its traditions only insofar as these can be reconciled with the digital present. Arguably this implicates adapting diplomacy – institutionally, organizationally and individually – and literally opening the doors of foreign ministries and embassies to citizens, whose opinions will influence (or better put, shape) foreign policy as a result of political socialization and the impact of social media platforms.

This general outlook for diplomacy in our digital present poses a series of challenges, but there are also areas of opportunity to be explored. The challenges are intrinsic to the era we live in: some analysts attribute them to broader social transformations that are affecting international society as a whole at all levels; others take a more critical stance, attributing them to the growing expectations of a new middle class and the exclusion of those marginalized by political processes and a hyper-globalization that has further widened the economic gap. Moreover, in our view, adding a technological factor, puts an extra strain on human, institutional and international relations.

Initially this seems to be a bleak situation, but digitalization does offer opportunities for diplomacy and foreign policies. In effect, prospects are encouraging, provided the diplomats and civil servants charged with representing their countries internationally take into account the socialization logic of our digital age. As mentioned, this is a time of participation and transparency aimed at establishing political credibility in the eyes of international actors of all types and levels. Therefore in analyzing the examples of digital public diplomacy in Latin America discussed in this paper, we can describe some challenges and opportunities, which, if properly addressed could help the region's countries make strategic progress in this area.

The Challenge of Modernizing Diplomacy in a Digital Age

During the last decade, some Latin America foreign ministries have realized they need to professionalize and even modernize their diplomatic institutions. Such initiatives have ranged from requiring higher qualifications of incoming civil servants to increasing budgets for foreign ministries so they can promote their foreign policy within broader levels of the international system.

On closer analysis, evidence demonstrates efforts to professionalize and modernize diplomacy in Latin America have coincided with the digitalization process that began to gain traction the first decade of the 2000s. In regards to the incorporation of digital technologies, we can say there are two sides to it.

On the one hand, some generally welcomed the modernization of the State and the practice of diplomacy in particular. Early on, there was enthusiasm and optimism surrounding technological tools as *a priori* solutions to public affairs issues. Advocates of the use of digital technologies in diplomacy embraced Internet platforms, whose benefits were expected to extend to the entire network of actors involved in the oversight and promotion of international policies.

Conversely, contrasting with the enthusiasm of the proponents of DPD, a wave of skeptics questioned the relevance of technology, stoking fears of making *faux pas* and calling for a return to a more conventional diplomacy, even one of secrecy. In some cases, resistance to change within the region's foreign ministries created divides, with diplomats in favor of preserving conventional practices keeping their distance from social media. Likewise, newcomers to the foreign service tended to avoid so-called "Twitter diplomacy" practices out of pragmatic concern to protect their fledgling careers. A few isolated cases of slipups by civil servants served to support the argument that social media should not be incorporated into diplomatic practice in Latin America, even though there had been successful cases in México and Perú, to mention just two examples.⁸

⁸ The Mexican case is an example of a calculated decision to adopt DPD, with the Foreign Ministry building a broad and active digital network in most of its missions/delegations. See Alejandro Ramos Cardoso and Luz Mariana Espinoza Castillo, "La di-

In spite of the initial divides it would appear that some common ground was found between these two stances, with the optimists recognizing the limitations of technology and the skeptics gradually admitting the benefits of DPD. The result has been the strategic use of these digital tools in varying degrees and intensities, accompanied by an acknowledgment and appreciation of the connections and reciprocal exchanges this new way of practicing diplomacy enables.

Broadly speaking, Latin American foreign ministries now recognize that digital technologies can help create a positive climate of acceptance and legitimacy, since foreign policies drawn up with the participation of civil society and take into account public opinion both at home and abroad become desirable. Such progress may not have been possible at all had it not been for their timely use and the conceptualizations of ambassadors like Arturo Sarukhán and Jorge Heine, who lent these practices legitimacy by describing them as *streetcraft* and *network diplomacy*, respectively.

