

## **Facebook Not Statebook: Defining SNS Diplomacy with Four Modes of Online Diplomatic Participation**

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Researchers have yet to bring definitional clarity to public diplomacy in the digital context. It is unclear whether digital diplomacy, an all-encompassing concept, always happens in the public domain. For social-networking-service (SNS) assisted public diplomacy engagements, I hereby propose “SNS diplomacy” as a new conceptual container. In SNS diplomacy, public participation is an essential component, which I conceptualize as online diplomatic participation. This article summarizes four modes of participation: expression, interaction, membership, and campaign, a framework built on online political participation research. The concept focuses on the flow of dialogue and action between diplomatic and individual actors, to which social platforms offer indispensable support. Voters may participate in domestic politics offline, but most individual actors can influence diplomatic actors only online. I argue that individuals’ online participation is significant in the diplomatic scene and that scholars should look beyond the number of retweets and comments when evaluating such behaviors and resultant impacts.

*Keywords: SNS diplomacy, public diplomacy, digital diplomacy, online political participation, social media*

The debate on the definition of digital diplomacy is ongoing. When David Cameron, the then British Prime Minister, personally responded to questions raised by his followers on Chinese social media, it was apparently a public diplomacy case with a digital approach. But when the French Foreign Ministry annotated the White House’s Twitter video and rebuked the administration’s criticism of the Paris Agreement, was that also digitalized public diplomacy? Or was it simply e-diplomacy among diplomatic actors? When conceptualizing digital diplomacy, scholars have debated whether public participation always plays a part. Some scholars use the term interchangeably with public diplomacy 2.0, treating both diplomatic actors and individual actors as key subjects. However, others view digital diplomacy as a broader concept that covers the digitalization in all areas of diplomacy. This includes online messaging among foreign service officers, using internal social platforms like the Statebook, or virtual embassies providing consular service for their own citizens.

As technologies evolve, digital platforms have grown from website-based to mobile-device-supported, which are more integrated into people’s everyday lives. This generation of social networking services (SNSs), such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, have enabled “mobile, collective, and dynamic practice of social interaction . . . with fewer temporal, locational, and cultural (linguistic) constraints” (Zhang,

Y. & Leung, 2015, p. 1009). The trend urges public diplomacy practitioners and scholars to understand and harness the power of these social platforms. In light of the rising research interest, I propose "SNS diplomacy" as a conceptual container and introduce four modes of online diplomatic participation: expression, interaction, membership, and campaign, which accentuate individuals' active roles in public diplomacy in the digital age. Built on well-established research of online political participation, this framework can help researchers identify and evaluate SNS engagements in dialogue and action between diplomatic and individual actors.

### **Digital Diplomacy**

Digital diplomacy scholars often debate (1) whether the concept should fall under public diplomacy and indicate the involvement of the public; and (2) in the public diplomacy scenario, how to conduct non-content-oriented studies. I first review the discussions of these two questions, which have inspired the formulation of the concept of SNS diplomacy.

#### ***The Indistinct Role of Public Engagement***

Nicholas Cull (2008) described the term *public diplomacy* as "a perfect piece of propaganda about propaganda" (p. 259), highlighting its primary goal in influencing foreign publics through information campaigns. The actors in public diplomacy activities should involve both governments and the foreign public. For clarification, governments, their agencies, and their representatives (politicians and foreign service officers) will be referred to as diplomatic actors, and foreign publics will be referred to as individual actors in this article. Cull suggested that public diplomacy should be a two-way flow of people and message. In other words, individuals have an active role and enjoy an interactive relationship with diplomatic actors who usually initiate the activities. Public diplomacy sets itself apart from other diplomatic scenarios by inviting the public to participate in the processes of social change in bilateral and multilateral relations.

In view of the revolution in information technology, scholars first called for a new public diplomacy that could engage foreign publics with "outreach techniques that were unknown to previous generations of practitioners" (Melissen, 2005, p. 25) in the digital age. The Internet-induced change in public diplomacy has since been given several other names throughout the past decade, such as "#diplomacy," "cyber diplomacy," or "Facebook diplomacy" (Holmes, 2019; Morozov, 2009). As the use of digital media in diplomacy became prevalently observed and studied, some scholars raised the concept of digital diplomacy, with which they equate public diplomacy 2.0 (Gilboa, 2016).

