

The Characteristics of Indonesian Digital Diplomacy

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Abstract

Digital diplomacy has gained momentum in recent years, especially when the COVID-19 pandemic occurred in 2020. The popularity of digital diplomacy lied in its characteristics where it offered more access to information, dialogic communication as well as transparency in diplomacy as had been implemented by many developed countries. However, recent studies have not focused yet on digital diplomacy implementation by non-developed countries. The research aimed to address the gap, by offering an analysis of the characteristics of and how Indonesia has implemented digital diplomacy. As every country had developed their respective path towards digitalisation and every Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) has its own evolution of digital diplomacy, each of which has its own characteristics in implementing digital diplomacy. The research focused on the characteristics of a country which has implemented digital diplomacy. Thus, the research tried to examine the characteristics of Indonesia's digital diplomacy. The research argued that Indonesia's digital diplomacy initiatives are based on a limited understanding of digital diplomacy, are sporadically pursued, and are based on an *ad hoc* basis. The domestic public's interest in international issues further encourages the implementation of digital instruments. The research covered three main issues, namely the COVID-19 pandemic, the issue of palm oil, and the Rohingya crisis to establish the characteristics of Indonesian digital diplomacy. The qualitative research used primary sources in the form of interviews with Indonesian diplomats and key researchers. Furthermore, secondary sources related to Indonesia's digital diplomacy are also used to support the research.

Keywords: characteristics, digital diplomacy, Indonesia

Introduction

“Our inability to keep up with technological leaps could leave us left behind. Likewise with diplomacy. If you cannot adapt to the rapid transformation, diplomacy will no longer be relevant. That is why now is the time for us to juxtapose diplomacy with digitalisation.”

(Kementerian Luar Negeri RI, 2019).¹

- Indonesian Foreign Minister, Retno Marsudi.

Digital diplomacy has gained momentum in recent years, especially when the COVID-19 pandemic occurred in 2020. Every Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) start to utilise digital tools to practice diplomacy. During the pandemic, digital diplomacy has been utilised mainly to combat disinformation, provide consular assistance, and manage a country's national image (Bjola & Manor, 2020). The popularity of digital diplomacy lies in its characteristics where it offers more access to information, dialogic communication as well as transparency in diplomacy (Manor, 2016; Rashica, 2018). These characteristics are based on observations of digital diplomacy practices by developed countries, such as the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States, and there are various examples of their work by the three countries. The United Kingdom's Foreign and Commonwealth Office strives to support Britain's image (Pamment, 2016) and their work ranges from blogs to social media used by British diplomats to interact and explain complicated issues regarding British foreign policy digitally (Pamment, 2016; Fletcher, 2017). The Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has its 'Global Dialogue' initiative to listen to people's opinions through an online discussion where people can contribute to foreign policymaking (Paris, 2013). The US used Twitter during the negotiation process for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (Duncombe, 2017).

While the practice of digital diplomacy has intensified, there is still limited research and studies about digital diplomacy by non-major economies. Research about digital diplomacy is mainly focused on the practices of developed countries or the development of digitalisation in diplomacy (Paris, 2013; Bjola & Jiang, 2015; Pamment, 2016; Manor, 2016; Fletcher, 2017; Duncombe, 2017; Manor, 2019). Recent studies have not focused on the execution of digital diplomacy by non-developed countries. The research aims to address the gap by offering an analysis of the characteristics of and how Indonesia has implemented digital diplomacy.

Thus far, research topics about Indonesian digital diplomacy have mostly been critical, questioning the challenges and focus of the country's digital diplomacy. One of the main criticisms is that Indonesia's digital diplomacy is still not digital enough. Numerous discussions and analyses have underlined that Indonesia's digital initiatives are only utilised as a tool for information dissemination which only serves as an online form of any paper-based documents. Indonesia's digital diplomacy initiatives are carried out without a clear objective or strategy. Moreover, digital infrastructure issues and bureaucracy hamper the

¹The original statement is, “Ketidakmampuan kita dalam mengikuti lompatan teknologi akan membuat kita tertinggal. Begitu juga dengan diplomasi. Bila tidak dapat menyesuaikan dengan transformasi yang cepat, diplomasi tidak akan relevan lagi. Itulah sebabnya sekarang ini saatnya kita menyandingkan diplomasi dengan digital.”

country's digital transformation journey. Some scholars and researchers argue that Indonesia is carrying out its digital diplomacy like a headless chicken (personal communications; Madu, 2018; Andika, Pamungkas, & Badaruddin, 2019; Hartati, 2018). The focus of digital instruments in Indonesian diplomacy is another area that has drawn open discussions with some arguing that the country should use it to focus on public diplomacy while others believe that it should serve broader diplomatic interests (Madu, Sugiarto, & Amiri, 2017; Pohan et al., 2017; Dwikardana et al., 2017).

Achieving success in digital diplomacy does not happen overnight and Indonesia's digital diplomacy is still developing. In addition, there is no grand digital diplomacy strategy that can apply to all countries. Instead, digital diplomacy is built on knowledge and experiences which then contributes to the unique characteristics of digital diplomacy of every MoFA, including Indonesia's. Therefore, the evolution of digital diplomacy varies from state to state (Rashica, 2018; Manor, 2016; Manor, 2019). The opening statement from Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi suggests the urgency for Indonesian diplomacy to adapt to the latest technological advancements. She further elaborates on the function of technological innovation to support foreign policy agendas, namely citizen protection, promoting peaceful messages, strengthening economic cooperation, and as a tool to promote development. Technological innovation, such as social media, has been utilized by many MoFAs to fulfil various foreign policy objectives, such as analysing public opinion, combating disinformation or as a tool for information dissemination to reach a wider audience. The inability to adapt to current technological progress will leave any MoFA behind and make it difficult to take advantage of new opportunities, for example, an innovation-oriented economy or to simply face new situations in the future (Margiansyah, 2020; Bjola and Manor, 2020). This indicates that the Indonesian MoFA is trying to adapt and find the best understanding of digital diplomacy within the country's diplomacy.

Every country has developed its own path towards digitalisation and every MoFA has its own evolution of digital diplomacy. Each MoFA, in the end, will have their own characteristics in implementing digital diplomacy (Manor, 2019), including the Indonesian MoFA. This article will offer fresh insight into the understanding of digital diplomacy, specifically digital diplomacy from the perspective of non-major powers and their characteristics which are seldom discussed. This article seeks to answer the question: What are the characteristics of Indonesia's digital diplomacy? The research argues that Indonesia's digital diplomacy initiatives are based on a limited understanding of digital diplomacy, are sporadically pursued, and are based on an *ad hoc* basis. The domestic public's interest in international issues further encourages the use of digital instruments. Initial digital initiatives were based on diplomats' aspirations or were conducted as a response to a domestic concern.