Former ambassador Sarukhán, who holds the title of México's first digital ambassador, explains how "streetcraft" goes hand-in-hand with "statecraft",⁹ both of which have their uses on the international level. Streetcraft in particular is about understanding and managing the "street" or civil society. Clearly, the inclusion of a broader cross-section of actors in diplomatic matters is a response to an unavoidable reality: diplomacy and foreign policy need to put a closed-door aristocratic past behind and admit the possibility of dialoguing with citizens they represent and a "global village" as a whole.

Similarly, the Chilean diplomat and academic Jorge Heine has made an important contribution by coining the term "network diplomacy". The concept is precise and fitting, describing as it does the transition from a

plomacia en 140 caracteres: el caso de México", in Daniel Aguirre, Matthias Erlandsen and Miguel Ángel López (eds.), *Diplomacia pública digital. El contexto iberoamericano*, Heredia, Editorial Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica, 2018. Peru is another case in point that deserves mention. See Alejandro Neyra and Rafa Rubio's article in this same issue of *Revista Mexicana de Política Exterior*.

⁹ For more information on Arturo Sarukhán's definitions, see A. Ramos Cardoso and L. M. Espinoza Castillo, *op. cit.*

diplomacy of a few (clubs) to one that represents the interests of actors of all types and levels. As such, network diplomacy is not necessarily practiced only by official diplomatic representations working in coordination, but involves non-governmental and private organizations and anyone concerned about specific global issues.¹⁰

The Challenge of Misinformation and the Misleading Use of Online Platforms

Recently research into the involvement of third parties in elections in several countries – primarily the 2016 presidential elections in the United States, France’s presidential elections and the Brexit referendum – have rekindled skepticism among civil servants and society at large as to the uses and scope of digital platforms in the practice of diplomacy.

These incidents could be having a negative impact on perceptions of diplomacy, namely public diplomacy in our digital present. And if it is proven that social media was indeed used to tamper with said elections remotely, diplomacy would once again be undermined by a similar, albeit slightly different concept: *international propaganda*.

Although this type of propaganda has adopted new guises, its goal is always to deceive those on the receiving end. In a so-called post-truth¹¹ era, misinformation is not necessarily achieved with an outright lie, but by repeatedly saturating citizens seeking to make informed opinions with information that downplays (or even ridicules) the facts and ignores other opinions that would otherwise be voiced in a healthy democracy. Conse-

¹⁰ Jorge Heine, “On the Manner of Practicing the New Diplomacy”, in Andrew F. Cooper, Brian Hocking and William Maley (eds.), *Global Governance and Diplomacy: Worlds Apart?*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, 271-287.

¹¹ Refers to arguments that appeal to the emotions as opposed to fact and that distort reality in an attempt to mold public opinion and influence social attitudes. According to several authors, the current use of the term is attributed to David Roberts, who, in 2010, defined it as “a political culture in which politics (public opinion and media narratives) have become almost entirely disconnected from policy (the substance of legislation)”. For further information, see D. Roberts, “Post-Truth Politics”, for Grist, April 1, 2010, at <http://grist.org/article/2010-03-30-post-truth-politics/> (consulted on March 13, 2018).

quently, the biggest challenge of our age is to combat this new international propaganda with more public diplomacy, especially digital public diplomacy, which offers transparency and can be of a collaborative nature.

Digital Public Diplomacy Opportunities for Latin America

In today's interconnected world, civil society is increasingly interested in public affairs and uses ICTs to gather information, as numerous communications researchers like Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen,¹² or W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg claim.¹³ These authors have reached the conclusion that the new social media facilitates a multi-directional flow of information and, in turn, play an important role in improving democracies and a State's international relations.

From the perspective of each respective disciplines, diplomat-practitioner Tom Fletcher,¹⁴ international relations expert Philip Seib¹⁵ and communications expert Eytan Gilboa¹⁶ discuss how diplomats, States and citizens use social media, and the opportunities and challenges these pose in the short and medium terms.

