

Indonesia Digital Public Diplomacy on @kemlu_ri Instagram: Benefit and Challenges during COVID-19

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Abstract. Communication and information systems have crucial roles during this uncertain pandemic era. The practice of public diplomacy demands a fast reconfiguration for efficiency in using digital communication to reach wider audiences. A trusted source of information is a must. At the same time, international cooperation is elusive to defeat the COVID-19 pandemic. Each nation's reputation and credibility are also put to the test through its actions and words. Previous studies stated, digital diplomacy is part of a communication revolution. This paper will be focused on state actors as legitimate sources. This paper seeks to address digital communication as an approach to digital diplomacy on Instagram. It describes the features Instagram has to offer. This paper explains Indonesia's benefit and challenge to increase digital communication use on Instagram as public diplomacy.

Keywords: Digital Public Diplomacy, Instagram, Social Media, COVID-19.

Abstrak. Sistem komunikasi dan informasi memiliki peran yang sangat krusial dalam era pandemi yang tidak menentu ini. Praktik diplomasi publik menuntut konfigurasi ulang yang cepat untuk efisiensi masing-masing dalam menggunakan komunikasi digital untuk menjangkau khalayak yang lebih luas. Sumber informasi terpercaya adalah suatu keharusan. Pada saat yang sama, kerja sama internasional sulit dilakukan untuk meredakan dan mengalahkan pandemi COVID-19. Reputasi dan kredibilitas setiap negara juga diuji melalui tindakan dan perkataannya. Pernyataan masalah sebelumnya, diplomasi digital merupakan bagian dari revolusi komunikasi. Makalah ini akan difokuskan pada aktor negara sebagai narasumber yang sah. Makalah ini berupaya membahas komunikasi digital sebagai pendekatan diplomasi digital di Instagram. Ini melibatkan fitur yang ditawarkan Instagram. Namun, tulisan ini menjelaskan manfaat dan tantangan Indonesia untuk meningkatkan penggunaan komunikasi digital di Instagram sebagai diplomasi publik.

Kata Kunci : Diplomasi Publik Digital, Instagram, Sosial Media, COVID-19.

A. Introduction

Rapid change of the daily life, the increased level of uncertainty and expansion of contactless but hyper-connected society could be changed within seconds. We are currently in the most disruptive era as conventional daily interaction with another human is also being replaced digitally. In the first quarter of the year, 2020 industry reports that digital media use has increased significantly worldwide (Kemp, 2020). However, the use of digital media and internet access is unequally spread in Indonesia.

While specific health protocols around the world may vary during the pandemic, for example, work-from-home policies, closing schools, non-essential physical shops, businesses and limiting public transportations and social gatherings. In a pandemic, the situations of public health are not the only concerns, the health of mental-being and being interconnected are also important. Despite the benefit of digital communication, in an interconnected yet competitive world riddled with fear and misleading information.

The possibilities to do traditional diplomacy require human contacts like meetings, bilateral summits, or multilateral gatherings. Diplomats and world leaders have had to adapt to working from home and having virtual meetings. Most diplomatic activities have moved online. Meetings are now held via telephone or video conferencing apps.

Digital diplomacy terms for Indonesia is part of the evolution of conventional public diplomacy (Kemlu, 2019). This pandemic situation confirms this statement as every element of diplomacy almost entirely has been made digitally. This study uses the public diplomacy concept to analyse the benefit and challenge. It focuses not only on how creative digital communication applies as an approach to strategic public diplomacy in the form of digital diplomacy, but also seeks the benefits and challenges of the use of Instagram as digital diplomacy for the foreseeable future.

Complimentary of this, Instagram are not just a social medium for individuals but also for commercial purposes, for industries as part of their promotion strategies. Even organisations, government institutions and government officials are considered to join social media. Instagram has evolved its features to be creative and developed such integrations with other social media platforms under its mother company Facebook, which also owns WhatsApp.

Many world leaders and ministries of foreign affairs worldwide joined Instagram to reach a wider audience. The author uses a case study approach (Yin, 2014), which all executed the digitalisation communication phenomenon on Instagram as a potential to enhance diplomatic agenda during the pandemic and immense description in its natural settings how digital communication reshapes the strategy to broaden the potential of new stakeholders. The applied methods on describing collected material such as theories, ideas, phenomena, and narratives.

