Diplomacy in 280 Characters: An In-Depth Content and Comparative Analysis of Official State Twitter Accounts

Audrey Firrone

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DIPLOMACY IN 280 CHARACTERS: AN IN-DEPTH CONTENT AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF OFFICIAL STATE TWITTER ACCOUNTS
by
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A Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract

This study conducted a content and comparative analysis of 17 states’ official Twitter accounts to analyze textual and visual content posted. The types of content, communication models, and visuals were analyzed to determine how states use Twitter as a form of digital diplomacy. A sample of 730 tweets ($n = 374$, $n = 356$) was taken from official state accounts. The present study found that the type of content posted varied by freedom level, with international issues and interstate cooperation themes being the most common among states. Additionally, the method of communication varied based on freedom level, with more free states engaging more with audiences instead of simply directing information at them. The final phase of the study looked at visuals and found states tended to use photography more when discussing issues of security.
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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

In December 2021, as Russia began gathering troops at the Ukrainian border, Ukraine posted a meme about the headache of living next to Russia. Through the official Ukrainian Twitter page (@Ukraine), an act of Twiplomacy was completed. As diplomacy has evolved over the years, the rise of digital diplomacy gives states a way to interact with the masses, both domestically and abroad, with each other in official capacities, and—as seen through @Ukraine—in unconventional ways. Twiplomacy is the convergence of traditional diplomacy and Twitter, and is a form of digital diplomacy (Chhabra, 2020). This emerging form of political communication has the potential to usher in a new wave of geopolitical relationships and understanding about how diplomacy can be conducted. Of the 193 UN member states, 189 have a presence on Twitter in some capacity (Burson, Cohn, & Wolfe, 2020). Accounts range from government ministries, state leadership, and official country accounts, such as @Ukraine. States have come to use Twitter to seek legitimate participation in a developing social world (Danielson & Hedling, 2022).

This research seeks to analyze Twitter content both text and visual content as it relates to the framing of diplomatic positions. Framing is the central component to digital diplomacy as governments construct frames to sway public opinion and assert policy decisions (Manor & Crilley, 2018). This research expands the understanding of digital diplomacy as it relates to how different states use Twitter as a platform for digital diplomacy.

By looking at both text and visual tweets, the present study builds greater understanding about how states maximize the visibility of messages while controlling the narrative (Crilley, Manor, & Bjola, 2020). An influx of studies has addressed how states use social media platforms
for digital diplomacy purposes (e.g., Guenther et al., 2020; Manor & Crilley, 2022), yet these studies tend to focus on specific events or regions of the world. Much of digital diplomacy research has been conducted on the Global North (economically developed societies), leaving room for study on the Global South’s (economically underdeveloped societies) use of Twitter for diplomatic purposes in relation to that of the North (Danziger & Schreiber, 2020). Thus, the present study conducts a broad analysis about how governments use text and visuals across contexts to determine the patterns and trends associated with digital diplomacy. As few studies examine visuals in relation to public and digital diplomacy, the present study seeks to expand the literature by including visuals in the comprehensive analysis. By examining the types of content posted across regional boundaries and contexts, the understanding of how states engage in digital diplomacy and the trends associated will grow and digital diplomacy research will continue to grow as a field.

Much of this study looks at literature from framing and visual media research. After establishing a connection to previous literature, the analysis conducted gives way to a more well-rounded understanding of how digital diplomacy is conducted today.
Chapter 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature supporting this research first centers on the general concept of framing. Framing is then broken into Twitter framing and visual framing. These subgroups of framing directly address the main points of this research and how broad framing literature has been expanded over time. Following the visual framing research, elements of visual media are looked at to expand understanding with semiotics and visual rhetoric. While the main body of the literature examined in this research is focused on general concepts, the latter half of the literature review focuses more on the political and diplomatic areas of research. By looking at the mediatization of politics, the transition from traditional public diplomacy to digital diplomacy and visual diplomacy, the understanding of how states use social media as diplomatic tools is better understood.

Framing

In its most basic sense, framing is the way for ideas, events, and decisions to be portrayed in the most favorable way for actors involved (Hallahan, 1999). Framing is the selection of elements of reality and making them more salient in the promotion of a particular problem (Entman, 1993). Framing emphasizes one reality over another; that frame is then in competition with others frames to be adopted by the masses (Ashfaq et al., 2021). Framing takes information and positions it in such a way that individuals are allowed to interact with it in a limited capacity. In the field of political communications, framing highlights the cultural orientation of the story’s narrator (Graber & Smith, 2005). Political communication is based on strategic framing patterns that are intentionally used to garner publicity, justify standpoints, and fulfill missions of convincing followers (Geunther et al., 2020). The understanding of framing as a whole and as it
relates to political communication is paramount to this study as it is the basis for digital diplomacy research.

**Twitter Framing**

Although much of framing is attributed to legacy media, social media have become a common source for developing new frames. Social media have taken on the four major characteristics of legacy media frames: stimulating opposition or support of an issue, providing moral judgment, representing a specific ideology, and determining tone for the coverage of events (Saleem, 2007). Twitter serves as a framing platform because of its ability to directly reach the masses (Sevin & Ingenhoff, 2018). Bypassing traditional media, Twitter users can create narratives for information to be spread and promote ideologies that might not be supported by the mainstream. Through these frames, the actor can control the messaging in favor of their wants and needs. Framing also allows the organization of groups that begin to rely on the frames being developed. Through the assemblage of groups that follow specific frames on Twitter, group identities are formed (Flowers, 2019). These groups are the consumers of the frames, which can spread through all topics and identities; however, political issues are one of the strongest forms of frames that come out of Twitter.

In terms of framing political issues, or issues of diplomacy, frames are especially important. Political communication is built on strategic framing patterns that garner more public viewership, appeal to potential followers and justify decisions being made (Guenther et al., 2020). Government intervention on social media create frames for digital citizens. Their identity as a state is developed through these frames that are established online, and through Twitter by interacting with the masses and other users (Nikolayenko, 2019). Framing through Twitter puts
the control in the hands of the user. These frames then work to establish the norms and realities of those consuming information through the platform.

Development of national brand identities is another form of framing diplomacy that is only capable of working if the image (perception) is carefully constructed to allow the single message to interact with audiences (Fan, 2010). If multiple messages are being spread, the state has a more disjointed international image; however, the need for various messages is often necessary to appeal to certain groups and for various diplomatic interactions. States must keep control of the narrative through framing society, norms, and positions to achieve diplomatic goals and develop its presence on the international stage.

The independence that comes from framing via Twitter allows the bypassing of traditional media for states to develop public opinion through hashtags, retweets, and online interaction (Mazumdar, 2021). Twitter serves as a direct communication link for the framers (states) and their audiences. This direct communication can lead to outcomes such as the national branding like @Sweden, or it can lead to the framing of events that are not as pleasant, such as war. The @Sweden account began as a nation-branding project that served as an exercise in transparent nation-branding (Christensen, 2013). The account was curated by a different Swede every week and the curators were allowed to post whatever they wanted. This changing lineup gave foreigners a look at Sweden through the eyes of Swedes who wanted to show off their country. Manor and Crilley (2018) studied the way the Gaza War of 2014 was framed by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs using Twitter and found that frames were developed to promote Israel’s desired solution, resulting in a more positive perception for international audiences looking to gain information from Twitter (Manor & Crilley, 2018). Developing frames through Twitter is challenging. Even though the state has the capacity to develop its own image
through frames, the competing narratives that can form from other states engaging in similar
tactics makes it a challenging form of diplomacy. Additionally, the increased use of Twitter as a
means of digital diplomacy can work to undermine other states and diplomatic relationships due
to the inherent complexity of online interaction (Duncombe, 2018). Through current scholarship,
Twitter is emerging as a common platform for digital diplomacy and with that comes the need to
investigate how it is being used and if states use it in different ways.