In terms of opportunities, these can be grouped into four broad categories. Firstly, sustained, uninterrupted democracy since 1990¹⁷ in the

¹² Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen, "The Future of States", in *The New Digital Age: Reshaping the Future of People, Nations and Business*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2013, 82-120.

¹³ W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg, "Digital Media and the Organization of Connective Action", in *id.*, *The Logic of the Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2013, 87-113.

¹⁴ Tom Fletcher, *The Naked Diplomat: Understanding Power and Politics in the Digital Age*, London, William Collins Books, 2016.

¹⁵ Philip Seib, *The Future of #Diplomacy*, Cambridge, Polity, 2016.

¹⁶ Eytan Gilboa, "Digital Diplomacy", in Costas M. Constantinou, P. Kerr and P. Sharp (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Diplomacy*, London, SAGE, 2016, 541-551.

¹⁷ Scott Mainwaring and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, *Democracies and Dictatorships in Latin America: Emergence, Survival, and Fall*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013. Even though Latin America's last authoritarian regime came to an end in 1990 – with the exception of Cuba –, we agree with Carlos Sánchez Berzaín's analysis of the current characteristics of the governments of Cuba, Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia and Nicaragua:

Latin-American region has facilitated the introduction of new channels for communication and participation. Likewise, the Internet, particularly the emergence of open platforms that promote participation and dialogue, has afforded ease of access to direct dialogue and fostered horizontal communications. And finally, social media in particular has the flexibility to bypass institutional structures and leverage international news in a hyper-connected world, making it possible to raise awareness and spark interest in audiences in other countries, or even call them to action. We will be discussing each of these topics later in this article.

Democratic Stability in Latin America

Latin America has enjoyed a phase of stable institutionalized democracy since 1990, when the Augusto Pinochet military regime ceded power in Chile. Since then, citizen participation has increased and paved the way for new channels of communication, including social media and the Internet.

According to Pablo Barberá and Thomas Zeitzoff,¹⁸ the likelihood a leader will adopt social media to communicate with citizens is greater when they need to reaffirm their position *vis-à-vis* a current issue or take credit for some achievement of their administration, the goal in both cases being to reach out to domestic or international audiences. Likewise, the authors go on to identify three factors that are likely to result in increased social media activity by world leaders: local social discontent, the degree to which local elections are being disputed and the state of diplomatic relations with other countries.

Based on the Twiplomacy 2017 study,¹⁹ heads of State on the Americas were found to have a total of 57 Twitter accounts and an average of

C. Sánchez Berzaín, "There Are Five Dictatorships in Latin America", in Interamerican Institute for Democracy, at <http://www.intdemocratic.org/en/2016/10/07/there-are-five-dictatorships-in-latin-america/> (consulted on: March 13, 2018).

¹⁸ Pablo Barberá and Thomas Zeitzoff; "The New Public Address System: Why Do World Leaders Adopt Social Media?", in *International Studies Quarterly*, October 11, 2017, available at doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqx047 (consulted on: March 13, 2018).

¹⁹ Matthias Lüfkens, "Full Twiplomacy 2017 Data Set", in Twiplomacy, at <http://twiplomacy.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Twiplomacy-2017-Master-Data-File.xlsx> (consulted on: October 6, 2017).

1,362,443 followers. Excluding U.S. President Donald Trump, who recently became the most-followed world leader,²⁰ the average falls to 848,682 followers, which is a pretty relevant figure considering that this digital platform provides leaders direct access to audiences both at home and abroad without the intermediation of third parties such as mass media.