Digital diplomacy, though widely used, bears more ambiguity in its definition than other terms. Scholars have not agreed on its theoretical scope or research subjects. Gilboa also pointed out that, to some scholars, digital diplomacy does not have to involve the public. Without the term "public" in its name, the concept can be used to depict the digitalization in other diplomatic areas. In Holmes' (2015) opinion, instead of being a new variation of public diplomacy, digital diplomacy falls directly under the overall practice of diplomacy; it is about diplomatic actors managing change in the international system through digital tools and online collaboration. Cull (2013) suggested that digital diplomacy concerns how diplomats communicate

and engage with one another. For instance, the U.S. Department of State once launched the Statebook, a secure Facebook-like site, for employees to engage online (Nichols, 2010).

To bridge the public and nonpublic dimensions, top scholars have offered generalized definitions and explanations. Gilboa (2016) defined digital diplomacy as “an instrument of diplomacy, based on ICTs and serving both traditional and new foreign policy goals of states and non-state actors” (p. 541). Holmes (2019) concluded that, despite disagreement on the subjects, the research on digital diplomacy essentially focuses on its “projection and retrieval” (para. 1), which refers to the transmission and the collection of information by diplomatic actors. When the public is involved, digital diplomacy refers to diplomatic actors exchanging information with the individuals via digital platforms. Otherwise, it refers to diplomatic actors exchanging information among themselves.

To take a generalized perspective is not without its problems. The broad definition stretches across multiple disciplines, including system management, organizational communication, and political communication. As political scientist Giovanni Sartori (1970) put it: “the lower the discriminating power of a conceptual container, the more the facts are misgathered, i.e., the greater the misinformation” (p. 1039). As theorists try to conceptualize digital diplomacy as an inclusive theoretical umbrella, the concept has lost its clarity and parsimony. I hereby address this issue by proposing SNS diplomacy to specifically describe and study public diplomacy activities in today’s interactive digital realm.

### ***Public Participation Online***

Despite the emphasis on the two-way flow and the interactivity of digital platforms, digitalized public diplomacy continues to be limited by a broadcasting-oriented mindset (Cull, 2013; Kampf, Manor, & Segev, 2015). Initially based on Web 2.0 phenomena such as blogging and virtual exhibition, public diplomacy 2.0 research focuses on nations winning hearts and minds of global audiences through online information dissemination (Esser, 2012; Hallams, 2010; Manor & Segev, 2015). Studies with this perspective discuss how diplomatic actors manage national images and influence foreign publics with websites and later SNS content. This approach touches on the interactive affordances of social platforms, which allow individual SNS users to give feedback. It also specifies the audience as foreign publics. Nonetheless, this school of thought narrowly takes the digitalization as an instrument for information exchange and concentrates on the content generated in the process (Metzgar & Lu, 2015; Pamment, 2016).

In contemporary society, digitalization is not a collection of new techniques but an omnipresent context. A digital-driven culture has reshaped organizational and institutional arrangements across social domains, despite the uneven distribution and controversial features of technologies (Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2012). In political communication research, abundant empirical evidence suggests that digital media has not only changed how people exchange information but also how they participate in politics (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Boulianne, 2018; Wojcieszak, Bimber, Feldman, & Stroud, 2016). Little has been done, however, to study how the public participates in diplomacy in the SNS context, let alone theorize the phenomenon. I argue that the public’s online participation should be identified and measured as an important dimension of the digitalization of public diplomacy. In many studies, SNS interactivity is often narrowly interpreted as individuals commenting, sharing, or liking diplomatic posts. The interpretation

downplays the active role of individual actors. Such an approach has overlooked that participation is the "single most powerful ethos of digital culture" (Wells, 2015, p. 53), and digital media has enabled unlimited possibilities for the public to participate in political communication processes. Broadening the understanding will bridge public diplomacy with extensive studies of online political participation. Consequently, scholars can expand the scope of research, strengthen the tools for analysis, and identify new variables for measurement in this emerging field.

I begin in the next section with a definition for SNS diplomacy, which features online diplomatic participation. Then, based on the framework of online political participation, I summarize four modes of diplomatic participation: expression, interaction, membership, and campaign. The framework involves both individual and diplomatic actors. I contend that the research of public diplomacy on social platforms should shift its focus to participatory and social networking behaviors from communication content.