*Visual Framing*

Framing literature has traditionally been associated with verbal-textual contexts (Branter,
Geise, & Lobinger, 2012) and has only recently begun to include visual elements. Visual framing
is distinct from linguistic framing as it is an interdisciplinary study that pulls from psychology,
art, and other social sciences (Bock, 2020). As a theory, visual framing has the same purposes of
traditional framing (Entman, 1993) with emphasis on the visual rather than the linguistic. The
definition of visual framing is the highlighting of certain elements strategically with the help of
colors, objects, text, people and so on in visuals (Metze, 2018). Rodriguez and Dimitrova (2011)
found three distinguishing characteristics of visuals as they relate to framing: analogical quality,
indexicality and lack of explicit propositional syntax. Analogical quality refers to the
associations between visuals and their meanings, indexicality is the idea that visuals (particularly
photographs) have an implicit guarantee of truth and lack of explicit propositional syntax refers
to the lack of cause-and effect relationships that are attributed to primarily texted-based frames.
These frames are then understood to engage in various meanings that range from denotative
representations of events to those that represent ideological representations of culture, religion,
philosophy, and more.
Expanding from the distinguishing characteristics of visual framing, Rodriguez and Dimitrova (2011) also contend additional levels apply. The first of these levels is for visuals to be denotative systems that are the initial reading of visual stimuli to determine what the analogic and indexical attributes of the visual are. The second moves into connotative systems that attach concepts and ideas to the visual. Related to the connotative systems is the level in which visuals are ideological representations which is the most important factor when considering frames. Visuals that are ideological representations are often used as instruments of power in the shaping of consciousness on both a micro and macro level (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011). Visuals act as more salient forms of frames compared to linguistic ones because of the aforementioned characteristics. Visuals often appear less intrusive than words which means they have the chance to be accepted more easily than other attempts in framing (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011). The activation of cognitive structures through less intrusive means allows visuals to penetrate more thoroughly into society and the individual (Branter, Geise, & Lobinger, 2012).

Bock (2020) highlights the unique nature of images (visuals) as they must be carefully constructed to have the intended effect on the publics they are trying to reach. Bock’s model for visual framing highlights the three main processes of visual framing: image creation, image selection, and image solution. Creation is how actors develop the visuals that are initially de-contextualized to highlight a certain aspect of an experience. Selection is when the selected visual is the one that aligns most closely with the frames being produced; once a visual is selected, the material is re-contextualized to fit into frames. This process does not negate the creation aspect; however, it is not always possible for the actor to create the visual and thus selection is needed. Once creation and selection are complete, the visual is placed into the public and if the frames were built correctly around the visual, the solution is achieved. The choice to
use solution does not limit to actionable solutions but can also refer to the adoption of frames as valid and thus continue the spread of the frames to a larger audience.

The majority of literature surrounding visual framing focuses on conflict, war, and social issues. Several studies look at how conflict is portrayed through media frames (e.g., Branter, Lobinger, & Wetzstein, 2011; Makhortykh & Sydorova, 2017; Dhanesh & Rahman, 2021). These studies indicate media and organizational frame producers (i.e., governments, NGOs, MNCs) use frames to create interest and advocacy for the position the frame supports. Framing conflicts and crises through visuals has been studied through traditional and new media lenses; however, much of the recent literature surrounding visual framing focuses on social media. Social media promotes personalized style which can highlight advocacy or moral positions that would be frowned upon in traditional media. Much of the frames surrounding crises employ visuals to produce guilt and prompt them to act (Dhanesh & Rahman, 2021), which are direct examples of the selection and solution model described by Bock (2020).

Using visual frames to dominate a narrative of an event or issue allow most audiences to become more susceptible to desired understandings of said event or issue. Fahmy and Kim (2008) studied the relationship of visual frames in British and U.S. press to determine how cultural limitations and expectations influence visual coverage of the war in Iraq. They found more of a push to depict the casualties and destruction of the Arab and Muslim world rather than that of the Allied troops (i.e. U.S. and UK) in order to promote public support for the war. This sort of activity of using frames to garner public support has been seen in other studies including ones following humanitarian crises (Lee, Lim, & Shi, 2022), the 2014 conflict in Ukraine (Makhortykh & Sydorova, 2017) and in terrorism media (Fahmy, 2020).
As it relates to this study, the understanding of how government actors rather than media actors use visual frames is important. In the current age, political leaders and government agencies develop visuals that are then distributed to media outlets (Marland, 2012). These visuals are used as framing tools that offer stylized and curated looks into the running of governments and create narratives that support policy and actions. Marland (2012) looks at how image management of the former prime minister of Canada acts as a form of visual framing, ultimately gatekeeping true access to the realities of the office. In this study, Marland found that the Prime Minister’s Office mirrored tactics of the British Conservative party and the U.S. presidency in its photo management tactics. The political handout photographs promote the frames that the prime minister wished publics to see and attribute to the government and him. The study found that journalists and other media outlets were likely to use handout photographs that appeared spontaneous and authentic (but were ultimately planned) to create narratives that could match with what editors wished to make the narrative. Mészáros (2019) found that the Hungarian government was directly responsible for constructing the frame surrounding the refugee/migration crisis through visuals. Although there were inclusions of linguistic frames to support the visual, the policies surrounding the crisis were accompanied with visual accessories which acted to manipulate threat perception for citizens and promote more nationalistic views (Mészáros, 2019).

**Semiotics**

Huang and Fahmy (2013) provide a framework for how visual framing can be achieved. Looking at the frequency of visuals covering a particular issue, inclusion and exclusion of individuals and objects, mechanics of presentation and accompanying textual information visual frames are created that support the phases and models. This framework deepens understanding
when frames are analyzed in conjunction with semiotics. Semiotics are the signs and codes used in producing, sharing, and interpreting messages and the codes that determine their use (Moriarty, 2004). Through semiotics, the various meanings of visuals can be used to convey compositional, representational, and interactive meaning (Dhanesh & Rahman, 2021).

Early theory of semiotics was established by Peirce (1956) and De Saussure (1974). De Saussure developed what is known as semiology (Peirce’s term semiotics replaced semiology in literature) that outlined what constitutes signs (Yakin & Totu, 2014). His science of semiology defined signs in two parts, the signifiers and the signified. Signifiers are ever sign that is made of sound-images and the signifieds are the concepts generated by the signifiers (Berger, 2013).

Furthering the framework that Saussure developed, Peirce added that there are three types of signs: icons, indexes, and symbols. Icons symbolize resemblance, indexes signify cause and effect, and symbols signify on the basis on convention.

Semiotics are social and are developed and evolve to make sense of the world for people living in it (Bezemer & Cowan, 2021). Through the development and evolutions of meanings, language and visuals gain encoded messages that become unique to certain groups. The meanings that are encoded into visuals and language are often not universal, but as the cultural context spreads outside of individual groups the messages are able to reach those in different groups. The development of decoding practices is what make visuals more universal than text (MacEchren et al., 2012). Peirce’s approach to semiotics is fundamental in understanding visuals (Moriarty, 2002). Peirce focused on the interpretation of semiotics which is based on the consideration of a sign in all possible signification possibilities which can mean different things to different audiences. Moriarty uses the example of an advertisement for a Jaguar car in front of
a high school, one must understand the status assigned with a Jaguar car to interpret the message that it is a symbol of achievement when in context for a class reunion (2002).

As the digital age has progressed, visuals are more pervasive, thus semiotics are becoming more important when learning to understand how and why visuals are used. Jones (2020) argues that current ways of “mage-making have come to transform the meaning and nature of being associated with visuals that traditional semiotics uses. Now that virtually everyone has access to image-making technology (cameras, smart phones, creative software like Photoshop) people can negotiate their experiences in the world and relationships with others by focusing less on meaning and representation. In this sense, visual communication is about communicating the embodied experience of the visual rather than the meaning (Jones, 2020). In looking at semiotics through a contemporary lens, social semiotics are also important to mention. Social semiotics focus on formal properties of visualizations together with semiotic and social affordances (Aiello, 2020). This focus on social semiotics posits all sign-making (image-making) have been developed to perform specific actions.

Much of semiotic research focuses on data visualizations. Understanding how to read and interpret data visualizations is done through using semiotics. Data visualization relies on rules and structures that are used to create meaning for the viewer through semiotics (Aiello, 2020). The creation of visualizations that are within the bounds of these rules then allows them to be situated in social and cultural contexts. Once a visualization is situated in a context, viewers can decode the meanings based on the semiotics that have been encoded in their lives over time. When the creator of the visualization is versed in the cultural and social contexts, the visualization is decoded more easily by specific audiences (Aiello, 2020). Aiello also focuses on the transformation of data visualizations when looking at semiotics to break away from
traditional norms to promote forms of action and change (2020). The evolution Aiello looks to provide groundwork for how social semiotics (and semiotics as a whole) continue to change as the methods that are used to create and present issues change.

