

# **PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT OF ASEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY (AEC) ISSUE IN TWITTER ACCOUNT OF MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIR, REPUBLIC OF INDONESIA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this research was to analyze public engagement on the issue of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in the Twitter account of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia. AEC is a single market and community across South East Asia started in 2016. As a member of Association of South East Asia Nations (ASEAN), Indonesia must disseminate information about AEC to its citizen. In term of population, Indonesia is the biggest in the region which make it affected more by this new policy. AEC is a good opportunity to increase quality of human resources to compete in global level. On the contrary, it could also be seen as a “threat” for the locals as they will not only compete with people from Indonesia, but also from other ASEAN countries. In term of economy, free market helps small medium enterprise to level up their business to regional level. The research has specifically analyzed data from Twitter account @Portal\_Kemlu-RI. Data were collected using Twitter analytic tools of the account from November 2015 to January 2016. The result indicates that different channel should use different approaches depend on the target audience. There should also be collaboration across institution to disseminate information about AEC since it involved many aspects.

**Keywords:** ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), Public Engagement, Foreign Affairs, Twitter

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## INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, all aspects in life are inevitably connected. One of the most influential aspect is economic globalization. It is the process of increasing the financial integration amongst countries. As a result, globalization creates the rising of a "global marketplace" or "a single world market". A country can no longer be seen as a single entity, but more connected to other countries, in regional or international level.

According to Community of Development Policy (CDP) Background Paper published by United Nations Development Policy and Analysis Division, economic globalization refers to “the increasing interdependence of world economies as a result of the growing scale of cross-border trade of commodities and services, flow of international capital and wide and rapid spread of technologies” (Shangquan, 2000). In regional level, leaders of Association of South East Asian Countries (ASEAN) had agreed to create a single market across the countries in 2015, namely ASEAN Economic Community. Founded in 2015, the objective of AEC is to support economic, political, social and cultural cooperation in the regional level. The purpose was to turn South-East Asia towards a global competitive single market and production base, with a unrestricted transfer of goods, services, labour, investments and capital across the 10 member states (World Economic Forum, 2016).

ASEAN considered success in applying modern economics. The year 2014 watched ASEAN as the seventh-largest economic forum in the world. It was also the third-largest economy in Asia, with a combined GDP of US\$2.6 trillion, which was higher than in India. (World Economic Forum, 2016)

Between 2007 and 2014, ASEAN commerce increased to around \$1 trillion. The highest percentage of that (24%) was trade within the region, shadowed by trade with China (14%), Europe (10%), Japan (9%) and the United States (8%). On the same period, foreign direct investment (FDI) increased from \$85 to \$136 billion, and, worldwide, from 5% to 11%. With population around 622 million, ASEAN become the world’s third largest market and the third largest labour force (World Economic Forum, 2016)

The establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015 is a crucial and impactful agreement in the regional economic integration agenda, opening opportunities to enter huge market of US\$2.6 trillion and over 622 million people. Therefore, AEC launched by 2015 is part of the main goal: ASEAN Community Vision 2025. Based on the information about AEC in the ASEAN website, the AEC Blueprint 2025 consists of five interrelated and mutually reinforcing characteristics: (i) A highly integrated and cohesive economy; (ii) A competitive, innovative, and dynamic ASEAN; (iii) Enhanced connectivity and sectoral cooperation; (iv) A resilient, inclusive, people-oriented, and people-centred ASEAN; and (v) A global ASEAN.

The examples of the successful practices of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Blueprint 2015 are excluding tariffs and enabling trade; developing the services trade liberalisation agenda; liberalising and simplifying investment; restructuring and synchronizing capital market regulatory frameworks and platforms; accelerating the movement of skilled labour; endorsing the development of regional frameworks in competition policy, consumer protection and intellectual property rights; encouraging connectivity; minimizing the development gap; and intensifying ASEAN's relationship with its external parties.

The implementation of ASEAN Economic Community had a big impact on Indonesian citizen as they will not only compete with the locals but also with foreigner from ASEAN countries in many aspects of life. Therefore, Indonesian government has to inform as well as educate people about AEC. One of the government body who is responsible to disseminate the information is The Ministry of Foreign Affair (*Kementerian Luar Negeri*) Republic of Indonesia. On top of many government's events and activities to disseminate the information, Ministry of Foreign Affair has also use Social Networking Sites (SNS) or, to be specific, Twitter Account. The ministry has actually implemented Twitter Diplomacy or Twi-plomacy.