### **SNS Diplomacy**

Traditional public diplomacy initiatives are capital-intensive, which involve the investments in international broadcasting, global programs, and events, in addition to overseas infrastructure and staffing. Although the participants of public diplomacy activities can make meaningful contributions to bilateral and multilateral relations, they are only a small amount in the population. As an example, since 1983, the British government has sponsored more than 50,000 global young leaders to study in the U.K. through the Chevening Scholarship (Chevening Awards, 2019). In comparison, the UK Foreign Office has nearly 1 million followers on Twitter as of June 2020. The use of social platforms has removed the limits of funding, resources, and borders, inviting the public around the world to make an impact on international politics.

### **Definition**

I define SNS diplomacy as "the communication process on social networking services by which diplomatic actors engage individual actors in international affairs." First, it lies in the intersection of digital diplomacy and public diplomacy, stressing an interactive online flow between diplomatic and individual actors. Second, the openness of social platforms ensures the public a place in the process and facilitates their participation. Even when the communication seems to happen specifically between two diplomatic actors, like the French Foreign Ministry's Twitter account annotating the White House video, in effect, the public always plays a role. Their presence is visible through the collective actions that include subscription, discussion, and information dissemination. Third, while domestic digital diplomacy aims at gaining support of foreign policies at home (Bjola & Manor, 2018), SNS diplomacy sets out to engage a global audience. For most individuals, it is the only form of engagement that connects them with foreign political entities.

To diplomatic actors, social platforms are more than just another bulletin board to distribute messages and to catch up on the news. SNS diplomacy is a mechanism to realize online diplomatic participation and to leverage the activeness of millions of previously inaccessible individuals. To be more precise, 3.43 billion people, or 42% of the world population, are expected to be on social platforms by 2023 (Clement, 2020). The high social network penetration rate shows a huge potential for strong and substantial digital diplomatic engagement. To individual audiences, following or interacting with the SNS account of a

foreign political entity is not simply to receive or respond to international affairs updates. Rather, it forms their own political experiences of being part of a diplomatic process. Potentially, they can shape diplomatic relations not only in the dimension of dialogue but in that of policymaking. Therefore, their louder-than-words engagement is worth identifying and investigating through a scholarly lens. For this purpose, I suggest a framework of four modes of online diplomatic participation.

### ***Online Political Participation as a Framework***

Before defining online diplomatic participation, one should first review the developing understanding of online political participation. Mostly in the context of domestic politics, scholars have extensively studied how the use of the Internet affects people's political participation online and offline (Gil de Zúñiga, Puig-I-Abril, & Rojas, 2009; Kim & Chen, 2016; Xia & Shen, 2018). Originally, Verba, Scholzman, and Brady (1995) characterized political participation as "activities that have the intent or effect of influencing government action" (p. 38), which traditionally includes voting, campaign activities, attending meetings, and contacting officials. More recently, scholars have expanded the concept to include demonstrations, political consumerism, and online activism (Copeland & Feezell, 2017). Some forms of online participation appear to be digital versions of offline activities, such as writing an email to officials, discussing politics on social media, or donating money online. However, research has pointed out that the Internet significantly changed political participation, for example, by lowering the effort and civic skills needed to engage in politics (Best & Krueger, 2005). Therefore, scholars have started to examine the features of online political participation separately from offline forms (Jung, Kim, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2011; Valenzuela, Kim, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2012; Vissers & Stolle, 2014). Gibson and Cantijoch (2013) noted that the online environment enables some forms of participation to take on "a more active, collective, and networked quality" (p. 714).

According to a report from the Pew Research Center, as many as 40% of Americans have participated in at least one form of digital media-based political activity (Smith, 2013). As aforementioned, the Internet has opened online channels for some traditional activities. Meanwhile, it also facilitates the creation of new, online-only activities. Based on existing studies (e.g., Gibson & Cantijoch, 2013; Smith, 2013; Theocharis & van Deth, 2018), most identified behaviors can be summarized into the following three modes of online political participation:

1. expression mode: expression of personal attitudes on political issues online (via comments, reposts, likes, hashtags, or self-produced media content such as posts, blogs, or videos);
2. interaction mode: interaction with political actors online (through communicating with public figures and institutions using email, webchat, or SNS functions such as direct message, comment, repost, @reply, or @mention); and
3. membership mode: membership of online groups that have political purposes (such as joining a group or liking a group page).