Of particular note are four leaders of three Latin-American countries – Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela,²¹ Evo Morales in Bolivia²² and Cristina Fernández in Argentina,²³ –, all active Twitter users who have fully grasped and utilized this digital tool. Despite the proclivity of over-personalization of these platforms, this does not seem to deter incoming leaders, who continue to support the idea of adopting social media as an effective channel of communication with their citizens.²⁴

It is also interesting to note – again based on the Twiplomacy 2017 study – that President Maduro was found to have 15 accounts, each in a different language, a strategy similar to that employed by the Vatican, which manages eight profiles of Pope Francis. Reaching out to audiences in their local language²⁵ would appear to be an increasingly institutionalized and procedural form of DPD. Globally, other leaders such as Canadian Prime Minister Justin

²⁰ Darren Samuelsohn, “Trump Now Twitter’s Most Followed World Leader”, in *Politico*, October 4, 2017, at <http://www.politico.com/story/2017/10/04/trump-most-followed-world-leader-twitter-243444> (consulted on: October 6, 2017).

²¹ Sergio Salinas, “La diplomacia pública digital en Venezuela: arma de ‘propaganda’ política”, in D. Aguirre, M. Erlandsen and M. Á. López (eds.), *op. cit.*

²² D. Aguirre and M. A. López, “Diplomacia pública digital en tiempos de crisis: el uso de Twitter en la disputa chileno-boliviana”, in D. Aguirre, M. Erlandsen and M. Á. López (eds.), *op. cit.*

²³ M. Erlandsen and María Fernanda Hernández, “Argentina en manos de @CFKArgentina”, in D. Aguirre, M. Erlandsen and M. Á. López (eds.), *op. cit.*

²⁴ Note that on taking office in Argentina on December 10, 2015, President Mauricio Macri was unable to access the social media accounts used by his predecessor Fernández, meaning his administration had to open new ones and begin the task of fostering dialogue with communities and civil society from scratch.

²⁵ Suin Kim, Ingmar Weber, Li Wei and Alice Oh, “Sociolinguistic Analysis of Twitter in Multilingual Societies”, in Leo Ferres, Virgilio Almeida, Gustavo Rossi and Eelco Herder (eds.), *HT’14: Proceedings of the 25th ACM Conference on Hypertext and Social Media*, New York, Association for Computing Machinery, 2014, 243-248, available at [doi:10.1145/2631775.2631824](https://doi.org/10.1145/2631775.2631824) (consulted on: March 14, 2018).

Trudeau, Israeli President Reuven Rivlin, the President of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mladen Ivanić, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić employ the same multilingual communications strategy.

A State Close to its Citizens

Participation is for and belongs to everyone; it does not need perfect structures or institutions to lay the foundations and take the first step toward digital public diplomacy. Take, for example, the foreign ministers of Brazil, Chile, México, Panamá and Venezuela, who were the only ones in the region who already had Twitter accounts before assuming their posts, which demonstrates an interest – at least on personal level – in exploring ICTs as a tools for diplomacy, even if local public policy is not particularly geared toward social media.

ICT has changed the face of communications, which no longer flows between two actors (the issuer and receptor, almost always depicted hierarchically), but takes the form of dialogue between multiple actors or of networked communication, which is better described as a group of nodes around which various actors converge.

Examples of this, especially of dialogues between an actor with power and one without, might be the digital conversations of former Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez with his local audience²⁶ or the personal videos former Argentinean president Cristina Fernández uploaded on YouTube and Twitter in an attempt to reach out to her public.²⁷

Within diplomatic circles a *node-based communication*²⁸ phenomenon can be observed most frequently via the accounts of former Mexi-

²⁶ Craig Hayden, “Engaging Technologies: A Comparative Study of US and Venezuelan Strategies of Influence and Public Diplomacy”, in *International Journal of Communication*, Vol. 7, 1-25, January, 2013.

²⁷ M. Erlandsen and M. F. Hernández, *op. cit.*

²⁸ In our view, *node-based communication*, in a DPD context, refers to a conceptual proposal that combines the notions of *streetcraft* and *statecraft* in a version that applies more to the offline world, this being a product that can be visualized operationalized in a set of stakeholders interacting with each other and that have ties to other interested parties, precisely via the bridge created by digitally interconnected diplomats.

can ambassador to the United States, Arturo Sarukhán,²⁹ or former Chilean ambassador to China, Jorge Heine,³⁰ who not only promoted the foreign policies of their respective countries via official channels, but engaged in dialogue, mostly informal, with their network of contacts and Twitter followers on their diplomatic activities and aspects of their daily lives, creating a digital symbiosis of sorts that helped project a positive image of their countries and foster cordial relations with audiences abroad.