Methodology

The research uses three case studies to assess the characteristics of Indonesian digital diplomacy. The selection of three case studies is based on the focus of Indonesia's digital diplomacy as mentioned by Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi, namely concerning citizen

protection, promoting peaceful messages, strengthening economic cooperation, and as a tool to promote development. The first case study takes on citizen protection, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Digital instruments helped the Indonesian MoFA to fulfil its objectives during the pandemic in 2020 when it strongly focused on citizen protection matters. The second case study is on palm oil as it is one of Indonesia's key economic commodities and was a focal point for the country's first digital diplomacy activities. This helps to draw important lessons from the very beginning of Indonesia's digital diplomacy journey and to better analyse its characteristics. Lastly, the case of the Rohingya crisis will also be used to analyse Indonesia's interest in projecting a peaceful message as well as promoting development in a regional context. This research helps to comprehend the characteristics of Indonesia's digital initiatives concerning the country's core foreign policy principle of *bebas aktif* (independent and active). Multiple case studies are covered to build a general explanation that fits with the main topic and provides in-depth insights into Indonesian digital diplomacy (Meriam & Tidsel, 2016). Moreover, the research focuses mainly on the use of Twitter because it is the only social media network that is connected to the Indonesian MoFA's website. All Indonesian overseas Missions have their own Twitter account that is connected directly to the Indonesian MoFA's official website. Other social media channels, such as YouTube, Facebook and blogs are also assessed to complement the analysis since they are deemed important by Indonesian diplomats (personal communication).

This qualitative research uses primary data from interviews with key Indonesian diplomats and officers in the Indonesian MoFA as well as with researchers and academicians. The interviews were with Indonesian diplomats who are directly involved in the conduct of Indonesian digital diplomacy, such as the Directorate General of Information and Public Diplomacy and the Directorate of Information and Media. Meanwhile, researchers and academicians who specialise in Indonesian digital diplomacy were also interviewed to enrich the analysis. In total, 17 interviews were conducted for this research. Secondary data is also used to complement the analysis and triangulate the data being presented. The research additionally uses the interpretative approach and thus, Indonesia's digital diplomacy characteristics will be analysed based on the author's interpretation of interviews, collected documents and information (Stake, 1995). The research seeks to present the characteristics of Indonesian digital diplomacy; it is not intended to show or analyse its effectiveness.

To discuss and explain the arguments, the research has been divided into six parts. After the introduction and research method, the third part discusses the analytical framework which gives a glance at digital diplomacy, namely its definition and the main characteristics. The fourth and fifth parts will be the analysis of Indonesian digital diplomacy using the three case studies encompassing citizen protection during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, palm oil and the Rohingya crisis. An analysis of the characteristics of Indonesian digital diplomacy has also been provided. A conclusion will be drawn to summarize the discussion about the characteristics of Indonesia's digital diplomacy and is presented in the final part of the research.

Analytical Framework

Digital diplomacy emphasises the utilisation of information and communication technologies (ICT), in particular the internet and social media, to support diplomatic practices including public communication, negotiations, and consular services. This phenomenon distinguishes the practice of digital diplomacy apart from traditional diplomacy as well as offers new aspects to understanding the use of ICT in diplomacy. Characteristics refer to the core elements of a particular thing which, for this research, is the conduct of digital diplomacy (Manor, 2016; Rashica, 2018).

The first characteristic of digital diplomacy is the nature of the practice which is the element of newness in how diplomacy is performed. There are multiple definitions of digital diplomacy and scholars also use various terms such as e-diplomacy, cyber diplomacy, 'twiplomacy,' and diplomacy 2.0 to explain the concept. These terms have been used interchangeably by several scholars to capture the recent phenomenon of communications technologies in diplomacy (Adesina, 2017; Hocking & Melissen, 2015; Hanson, 2015). One of the early scholars who captured the phenomenon was Hanson; other scholars include Bjola and Holmes. Hanson referred to the adoption of ICT in diplomacy as 'e-diplomacy,' and defined it as "the use of the internet and new ICT to help carry out diplomatic objectives" (Hanson, 2015). According to Bjola and Jiang (2015), digital diplomacy is "the use of social media for diplomatic purposes, could change practices of how diplomats engage in information management, public diplomacy, strategy planning, international negotiations or even crisis management." Similarly, Holmes (2015) describes digital diplomacy as "a strategy of managing change through digital tools and virtual collaboration." Taking this understanding into consideration, digital instruments, such as social media or the internet, serve one of the most important aspects of diplomacy: a medium of communication. Digital tools help with information dissemination and managing changes in international affairs.

A distinctive aspect of digital diplomacy is the role of digital instruments to unlock the possibility of two-way communication and to create more transparent communication in diplomacy. Social media is a significant communication tool for exercising transparency and makes communication with diplomatic actors possible as it removes the barriers that had previously made it unfeasible to do. In general, digital instruments are considered active, interactive, reflective, and multidimensional tools. Further, it enhances communication between MoFAs, diplomats, Foreign Ministers, multinational corporations and the public as it offers proximity between audiences (Rashica, 2018). Two-way communication enables MoFAs to inform the public about a specific issue while also serving as a knowledge management tool so that national interests can be achieved (Rashica, 2018). Online discussions offer diplomats the chance to listen and readjust their agenda, reduce misinformation, and enhance mutual understanding (Bjola & Jiang, 2015). According to Holmes (2015), the essence of digital diplomacy is to help diplomats evaluate a situation.

The next characteristic of digital diplomacy is related to timing, tempo, consistency, commitment and content. Timing and tempo refer to the period needed to apply digital initiatives, hence, digital experiments are required to find the exact type of digital diplomacy

that works the best (Rashica, 2018). Consistency and commitment are crucial to digital diplomacy since engagement and interactive communication are built from long-term relationships (Bjola & Jiang, 2015; Manor, 2019). Moreover, digital diplomacy also needs to reflect actual reality because digital initiatives can be effective if the content is relevant and offer context to the audience (Rashica, 2018).

Another characteristic of digital diplomacy is that it reflects the interaction between the domestic and foreign agendas. Domestic interests will influence the diplomatic channels being utilised for pursuing foreign policy as it interacts with international changes. The MoFA or diplomats will adjust the foreign policy to not neglect domestic demands (Doeser, 2010). As suggested by Bjola and Manor, “the rise of social media makes governments and MFAs more likely to digitally engage with their citizens as a way of shaping their online views hence potentially securing their support for certain foreign policies” (Bjola & Manor, 2018). As such, digital diplomacy could be influenced by the domestic agenda while, at the same time, MoFAs project certain values and beliefs to a foreign audience based on the pursued national interests (Manor, 2019).