In relation to the current study, semiotics has a hand in understanding visuals that are used in conjunction with politics, social movements, and conflicts. Social media allows government organizations and actors to produce content that support policies and develop images for publics to consume. These mediated spaces are then used to create encoded messages that individuals are taught to decode in ways that support the actors. Walby and Wilkinson (2021) looked at the use of visuals posted by police forces in Canada and how social semiotics are used to encode and decode the messages that are put out by police. They found that police services use Instagram to curate narratives that reinforce organizationally acceptable stories which serve to counter opposing narratives that can be found elsewhere in the media (Walby & Wilkinson, 2021). As in the discussion with visual framing, the use of social media serves to bypass traditional news media and promote messages for audiences to take in more readily (through the use of visuals).

**Visual Rhetoric**

Visual rhetoric is the study of both the visual object and the perspective on the subject of visual data (Foss, 2005). Visual rhetoric research involves studying the products individuals create to use symbols and visuals to communicate and the perspective that scholars apply to understand the symbolic processes visuals perform. Visual rhetoric theory builds on rhetoric literature from communication, but the focus is turned more to the rhetorical responses to visuals rather than the visual itself (Firmansyah et al., 2021). Studying the rhetorical responses to visuals means an understanding of viewers’ experiences and knowledge must be considered (Foss,
Much like semiotics, visual rhetoric focuses on cultural context and relies on such for visuals to be analyzed appropriately. Foss (2005) goes on to explore the characteristics needed when looking at rhetorical perspectives: nature, function, and evaluation. Nature refers to the presented and suggested elements of a visual which are necessary to understand the primary communicative meaning. Function is how the visual operates for viewers. Evaluation looks at if the communicative goal has been accomplished as suggested by the nature and function of the visual. These three characteristics can be used to analyze visuals across the spectrum to determine how and why a certain visual was used to communicate a certain process or message.

In recent years, visual rhetoric research has moved to studies of symbolic processes and dynamics where visuals are addressed in relation to the creation of meaningful information (Ventsel, 2014). Studies that follow this method focus in all areas, but primarily in photography or photojournalism and advertising. Phillips and McQuarrie (2004) studied the visual rhetoric of advertisements and found consumer response to visual metaphors relied on a combination of complexity and richness. In the same study, nine types of visual figures were analyzed. The nine types of visual figures are: figures of connection, similarity, opposition, juxtaposition, fusion, and replacement (Phillips and McQuarrie, 2004).

**Mediatization of Politics**

Media is a part of every aspect of society. The media institutions of society are no longer able to be separated from cultural and other social institutions as they once were decades ago (Hjarvard, 2008). The intertwining of media into every aspect of contemporary society is the premise of mediatization. Mediatization is the adoption of media logic and formats by non-media actors to succeed in contemporary media culture and society (Manor & Crilley, 2022). Mediatization as a theory has not been developed to the level of framing or other major mass
media theories; however, it does still hold weight in understanding the role media has to play in society (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014). Despite the lack of theoretical backing, mediatization still has a role in societal development. The role of non-actors taking on media logic and formats is the most common form of mediatization; however, the influence over other areas of society is also important to consider (Jost, 2022). Mediatization has been used to relate to the theory of modernity (Hjarvard, 2008), which, although not pertinent to this study, has importance when developing an understanding of mediatization. Media development aids in the development of modern society which has led to the increased importance of media in all aspects of modern life. Mediatization of society has direct connections with technological advancements and communicative relationships across various mediums. These advances in mediated communication (Thompson, 2013) have led to much of the literature surrounding mediatization.

Although mediatization is conducted in every aspect of life, the majority of mediatization literature focuses on the mediatization of politics. Strömbäck (2008) defined four phases of mediatization that connect the previous literature of mediatization theory to that of politics. The first phase of mediatization is when mass media acts as the most important information source and communication channel between the public and political actors. When politics is mediated, the media tend to control in the narrative and interactions between publics and their governments. Reality is perceived how the media shows it and takes away the power from institutions to control the narrative as opposed to when institutions have framing power. The second phase of mediatization is when the media become more independent of political institutions and are governed more by media logic than government logic. Governing through media logic means messages are spread based on the media makers’ judgment rather than the judgments of political bodies. Once media logic takes control, the third phase is when media
influence increases to the level that political and social actors must adapt to media, rather than media adapting to them. Rather than simply integrating media logic into the interactions that media have with political actors, political actors are forced to take media into consideration, or else their messages will not reach audiences. Finally, the fourth phase of mediatization is when political actors internalize media logic and media values into the governing process. Evolving to the fourth phase means media and their communicative output are impossible to avoid and must be taken into consideration when governing.

Stömbäck’s work is key to understanding the way mediatization has evolved to include politics, but before Stömbäck, Asp (1986) was one of the leading scholars about the mediatization of politics. Asp described the mediatization of politics as an adjustment of political systems to meet the demands of mass media in the coverage of politics (1986). The mediatization of politics is currently under development and does not have a true definition of its own and is better described as a loosely defined concept (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014). The role of the media in politics is something that has been studied countless times; however, when looking at the mediatization of politics the importance should be placed more on the media’s role in shaping and reshaping politics, culture and people’s opinions that align more to a media culture than one of politics (Strömbäck, 2008). The process of mediatization has been criticized for causing politics to lose its autonomy and become dependent on the functions of mass media (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). This critique is one that looks at media as disorienting the political process, but as other literature has shown, it has a place because of the importance of making sure messages are spread to the public as best they can. As with framing, politics relies on power to spread messages and those that understand the media system are more likely to have control over messages being spread because they have the power to share influence.
As it relates to the current study, the mediatization of politics has allowed politics to change its position in relation to the people. Jost (2022) fills a gap in mediatization research to include social media. Looking at how political actors adapt to the now ever-present realm of social media, Jost found that those who adapted to a media-logic over that of a political-logic (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014) were more likely to have higher engagement. Mediatizing politics through social media is a relatively new area of research in mediatization studies. The use of social media in the mediatization of politics also requires knowledge of how each platform works. As actors become more comfortable and confident with social media-logic, the more likely they are to have higher engagement rates and propel themselves further into the audiences they are seeking to communicate with. Jost’s study about Facebook posts made by Bundestag members shows the importance of including social media into the narrative of mediatization.

Manor and Crilley (2022) also show how mediatization has evolved to include interactions with media gatekeepers and real-time framing for diverse audiences. Manor and Crilley found that Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) have become mediatized to develop frames surrounding a state’s actions, identity, and relationship to other states (2022). Migration to social media has allowed MFAs to interact with multiple audiences that bypass traditional gatekeepers that were present in the first three cycles of the mediatization phases as described by Strömbäck (2008). In addition to the mediatization of politics as it relates to official political actors, politics is also mediatized by the inclusion of celebrities. Wheeler (2014) explored celebrity humanitarianism as it relates to the mediatization of politics and found that celebrities have an effect (both good and bad) on the practices of domestic and international political communication. Although the present study does not look at celebrities but rather political actors
themselves, the inclusion of Wheeler’s research is important when considering mediatization studies.

**Public Diplomacy**

Public diplomacy is a form of soft power that centers on communication between political entities and people, both foreign and domestic (Huijgh, 2016; Nye, 2008). Public diplomacy has two distinct eras: traditional and contemporary. Traditional public diplomacy is seen as a less-biased type of propaganda that served to disseminate information. This information dissemination was aimed at influencing publics and not as focused on relationship-building (Huijgh, 2016). Contemporary public diplomacy is simply defined as the adoption of new methods and forms of media to participate in information management and cultural promotion. Huijgh (2016) argues that there are two features that contemporary public diplomacy needs to encompass, the use of a multi-actor approach and the formation of relationships through dialog and networking. The multi-actor approach means that state actors, nongovernmental actors, and other publics (both domestically and abroad) need to be involved in the diplomatic relations. Another important aspect of contemporary public diplomacy is that of digitization. As discussed in the mediatization section, the adoption of new technologies and communication methods have helped states become more connected and able to reinforce the use of state and non-state actors in the diplomatic sphere.

Nye (2008) categorizes public diplomacy as a form of soft power that highlights the importance of influence. This soft power is present in public diplomacy as it attempts to draw attention to culture values, and politics that are not always attractive. In contemporary public diplomacy, governments and other state organizations look to foreign audiences more than before (Yenigun, Yari, & Mani, 2021). By looking at foreign audiences, states can gather
feedback on how policies and cultural practices are received, this information is then taken and used to adjust policy goals or methods of distribution.