Many foreign ministries in Latin America acknowledge the importance of DPD: 11 countries in the region have a digital public policy – either by defining it via laws or within the context of an official discourse or practice. Hence, generally, they have followed the examples of the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union. Thus seeking to use these new ICT tools is not merely aimed to establish innovative accountability mechanisms, but also coincides with certain taxonomical aspects of public diplomacy as defined by Nicholas J. Cull.³¹

Clearly, social media effectively supports efforts to listen to audiences and although governments do not professionally gather opinions expressed on digital platforms, they *do* issue messages regarding affairs of national interest; promote cultural diplomacy, especially in connection with country-image initiatives; engage in reciprocal academic exchanges to a certain degree, lending their support mainly to initiatives like the ones that have brought together students from Asia-Pacific Economic

²⁹ Arturo Sarukhán, “One of the World’s Original Digital Diplomats Says Twitter is an ‘Unrivaled Tool’ for Foreign Policy”, interview by Jeb Sharp and Susie Blair on Public Radio International, at <https://www.pri.org/stories/2014-12-11/worlds-first-digital-diplomat-says-twitter-unrivaled-tool-foreign-policy> (consulted on: March 14, 2018); Clifton Martin and Laura Jagla, *Integrating Diplomacy and Social Media: A Report of the First Annual Aspen Institute Dialogue on Diplomacy and Technology*, Washington, D.C., The Aspen Institute, 2013.

³⁰ J. Heine, “On the Manner of Practising the New Diplomacy”, in *Global Governance and Diplomacy*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, 271-287; J. Heine and Joseph F. Turcotte, “Tweeing as Statecraft: How, Against All Odds, Twitter Is Changing the World’s Second-Oldest Profession”, in *Crossroads: The Macedonian Foreign Policy Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 2, April-October, 2012, 57-70; Alan K. Henrikson, “Sovereignty, Diplomacy, and Democracy: The Changing Character of International Representation - From State to Self”, in *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, Vol. 37, No. 3, 2013, 111-140.

³¹ Nicholas J. Cull, “Diplomacia pública: consideraciones teóricas”, in *Revista Mexicana de Política Exterior*, No. 85, November 2008-February 2009, 55-92.

Cooperation (APEC) member countries; and use social media to get international exposure for local news – agencies such as Télam in Argentina, Notimex in México, Agencia Venezolana de Noticias, the Agencia Pública de Noticias del Ecuador y Suramérica and Prensa Latina in Cuba are all examples of media that have adopted social media for such purposes.

That said, the region has yet to make the leap to the institutionalization of DPD by coming up with a consolidated model of its own, the success stories of México and Perú aside.

In the specific case of México, the need to optimize the delivery of information via its network of consulates,³² especially those in the United States, has turned the country into something of a referent in this area. Its effective, broad-based model boasts the digital presence of no less than 67 consulates, 80 embassies, eight missions and three overseas liaison offices.

Likewise, in 2014 Perú seized the opportunity to launch a digital strategy during the dispute with Chile over maritime boundaries. The strategy not only included interviews with President Ollanta Humala and Foreign Minister Ada Rivas that gave Perú a strong presence in the international mass media, but also a website devoted to the case that took place at the International Court of Justice in The Hague. It also featured the intensive use of social media to demystify and support the government's stance and tone down the confrontational mood between Peruvians and Chileans, paving the way for a constructive relationship with Chile after the dispute was settled.³³

International Coverage of Movements, Natural Disasters and Environmental Issues

Along with the concept of *citizen diplomacy* as explained by Melissa Conley Tyler and Craig Beyerinck,³⁴ and the notion of *humanitarian di-*

³² A. Ramos Cardoso and L. M. Espinoza Castillo, *op. cit.*

³³ We would like to thank former Peruvian diplomat Alejandro Neyra for providing us with background to the Peruvian case.