These three modes can be contextualized in SNS diplomacy. Individual actors share their opinions on global affairs, which diplomatic actors can systematically collect for analysis. Diplomatic actors set up accounts to gather individual actors, who give feedback, repost content, or simply follow to help increase the accounts' influence.

Little research analyzes participation in online campaigns organized by political actors separately from interaction behaviors. For two reasons, I propose to include the campaign mode as a standalone mode of participation to establish a comprehensive framework for SNS diplomacy. First, diplomatic actors rely on online campaigns even more than political parties because of the lack of local resources and the need to reach a global audience. Second, SNS diplomacy campaigns carry political connotations and objectives, regardless of the awareness or intention of public participants. In other words, individuals' involvements in a cultural or education campaign will still contribute to the impact of a foreign political entity. The GREAT Britain Campaign is delivered through a series of marketing activities promoting British literature, education, tourism, and culture, but its "senior responsible owner . . . sits in No 10 and is therefore well placed to exert overall control over the campaign and can use the convening power of No 10, and the pull of additional funding, to influence partners" (National Audit Office, 2015, p.7). In some cases, diplomatic actors can also frame stakeholders' campaigns with a diplomatic connotation. Therefore, campaign mode should be examined individually. Aligned with the first three modes of online political participation, it can be defined as follows:

4. campaign mode: participation in online campaigns organized or enabled by political actors (such as using the hashtag of an official campaign).

In campaign mode, individual actors may engage in international politics without knowing it. For this reason, analyzing content posted by diplomatic accounts—the predominant research approach—is inadequate. Specific examples will be given for further explanation in the next section.

#### **Four Modes of Online Diplomatic Participation**

Based on the framework discussed, this section will conceptualize the four modes of online diplomatic participation, which distinguish SNS diplomacy from other digitalized activities in international politics.

##### ***Expression Mode***

Cull (2008) has identified five components of public diplomacy: listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange, and international broadcasting. Gathering public opinions in digital diplomacy is often studied as a process of listening. In the research on public diplomacy, public opinion is often used as a thermometer to test the popularity of foreign nations among the target audience (Zhang, C. & Meadows, 2012). In the traditional format, listening is limited to collecting viewpoints from opinion leaders, scholars, or current-affair commentators (Bjola & Jiang, 2015). In the digital age, individual users can demonstrate their attitudes directly toward foreign nations through tweeting and commenting about specific issues. Facilitated by SNS functions, diplomats can gather individuals' opinions about world affairs in many ways.

They can review the comments on their own pages, follow the hashtags of trending topics, or use keyword searches. The comment section of online news stories is also a good source to see how individual users react to global issues. Hence, when individuals share their views about the issues that concern diplomatic actors, their voices can potentially be collected for analysis and policymaking in diplomacy.

In a way, expression generates international political power. For instance, Yang and Lim (2009) found that, because of Japan's economic stagnation, the nationalism of Japanese youths was growing rapidly, with the China and Korea detestation theories spreading online "like wildfire" (p. 79) in the early 2000s. Social platforms have provided a new public sphere for people worldwide to gather and discuss international politics, which was not feasible in the past (Rauchfleisch & Schäfer, 2015). Scholars have observed that, as individuals discuss world affairs actively and visibly online, their opinions and sentiments can affect foreign relations and policies or be used by governments to push existing agendas (Hyun & Kim, 2015).

Except for some research on controversial nationalism cases, little has been done to systematically study how online expressions influence diplomatic activities, for example, through generating responses from foreign officials. However, anecdotally, real-life cases have shown that individuals' expressions on social platforms do affect public diplomacy agendas. For instance, former U.S. Ambassador Gary Locke charmed tens of thousands of Chinese people like a celebrity before he even landed in Beijing (Wong, 2011). It was all because someone took a photo of him at the Seattle airport and posted it online. Chinese SNS users were surprised to see Locke, previously the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, carrying his own backpack and buying his own coffee with a coupon at a Starbucks. In the 2000s, Chinese ministers rarely displayed themselves living a regular person's lifestyle in front of the public. Locke's photo was reposted 40,000 times on social media and was later covered by the mainstream media. But it was not over yet. Soon after, a flight attendant's comment about Locke flying economy was reposted 25,000 times, eliciting another tidal wave of positive attention (Economy, 2011). Such a humble image of American officialdom immediately generated diplomatic impact, paving the way for Joe Biden's visit to Beijing the following week (Wong, 2011). During his tenure in Beijing, Locke responded several times to the media about these high-profile discussions. Apparently, individuals' spontaneous expressions can create a public diplomacy scenario, generating long-lasting effects on diplomatic actors in their discourse and activities.