The methods of distribution have changed over time and now focus on the establishment of ways to protect state interests. An assertion made by Yenigun et al. (2021) is that public diplomacy technologies are no longer about winning hearts and minds (2021); however, with the introduction of new diplomatic tools the connection to the masses is greater than before and serve to create relationships not just with other states but with the citizens of those states. Soft power is built on the idea of winning hearts and minds (Awniczak, 2019). Winning hearts and minds outwardly negate the assertion made by Yenigun, et al. (2021) as states have started using public diplomacy more readily over the decades spreading influence and policy ideas with not only their citizens but those around the world. Although contemporary public diplomacy is still seen partially as following traditional practices, contemporary public diplomacy has also given way to the adoption of digital diplomacy and digital diplomacy serves as its own piece in understanding how states interact with global publics and other states.

**Digital Diplomacy**

Digital diplomacy is a branch of public diplomacy that serves as a way for states and organizations within states to connect using social media (Theander, 2021). As discussed in the mediatization of politics section, as technologies evolved and diplomats began incorporating media into their training and practices, there was a bypass of traditional media.

Rashica (2018) defines eight goals of digital diplomacy. The goals are knowledge management, public diplomacy, information management, consular communication and response, disaster response, internet freedom, external resources, and policy planning. States based their digital diplomacy strategies on these goals. The goal of internet freedom is something
that is not necessarily something that is accomplished or priority for all states (Freedom House, 2022), but the overall goal is still a guiding force in how digital diplomacy is conducted in most states. Although digital is found in many forms, the most researched and discussed is that of Twitter diplomacy. Twitter has become the dominate platform for diplomacy with nearly 800 accounts of heads of state and governments (Manor & Pamment, 2019).

**Twitter Diplomacy**

Twitter has become a platform of diplomacy for most states around the world. Diplomats, embassies, and ministries of foreign affairs have all taken to Twitter to spread policy decisions and engage in political discourse through more unofficial channels. Social activity on Twitter presents a state’s identity to the masses by sharing social values, culture, and policies to make it attractive and legitimate in the eyes of others (Danziger & Schreiber, 2021). Twiplomacy does not erase the need for traditional diplomacy, instead, it assists in the advancing of policy goals and affecting those who would have never engaged with the state before (Rashica, 2018).

Through Twitter diplomacy, states can communicate with digital citizens (both domestic and foreign), respond to crises, and enhance their images (Chhabra, 2020). These three elements are important in the realm of diplomacy because it takes aspects of traditional diplomacy and puts it directly in front of the masses. The masses are then able to engage directly with state accounts to gain information and build rapport that would otherwise not be accessible (Ittefaq, 2019). This engagement, in turn, transforms the state into something of a brand. Through most Twitter diplomacy, states begin to develop an online persona that is important in upholding the brand of the state. For example, the curated @Sweden Twitter account maintained and even promoted its brand to those living abroad (Christensen, 2013). This form of digital establishes
the national brand and in certain circumstances uses audience engagement to further promote the brand (Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011).

Twitter diplomacy is more than the branding of a nation as a good place to live, it also serves to spread policy information and decisions. Of the types of accounts studied in Twitter diplomacy scholarship, that of foreign affair ministries (i.e., Department of State) are the most common (Chhabra, 2020). The connection between state decisions and Twitter followers opens a direct line of communication and engagement. By looking exclusively at the content for the type of diplomacy being engaged, whether it is to promote policy or to promote the state as a brand and destination (Giannopoulos et al., 2011), the role Twitter diplomacy can be narrowed to focus on what is posted and if a state’s characteristics have a role to play in its diplomatic presence on Twitter.

Actors set frames that support existing agendas for audiences to engage with (Manor & Segev, 2020). However, the non-normative method of conducting diplomacy builds connections with citizens and can serve to keep public opinion in line with the frames being established (Dinata, 2014). Through official channels, messages are shared that ultimately form the perception of the state for social media audiences (Sevin & Ingenhoff, 2018). An aspect of Twitter diplomacy that is often taken by states is that of national branding, which serve as ways to brand a state much like a company would. Although this branding can be done on a variety of platforms, Twitter is seen as one of the most common. Christensen (2013) found that Twitter provided openness and transparency for diplomatic purposes through the @Sweden. This project allowed everyday Swedes to take control of the official Twitter account, by putting state image in the hands of the people the perceived identity of Sweden was preserved and promoted. Although not every state engages in state branding on Twitter this way, Twitter gives a state
multiple platforms to develop their identity and relationship with a variety of other states and audiences (Shahin & Haung, 2019).

Previous research has also investigated the differences between state use of Twitter (Dodd & Collins, 2017). These studies typically look at one region or specific cases of how Twitter is used as a diplomatic tool. Exploring the differences in how states engage in Twitter diplomacy gives way to see how different diplomatic strategies are adopted and modified for social media. Strauss et al. (2015) conducted a study about how Western diplomatic institutions based in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries used Twitter as a means of digital diplomacy. Communication strategies were analyzed and found that the way states engage in Twitter diplomacy serves to interact with a variety of stakeholders and publics (Strauss et al., 2015). Although this research was able to analyze the way in which Western states used Twitter for countries in the GCC, it like many others does not vary in region which limits understanding of how Twitter diplomacy is used internationally.

Visual Diplomacy

Visual diplomacy is a form of digital diplomacy by which visuals are distributed by diplomatic actors to contribute to narratives that seek to influence, shape, and transform relations between the actor and the public (Constantinou, 2018). Through digitalization, diplomatic actors have started using visuals to shape perceptions of events, policies, and issues which create a new field of digital diplomacy to study. The area of study for visual diplomacy is new and emerging, leaving this study to help fill in some of the research gaps. Manor (2022) argues that visuals have now become strategic communication methods for diplomats on social media. As previously mentioned with regards to visual framing, semiotics and visual rhetoric, visuals have the power to position issues in ways which support a directed message or frame. Diplomats (and other
government actors) have now become visual narrators in the current time as social media campaigns become the new form of digital communication (Manor, 2022). The visuals posted by political actors serve to manifest national values by encoding meaning through semiotics that are then decoded by publics across the world. Using visuals serve to trigger emotional responses and support positive influence for the actor posting the content (Manor, 2022).

Global politics places visuality as a key feature. The visual and the political are often now working hand in hand to enter key debates and narratives to develop a multifaceted relationship (Bleiker, 2021). Despite visual diplomacy entering digital diplomacy literature recently, the visual has always been a function of diplomacy. An element of performance is associated with diplomacy, and it relies on visuals (Neumann, 2021). Neumann argues that there are three visual modalities that are associated with diplomacy. The first is that the visuals tend to be unacknowledged by diplomats on the surface, but effort and work go into developing visuals for diplomatic efforts. Second, visuals remain inevitably contested. Third is the presence of multiple audiences for one visual performance. The second and third modality are pivotal in understanding visual diplomacy in the age of social media. Because visual performances are done once (i.e. One video or one photo of an event being published by diplomatic actors) for a variety of audiences (domestic, foreign, educated, uneducated) more effort is needed to go into the creation of the visuals. Neumann acknowledges the struggles of visual diplomacy but emphasizes the need for visuals and visual performances to be disseminated widely to have the greatest effect in diplomacy (2021).

To understand the importance of dissemination that Neumann (2021) highlights, the salience of visuals is often discussed. Visuals can be observed as salient in three main ways: production, circulation, and reception (Crilley, Manor, & Bjola, 2020). These three means of
salience resemble the processes of visual Bock (2020) defined in the visual framing section. The salience of visuals can be applied to public diplomacy and digital propaganda as visuals maximize reach and engagement of online messages and support the visibility of certain topics and viewpoints while discrediting others (Crilley, Manor, & Bjola, 2020). The stories told through visual means serve to spread narratives that are interlinked with other signifiers, such as text or audio.

As discussed in the mediatization section, politics has found a way to bypass mainstream media by adapting to media logic. Visual diplomacy presents opportunities for status signaling which package diplomatic messages through forms of communication that complement, illuminate, or supplement language (Danielson & Hedling, 2021). Danielson and Hedling (2021) conducted a study about status signaling in virtual summits during the COVID-19 pandemic. They found that virtual summit meetings (and the visual communication aspect of them) allowed traditional diplomatic practices for summits to be stripped away and new opportunities to flourish. The absence of protocol in virtual summitry can also be translated into other forms of visual communication via social media as the limits of traditional diplomacy are no longer present. All participants in the virtual summits engaged in status-seeking behaviors through their visual performances though conscious or unconscious methods (Danielson & Hedlin, 2021). While visual diplomacy initiatives can be positive, it can also be used to spread mis- and disinformation. The use of social media, out-of-context visual information and manipulation technologies are being used by governments and other political actors to participate in the dissemination of mis- and disinformation through the means of social media to bypass traditional media sources (Dan et al., 2021).
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the review of the literature of framing, Twitter framing, visual framing, visual rheotiric and semiotics mediatization of politics, public diplomacy, digital diplomacy, and visual diplomacy this study asks the following research questions for the study presented:

RQ1: What types of content is posted by official state accounts?