On a national level, compared to other ministries and government bodies, The Ministry of Foreign Affair Republic of Indonesia's Twitter account (@Portal\_Kemlu\_RI) is the 4th most important account based on the total followers.

However, globally, compared to other countries, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Indonesia reached 37<sup>th</sup> ranking on digital diplomacy, which is lower than Thailand. The scores assessed The Ministry of Foreign Affairs's Twitter account in terms of utilizing social networking sites to implement digital diplomacy or, to be specific, Twitter diplomacy. The ratings were measured by several components such as: presence, customization, *up-to-date-ness*, engagement and diplomacy 4.0 (Digital Diplomacy Rating, 2016).

According to recent study by a prominent international strategic communications and public relations, Burson-Marsteller, Twitter and Facebook have been proved to be the most effective way for government institutions to grasp more people. Based on the findings, governments use Twitter most and reach larger audiences on Facebook (Marsteller, 2016).

It goes in line with the duty or objective of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Indonesia as the front liner to deliver public diplomacy through social media. The ministry has practicing digital diplomacy approaches in delivering information to their target audience via Twitter. Therefore, based on the duties to connect with people to disseminate information about country's policy or information, Ministry of Foreign Affairs is clearly applying standards of public relations. The ministry considered as a public relations body for the country, especially when sharing information about Indonesia to other countries.

Public Relations organization (IPR.org) has its definition about public relations practice. They define it as methods and systems of an organizations (or, in this case, a country) to communicate with their target audience: society and the press or media. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs corresponds with citizens directly through social networking sites with "an aim to spread information, maintain a positive reputation and create a strong relationship with public and get feedback from audience, which categorized as two-way communication approach." (IPR, 2016)

In performing their role as public relations that practicing digital diplomacy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Indonesia delivered many themes of information on Twitter. They post several

topics within the diplomacy area, such as maritime diplomacy case, haze crisis, terrorism issue, live report about Organization of Islamic Country (OIC) Summit Meeting, as well as one of the trending topics in Twitter, which is ASEAN Economic Community (AEC).

As the biggest country in ASEAN whose citizen will be affected a lot by this new regional initiative, Indonesia needs to share information and educate the people about AEC, the challenge and the consequences. AEC opens new opportunities for Indonesia as the most populated country in the region, for example: the opportunity to increase human resources' standard so that they are able to compete in regional or international level. From economic point of view, the free market system as offered by AEC will also help small medium enterprise to increase their business to wider and higher level.

Since there are lots of important benefits and influences for Indonesia to implement AEC, the government need to share information, educate and promote the program simultaneously to the people. By practicing the standard and principle of public relation through social media, Indonesian people are expected to be more well-informed, so they can equip themselves better to compete in global level. Therefore, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Indonesia regularly upload, or post information related to AEC, in order to strengthen public's awareness about the issue. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Indonesia utilize this social media platform to share and broadcast AEC related news and updates real time, in a simple and concise way, in accordance with its foreign policy goals.

Social media has been very effective to reach wider audience. Most people are fully depended on smartphones and gadget in this internet era. Social networking sites has been one of the most important part of people nowadays. People utilize social media to make life more simple, practical and efficient. Social media is undeniably not just a tool or platform but a basic need, a lifestyle and a culture. Recent study has confirmed that in today's social media era, million application (or apps) were invented and number of websites that overflows the internet has also grow very fast to connect people or to help them to communicate. Internet is considered giving freedom to their users so that everyone's voice are relevant and can be heard (Goodyear, 2014).

A study published on Tech in Asia measures that there are 88.1 million active internet user in January 2016. It is also said that there are 79 million active social media user and 66 million active mobile social user. The annual growth increase to 15% since January 2015 for active internet user, 10% for active social media user and 6% for active mobile social user. It is also stated that 43% of all population have and own smartphones. (Balea, 2016).

Based on an article in The Jakarta Globe in 2017, the quantity of Twitter accounts hit 328 million globally, representing a 14 percent increase from the same period last year. Indonesia appeared in number five in the ranking of number of Twitter users in the country, with 4.1 billion tweets having created here last year. According to Dwi Ardiansyah, Twitter's head of business development for South East Asia and Australia, Indonesia's Twitter user is among the top five in the world. He also stated that 77 percent of the Twitter accounts in Indonesia are actively used. He explained that "Indonesia is an important market for Twitter. We often see many global trending topics come from the country." (Jakarta Globe, 2017)

Based on data from Statista, an online statistics, market research and business intelligence portal, Indonesia had nearly 24.34 million active Twitter accounts as of May last year. It made the country become number three of the highest Twitter users globally.