Analysis

Before elaborating on the characteristics of Indonesian digital diplomacy, it is important to understand the background of the three case studies highlighted in this research. The selected case studies demonstrate the focus of Indonesia’s foreign policy concerning the use of digital instruments. This section provides a brief background to introduce the three case studies and will be followed by a discussion section as well as an analysis of Indonesia’s digital diplomacy characteristics based on what has been conducted.

Indonesia’s Digital Diplomacy: Three Case Studies

The COVID-19 Pandemic

Executing digital diplomacy for citizen protection started before the pandemic. The importance of digital instruments for citizen protection was first mentioned in the Annual Press Statement in 2017. The press statement underlined the establishment of a digital command centre to support Indonesia’s digital diplomacy and in particular, mentioned the use of technology (mobile applications) in the protection of Indonesian citizens (Kementerian Luar Negeri Republik Indonesia, 2017). During the Regional Conference on Digital Diplomacy (RCDD) in 2019, Minister Marsudi made an assertive statement saying, “Digital diplomacy is a tool for the protection of our citizens. I believe that when it is used effectively, the internet can be an excellent tool for protecting our citizens and national interests abroad” (Sinaga, 2019). The protection using mobile applications is provided by giving an update about local situations where the Indonesian Missions are located as well as an emergency button through

the Safe Travel mobile application. The Indonesian MoFA also uses SMS Blast to inform citizens about the emergency contact of the closest Indonesian Mission in the user's area.

In 2020, the Indonesian MoFA issued their 4+1 priorities in the Annual Press Statement which notably underscored the issue of protection in Indonesian diplomacy alongside additional priorities of strengthening economic diplomacy, sovereignty and national diplomacy, and Indonesia's role in the region and globally. Another objective of the 4+1 programme was to strengthen the country's diplomatic infrastructure (Kementerian Luar Negeri Republik Indonesia, 2020c). The MoFA and many Indonesian diplomats find digital instruments' focus on citizens as important and the implementation is considered a success (personal communication; Dharossa & Rezasyah, 2020). Some of the Indonesian government's programs on citizen protection include the Safe Travel app, SMS Blast (Andika, et al., 2019), and *Portal Peduli WNI*. To popularise digital diplomacy, the Indonesian MoFA promoted the hashtag #NegaraMelindungi which means 'the state protects' on various social media platforms. The use of the hashtag aimed to symbolise the presence of the state in a crisis for Indonesian citizens (Madu, 2018).

The COVID-19 virus grabbed the world's attention when the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it a pandemic on 11 March 2020 even though attention on the virus had begun several months before. On 31 December 2019, China reported new cases of pneumonia in Wuhan to the WHO then on 7 January 2020, the virus was identified as a novel coronavirus. After the health crisis was listed as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020, the situation grew substantially tense as the number of COVID-related deaths rose and many countries began the repatriation process.

Palm Oil

Palm oil is an important commodity for the Indonesian economy and diplomacy is a significant tool to support its marketability. Indonesia's diplomacy encompasses economic activities to promote Indonesian products around the world. With the emphasis on economic diplomacy in 2020, as stipulated in the Annual Press Statement (Kementerian Luar Negeri Republik Indonesia, 2020c), promoting palm oil has become more prominent in the work of the Indonesian MoFA. Besides the use of traditional diplomatic practices, such as lobbying or trade agreements, the MoFA also turns to digital diplomacy to promote Indonesian palm oil and to counter negative campaigns or narratives against the commodity. As such, digital diplomacy initiatives undertaken by Indonesian Missions and diplomats are essential in supporting palm oil attractiveness. Moreover, its implementation aims to bridge the domestic public's response in Indonesia and foreign audiences regarding the industry.

Diplomatic efforts to support the palm oil industry can be traced back to the anti-palm oil campaign in the early 2000s. One of the initial negative campaigns on record by the Government of Indonesia (GOI) was the Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth campaigns. Both organisations' campaigns took issue with the cultivation, import, and commercial use of palm oil. The campaign had ranged from opposing the shipments of palm oil to developed

countries to lobbying European officials and executives to ban the import of palm oil as biofuel. The campaign also demanded palm oil advertisements be banned on television. In 2008, the European Union (EU) expressed its concerns over deforestation resulting from the palm oil industry and started limiting biofuel products derived from palm oil to the region (Pusat Pengkajian dan Pengembangan Kebijakan Multilateral Badan Pengkajian dan Pengembangan Kebijakan Kementerian Luar Negeri RI, 2019). In 2017, the European Parliament passed a resolution to abolish and prohibit the use of biofuels made from palm oil because it is perceived to be the main factor of deforestation in Indonesia (Elfadina, 2021). In 2019, the EU Commission issued a document entitled the 'Delegated Act for Renewable Energy Directive (RED) II' which listed palm oil as a high-risk commodity, mainly because it is a primary material for biofuels with is linked to deforestation (Pusat Pengkajian dan Pengembangan Kebijakan Multilateral Badan Pengkajian dan Pengembangan Kebijakan Kementerian Luar Negeri RI, 2019). The EU also cited the impacts of palm oil on the degradation of animal habitats, corruption, child labour, and human rights violations ("Perkembangan mutakhir industri", 2021; Sidik, 2021).

For Indonesia, the narrative in Europe about the country's palm oil industry was viewed as an unfair trade practice. First, the narrative and the Delegated Act for RED II were perceived to solely target palm oil while similar standards were rarely applied to other vegetable oils. Second, the standard being used did not reflect the real situation of the palm oil industry. The palm oil industry is better in terms of land use efficiency, productivity rate and price. This made other vegetable oils difficult to compete with palm oil (personal communication with a high-ranking officer in the Indonesian MoFA, Indonesian diplomats, and a representative from the Indonesian Palm Oil Entrepreneurs Association/GAPKI; Pusat Pengkajian dan Pengembangan Kebijakan Multilateral Badan Pengkajian dan Pengembangan Kebijakan Kementerian Luar Negeri RI, 2019). As a result, Indonesia's stance to fight the unfair practice of palm oil has mostly been directed at European countries and the EU.

In 2011, the GOI supported the decision of GAPKI to leave its membership in the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) (Barus, 2011). RSPO is known as a not-for-profit multistakeholder initiative that set the standards for sustainable palm oil (RSPO, 2023). For the GOI, the narrative by RSPO is perceived to be unfair towards Indonesia's palm oil. In one interview, former Indonesian Minister of Industry M.S. Hidayat stated, "In fact, I support the decision (to leave RSPO), my friends have been treated unfairly by RSPO all this time" (Barus, 2011). Then the GOI launched Indonesia Sustainable Palm Oil (ISPO) in 2011 to set the national standard for good governance and sustainability of the palm oil industry (Pusat Pengkajian dan Pengembangan Kebijakan Multilateral Badan Pengkajian dan Pengembangan Kebijakan Kementerian Luar Negeri RI, 2019). Through the platform, Indonesia has consistently tried to counter negative campaigns concerning the palm oil industry and instead built its narrative to promote Indonesian palm oil products. As one of the researchers in a research organisation recalled,

"In my opinion, there is an evolution of narrative built by the government. When Indonesia gradually became the biggest producer of palm oil, many started to criticise the socio-economic and ecological impact. These criticisms, which the government

opposes, are considered based more on the foreign narrative. As a result, the government started to promote its narrative around 2013” (personal communication).