³⁴ Melissa Conkey Tyler and Craig Beyerinck, "Citizen Diplomacy", in Costas M. Constantinou, P. Kerr and P. Sharp (eds.), *op. cit.*, 521-529.

plomacy as discussed by Philippe Régnier³⁵ and Hazel Smith,³⁶ it is interesting to observe how DPD has found a natural, albeit unfortunate niche in Latin America, which suffers frequent natural disasters that require immediate humanitarian aid. Of particular note are civil society initiatives that have spontaneously channeled aid, without any intention whatsoever of displacing diplomatic functions to the detriment of traditional institutional channels, but, rather, in support of these.

Ilan Manor provides another example from further afield:³⁷ in April 2015, an earthquake hit Nepal, leaving over 8,000 people either dead or homeless. In a matter of hours, Vikas Swarup, who was India's foreign minister at the time, set up a series of specialized Twitter accounts to coordinate consular aid for his fellow countrymen in neighboring Nepal, including the channeling of humanitarian aid and transportation for civilians in need.

Since around 2009, after witnessing online digital actions in response to emergencies, academic literature has offered the classification of *Twitter volunteerism*.³⁸ In terms of Latin America, large volumes of hashtag messages related to events such as the 2010 earthquakes in Haiti (341 million

³⁵ Philippe Régnier, "The Emerging Concept of Humanitarian Diplomacy: Identification of a Community of Practice and Prospects for International Recognition", in *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 93, No. 884, December 2011, 1211-1237, available at doi:10.1017/S1816383112000574 (consulted on: March 14, 2018).

³⁶ Hazel Smith, "Humanitarian Diplomacy: Theory and Practise", in Larry Minear and H. Smith (eds.), *Humanitarian Diplomacy: Practitioners and Their Craft*, Tokyo, United Nations University Press, 2007, 36-62.

³⁷ Ilan Manor, "What Is Digital Diplomacy and How It Is Practised Around the World", in *Diplomatist*, annual edition, 2016, 34-38, in <http://www.diplomatist.com/dipoannual2016/index.html?pageNumber=36> (consulted on: October 9, 2017).

³⁸ Kate Starbird, "Digital Volunteerism During Disaster: Crowdsourcing Information Processing", speech delivered at the *29th CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, Vancouver, Canada, May 8, 2011, available at <http://crowdresearch.org/chi2011-workshop/papers/starbird.pdf> (consulted on: March 14, 2018); Onook Oh, Kyounghee Hazel Kwon and H. Raghav Rao, "An Exploration of Social Media In Extreme Events: Rumor Theory and Twitter during the Haiti Earthquake 2010", speech delivered at the *31st International Conference on Information Systems*, Saint Louis, Missouri, 2010, available at https://aisel.aisnet.org/icis2010_submissions/231https://aisel.aisnet.org/icis2010_submissions/231 (consulted on: March 15, 2018); Amanda Lee Hughes and Leysia Palen, "Twitter Adoption and Use in Mass Convergence and Emergency Events", in *International Journal of Emergency Management*, Vol. 6, No. 3-4, 2009, 248-260, available at doi:10.1504/IJEM.2009.031564 (consulted on: March 15, 2018).

mentions) and Chile (342 million), in México in 2017 (1.8 million in the first month alone), Hurricane Irma in 2017 (995,000 mentions in 45 days) and the floods in the north of Perú that same year (400,000 mentions),³⁹ provide evidence of the strategic use of social media at a regional level.