In relation to the dissemination of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) information through Twitter by the Ministry of Foreign Affair, Republic of Indonesia, this study aimed to:

- Analyze the public engagement on AEC topics shared via Twitter Account of Ministry of Foreign Affair, Republic of Indonesia
- Analyze the effectiveness of sharing information about AEC via Twitter Account of Ministry of Foreign Affair, Republic of Indonesia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Public Relations Model

According to Grunig and Hunt's model, there are four models of public relation. They are press agency, public information, asymmetrical model and the two-way symmetrical model. The first model is *press agency*. This model describes about one-way information, from provider to receiver, for propaganda goals. In this case, the provider is the government (or Ministry of Foreign Affair, Republic of Indonesia) and the receiver are public (specifically in Indonesia). By using this model, information can be used to persuade and manipulate to affect audience. (Grunig, 2000)

The second model explained by Grunig is public information. This model is actually still a one-way communication as explained in the first model above. The difference is its purpose, which is not for propaganda but for promotion and publicity. This model is nowadays used widely by public relations practitioner in government institutions, corporates and non-profit organizations. One of the practices that follows this model is distributing press release to the press or media people, expect them to re-share the information to public, etc. Third, *two-way asymmetrical model*. Vary from two previous models above, this model involved both parties (provider and receiver) to communicate both ways. It is categorized as scientific persuasion because it involves social science research methods to strengthen the persuasiveness of messages and its effectiveness in reaching their target audience. Lastly, *two-way symmetrical model*. It is also involved both provider and receiver and focus on the use of social science research methods. However, the objective is not to persuade as it is in the third model above, but to create mutual understanding through interactive communication. (Grunig, 2000)

The two-way symmetrical model also supported by Coombs and Holladay, "The model focuses on the use of social science research methods to achieve mutual understanding and two-way communication rather than one-way persuasion" (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). According to Grunig, the model is not only focused on the self-interest of an organization as the provider, but also measured the interest of the receiver. It tried to bridge interests of both parties: the provider and receiver.

Based on the description above, we can conclude that the first three models depend on persuasion to reach the goals. The fourth model is considered more ideal in public relation practices, because it allows both parties (provider and receiver) to communicate both ways and give feedback to each other to achieve shared goal.

### **Social Media Integration Model**

Digital and internet era has created the need for people to interact on social media or social networking sites. The online social interaction has changed the communication process. Most of the earlier and “conventional” process of communication has swift to digital communication or, to be specific, social media communication. Slowly but inevitable, social media changed the way people communicate.

Based on Social Media Integration Model, social media platform encompassed four processes: the exposure, feedback, engagement (*connecting*) and exchange (*sharing*). These processes have resulted in big and significant changes in the traditional communication. Social media integration theory is not merely designed for the purpose of digital marketing, but also used for evaluating the effectiveness of social media implementation. By using this model, “individual or institutional account can maximize the usage of social media to reach the key performance indicator.” (Garcia, 2011).

As mentioned before, the exposure, feedback, engagement (*connecting*) and exchange (*sharing*) process included in social media platforms. As a result, there are massive changes in the communications process from traditional to digital and integrated model.

Previously in the past, the flow of information is mainly one-way. People (providers) shares information to their audience (receiver) by using “I communicate- you receive” formula. Nowadays, the process is two-ways and more interactive. Both parties (provider and receiver) are equal in the process of information exchange. They have similar and balance opportunity to communicate

Social media integration is seen as an interactive process that enables same-level information exchange among the audience and the brand.



The impact will be long-lasting because the brand (that is communicated through social media) are engaged more with the audience.

Social Media Integration theory explains the use of social media platform to provide the exposure, feedback, engagement (*connecting*) and exchange (*sharing*) process to create major changes for the traditional communication understanding (Garcia, 2011).

### **Public Diplomacy**

ICPD Public Diplomacy Research and Training (Srugies, 2014) defines public diplomacy as a communication activity conducted by individuals, governmental and non-governmental organizations with a foreign government, foreign publics or domestic public as the target audience or receiver. The purpose of sharing the information is to minimize negative reaction and prejudices, as well as to gain sympathy and understanding for a nation's foreign goals, policies, institutions, culture and model of society. By practicing this model of communication, an institution or a government is expected to be able to develop positive image and strengthen connection with their targeted public and to facilitate political relationships among them.