Digital diplomacy is deemed necessary to promote palm oil and this view emerged during a period when a greater awareness of strategic digital communication happened. For example, the existence of social media and blogs to counter negative campaigns against palm oil. Research conducted by the Policy Analysis and Development Agency of Indonesian MoFA in 2019 found that many negative campaigns were on social media, including campaigns by Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth. The outcome led to a suggestion for the MoFA to place their attention on using social media to promote Indonesian palm oil (Pusat Pengkajian dan Pengembangan Kebijakan Multilateral Badan Pengkajian dan Pengembangan Kebijakan Kementerian Luar Negeri RI, 2019). This recommendation underscored the possibility of digital diplomacy playing integral role to counter negative narratives and instead, promoting Indonesia’s narrative to the public. In addition, digital diplomacy was viewed as an instrument to reach foreign and domestic audiences. A high-ranking officer in the Policy Analysis and Development Agency stipulated,

“... specifically for palm oil, we also have to provide information to the domestic public so that they can understand. The domestic public needs to understand what the issue really is. If the public understands the issue, we can find a better solution nationally. That's why the issue of palm oil is internal and external” (personal communication).

The Rohingya Crisis

The Rohingya crisis is viewed as a religious as well as a politically- and economically-driven conflict (Mohajan, 2018). The Rohingyas live in the Rakhine state of Myanmar and are predominantly Muslim. Most Burmese people find the minority group to be economically developed and successful. As a minority community in Myanmar which is surrounded by Muslim countries such as Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia, the Burmese people feared the Rohingyas lack loyalty to the country. This fear has led to their discrimination and persecution by the Government of Myanmar, creating a long-lasting series of violent clashes (Wolf, 2017). These clashes have forced many Rohingyas to flee Myanmar and sparked a refugee crisis in neighbouring countries in 2015. Since the 1970s, around 1.6 million Rohingyas have sought refuge in neighbouring countries with many arriving in Bangladesh (Sengupta, 2021), while others find themselves stranded in Malaysia, India or Indonesia. The situation in Rakhine state began deteriorating in 2012 following the formation of a Rohingya insurgent group The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) (Sengupta, 2021). In 2015, Indonesia welcomed Rohingya refugees found stranded in Indonesian waters near Aceh after receiving immense pressure from the local and international communities (“Apa kata media Asia Tenggara”, 2015; Pasuhuk, 2015; Moy & Kusuma, 2016).

Indonesia’s digital diplomacy approach to the Rohingya refugees has been distinct compared to the COVID-19 and palm oil topics. On one hand, Indonesia is not a party with direct involvement in the case and the main cause of the crisis did not derive from Indonesia.

On the other hand, Indonesia finds interest in the issue and some aspects are linked to the topic. First, Indonesia's *bebas aktif* principle has instilled a sense of responsibility for the country to be involved. Indonesia's support of the idea of world peace fosters an obligatory sense of responsibility to actively partake in peacebuilding (Sundari, Prayuda, & Sary, 2021). Second, the crisis involves Southeast Asia, a region that is central to Indonesia's foreign policy and is deemed vital for the country (Pujayanti, 2017). Lastly, as the country with the world's largest Muslim population, Indonesia is a proponent of building and promoting a narrative where democracy and Islam can mutually co-exist (Sukma, 2011). The international community and local community have pressed the GOI to take up involvement in the crisis on the grounds of Muslim brotherhood ("Thousands of Indonesians join", 2017). Taking into consideration the three factors, Indonesia hones in on digital diplomacy to maximise and fulfil its national interests.

Characteristics of Indonesia's Digital Diplomacy

The first characteristic is the Indonesian MoFA's understanding of digital diplomacy. In 2018, the MoFA sought to define digital diplomacy. Through Foreign Minister Decree Number 42 in 2018 (Keputusan Menteri Luar Negeri Republik Indonesia Nomor 42/B/RO/I/2018/01) they defined digital diplomacy as,

'Digital diplomacy is diplomacy carried out by using the internet to achieve the expected goals. Digital diplomacy offers a new way of communicating in support of diplomacy activities, both aimed at stakeholders, other countries, and the public. Digital diplomacy is aimed at collecting and analysing important information to support foreign policy; communicating foreign policy positions; and protect the interests of the state and citizens.'²

As the research is written in the middle of 2022, the practices of digital diplomacy by Indonesia's MoFA, its Missions and diplomats have shown that the understanding is still limited to information dissemination. Digital instruments, such as Twitter, are merely viewed as a tool that can reach a wider audience to provide information about Indonesia's foreign policy, economic opportunities or other important updates like COVID-19 regulations. It is not yet realized as a medium for two-way communication to absorb and influence digital public opinion. This perception is affected by the claim that digital instruments are only diplomatic tools and as a result, digital diplomacy is a tool to complement traditional diplomacy. Many Indonesian diplomats share that opinion and further argue that digital diplomacy will never be on par with traditional diplomacy (personal communications). One

² The original definition is "*Diplomasi Digital adalah diplomasi yang dilakukan dengan menggunakan internet untuk mencapai tujuan yang diharapkan. Diplomasi digital menawarkan cara baru dalam berkomunikasi dalam mendukung aktifitas diplomasi, baik yang ditujukan kepada pemangku kepentingan, negara lain, serta publik. Diplomasi digital ditujukan dalam rangka mengumpulkan dan menganalisis informasi-informasi penting untuk mendukung kebijakan luar negeri; mengkomunikasikan posisi kebijakan luar negeri; serta melindungi kepentingan negara dan warga negara.*"

of the reasons is the assumption that digital channels do not provide sufficient informal sessions for a discussion. The transparency aspect driven by the way social media functions has hindered the possibility of informal discussions thus causing many Indonesian diplomats to be cautious before tweeting a post. Therefore, they only tweet a post deemed safe and cordial or anything that is not sensitive and trouble-free and in addition, has already been approved by the headquarters.

Despite the significance of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Indonesian MoFA's digital activities focus mainly on information dissemination. As stated by an Indonesian diplomat, social media use is mainly to inform Indonesian citizens about recent COVID-19 protocols and regulations in the area of Indonesian Missions. An Indonesian diplomat in Germany commented,

“The event (pandemic) is timely and it is related to our citizens. For the protection of our citizens, it makes it easier for us to use digital diplomacy. During the pandemic, having digital platforms has been really helpful for issuing announcements that we can share with our friends and citizens here. We can also inform citizens about COVID-related protocols and others...” (personal communication).