RQ2: Does a state’s freedom index score determine the types of content posted?

RQ3: What forms of communication do official state accounts have with their followers based on their content?

RQ4: What types of visuals are associated with content types?

RQ5: What is the main type of visual posted by official state accounts?

RQ6: What elements are consistent throughout the visuals?

RQ7: Is there a relationship between visual diplomatic goals and freedom index scores?
Chapter 3
METHOD

To answer the research questions posed in the study, two phases of analysis were conducted to analyze text and visual tweets. The first took an exclusive approach to the tweets by only looking at the visuals posted and the second looked at content posted overall. Two separate samples of tweets were gathered to amount to 730 tweets (with 356 specifically analyzed for their visual components).

The first phase analyzed 374 tweets through a content analysis. Content analysis has been applied in a variety of studies about Twitter diplomacy seeking to understand the types of content posted by state accounts. Content analyses have been applied in a variety of studies of social media use, and more specifically studies that seek to understand how social media can be used for diplomacy and national branding. Sobel, Riffe, and Hester (2016) used a content analysis of U.S. embassy Twitter feeds to show how the State Department used the platform differently across various U.S. missions. The nature of tweets and the messages they share can be analyzed more thoroughly through a content analysis because not only the message can be categorized, but the method of the messaging can, too (Ashfaq et al., 2021; Manor & Crilley, 2018).

Although the tweets analyzed in phase one have some form of visual associated with them (infographic, photograph, video, etc.), the analysis was not enough to constitute an exploration of how visuals are used. Many studies conducted in visual communication research use a content analysis to seek understanding about the kinds of content posted. This method is also common when looking at visual diplomacy research as it relates to both social and traditional media sources (Hopke & Hestres, 2018; Fahmy, 2020). The second phase conducted
was completed as a decision to gain as much understanding of the content posted outside of what types of visuals were posted. This follow-up phase leans on research conducted by Danielson and Hedling (2022) analyzing status signaling in virtual summity.

**Conceptualization & Operationalization**

Entman defines framing as the selecting and highlighting aspects of a situation to promote a particular interpretation (Entman, 2008). Frames are manifested the way messages are shared via Twitter to engage in informative, facilitative, and persuasive strategies of governance that benefit the state in their policy goals (Dodd & Collins, 2017). Further, it defines these strategies as important aspects of public diplomacy when comparing how different states utilize social networking as primary methods of diplomacy.

The present study defines visual framing as the highlighting of certain elements strategically with the help of colors, objects, text, people and so on in visuals (Metze, 2018). Further it expands its understanding into semiotics and visual rhetoric literature. Semiotics are the signs and codes used in producing, sharing, and interpreting messages and the codes that determine their use (Moriarty, 2004). Visual rhetoric is defined as the study of the visual as an object (or artifact) and as a perspective (Foss, 2005). Both semiotics and visual rhetoric are used when looking at visual framing to gain the most understanding for how visual frames are developed, distributed, and interpreted.

The present study defines Twitter diplomacy, or Twiplomacy, as the use of Twitter by world leaders, government officials or official state institutions to amplify policy positions and priorities and promote their perspectives on world events (Collins, Dewitt, & LeFebvre, 2019; Chhabra, 2020). Twiplomacy is manifested in native tweets, retweets and modified tweets as defined by Strauss et al. (2015) as forms of interactive communication, the main form of
communication used by official state accounts which are considered in this research. In addition to native tweets, retweets and modified tweets, images, videos, external links, and hashtags are used as ways to determine the types of posts. Further, the function of Twiplomacy is defined as focusing on interstate relationships and international issues, society and culture, religion and tradition, tourism, the economy, security, technology and innovation and other miscellaneous topics as defined by Danziger and Schreiber (2021). Visual diplomacy is looked at as a subgroup of digital diplomacy and is defined as a form of digital diplomacy by which visuals are distributed by diplomatic actors to contribute to narratives that seek to influence, shape and transform relations between the actor and the public (Constantinou, 2018).

This study uses the global freedom score to categorize states for analysis. The scores are determined by Freedom House based on annual reports based on numerical ratings of political rights and civil liberties (Freedom House, 2022). The categories are free, partly free, and not free. Freedom House’s methodology uses measures derived from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and operates under the assumption that freedom is best achieved in liberal democratic societies. This measure is used help categorize states and conduct analysis to understand what forms of content are being posted and if there is a correlation between freedom ranking and posted content. The present study considers the freedom index score in two ways. First as a categorical variable, describing the three levels of freedom: free, partly free, not free and second as a continuous variable with the score as set by Freedom House. Scores of 72 and above are classified as free, 35-72 are classified as partly free and 0-34 are classified as not free.

**Measurements**

To measure types of content posted by official state Twitter accounts, frequencies of posts were defined by the four models of public relations: one-way models, press agentry, public
information, and two-way communication models (Waters & Williams, 2011). This measure of frequency has subgroups associated with the four models that are also used in the present study, to have more specific results (Appendix C). Slight modifications were done to this measure to include questions asking if the use of words or emoticons expressed emotion rather than evoking emotion only as it was in Waters and Williams (2011).

To measure visuals, a framework developed by Ge and Gretzel (2018) will be used for the initial content analysis (Appendix B). This measure looks at the marketing goals (changed to diplomatic goals for the purposes of this study), formats, content, and relationship with text (if text is present alongside visuals). Slight modifications of the Ge and Gretzel framework were done to match the purposes of this study of looking at diplomacy. In addition to the initial content analysis a secondary analysis was conducted based on the initial findings to complete a more in-depth analysis of what is in the visuals and various cultural and social contexts associated with them.

Additionally, to measure both types of content, a topic category is used (Appendix A). The coding categories for tweet topics are defined as interstate issues, society, religion, tradition and culture, tourism, economy, security, technology and innovation, and other miscellaneous topics (Danziger & Schreiber, 2020). In this study, interstate issues were defined as social, political, and other issues in the international arena, except issues that include security and conflict which were coded under security. The category of religion, tradition, and culture were combined to have a broader reach than the society and culture definition given by Danziger and Schreiber (2020).
Sampling

Although the method of analysis is different for the two studies, the sample is the same in terms of which states are analyzed in this study. To see how states engage in Twitter diplomacy, a sample of 17 states was taken following specific guidelines. To begin the selection process, states were ranked based on their Freedom House Global Freedom scores (free, partly free, and not free) (Freedom House, 2022). After ranking states based on their freedom scores, the sampling process turned to data in the 2020 Twiplomacy study (Burson, Cohn, & Wolfe). In the 2020 Twiplomacy study, the most followed and most active Twitter accounts of heads of state were outlined. States that had been flagged for both an active and followed head of state account were selected to be in the initial sample. This filtering resulted in 10 states being selected (France, the United States, Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Indonesia, Pakistan, Nigeria, Russia, and Venezuela).

However, the 10 states identified in the first round of sampling did not give adequate representation to the six regions of the world or the Freedom scores. The next step was to then select states to fill in gaps for both regional and Freedom score gaps. To do this, states were selected first on classification of Freedom scores and then if they had a presence on Twitter. This step led to the removal of some states and the addition of others based on criteria set up for this study. The most followed English language and verified Twitter accounts that deal in diplomacy were selected, with the exclusion of accounts for heads of state. In the process of selecting Twitter accounts, El Salvador, Venezuela, Colombia, and Indonesia were removed from the initial sample of 10 for not meeting one or more of the criteria. Nigeria was removed as well for not having tweeted during the time specification. The exclusion criteria also led to some regions not having representation from all three levels of Freedom scores (specifically for South America.
and Oceania). The final sample includes: France (@frencediplo_EN), Ukraine (@Ukraine), Russia (@mfa_russia), United States (@StateDept), Mexico (@WeVisitMex), Cuba (@EmbCubaUS), Japan (@JapanGov), Pakistan (@GovtofPakistan), China (@MFA_China), Australia (@dfat), New Zealand (@MFATNZ), South Africa (@GovernmentZA), Kenya (@ForeignOfficeKE), Uganda (@GovUganda), Brazil (@govbrazil), Uruguay (@UruguayinUSA) and Peru (@peru).