According to Foreign Policy Centre (Leonard, Stead, & Smewing, 2002), public diplomacy is about “building relationships: understanding the needs of other countries, cultures and peoples; communicating our points of view; correcting misperception; looking for areas where we can find common cause”. Public diplomacy involves more people and groups in a country or in a regional level and encompass wider topic beyond the daily information from a government only.

By practicing public diplomacy, the country's image and reputation are public domain, where public (as individual or organization) can involve in the process. A country's public relation body will work on specific issue and expect people's response, which could be positive or negative, and have to anticipate the answers or explanation.

## **The Circle of Public Diplomacy**

According to Lowy Institute (Hanson, 2012), there are transformative goals of digital diplomacy, such as:

1. **Knowledge management:** to connect departmental and whole of government knowledge, so that it could be kept and distributed in tracking down the national interests abroad.
2. **Public diplomacy:** to develop new communication platform where public (audience or followers) can be informed about recent policies.
3. **Information management:** to create flow of information, to share policy-making process and to react to any social and political movements.
4. **Consular communications and response:** to produce direct and effective communications networks, where people can communicate efficient and effective.
5. **Disaster response:** to inform and response on a disaster occurrence.
6. **Internet freedom:** to encourage freedom of speech and democracy in social media
7. **External resources:** creating digital mechanisms to draw on and connect external expertise to reach national objectives.
8. **Policy planning:** to facilitate coordination and planning of international policy across government by opening public discussion.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research used qualitative method to analyze the data gathered through Twitter Analytical Data. The data was gathered from the Twitter account of Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Indonesia, @Portal\_Kemlu\_RI, from November 2015 to January 2016 which consist the ASEAN Economic Community word or topic. The reason of specific time, due to the ASEAN Economic Community already started in December 31th, 2016; researcher want to analyze Ministry of Foreign Affair preparation on ASEAN Economic Community topic in social media before (November) and after (January) when ASEAN Economic Community began. The content can be words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes, or any communicated message.

Measurement in content analysis uses structured observation: systematic, careful observation based on written rules (Neuman, 2013).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Twitter Analytic Data

**Table 1.** Profile of Follower @Portal\_Kemlu\_RI

Total	: 64.129
Gender	: 65% Male & 35% Female.
Language	: 97% English speakers, 3% Spanish, 1% Arabic, 1% Japanese and 1% Korean.
Demography	: 92 % in Indonesia, 1% in Unites States, <1% in Australia, <1% in Malaysia
Top interest	: Business and News

Data from @Portal\_Kemlu\_RI above are gathered using Twitter analytic tools and is valid per 8 June 2016.

### Twitter Content Data

There are 135 tweets about the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) from November 2015 to January 2016 with up to 290.118 total impression, 5.655 engagements and 1.053 re-tweets.

**Table 2.** Twitter Content Data of @Portal\_Kemlu\_RI about AEC, November 2015-January 2016

	<b>Total Tweet per Month</b>	<b>Impressions</b>	<b>Engagements</b>	<b>Re-tweets</b>
<b>November 2015</b>	41	109.658	3.678	433
<b>December 2015</b>	69	127.693	1.236	446
<b>January 2016</b>	23	52.767	741	174
<b>TOTAL</b>	133	290.118	5.655	1.053

**The most re-tweet tweet:** “*Presiden RI, Joko Widodo, tiba di Kuala Lumpur untuk hadir KTT ke-27 ASEAN #ASEANSummit2015*” (28 re-tweets) It is about the President of republic Indonesia, Joko Widodo, has arrived in Kuala Lumpur to attend the ASEAN 27<sup>th</sup> Summit with a hashtag “ASEANSummit2015”

**The highest impression tweet:** “Bilateral meeting between President & PM of Viet Nam Nguyễn Tấn Dũng (22/11)” (7870 impression)

**The highest engagement tweet:** “Bilateral meeting between President & PM of Viet Nam Nguyễn Tấn Dũng (22/11)” (314 engagement)

The regularity and intensity of tweeting AEC-related information increases in December 2015, due to the official launch of ASEAN Economic Community on December 31, 2015.