Figure 1 Indonesian MoFA Updates on COVID-19 Situation

Source: MoFA Indonesia, 2020d.

The headquarters in Jakarta has actively posted tweets about the current situation of the pandemic from all around the world by updating the information about Indonesian citizens being infected worldwide (Figure 1). This is a form of one-way communication and does not generate any conversation between the public and the MoFA. Even when the headquarters actively used the hashtags #NegaraMelindungi and received a reply or repost by the

domestic, the Indonesian MoFA seldom responded. When a conversation is needed, Indonesian diplomats and Missions tend to reply through the direct messaging feature and contact the person directly. This reaffirms the notion that the objective of social media is to manage the information dissemination process and help to make sense of the overall situation (personal communication). Nevertheless, this aspect makes digital diplomacy on citizen protection different from any other initial technology-driven application used before. Social media makes it possible to expand the audience reach compared to the Safe Travel application which only targeted Indonesian citizens going abroad. The use of Twitter or Facebook is simply easier and more effective to widen audience outreach, especially with the use of hashtags. The momentum and responsiveness can be seen through many hashtags being used and the dedicated tweets on citizen protection. Hashtags are useful in reaching a new audience who show an interest in a particular issue (Manor, 2019). After the situation is well-perceived, the follow-up action is usually a direct traditional communication. This is mainly because Indonesia’s digital training emphasized on remaining cautious when performing digital diplomacy and avoiding online debates (personal communication). And thus, when a tweet about the repatriation of Indonesian citizens from Wuhan gained online popularity among Indonesians – receiving 879 retweets and 1,377 likes (as of September 2021; MoFA Indonesia, 2020c) – the Indonesian MoFA did not offer a single reply or comment.

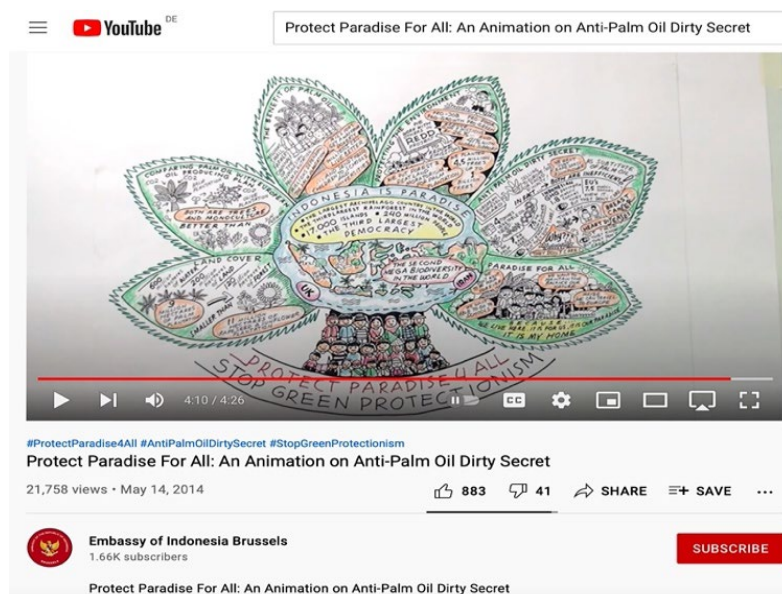


Figure 2 YouTube Video by the Indonesian Embassy in Brussels

Source: Embassy of Indonesia Brussels, 2014.

Most of the tweets about palm oil are intended to counter any negative narrative and thus, Indonesian diplomats typically share positive and more factual data about Indonesian palm oil. One of the examples is the video ‘Protect Paradise for All: An Animation on Anti-Palm Oil Dirty Secret’ by the Indonesian Embassy in Brussels which was posted on YouTube

and promoted on Twitter and Facebook. The video offered insights into land use in Indonesia, the benefits of palm oil, Indonesia's efforts to protect the environment, and the negative palm oil campaigns (Figure 2) (Embassy of Indonesia Brussels, 2014). Such videos were intended to distribute true and recent facts about the sector whilst their circulation on social media was intended to reinforce Indonesia's narrative and to reach a wider audience (personal communication). Once again, the digital initiative was another act of information dissemination on social media. There was no two-way communication achieved to discuss palm oil in Europe on social media such as Twitter, Facebook or YouTube. A comment box on YouTube was even closed by the embassy (as of August 2022) and one of the reasons was so it would not spark an online debate which can result in a backlash for Indonesian diplomacy (personal communication).

Digital activities on social media on the Rohingya crisis were more difficult to find as most were only posted for informative reasons and to show Indonesia's actions to solve the crisis; most of the messages were a repost of messages from Jakarta. This was due to the sensitive nature of the topic in the Southeast Asian region as well as in Indonesia. Thus, the Indonesian MoFA and its Mission in Yangon only tweeted safe and cordial messages. A high-ranking officer in the MoFA stated,

"We often did not exercise digital diplomacy on the issue of the Rohingyas because we are very careful about Myanmar. It is quite difficult for us to draft a good wording digitally, especially when we need to appease the domestic audience while displaying a firm position internationally" (personal communication).

The number of published posts also did not result in any two-way communication. All three case studies have shown that the Indonesian MoFA and its Missions perform digital diplomacy mostly for information dissemination and knowledge management. Indonesia's digital diplomacy or the use of digital instruments does not comprise two-way communication even though the implementation is to promote transparency.

When assessing the timing, tempo, consistency, commitment and content components, Indonesia applies digital diplomacy predominantly based on a specific moment or situation that requires extra attention. As a consequence, even though the timing of the digital initiative is correct, the Indonesian MoFA and its Missions oftentimes execute it sporadically and on an *ad hoc* basis. Over time, no consistency or relationship transpires with the online audience because the topic of digital initiatives constantly changes. What can be gathered is that one digital initiative about Indonesian diplomacy or foreign policy is published only at specific times. There is no follow-up discussion or continuation from the first initiative and ultimately acts as a one-shot digital activity. As such, digital diplomacy initiatives emerge when deemed necessary because the situation requires digital communication or dissemination of information. In many cases, a digital activity starts from diplomats' personal initiative since they have an awareness of the situation on the ground. To date, there is no general digital diplomacy strategy developed by the headquarters in Jakarta. There is only a general regulation about digital media management via Regulation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Number 10 in 2018. Therefore, the execution of digital initiatives is left to each of the

Indonesian Missions and its diplomats while reflecting the reality and making it relevant to the audience as it is based on the current situation.