The collaborative nature of social media is easily observed in this area, given that audiences tend to exert pressure on their governments and foreign services to take official measures based on the news they consume, whether it be concrete action by an ambassador or a foreign policy. The social protests that broke out in Chile in 2013 over the construction of the Pascua Lama mining complex on the border between the Atacama region in Chile and the province of San Juan in Argentina are an example of this. These were followed by protests over the Punta Alcalde and Río Cuervo projects in 2013, Hidroaysén in 2014, Alto Maipo in 2016 and Dominga in 2017, giving rise to what Dennis Linders⁴⁰ calls the *we-government* phenomenon, the uses and benefits of which are explained by Sebastián Valenzuela⁴¹, who states that social media do indeed foster direct political action by empowered citizens.

Along the same lines, there are two other cases deserving of mention: the social and environmental protests in Chile and the “Ni Una Menos” movement in Argentina. The former promoted initiatives like Our Oceans that were aligned with the goals of the country’s foreign policy and served to project a positive image that improved international opinion of Chile, while the latter spread from Buenos Aires in 2015 to the rest of the continent, putting pressure on the region’s governments to draw up public policies in keeping with international commitments to combat violence against women, particularly femicide.

³⁹ The volume of mentions or messages is estimated based on data generated by Brand-Watch digital software.

⁴⁰ Dennis Linders, “From e-government to we-government: Defining a Typology for Citizen Coproduction in the Age of Social Media”, in *Government Information Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 4, October 2012, 446-454, available at [doi:10.1016/j.giq.2012.06.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2012.06.003) (consulted on: March 15, 2018).

⁴¹ Sebastián Valenzuela, “Unpacking the Use of Social Media for Protest Behavior: The Roles of Information, Opinion Expression and Activism”, in *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 57, No. 7, July 2013, 920-942, available at [doi:10.1177/0002764213479375](https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764213479375) (consulted on: March 15, 2018).

The *we-government* concept would also seem to explain how social causes that have received extensive media coverage in Latin America have provided yet another opportunity for foreign ministries to practice and consolidate DPD. Venezuela's social and political crisis, Ayotzinapa in México and pressure from civil society during the FARC crisis in Colombia are just a few examples of times when digital action has been taken with the backing of presidents, foreign ministers and empowered citizens interested in reaching peaceful solutions by means of hashtags and online campaigns.

Latin America en Route to the Digitalization of Diplomacy

As discussed above, the governments of Latin America are exploring and incorporating new channels of communication as an effective means of reaching out to their citizens taking on their concerns and offering guidance or solutions. While digital technologies are being increasingly employed to facilitate the practice of diplomacy by representatives of the region's various States, for it is in this region where the representation, negotiation and communication equation is strongly dominated by communication – a concept that we have argued is at the very core of the digitalization of diplomacy.

The task of communicating – which was the main subject of this paper – has taken a new form, as public diplomacy evolves from being a secrecy-focused, elitist profession from 1815 Congress of Vienna into a modern-day one that takes into consideration and values the participation of citizens, multiple opinions and non-hierarchical dialogue.

To conclude, then, we need to ask ourselves if policies and guidelines for the digitalization of diplomacy are necessary and whether we need institutions to coordinate ambassadors, civil servants and citizens so as to seize opportunities to improve international relations and, in turn, the position of countries within the international system. Additionally, how can a “digital infrastructure” further the objectives of diplomacy in terms of national, bilateral, multilateral and global interests? And finally, to what extent is it logistically viable to involve civil society in these pursuits? The specific cases of former Argentine president Cristina Fernández, Venezu-

elan President Nicolás Maduro and Bolivia's Evo Morales would seem to give us some indication, but focusing strategies on individuals (as in the non-virtual world) is hardly sustainable over time. Consequently, transitioning toward the institutionalization of digital public diplomacy requires further reflection and consolidation. Last, but certainly not the least of the challenges facing governments in thinking about it is how to refrain from negatively bureaucratizing the socialization and practice of 21st-century diplomacy. Above all, what is needed is flexibility and aiming to strike a balance between social and technological progress. These are the ideas that seem to prevail and that have apparently guided the majority of Latin-American foreign ministries in recent years.