Based on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ tweet compilation from November to December 2015 in relation with the four transformative goals of digital diplomacy in the previous chapter, most of tweets categorized as *information management*. (Hanson, 2012). It shows that Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Indonesia using Twitter to post about government’s policies, event, or any other update to public or, to be specific, followers. There were a significant number of tweets increases from November to December 2015, because it was approaching the official launch day of ASEAN Economic Community on December 31, 2015. Therefore, the intensity of tweets and engagement with the followers escalated.

Data accumulation shows there are 112 tweets that falls under *information management*. The goal is to disseminate information to public about current policies or government updates. One example of a tweet in this category: “*Jakarta is the host of ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (AIPR) aims to promote values of peace in #ASEAN #ASEANisUS*”

Synergy and connectivity with other government bodies are also important. The Twitter data shows there are 21 tweets that were related to another Twitter account of government’s institution. The ministry account regularly mentioned other account, such as official account of President of Republic of Indonesia or international institution. It proves that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs utilizing social media by *connecting*

to another account. The objective of *connecting* is to sustain a good relation and to build a good reputation towards the ASEAN Economic Community. One example of the tweet in this category: “*Bilateral meeting between President @jokowi and PM of New Zealand @johnkeypm on the sidelines of #ASEANSummit2015*”

Based on the analysis above, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs implemented the Social Media Integration Model in their Twitter account. The objective is to enhance the usage of social networking sites in their digital diplomacy goal.

The research provided three recommendations. First, in order to deliver a message more effectively, it is highly recommended to create a specific hashtag for a specific target group. The hashtag should be interesting and relevant. It will be useful for both provider (the ministry’s Twitter account) and receiver (Twitter user in general, or follower in particular). It will make the online search easier since the issues or topics are organized based on each hashtag. The choice of hashtag can also be used for branding the program, the ministry or the country. On top of that, it potentially encourages more interaction and engagement. Twitter Research Department stated that hashtags enhance 16% of engagement (Rogers, 2014).

The second recommendation is related to the target audience. Since the target audience of the post about AEC is varied, @Portal\_Kemlu\_RI should customize the message accordingly. Based on the collected tweet, most of the messages are formal and targeted to professionals, while actually many other groups are also affected by AEC. Therefore, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should consider modifying the message so that it can also reach a wider audience. Different target audiences will have to be approached with different content. For example, a post about the ASEAN Economic Community for millennials should be presented with a more up-to-date term and language.

Thirdly, it is suggested in order to maximize the social media usage, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should frequently post a live-tweet and open discussion about a particular topic or event. It potentially increases the audience engagement to the topic and the account. Last but not least, to engage more with the audience, the Ministry’s Twitter account should present more visual content such as photos and short videos. It will attract

people's interest in reading it. The more people interact with a tweet, the better engagement it created.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the data and finding above, it can be concluded that digital diplomacy is a new method of implementing diplomatic communication. The nature of this new approach is to mediate the message using social media platform. This approach is actually a complement to the conventional diplomacy that has been practiced. Ministry of Foreign Affairs aware that in order to achieve their communication goals in this internet era, they have to upgrade and adopt the new approach to support the conventional way of diplomacy. The public engagement on AEC topics shared via Twitter Account of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia can be seen from the usage of content of account. Engagement can be counted from the total amount of user interact with a post in Twitter. It encompasses every respond to a tweet, such as retweets, replies, follows, likes, or sharing photo or media or hashtag. Another measurement is impression. It can be defined as the possibility of a tweet reach its potential audience.

There are 5655 engagement and 290118 impressions in the period of research. As much as 83% of tweets (112 of 135 tweets) are used for *information management* based on transformative goal of digital diplomacy theory). The account is used to disseminate information on specific topic, respond to social and political movement and inform policy-making process.

There are three hashtags related to ASEAN Economic Community from November 2015-January 2016 which are #ASEANisUS #ASEANAdalahKITA #MEA2015 which are good to boost Twitter engagement and impression. ASEAN adalah Kita is hashtag in Bahasa or Indonesian Language, it has a similar meaning with ASEAN is Us.

Basically, the ministry has put lots of efforts in implementing good public relation strategy. According to Public Relation model, they are practicing two-way symmetric model. They apply this two-way communication method in their digital diplomacy strategy. The purpose is to maintain good reputation and relation with stakeholders and

public. However, since the numbers of followers and shared tweet are still average, the ministry should reformulate a more interesting and relevant post in their social media so that it will reach their audience effectively.

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