The characteristic of sporadic and *ad hoc* performance of digital diplomacy can be seen in the example of the Indonesian digital initiative on palm oil. In 2019, the MoFA created another promotional video which centred on the economic welfare and environmental sustainability of palm oil (MoFA Indonesia, 2019). In 2021, another digital counter-narrative came from the Indonesian Mission in Bern and Geneva to build a positive message around palm oil through a blog called 'Indonesia in Swiss' (Palm Oil in Indonesia, 2021; Laucereno, 2021; personal communication). It featured information about palm oil in Indonesia and controversies on the issue, from general information about Indonesian palm oil, and economic news, to the issue of orangutans. At the time, the blog was regularly updated by the Indonesian Mission to support the economic agreement of the Indonesia-European Free Trade Association Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (I-EFTA CEPA) (personal communication). These two digital initiatives were different than the one in 2014 which had been promoted by the Indonesian Embassy in Brussels. Those three digital initiatives were not connected and were run independently and initiated based on different situations. The blog in 2021 was created to support the referendum in Switzerland concerning the Indonesia-Switzerland economic agreement under the I-EFTA CEPA (Drajat, 2021). Meanwhile, the video promotion in 2019 was created as a response to questions surrounding palm oil governance in Indonesia. The video was different than the first video which was made by the Indonesian Mission in Brussels and there was no cross-promotion between the two Missions involved.



Figure 3. Tweet by Arif Havas O.

Source: Oegroseno, 2021.

Another notable factor is the Indonesian diplomats or Missions which actively engage in digital discussions surrounding palm oil. Their role is an integral aspect in determining what conversation topics about Indonesia are discussed online. Diplomats' engagement hence enables a wider circulation of messages among a larger audience to take place (personal communication). One example is Ambassador Arif Havas who is an Indonesian diplomat known for his active social media engagement on matters of foreign policy issues ranging from palm oil and the South China Sea. He also previously served as Indonesian Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg, and the EU. As of April 2022, he has more than two thousand followers on Twitter and is considered a pioneer and exemplary figure in digital diplomacy among Indonesian diplomats (personal communication). He often discusses the topic of palm oil on Twitter from a critical point of view (Figure 3). In his view, the use of Twitter is part of a larger effort to level the playing field and provide fair facts about palm oil. Ambassador Havas has used social media as an online medium since he was appointed the Ambassador of Indonesia to Belgium in 2010 (personal communication). Since then, he has actively initiated digital activities independently or on behalf of the Indonesian Mission in Brussels. Evidence of his contribution was the video "Protect Paradise for All: An Animation on Anti-Palm Oil Dirty Secret" which was developed and promoted during his tenure as Indonesian Ambassador to Belgium, Luxemburg and the EU. Another example was the 'Indonesia in Swiss' blog which was a joint initiative from the Indonesian Mission in Bern and Geneva.

Citizen protection matters present a different situation because the success of the repatriation process served as momentum for Indonesia's digital diplomacy to inform citizens back home and abroad about the MoFA's policies. The popularity of the social media post indicated success. Even though citizen protection was an existing key national interest for the Indonesian MoFA, the repatriation process demonstrated the Ministry's ability to manage information during a crisis through the use of digital instruments. A high-ranking officer in the MoFA stated,

"... for Indonesia, at this time, the translation of digital diplomacy for citizen protection is indeed the most effective, perfect, and appropriate, ... it is utilised for the interest of all people, so that it is easier to define. Before, it was often assumed that Indonesian Missions overseas are full of secrecy or perhaps considered not close enough to the community, now it is not. Now it is open to the public, where people can come freely, easily, asking for help is simple, and make complaints via Facebook are immediately answered" (personal communication).

The wake of the COVID-19 pandemic intensified the use of the hashtag #NegaraMelindungi. In 2020, the MoFA used the hashtag 258 times on Twitter to give updates related to citizen protection, repatriation, and information regarding COVID-19 measures at overseas Indonesian Missions.³ In essence, diplomacy can benefit from digital diplomacy particularly to inform updates to Indonesian citizens when a face-to-face meeting is impossible. However, the intensity of updates through social media happened because of the

³ Compiled by the author based on hashtag #NegaraMelindungi on Twitter @Kemlu_RI in 2020.

pandemic. No prior citizen-protection-related agenda received that much online attention compared to what took place during the pandemic. The repatriation process of Indonesian citizens from Wuhan was even covered in many posts through various Indonesian MoFA social media channels. It remains to be seen if other citizen protection issues will be covered as intensely in the future.

The sporadic and *ad hoc* performance of digital diplomacy concerning the Rohingya crisis is strongly linked to the domestic situation in Indonesia hence illustrating the interlinking of domestic and foreign agendas. The strategy of handling the Rohingya crisis suggests that the MoFA adopts a cautious approach in how it implements its digital diplomacy. It also reveals how digital diplomacy is affected by incremental and exogenous shocks though it can also be argued that it is influenced by the domestic situation. The domestic pressure forced the GOI to maintain an active digital presence to appease the public at home while at the same time informing the international audience of the country's position concerning the crisis without endangering its national interests.



Figure 4. Indonesian MoFA Tweet on Crisis in Rakhine

Source: MoFA Indonesia, 2017a.

Further assessments on the power of domestic pressure on digital diplomacy include an incident from 2017. At the time, the situation in Rakhine state deteriorated on 25 August 2017 encompassing massive violence, the death of hundreds of Rohingyas, thousands of refugees fleeing, coordinated attacks by Rohingya militants, and a military operation called 'clearance operations' by Myanmar's armed forces to face the Rohingya militant (Wolf, 2017). These events resulted in the GOI condemning the conflict in Rakhine state (Islam, 2017) and they also posted an online statement on 30 August informing Indonesia's stance on the situation. The statement was released in Bahasa Indonesia and outlined the country's seven positions, which were: condemns the attacks of armed groups on 25 August 2017; regrets the loss of life and injuries; expect the Government of Myanmar to take steps to restore security and provide

humanitarian protection; urge all parties to immediately stop the violence in Rakhine State; the cooperation of all stakeholders for peace, security, stability and inclusive development in Rakhine State; conducive conditions in Myanmar, including in Rakhine State, support the maintenance of stability in ASEAN; the Indonesian government will continue to cooperate with Myanmar in the process of reconciliation, democratization and inclusive development (Figure 4).

As a further response to de-escalate the situation, Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi discussed the issue in Myanmar on 3 September 2017 (Virantika, 2017) which also appeared in the Ministry's Twitter account on 4 September (MoFA Indonesia, 2017b). Meanwhile, in Jakarta, many Muslims gathered for an anti-Myanmar protest and to offer support to Rohingya Muslims on 4 September 2017. A day prior, a petrol bomb exploded at the Embassy of Myanmar in Jakarta. The demonstration at the Myanmar Embassy was covered by the Indonesian media and international press (Nurfuadah, 2017; "Thousands of Indonesians join", 2017). The protest lasted several weeks when supporters from *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* (The Prosperous Justice Party/PKS) and Islamic organisations gathered to show Muslim solidarity and condemn the situation in Myanmar. Prabowo Subianto and Sandiaga Uno – prominent candidates for the presidential election in 2019 – attended the event (Fahlevi, 2017). Many local and national Islamic organisations became more vocal and pressured the GOI to be more active internationally to solve the problem (Fauzia, 2017; Smith & Williams, 2021).