Data included tweets posted between December 1, 2021, and March 1, 2022. This three-month period provides a sample large enough to determine trends and covers at least two major events, the most recent COVID-19 variant and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Although those two events are important, the purpose of the study is to see what types of content are posted, how it performs and if Freedom scores can predict types of content posted. There will be content focused on both events, but for the purposes of this study, there is not a specific emphasis being put on the events, but rather the content as a whole.

Only original tweets, retweets, and quote tweets (modified tweets) will be considered for phase one; thus, any replies will be excluded from the data set. The tweets were then coded based on type of content (Danziger & Schreiber, 2020) and the frequencies of posts defined by the four models of public relations (Waters & Williams, 2011). The sampling procedure resulted in a sample of 374 tweets (n = 374).

For the purposes of phase two, only original tweets and quote tweets (modified tweets) will be considered; retweets and replies are excluded from this data set. The tweets were then coded using the content type measure created by Danziger and Schreiber (2020) and coded for elements using an original coding criterion based on criteria establish by Ge and Gretzel (2018). After the visuals were coded following Danziger and Schreiber and Ge and Gretzel, the visuals
were compared based on their diplomatic goals and formats to analyze which states were more likely to engage in which type of goal and format for their visuals. The sampling procedures for this study resulted in a sample of 356 tweets ($n = 356$).

Tweets were collected using the website AllMyTweets.net. Each tweet is considered a unit of analysis, replies, retweets, and individual tweets in threaded tweets are each considered individual tweets. For the visual study, the visual included in a tweet is considered one unit of analysis including videos. Videos will be analyzed and considered for analysis if less than two minutes long, videos longer than two minutes are excluded from this study.

For the first three RQs, two coders were used to code the data, both coded an amount equal to 10% of the data ($n = 38$). Intercoder reliability was measured using ReCal2 (Freelon, 2010) and was found to be at an acceptable level of agreement with an average Krippendorff’s Alpha of .725 and $SD = .337$, agreements ranging from 74.4% - 100%. For the remaining RQs, two coders coded the data with 10% coded for ($n = 35$) intercoder reliability. The reliability was measured by ReCal2 (Freelon, 2010) and found an acceptable level of agreement with an average Krippendorff’s Alpha of .758 and a standard deviation of .337, agreements ranging from 85.3%-100%. For the purposes of this study, freedom index scores were treated as categorical or continuous variables. This allowed for results to show how freedom index scores related to tweets posted. Freedom index scores were evaluated in either a categorical or continuous form which allowed for more extensive tests to be conducted when answering the proposed research questions.
Chapter 4
RESULTS

RQ1 asked what types of content is posted by official state accounts. Following Danziger and Schreiber (2021) definition of content types the present study found interstate cooperation and international issue messages were most frequent (26.0%, n = 97). Tourism themes are also common (13.9%, n = 52), religion, tradition, and culture (13.4% n = 50), security (11.5%, n = 43), society (10.7%, n = 40), other (10.3%, n = 38), economy (7.8%, n = 29), and technology and innovation (6.4%, n = 24).

About two-thirds of tweets were original tweets (67.4% n = 252). Retweets (25.4% n = 95) quote tweets were rare (7.2% n = 27). A Chi-Square test of independence was performed to assess the relationship between type of tweet and freedom index score. There was a significant relationship between the two variables $\chi^2 (4, n = 374) = 13.96, p = .007$, see Table 1. Considering the freedom score in its categorical form, free states were less likely to post original or quote tweets compared to partly free and not free states. Not free states were less likely to retweet content compared to free and partly free states.

**Table 1**
*Type of Tweet by Freedom Score*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Freedom Score</th>
<th>Type of Tweet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Original Tweet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free</td>
<td>60.23%, n = 106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partly Free</td>
<td>71.82%, n = 79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Free</td>
<td>76.14%, n = 67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
χ² (4, n = 374) = 13.96, p = .007

RQ2 asked if freedom scores had a relationship with the types of content posted. A series of independent samples t-tests compared the presence or absence of the eight content types for tweets against the mean continuous variable freedom index score and only found significant differences for one content type. The t-test indicated a significant difference in the scores for posts about tourism (M = 71.02, SD = 15.25) versus not (M = 61.65, SD = 31.68); t(371) = -2.091, p = .037. These results suggest that tourism posts are more associated with higher freedom index scores than non-tourism posts, however, the mean freedom index score for tourism posts sits within the range of partly free states.

A one-way ANOVA compared the means of the eight content types across freedom index scores as continuous variables and found several significant differences. A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of freedom on types of content posted on official state Twitter accounts. There was a significant difference in the frequency of posting international cooperation and international issues themed content between not free states (M = .37, SD = .49) than partly free states (M = .16, SD = .37) [F(2, 370) = 5.42, p = .005]. Religion, tradition and culture tweets were posted more by partly free states (M = .22, SD = .42) compared to both free (M = .10, SD = .30) and not free states (M = .10, SD = .31) [F(2, 370) = 4.85, p = .008]. Tourism had the strongest difference with partly free states (M = .29, SD = .46) posting more frequently than both free (M = .10, SD = .30) and not free states (M = .02, SD = .15) [F(2, 370) = 1.97, p < .001].
RQ3 asked what forms of communication were used by official accounts to interact with their followers. Most official accounts used a one-way model of communication (83.2% \( n = 311 \)). The remainder used two-way (10.7% \( n = 40 \)) and an unknown (6.1% \( n = 23 \)).

For the one-way model of communication, most posts used a public information model (74.7% \( n = 275 \)), a little more than a third of posts used the press agentry model (36.4%, \( n = 134 \)) of one-way communication. An independent samples t-test compared the use of public information and press agentry types of communication against the mean continuous variable freedom index score. No significant difference was found in the use of press agentry by freedom scores. However, the t-test indicated a significant difference in the scores for public information types (\( M = 60.40, SD = 31.53 \)) versus not (\( M = 71.62, SD = 22.52 \)); \( t(366) = 3.169, p = .002 \). Thus, the public information type is more commonly associated with states with lower freedom index scores.

Looking specifically at the tools of one-way communication, the use of emojis were rare, but were occasionally used to express emotion (\( M = .05, SD = .23 \)) more than they were to evoke emotion (\( M = .02, SD = .14 \)). Words were most often used to express emotion (\( M = .28, SD = .45 \)) than to evoke emotions (\( M = .17, SD = .37 \)). An independent samples t-test compared the use of emojis to evoke and express emotion against the mean continuous variable freedom index score. Significant differences were found for expressing emotion through emojis. (\( M = 80.65, SD = 13.72 \)) versus not (\( M = 62.24, SD = 30.27 \)); \( t(366) = -2.702, p = .007 \). Thus, using emojis to express emotions was significantly more associated with higher freedom index scores and those scores fell within the range of free states. Tools of communication were coded on a binary variable, with 0 used for absence and 1 used for presence.
For information messages, updates were most common \((M = .71, SD = .46)\) while information from other sources was somewhat frequent \((M = .18, SD = .39)\). Again, a significant difference was found for the continuous freedom index score; \(t(366) = 3.577, p < .001\). Freedom index scores were higher for non-update posts \((M = 71.80, SD = 23.60)\) than for update posts \((M = 59.72, SD = 31.49)\).

Two-way communication was rare with asymmetrical \((M = .09, SD = .28)\) being more frequent than symmetrical \((M = .03, SD = .16)\). A significant difference was found for the continuation freedom index score; \(t(371) = -3.029, p = .003\). Freedom index scores were higher for asymmetrical communication \((M = 78.13, SD = 14.28)\) than for non-asymmetrical communication \((M = 61.46, SD = 30.80)\).

For asymmetrical communication models, participation and involvement were examined. For participation messages, significant difference was found in the use of participation messages \((M = 78.61, SD = 14.05)\) versus not \((M = 61.61, SD = 30.69)\); \(t(372) = -2.903, p = .004\). Participation messages is significantly more correlated with states with higher continuous freedom index scores.