Ambassador Locke's case happened when SNS diplomacy was just coming into existence, hence the novelty of such discussions received high media attention. More often, diplomatic actors actively use social media to seek out valuable public opinion information. To study expression mode, scholars need to examine not only what individual actors share but also how diplomatic actors make use of those messages. This calls for more investigations into foreign public opinion analysis and diplomatic decision making that are informed by SNS expressions. For this purpose, researchers should go beyond content analysis of profile pages and conduct ethnographic observations or interviews in embassies or ministries of foreign affairs (MFAs). This way, scholars can begin to evaluate the weight of today's highly available public expressions in international politics, for critiquing or strategizing the policy making in foreign affairs.

### ***Interaction Mode***

SNS diplomacy has offered various forms for the public to interact with diplomatic actors. The *Twiplomacy Study 2018* analyzed 951 Twitter accounts of governments, MFAs, diplomats, and heads of state (Lüfkens, 2018). It shows that King Salman of Saudi Arabia had an exceptionally good interaction rate, as he received 154,294 retweets for each one of his tweets. In comparison, U.S. President Donald Trump, in second place, received about 20,319 retweets on average. A high interaction rate amplifies their voices across borders. Although world leaders do not always perform with a diplomatic agenda, the responsibilities of ambassadors or MFAs are less ambiguous. The public's interaction with their SNS accounts is always diplomatic participation.

When interacting with diplomatic actors, individuals are more purposeful in exerting direct influence on foreign governments, compared with when they are in expression mode. The participatory affordances of SNS have brought distinguished features to interactions in public diplomacy (Hayden, 2012; Pamment, 2016). First, the engagement does not always happen in the virtual space managed by diplomatic actors. Sometimes individuals would use @mention to get the attention of diplomatic actors when they wanted to make a statement or ask a question. Additionally, social platforms are particularly suitable for foreign service officers to make an impact. Social media-savvy diplomats can expect increased popularity among foreign publics (Sotiriu, 2015). Their communication styles can be more personalized and consistent, which are likelier to invite more reactions from individuals. Lastly, diplomatic actors can leverage the networks of their followers to promote messages to a wider audience and to attract new followers. Karlsen (2015) has found that those who follow political accounts are likelier to pass on information in their own social networks.

Online interaction weighs more in diplomatic participation than in domestic political participation. Although voters can reach local politicians to different extents, people hardly ever meet diplomats in real life. Sometimes, they can incorporate advocacy about foreign relations into domestic political activities. For instance, over 1.8 million people signed a petition against Donald Trump's state visit to Britain, and tens of thousands protested when he finally made the trip (O'Donnell, 2017; Topping, Wintour, & Walker, 2018). Nevertheless, there is no institutional mechanism for the public to meet regularly with foreign politicians, make suggestions to foreign governments' policies, or determine the political career of any foreign officer through voting. In offline public diplomacy activities, diplomatic missions handpick a few participants based on the government's interests, resources, and goals. Hence, only through SNS diplomacy can most people interact with diplomatic actors. In other words, although social media may have reshaped domestic political participation, it has enabled diplomatic participation for most of the public.

Many studies of interactions in SNS diplomacy focus on the frequency analysis of reposts and mentions, while more recent research has adopted social network analysis to examine interaction patterns (Park, S., Chung, & Park, H. W., 2019). Researchers often call for diplomatic actors' smarter use of social platforms to gain reactions and rebroadcasts. Still missing in the picture are individuals' experiences, expectations, and motivations when conversing with the representatives of foreign political entities. Large-scale polls have surveyed people about their interactions with politicians since the nondigital era, but the setting of international politics can be a significant mediating factor. SNS diplomacy scholars will have to



design their own questionnaires or focus group studies to contextualize these research questions. The understanding of people's motivations not only offers practical guidance for diplomatic actors to strategize their engagements but also connects SNS diplomacy with the scholarship of political efficacy.