This article is structured as follows. In the first step, the author will retrieve and observe the Instagram profile page of @kemlu_ri, resulting in efforts in a manner of creative digital communication that has been done, this called explorative data. Then, this paper uses qualitative reports from collected available information on @kemlu_ri, such as posts on Instagram, published documents from MFA, scientific journals, and official credited sources from the internet.

B. Literatur Reviewers

The development of public diplomacy definitions has developed over the years. Taking the defined examples of public diplomacy from (Tuch, 1990), it's a way for the government to communicate with foreign publics develop its influence, ideas and ideals, institutions and culture, and national goals and policies. Later, (Frederick, 1993) added that, adding activities directed abroad in information, education, and culture. The aim is to influence the foreign public, and most importantly the foreign government.

Public diplomacy is an interconnected relationship between three major elements: the government, the media and public opinion (Soroka, 2003). Media involvement in diplomacy

has become increasingly essential because leaders of state and non-state actors are using the media as a powerful standard instrument for politics, communication and negotiation (Gilboa, 2000). Further, she added that before 1998, digital diplomacy had been frequently confused with public diplomacy by its outcomes. Public diplomacy precedes media diplomacy and motivates the respective publics for conflict resolution.

Information involvement always has been a priority of public diplomacy in this digitalised and contactless age. Digital diplomacy broadly broaches to using the internet and information communication technologies (ICTs), from video conferencing to social media platforms (Bjola & Holmes, 2015). Perspective from (Sotiriu, 2015) defines that digital diplomacy represents a novel and practical extension of the concept of soft power and public diplomacy.

From the very beginning of the digital era, public diplomacy enabled its approach to multidirectional communication. This chance of digital diplomacy brought increasingly interconnected foreign publics and moving away from one-way information flows towards dialogue and engagement (Melissen, 2005). As experts from public diplomacy studies and strategic communications studies developed theoretical studies to combine these two, the relatively new social media's potential continues to be explored. A statement from the previous studies said that Indonesia's digital diplomacy is not a replacement for traditional diplomacy, which is face-to-face diplomacy, rather digital diplomacy is a complementary (Pohan et al., 2016)

Social media has become public diplomacy's essential tool. In the previous study from Burson-Marsteller in 2017, Twiplomacy studies state that social media brought a wave of openness and transparency and became a communicator's most powerful tool. Further, he added twitter had become a diplomatic barometer, a tool used to analyse and forecast international relations (Burson-Marsteller, 2017).

Besides, assessing social media impact in public diplomacy has three dimensions (Pamment, 2013). The first dimension is agenda-setting, extent to which social media platforms enable diplomats to set the agenda to discuss with their target audience. The second dimension is presence expansion, and it could be in the form of mass communication, cultural exchanges or educational programs as the contents. The third dimension is conversation generating agenda, which one of the essential features of the new public diplomacy (Pamment, 2013) A successful public diplomacy is its engagement with the targeted audience. It has to be a two way or multidirectional communication between parties and stimulate collaboration (Cowan & Arsenault, 2008). Social media has interactive features in this regard that can generate continuous dialogue between diplomats and the foreign publics. The author will use the three dimensions mentioned above to interpret posts on @kemlu_ri Instagram towards public diplomacy to answer the research questions.

The term Instagram itself shows its essence. It is a unification of the words "instant" and "telegram", which together indicate a form of quick and instantaneous communication as a telegram can be, which becomes visual (Zingone, 2019). Instagram is an entirely visual social media platform for sharing photos and videos. Instagram is a mobile application and typically software used on a smartphone. Most of the users are using a smartphone, although it could be accessed on a website version.

Through social media and especially Instagram, diplomacy is becoming more visual. Instagram has become the fastest growing social media network among world leaders, governments and foreign ministers. It is the third most used social media platform after Twitter and Facebook, with 81 per cent of the 193 UN member states active on the platform (Twiplomacy.com, 2018).