To address the Rohingya crisis, Indonesia chose to focus on humanitarian diplomacy. Through humanitarian diplomacy, the GOI was able to fulfil its interest, such as adhering to the ASEAN Way of non-intervention, keeping the region stable, establishing a compelling international position, and responding to domestic public pressure. The GOI's decision to adopt a humanitarian stance during that time was ultimately to share information with the public about the government's actions via the Indonesian MoFA and also the Indonesian Mission in Yangon. They also needed to please the domestic public and avoid stirring further controversies at home. Thus, the MoFA and Indonesian Mission in Yangon were very careful not to initiate any backlash on the government (personal communication). Although asserting a firm position to the international audience was required, extra attention to the domestic situation was equally necessary because of several factors such as Indonesia's history of civil-military relations, the international intervention in East Timor, and the history of ethno-nationalist conflicts (Smith and Williams, 2021). Such emphasis was evident based on a tweet by the MoFA in Bahasa Indonesia (Figure 5) (MoFA Indonesia, 2017) to make it easier to grasp for Indonesians.

The Indonesian Mission in Yangon additionally backed humanitarian diplomacy initiatives where most of the tweets by @KbriYangon about Indonesia's humanitarian assistance in Myanmar were published in Bahasa (for example, see Figure 6) (Indonesia in Yangon, 2017). Following the violent clashes in August and September, the GOI offered its assistance by building a hospital and supporting resettlement measures as well as repatriation of the Rohingya people – all of which were shared on social media by the Indonesian Mission in Yangon.



Figure 5. Tweet by the Indonesian MoFA about the Rohingyas

Source: MoFA Indonesia, 2017c.



Figure 6. Retweet by @KbriYangon from @Kemlu_RI

Source: Indonesia Embassy Yangon, 2017.



Figure 7. Tweet by the Embassy of Indonesia in Brussels

Source: Indonesian Embassy Brussels, 2019.

Furthermore, the interaction between domestic and foreign agendas has also appeared for the palm oil and citizen protection subjects in which the majority of the posts by the Indonesian MoFA and Missions were in Bahasa Indonesia. Even though not all tweets were

issued in Bahasa, there was a significant number of tweets, Instagram and Facebook posts in the language. Another example of how a domestic situation impacts palm oil sustainability was in the digital diplomacy campaigns in response to a conflict between an orangutan and villagers at a palm oil plantation in Indonesia. The orangutan was shot and became blind as a result of the conflict. The incident sparked anger in Indonesia and caused a demonstration demanding jail time for the perpetrators. There was also an online petition urging the government to thoroughly investigate the case and take firm action against the perpetrators and regulate the use of air rifles in the community (Wismabrata, 2019; Arifah, 2019). The incident was then reported by the New York Times (Beech, 2019). To calm the situation, the Indonesian Embassy in Brussels issued a statement and disseminated it digitally including on their official website (Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Brussels, 2019) and Twitter account (Figure 7) (Indonesia Embassy Brussels, 2019). This type of information sharing once again showcased a reaction to a certain situation concerning palm oil. Essentially, the key aspect of relations-building in digital diplomacy was not demonstrated in any of the digital initiatives assessed.

Several researchers in Indonesia underscored the significance of the domestic audience in supporting Indonesian palm oil. Initial criticisms about deforestation and other strategic issues of palm oil were mostly from national and local NGOs in Indonesia thus illustrating the importance of considering the domestic level when tackling palm oil issues (personal communication with a researcher and NGO activist in Indonesia). The GOI thus needed to address the issue for the domestic audience. This highlighted the need to include domestic and foreign audiences as part of digital diplomacy within the context of palm oil. In addition, Indonesian Missions underlined the importance of the domestic audience for accountability reasons and they uphold this by providing a glimpse of their diplomatic work to the public, particularly how diplomats strive to fulfil national interests. This is in keeping with the accountability aspect meant for the domestic audience as well as to provide knowledge to the Indonesian people. A diplomat in Brussels shared,

“it is to show how far we carry out this mission, we report this to the public virtually via social media. So, people know the work we have conducted at the Mission and that we do the tasks that are given to us. Well, that's part of public accountability” (personal communication).

The convergence of domestic and international agendas additionally affected citizen protection activities, particularly the repatriation process of Indonesian citizens from Wuhan. After growing calls for repatriation by Indonesians at home and the overall attention to the situation, Indonesia intensified its digital activities to satisfy the calls. Several parties in Indonesia also pressured the government to repatriate Indonesian citizens in Wuhan, for example, members of the House of Representatives (DPR) and families of Indonesian citizens in Wuhan (Prabowo, 2020), and Islamic non-governmental organisations (Rizky, 2020). News about the situation in Wuhan and repatriation further piqued public interest as countries like the United States and Japan successfully repatriated their citizens (“Wabah pneumonia”, 2020). Moreover, the GOI also emphasised its commitment to repatriate Indonesian citizens

reflecting the importance of citizen protection matters as a key national interest (Adhiyuda, 2020). As a result, on 30 January 2020, the GOI decided to repatriate Indonesian citizens from Wuhan (Pramudyani, 2020) in which 243 citizens were successfully repatriated and landed in Indonesia on 2 February 2020 (Kementerian Luar Negeri Republik Indonesia, 2020a). All of the processes were documented and shared online via the Indonesian MoFA's social media channels.

The implementation of digital diplomacy in that situation focused on providing updates on the repatriation and not communicating with the public. If follow-up communication did happen, it was continued in a more traditional way (personal communications). First, when domestic audiences demanded information on the repatriation of Indonesian citizens in Wuhan, the MoFA issued a statement across the online media. The MoFA issued a traditional press release on its website (Kementerian Luar Negeri Republik Indonesia, 2020b) and used Twitter to disseminate information. On 31 January 2020, the MoFA released a statement regarding its plan to repatriate Indonesian citizens in Wuhan followed by a series of tweets (Figure 8) about the repatriation process. It tweeted pictures of Indonesian citizens at the airport, embarking on the plane and arriving safely in Indonesia. The series of tweets indicated that the MoFA turned to digital diplomacy to inform domestic audiences about the on-the-ground situation as the repatriation process became national headlines. The tweets also received significant attention indicated by the number of retweets and likes with the process of repatriation from Wuhan becoming one of the most popular tweets of the MoFA.



Figure 8. Series of tweets from Indonesian MoFA regarding the repatriation process from Wuhan, China

Source: Indonesian MoFA Twitter account, @Kemlu_RI (From left to right, MoFA Indonesia, 2020a; MoFA Indonesia, 2020b; MoFA Indonesia, 2020c).