These results show that a state’s freedom status has an influence on the types of content posted and how they communicate with their followers. Free states were more likely to directly engage with their followers through asymmetrical communication models, however, there was no other significant difference for free states. Partly free states on the other hand, were more likely to use asymmetrical communication models to encourage participation from their followers while engaging in content that focused more on tourism centered posts. Although there was no significance found in the results, international cooperation and international issues were more likely to be posted by not free states along with public information messages.
The remaining RQs focus on visual tweets \((n = 356)\) posted by state accounts. RQ4 asked what types of visuals (photo, video, infographic, text) are associated with content types (interstate cooperation, society, religion, tradition and culture, tourism, economy, security, technology and innovation and other). A series of Chi Square tests found significant relationships with society and infographics \(\chi^2 (3, N = 357) = 8.17, p = .043\), with infographics \((n = 9)\) accounting for 28.1% of society posts. Tourism had a significant relationship with photos \(\chi^2 (3, N = 357) = 14.26, p = .003\), with photos \((n = 39)\) accounting for 17.0% of all tourism posts. Security had a significant relationship with both photos and text-based visuals \(\chi^2 (3, N = 357) = 21.90, p < .001\), with photos accounting for 37.8% of security posts and text-based visuals accounting for 35.1%.

RQ5 asked about the main type is of visual posted by official state accounts. Overwhelmingly, state accounts post original tweets \((91.9\%, n = 328)\), but quote tweets happen some \((8.1\%, n = 29)\). Similar to in RQ1, not free states lagged behind free states and partially free states in quote tweets. A Chi-Square Test of Independence was performed to assess the relationship between tweet type and categorical freedom scores for tweets with visuals. There was a significant relationship between the two variables \(\chi^2 (2, N = 357) = 13.29, p = .001\), see Table 2. Ultimately free states and partially free states had more quote tweets than not free states.
Table 2

Type of tweet by freedom score for visuals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Freedom Score</th>
<th>Type of Tweet</th>
<th>Original</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free</td>
<td></td>
<td>86.9%, n = 146</td>
<td>13.1%, n = 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partly Free</td>
<td></td>
<td>93.3%, n = 98</td>
<td>6.7%, n = 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Free</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%, n = 88</td>
<td>0%, n = 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$\chi^2 (2, N = 357) = 13.29, p = .001$

Regarding the post format, nearly two-thirds of posts were photos (64.4%, n = 230). Video posts accounted for 14.0% of posts (n = 50), while images of text, such as government statements, news releases, and lists of tips or reminders, typically associated with COVID-19, accounted for 12.6% (n = 45). Infographics were least common, appearing in 9.0% of posts (n = 32). GIFs which are animated visuals were never posted within the sample. A Chi-Square Test of Independence found no significant difference in the format type compared with categorical freedom scores.

RQ6 asked what elements are consistent throughout the visuals. State accounts predominantly incorporated people into their visuals (44%, n = 157). The next most popular component incorporated in visuals was that of text which accounted for 22.4% of posts (n = 80). Nature and architecture or building imagery were the third and fourth most common components (11.5%, n = 41 and 10.4%, n = 37). More uncommon was lifestyle content (5.3%, n = 19), traditional elements (3.1%, n = 11), animals (1.7%, n = 6), and other (1.7%, n = 5).

A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare continuous Freedom Index Score with the elements present in visuals. There was a significant difference of elements used based on freedom index score at the $p < .001$ level [$F(350, 6) = 5.95, p < .001$]. Post Hoc Least Significant Difference Testing found people elements (n = 157, $M = 54.36$, $SD = 30.79$) to
be more negatively associated with freedom than all other elements: nature ($n = 41, M = 68.68, SD = 21.68$), architecture and buildings ($n = 37, M = 76.08, SD = 24.47$), way of life ($n = 19, M = 74.68, SD = 31.29$), traditional elements ($n = 11, M = 78.09, SD = 12.17$), text ($n = 80, M = 63.76, SD = 30.58$), and other ($n = 12, M = 82.42, SD = 17.86$).

Building elements were also more commonly associated with higher freedom index scores than text elements. Similarly other elements which included art, flags and leisure activities were more associated with higher freedom index scores than text. Thus, posts that included people and text elements were most associated with a lack of freedom while other categorized posts were most associated with higher levels of freedom.

RQ7 asked if there is a relationship between visual diplomatic goals and freedom index score. A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare continuous Freedom Index Score with diplomatic goals. There was a significant difference of elements used based on freedom index score at the $p < .001$ [$F(352, 4) = 4.82, p < .001$]. Post Hoc Least Significant Difference testing found economic opportunity goals ($n = 10, M = 92.80, SD = 15.99$) to be more positively associated with freedom than all other goals: helping of own state ($n = 116, M = 56.63, SD = 28.98$), promotion of the state ($n = 139, M = 66.90, SD = 26.30$), encouragement of cooperation ($n = 79, M = 63.34, SD = 34.05$), maintenance of peace ($n = 13, M = 56.38, SD = 32.47$). Promotion of the state was also found to be significantly higher than helping of own state.

These results show that there is not as much difference between states’ and the use of visuals in official tweets. Freedom index scores do have a relationship in what elements are present in visuals with people and text being the most popular and more associated with states that lack freedom compared to more free counterparts. As it relates to diplomatic goals, free
states posted more visuals that related to economic goals compared to all other goals. Visuals did not have as much significant difference in forms and types of content as with the previous sample, but the insights gained help to inform discussion of how states use visuals on official accounts.
Chapter 5  
DISCUSSION

The results of this study suggest Twitter diplomacy serves varying purposes for the types of content posted and how visuals and communication models are used to engage with followers. Considering the first phase of the study, the results show that a state’s freedom status has a relationship with the types of content posted and how communication is carried out with followers. Free states were more likely to directly engage with followers through asymmetrical communication models. Partly free states on the other hand, were more likely to use the asymmetrical communication model to encourage participation from followers while engaging in content that focused more on tourism and cultural matters. Not free states were more likely to post content that provided public information and were more likely to post content relating to international cooperation and international issues.

Through the first phase, Twitter was found to serve as a framing platform using press agentry and public information related communication models. Although public information models were more common in the sample, press agentry was still found to be an important aspect of Twitter framing. Not free states were the most likely to use public information communication models, essentially using Twitter as a direct communication tool with followers, both foreign and domestic. Additionally, not free states using the public information model can be interpreted to frame issues in favor of the state and their goals.

In context with previous studies, Manor and Crilley (2018) found that Israel (not a state sampled in this study) engaged in frame making surrounding public information during the Gaza War of 2014 as a way to promote desired solutions of the Israeli government. Although Israel is a free state, the use of public information models was found to be most common among not free states because of the need to control narratives surrounding policy and interstate issues. Russia
state sampled) commonly used the public information model to share information in a way that supported Russian motivations and policies, see Figure 1 for examples of Russian public information tweets.

![Figure 1](image)

**Figure 1.** Public information tweets by @mfa_russia.

Additionally, the main findings from the present study continue to support Twitter’s growing role in international diplomacy. Twitter is used primarily by official state accounts for diplomatic means based on types of content posted. International cooperation and international issues were the most common topics across freedom levels. The dominance of using Twitter for interstate relations found in this study supports a previous study by Danziger and Schreiber (2021). Danziger and Schreiber (2021) had similar results to the current study, see Figure 2, which furthers the validity of the previous study and establishes a more concrete generalization of what types of content topics states post about on official accounts.
Although international cooperation and international issues were the most common topics, tourism and religion, tradition, and cultural topics followed behind. Partly free states were significantly more likely to publish content about tourism and religion, tradition, and culture than not free and free states. This finding demonstrates that state image is an important diplomatic strategy for partly free states on Twitter.

Figure 2. Comparison of topic percentages between Danziger and Schreiber (2021) and current study.
The second phase of tweets examined visuals and found photos were the most common format of visual posted by state accounts. Photos were followed by video, but the small percentage (14.0%) leads to the discussion of how and why video is not a more used format. Although little research has addressed the move to video as a primary visual across platforms, popular media indicate that audiences are embracing video content more than before (Listen First Media, n.d.). Video-based content has become more common across platforms like Instagram and Facebook, and the sole form of content on platforms like TikTok; however, Twitter, as shown in this study, tends to use other visual formats more. Twitter is beginning to lean into video trends, but as that occurs, it will be important to see how states react and begin to engage with video content in more meaningful ways.