Method

In this research, the author will use a qualitative approach to formulate the research strategy based on the formulation of the research problem and research problems (Yin, 2009). Qualitative research has been often used to describe social media use in organisations as a balance of openness, strategy and management (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012).

This method intends to describe and to interpret creative digital communication phenomenons

on @kemlu_ri Instagram during the pandemic COVID-19. In this research, inductive explorations are necessary to identify recurring themes, patterns, or concepts, describing and interpreting those categories (Gall et al., 2007). Particularly in this research, the author will use the description, which aims to describe and explain the objects' invariance.

C. Analysis

The author analysed 1075 posts on @kemlu_ri, its 267 thousand followers and the 124 accounts being followed. Interpreting the number of the following accounts, it mostly follows Indonesian's representations abroad, Indonesian embassies, consulates, and Indonesian's ministries IG accounts. During the pandemic COVID-19, on the time range started on 29 January 2019 @kemlu_ri uploaded 73 posts until 24 February 2021.

IG offers visual medium to communication purposes. It allows you to upload photos and videos that would last forever on the profile page as a representation "gallery". It allows it to accommodate a narration it calls "caption" which can contain a maximum of 2200 characters. Heavy visualisation on IG is not the only factor that plays a role in user engagement. A proper caption does, it is also a key to the success of IG algorithms (Warren, 2021). People use hashtags to find content for a variety of reasons, such information on products, learn how to do something, and even to watch videos of a certain theme (Herman et al., 2021). On IG, a caption can be translated into the audiences languages. Which is a benefit, to erase language barriers.

@kemlu_ri IG account is an extension to social media of the Ministry Foreign Affair of Indonesia (MFA) created in 2016, which MFA Twitter and Facebook already developed ten years before, in 2010. On IG posts, you could provide up to 30 hashtags which are used for categorising the content and make the post more discoverable and promoting the IG's profile.

The first dimension assessing social media in public diplomacy is to set an agenda setting which one of them, MFA has a strategy to use the same hashtags narration in each social media account. These uniform hashtags reflect Indonesian foreign policy goals. Namely #IniDiplomasi, which it has used in every post that related to Indonesia diplomacy and foreign policy and #SahabatKemlu refers to the audiences. There are four hashtag narratives, that has been designed to follow the related topic of the post.



Picture 1. #NegaraMelindungi (protection enforcement for Indonesian citizens)e.g., Interview video with experts, about Indonesian government helping Indonesian in Wuhan to return on January 2020.

Source: @kemlu_ri Instagram, 2020



Picture 2. #IndonesiaUntukDunia (a post related to Indonesia's role in international forum)

Source: @kemlu_ri Instagram, 2020



Picture 3. #DemiNKRI (related to enforcement activities to ensure Indonesia sovereignty)

Source: @kemlu_ri Instagram, 2020



Picture 4. #RintisKemajuan (related to economy diplomacy enforcements).

Source: @kemlu_ri Instagram, 2020

At the other possible risk but also a challenge, IG's hashtag is prone to a scam scheme for example irresponsible parties to use similar hashtags to promote a dark campaign against Indonesia's government, which could undermine Indonesia's public diplomacy strategy and Indonesia as a country.

The visual medium of IG also comes with a limitation. To upload a video as a post, it only provides a maximum 60 seconds of length. The challenge is to make the content to be informative and as efficient as possible. IG also allows users to upload a mix media such photo and video in one single post up to 10, including video of more than 60 seconds in the form of a post series, like the picture 5 shows three posts divided by three on the same theme, that promote Indonesia's cultural showcase in Chicago, @kemlu_ri using it to enrich information in efficient yet aesthetic way for their profiles gallery.



Picture.5

Source: @kemlu_ri Instagram, 2020

During the pandemic, @kemlu_ri uploaded about 34 videos with varieties of topics, mostly supporting the government as an information hub for pandemic mitigations, also promoting sub narratives of diplomacy.

Another video feature of Instagram, introduced on 2016, called IG Story, aim to get users to post more content and reach engagement. The video length is only 15 seconds, and will disappears within 24 hours. There are perks applies to Instagram stories e.g., Questionnaires feature, Polling feature, and it also allows users to post the answered questions, which this creative communication using an interactive Q&A is also a benefit to enhance public diplomacy purposes and beyond.