Digital Diplomacy and the Bebas-Aktif Principle

An important aspect of Indonesian foreign policy is the principle of *bebas-aktif*. It is known as one of the most important principles of Indonesia's foreign policy besides anticolonialism (Sukma, 1995). In its simplest meaning, *bebas* means independent, while *aktif* means active. Independent is understood as Indonesia's willingness to pursue its foreign policy that is not determined by others. The active principle is related to Indonesia's willingness to participate in international affairs namely in the efforts to contribute toward world peace (Hatta, 1953; Anwar, 2003; Wirajuda, 2014). The principle of *bebas aktif* is considered the main principle of Indonesia's foreign policy as it is always followed by every ruling president. According to Anwar (2003), it is even considered "the right doctrine for Indonesia to follow for all time." The use of the *bebas aktif* principle extends beyond the period in which the principle was created. Concerning digital diplomacy, it is interesting to see whether digital diplomacy is compatible with and adds value to the *bebas aktif* principle.

Based on what has been done by Indonesian MoFA and its Missions, digital diplomacy is compatible and adds value to the *bebas aktif* principle (personal communication). As previously mentioned, many Indonesian diplomats believe that digital diplomacy complements traditional diplomacy and will not be on par with traditional diplomacy in the near future. This reasserts the view that digital diplomacy merely serves as a tool of information dissemination when it is deemed necessary. Moreover, the intention to avoid sparking online debates adds the possibility for the Indonesian MoFA, its Missions, and its diplomats to stay independent at any time.

Indonesia's digital activities in response to the Rohingya crisis have shown its benefits and how it adds value to the *bebas aktif* principle. Indonesia has taken up a form of humanitarian diplomacy over the crisis, even when some scholars criticize the country for not being vocal as other Parties regarding the issue. In the past, scholars labelled it as the 'quiet diplomacy' of Islamic humanitarianism (Permata, Hijrah, & Sinulingga, 2019; Smith and Williams, 2021). As such, its foreign policy places greater emphasis on the humanitarian side of the conflict by providing humanitarian assistance rather than addressing the political nature of the conflict or confronting the Myanmar Government. The digital activity about the issue reflects the prudent behaviour of Indonesian foreign policy. To maintain stability in the region, the Indonesian MoFA and its Yangon-based Mission used neutral wording when extending its support and humanitarian assistance, often choosing words such as Rakhine State rather than Rohingya or Muslim Rohingya (personal communications, Smith and Williams, 2021). By digital instruments, the Indonesian MoFA and its Mission have tried, at least, to widen the information dissemination reach of Indonesia's position on the Rohingya issue. Even though there are limited digital posts on the subject, the Indonesian MoFA has been able to show Indonesia's support for the Rohingya people while avoiding sparking criticism, especially from Myanmar authorities. This showcases the advantage of digital diplomacy for Indonesia as it avoided having to choose a side and opted to resolve the conflict through humanitarian action. The examples in Pictures 4, 5 and 6 show the effort.

However, Indonesia should try to further maximize the potential of digital diplomacy. What has been done by the Indonesian MoFA, its Missions and diplomats is still far from the true intention of digital diplomacy which is to create a more transparent diplomacy with two-way communication, especially on social media. A more open and lively online discussion between Indonesian diplomats and the public should be encouraged to create more long-term engagement. Active digital diplomacy doesn't necessarily mean jeopardizing the *bebas-aktif* principle and engaging in online discussions about Indonesian foreign policy will open opportunities for the Indonesian MoFA to receive different opinions, prepare for various outcomes, and analyse public opinion. Nevertheless, a grand overarching digital diplomacy strategy that accommodates tailor-based digital activities and streamlines multiple digital initiatives on the same topic – such as economic activities, issues in the Southeast Asian region or other current issues – needs to be developed. Another important evaluation is that Indonesia's social media posts must be presented in a minimum of two languages, specifically Bahasa Indonesia and English, to expand the audience reach. A formal and official English translation of each post from an official account would be more reliable for the public and will create more engagement.

Conclusions

Digital instruments have increasingly become an important aspect of diplomacy to facilitate various diplomatic interests. Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi stipulated how digital instruments can be utilised for citizen protection reasons, to promote peaceful messages, to strengthen economic cooperation, and as a tool to promote development. Digital innovation, especially social media, will open many opportunities for MoFA to fulfil its foreign policy objectives. This paper sought to answer the question: What are the characteristics of a specific country's digital diplomacy? Taking Indonesia as its research subject and selecting three case studies to assess the Indonesian MoFA, Missions, and diplomats' social media activities, this paper establishes that Indonesian digital diplomacy has three main characteristics.

First and foremost, the Indonesian MoFA's understanding of digital diplomacy remains limited to information dissemination, mostly as a tool to share information online. The MoFA and Missions very rarely engage in or promote two-way online communication in their online posts including on substantial topics like palm oil or the Rohingyas. These actions reaffirm the opinion that digital diplomacy would never be on par with traditional diplomacy. Even though Indonesia's development of digital diplomacy initiatives is still developing, the restricted point of view on the subject must be revised swiftly if the MoFA aspires to take advantage of the numerous opportunities offered by digital diplomacy. Second, Indonesian digital diplomacy is marked by its sporadic and *ad hoc* digital initiatives meaning that digital diplomacy is only conducted when it is deemed necessary. As a result, many digital initiatives were not streamlined nor mutually supported among related Missions even when the content covered the same topic. Digital initiatives on palm oil exemplify this trait where the blog initiative in 2021 did not mention a video made in 2014 concerning the same subject. This

finding reflects the country's missing grand strategy on digital initiatives, thus, many initiatives were conducted independently, were initiated by diplomats or Missions and were not well coordinated. To improve Indonesian digital diplomacy in the short term, the Indonesian MoFA can coordinate digital initiatives which have commonalities. Third, Indonesian digital diplomacy is strongly affected by domestic and foreign agendas. Digital diplomacy initiatives are oftentimes conducted as a response to facing domestic pressure and, essentially, to appease the domestic public. It is also intended to inform the international audience about Indonesia's foreign policy. That is why many online social media posts were published in Bahasa. The importance of domestic and international audiences makes it crucial that online content feature Bahasa Indonesia and English languages as it can bolster the Indonesian MoFA's credibility and widen the outreach of its digital measures.

Furthermore, digital diplomacy complements and adds value to Indonesia's foreign policy principle of *bebas aktif*. The use of digital diplomacy to share information about what has been conducted by Indonesia to solve global or regional issues has enhanced the profile of Indonesian diplomacy. In essence, digital diplomacy fulfils its advantage of expanding the audience reach. A topic which requires further assessment is an in-depth look at whether the three main characteristics drawn from this paper also appear in another country's digital diplomacy practices; additionally, determining whether digital diplomacy has effectively assisted a country's ability to navigate past certain situations.

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