In the second phase of tweets, which examined visuals, content types surrounding tourism was heavily related to the inclusion of photographs. This photo dominance shows that states that engaged in tourism posts were attempting to show the state in a positive light and develop an image for the state through photos of the locations in the state. However, photos were not the only visuals to be tweeted. In this study, photos were the most common, followed by videos, text-based visuals, and infographics. States were found to use the visual formats with little significant differences, meaning that the format of visual was more directly tied to the type of content being posted. The same can be said for security related posts. The visuals surrounding security were mainly photographs, typically of soldiers or military equipment; however, text-based visuals were the second most common which are related more closely with government statements and news releases giving way to information spreading rather than developing an image. The use of photographs in security posts is something that was commonly found in the literature surrounding visual framing. Conflict, war, and social issues are the most often
researched issues when it comes to visual frames (Branter, Lobinger, & Wetzstein, 2011; Makhortykh & Sydorova, 2017; Dhanesh & Rahman, 2021). Makhortykh and Sydorova (2017) looked at visuals during the 2014 Ukrainian conflict and found that production of visuals during a war often related to the situation in conflict zones; however, the use of photographs to tell a story of the conflict was used to develop and maintain support for the war. This narrative is similar to posts made by Ukraine in the current study following the invasion on February 24, 2022. Figure 3 shows an example post of how Ukraine is using photographs to develop and maintain support for pro-Ukrainian movement.

![Figure 3](image)

**Figure 3.** Still from video posted by @Ukraine tweet.

Society related visuals were commonly infographics which allow for the distribution of information to followers that related directly to the societal issues such as healthcare or education that require more information than a photograph could offer.
An aspect of this study looked at what elements were common throughout visuals and the use of people in photos and in other visuals was found to be the most associated with not free states. States with higher freedom scores were more likely to use buildings and architecture in visual posts, promoting the image of the state for what it can build or create rather than who is leading or part of the state. Unlike more free states which highlighted locations, the use of people in visuals from not free states give way to discussion of why and how those people are being used. This choice can be understood to add a face to the not free states, which traditionally are only seen as their head of state. The inclusion of people to create a face for the state is true for several not free states; China and Russia commonly posted visuals with the faces of either the head of state or ministry official to provide credence to the ministry or state.

Using people to create a face for the state is something that has been occurring before the emergence of digital diplomacy. States including Russia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, just to name a few, use image management of the head of state to create a narrative of the state that is represented by the individual (Marland, 2012). Often these images are designed in a way to reduce opportunities of scrutiny and promote positive images of the leader (and therefore the state). Although actors commonly become a visual narrator (Manor, 2022), the way visual narration is conducted varies state to state. Although states that lacked in freedom commonly incorporated photos of people in the visual narrative, the way it was done is not the same. As previously mentioned, states including China and Russia often used posed shots, see Figure 4, of the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the visuals rather than candid shots.
Figure 4. Examples of photos from @MFA_China and @mfa_russia

This style is different from how Cuba or Uganda used people in visuals. It was more common for the people to be participating in an act, whether giving a speech or a group image of people that are with heads of government organizations, rather than for posed photographs (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Examples of photos from @GovUganda and @EmbaCubaUS.

In the second phase, the relationship between visuals and diplomatic goals was also explored and found that economic goals in Twitter diplomacy was more commonly associated
with higher freedom than all other diplomatic goals. Economy was not often used as a content topic in the samples; however, the result is still important. Having economic goals be the most associated goal with visuals for freer states implies that free states are able to more openly promote their economic goals and partnerships than states with less freedom. Posts surrounding economy tended to focus on trade endeavors with other states, promoting freer states as good to trade with and stable in economic relations, something with which not free or partly free states were less capable of participating.
Chapter 6
CONCLUSION

Political communications have expanded beyond traditional means to the realm of social media. The use of social media, and specifically Twitter, as a means of political communications has expanded to be a main form of diplomacy form many states around the world. Geopolitical relationships have the potential for new growth because of Twitter diplomacy, but also has the potential to have wider international implications through framing.

The understanding of digital diplomacy is expanded by this research through looking at the topics, visuals, and how content is being communicated by states to their audiences. For the field of political communications and the expanding field of digital diplomacy research, this study helps to support previous claims and expand on the ways that digital diplomacy is conducted today. The role of state freedom is an important factor in how states participate in diplomacy and that is even more important when looking at digital diplomacy because of the ease of connection with domestic and foreign audiences. The ways in which states use Twitter and its implications on geopolitical matters are continually important to study in both an academic and professional realm.

Implications of Twitter on geopolitical matters spans from academic to professional practice. In relation to academia, the development of programs focusing on public diplomacy need to have elements of digital diplomacy included in areas of study. As a new generation of diplomats and scholars enter the field understanding how digital diplomacy functions is pivotal. For scholars, Twitter is an entry point into understanding digital diplomacy. Twitter is used by many states in varying capacities, for understanding how digital diplomacy uses traditional mass communication theory (such as framing as seen in this study) to communicate with audiences and spread messages.
In relation to the professional realm, diplomats are required to change the way they interact with the world because of digital diplomacy. Twitter and other social networks keep diplomacy in the eye of everyday citizens who make judgements or lend support to states and diplomatic goals being projected. For the profession and actors involved in public diplomacy, understanding what works, what certain trends are and how it changes outcomes allows for better practice and outcomes.

Limitations

There were several limitations applied to this study that leave room for future research to be conducted. Although the sample covered a more varied landscape than previous studies (Danziger & Schreiber, 2020; Strauss et al., 2015), only 17 states were chosen and some regions were not as evenly represented as others. This imbalance was because of the sampling method and need for posts to be in English for adequate evaluation and coding. There is room for further study on the differences between regions as it relates to freedom index scores or regions as stand-alone variables. Additionally, because of the sampling guidelines outlined, some states were represented by accounts that skewed to be more heavily focused on one form of content (i.e., @WeVisitMexico). If other accounts could have been used without language barriers, the results of this study could have been different.

Suggestions for future research

Further research about Twitter diplomacy should focus on audience interaction. This interaction was beyond the scope of this study to monitor analytics or preform a content analysis of replies or quote tweets by the audience. A future study focusing on the subject might provide further understanding as to how well Twitter diplomacy works as a way to engage with non-government or official accounts.
Additionally, future research surrounding digital diplomacy should focus on how other social networks function as tools of diplomacy. Though not as common among states, TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook would be important to investigate as there is more of a shift to video content and following of trends. Although at the time of writing, use of TikTok by states is limited, as time progresses there could be a potential it becomes similarly popular in the diplomacy space to engage with younger audiences and participate in internet culture.
References


Appendix A: Codebook for Phases 1 and 2

Coding categories for tweet topics
Interstate cooperation and international issues
   0=No, 1=Yes
Society
   0=No, 1=Yes
Religion, tradition and culture
   0=No, 1=Yes
Tourism
   0=No, 1=Yes
Economy
   0=No, 1=Yes
Security
   0=No, 1=Yes
Technology and Innovation
   0=No, 1=Yes
Other
   0=No, 1=Yes

Appendix C: Phase 1 Codebook

Frequency of government agencies’ tweets by the four models of public relations
Does the tweet use a one-way model or two-way model?
   0=Unknown, 1= One-Way, 2= Two-Way
If one-way, does the tweet use press agentry?
   0=No, 1=Yes
If press agentry, does it use emoticons to express emotion?
   0=No, 1=Yes
If press agentry, does it use emoticons to evoke emotion?
   0=No, 1=Yes
If press agentry, does it use words that express emotion?
   0=No, 1=Yes
If press agentry, does it use words that evoke emotion?
   0=No, 1=Yes
If one-way, does the tweet use public information?
   0=No, 1=Yes
If public information, does it provide updates and announcements?
   0=No, 1=Yes
If public information, does it provide information and reports from other organizations/agencies?
   0=No, 1=Yes
If two-way, does the tweet use two-way asymmetry?
   0=No, 1=Yes
If two-way asymmetry does it ask for specific feedback?
   0=No, 1=Yes
If two-way asymmetry, does it ask for participation?
   0=No, 1=Yes
If two-way asymmetry, does it ask for involvement?
If two-way, does the tweet use two-way symmetry?
   0=No, 1=Yes

If two-way symmetry, does it use publicly posted direct messages using @-reply for conversation?
   0=No, 1=Yes

If two-way symmetry, does it use mention other Twitter users without attempting to engage in conversation?
   0=No, 1=Yes

If two-way symmetry, does it use conversation to resolve conflict?
   0=No, 1=Yes

Appendix B: Phase 2 Codebook

Coding categories for visual posts

Diplomatic goals
   1=Help own state
   2=Promote state
   3=Encourage cooperation between states
   4=Maintain peace
   5=Economic opportunity

Format
   1=Photo
   2=Gif
   3=Video
   4=Infographic
   5=Text-based image

Type of content
   1=Nature/landscape
   2=People
   3=Architecture/buildings
   4=Way of life
   5=Traditional food, clothing or events
   6=Animals
   7=Leisure activities
   8=Art

Relationship with text
   1=Background
   2=Elaboration
   3=Motivation
   4=Restatement
   5=Summary
   6=Justification