Picture 6.

Source: @kemlu_ri Instagram, 2020



Picture 7.

Source: @kemlu_ri Instagram, 2020

IG Story feature, has the added value for communicating information purposes as it could “preserved” on the user profiles called “Highlights” as it visualized on below Picture 8.



Picture 8.

Source: @kemlu_ri Instagram, 2020

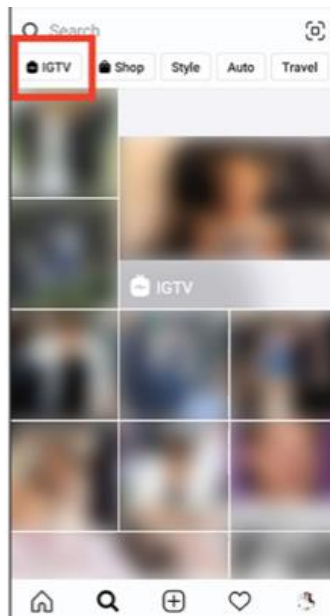
On 2016 a video feature developed, called IG Live, where two people could have a joined interface which is interactive and real-time. This feature also allows the followers of the host to comment as well as asking questions. This interaction enables @kemlu_ri to become interactive with audiences and encourage the policy makers to assist the issues. Also, on this IG Live feature, a host could turn off the comment sections. That could benefit to broadcast a sensitive topic. In the additions to IG Live feature, it could last for an hour, which 60 minutes. Later IGTV feature that it could also get preserved on the profile gallery as IGTV which also has 60 minutes limit length. IGTV Videos from 1 to 15 minutes can be uploaded from a mobile device and videos over 15 minutes can be uploaded via desktop computer.

IGTV could also uploaded as a post, it has also engagement features as it can appear on Explore sections. Explore sections on IG displays variety of content targeted towards user's interest, that based on IG's algorithm, based on the types of accounts the users follow and interact with (Herman et al., 2021). To get on board with this feature a hashtag is the most important as the captions of a IG TV videos.



Picture 9.

Source: (Herman et al., 2021)



Picture 10.

Source: (Herman et al., 2021)

During the pandemic, the author seeing an increased number of IGTV videos being uploaded on @kemlu_ri. The first IGTV on 24 February 2020, an interview about the return of Indonesia from COVID-19 first outbreak region, Wuhan. At the end of 2020 @kemlu_ri has episodic IGTV weekly programs called “30 minutes around the world” which a talk show with Indonesia diasporas, representative and diplomats abroad on varieties of topics related diplomacies. @kemlu_ri also made it available to accessed again who missed the IG Live streaming as IGTV on their profile.

Even though there are comment sections available on IG Live, functioned to encourage to have interactive sections on the regular posts. Unfortunately, from the author observations, this function is not appeared to be two ways communications. @kemlu_ri is not responsive to answers the comments neither to Direct Message. During the pandemic period January 2020 until January 2021, there are 17 comments related to social-economic and 20 comments related to COVID-19 mitigation complaints, that are left without any response from @kemlu_ri. This matter is a challenge, the interaction purposes is not run as it is supposed to be. Yet it has to be careful to monitor, certain comments that are harm to Indonesia reputation. Another challenge that are not only harm to IG but also another social media that has visual based contents, which cyber-attack, hackings, content stealing and use it for inappropriate manner.

D. Conclusion

Christer Jönsson points out without communication there will no diplomacy (Jönsson, 2016). Digital platform such social media, will continue to reshape the context of public diplomacy. Pandemic has accelerated the use of digital communication and the landscape for public diplomacy the need for practitioners is rapidly evolving to tackled the challenges. MFA on @kemlu_ri has already used IG to its newest features and use it in manner to achieve public diplomacy engagement digitally. A practitioner such as a diplomat now must acquire broad-based digital skills and seek new models of engagement (Wang, 2021). Further guidelines on each social media on public diplomacy as an extension tool for digital diplomacy is necessary for MFA to cope with increasing used features on IG for interactive meaning.

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