### ***Membership Mode***

People build online communities to connect with others with similar interests and gradually develop a sense of group identity through their participation (Litt, 2012; Nardi, 2009). Joining an SNS political group requires only a low level of involvement but facilitates political expression to an expanded audience (Marichal, 2013). Studies have found that membership of SNS groups can boost political participation (Gibson & McAllister, 2013; Yang, H. C. & DeHart, 2016).

In international affairs, individuals with similar interests are often gathered around diplomatic actors, academic institutions, or cross-cultural organizations. Platforms use different functions to assemble users, thus in this article, membership can be acquired through Twitter or Instagram account following or Facebook page likes. Diplomatic actors can attract millions of SNS followers. In March 2020, global diplomatic actors operated 721 Facebook pages that had a combination of 362 million page likes, up by 11% and 17% from 2018, respectively (Burson Cohn & Wolfe, 2018, 2020). The enormous network of followers in the global political setting underscores the importance of membership mode in SNS diplomacy.

In membership mode, individual actors demonstrate their interests in diplomatic actors by following them, while the diplomatic accounts have the incentive to fulfill their followers' trust by providing quality information (Huang & Sun, 2014). Accounts with large follower networks enjoy stronger influencing power, especially via two-step flow processes (Wu, Hofman, Mason, & Watts, 2011). They also tend to create more content (Fu & Chau, 2013). As aforementioned, followers or members may develop a sense of group identity during the process. In other words, both types of actors can be the subject of membership research.

The research of SNS diplomacy membership can draw on political communication studies. Extant literature on an individual's online political membership examine several variables: social influence (Wang, Li, & Luo, 2016), political preference (Bartlett, Bennett, Birnie, & Wibberley, 2013; Golbeck & Hansen, 2014), political identity (Marichal, 2013), and opinion leadership (Karlsen, 2015; Xu, Sang, Blasiola, & Park, 2014). From a political accounts' perspective, membership studies focus on social network mapping (Hsu & Park, 2012) and follower growth patterns (Wang, Luo, Niemi, & Li, 2016). Public diplomacy scholars can contextualize research questions of political communication in foreign affairs scenarios. For instance, a recent article examines the structure of diplomatic accounts' networks (Sevin & Inghoff, 2018). Future studies can also examine how diplomatic actors operate across several cultural contexts with social network analysis. The Russian Foreign Ministry tweets in three languages, while the French agency tweets in six, managing follower networks of various sizes and attributes. Furthermore, researchers can explore how individual actors develop a sense of global digital community through their memberships, since public diplomacy endeavors can inform global citizenship education (Brown, Morgan, & McGrath, 2009). This way, we can identify and evaluate SNS diplomacy specific variables for membership research.

### ***Campaign Mode***

SNS campaigns can be highly cost-effective and influential in international affairs. Besides governments, social movement groups have also used social platforms to promote counterterrorism, world peace, and other global issues (Sotiriu, 2015). Aylan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian boy, was found drowned at a beach in Turkey on September 2, 2015. The photos of his death were rapidly spread online, which sparked an international outcry that pressured governments to change refugee policies (Lenette & Cleland, 2016; Goriunova, 2015). Even without news stories, diplomatic actors can strategically plan and deliver campaigns. For instance, in the Campaign to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, the British government used SNS promotion in addition to offline events and tours (Pamment, 2016). For clarity, in this article I categorize campaigns as the activities organized or enabled by diplomatic actors (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013), whereas individuals partake in news-driven organized actions in expression mode.

As commonly known, many campaigns are delivered through SNS posts, such as a Q&A session. In scholarly research, the effectiveness of posting activities is often measured by the number of comments and reposts. With a content-oriented perspective, such posts are considered "digital conversation-generating" (Bjola & Jiang, 2015, p. 72) and are currently viewed as a good practice of engagement. However, SNS diplomacy campaigns can creatively take many other forms, and an analysis of profile pages may not capture the interactivity in them. Some activities do not require an individual's immediate response to diplomatic actor's posts. For example, online photo contests can collect the participants' works from email submissions or hashtags. When launching a campaign through SNS posts, diplomatic actors may give incentives to their followers, such as an event invitation or a flight ticket, to encourage short-term participation. But they need to be innovative with SNS affordances to keep the campaigns visible for a long period of time. To promote the GREAT Britain Campaign leveraging the launch of a new movie, the UK Embassy Bucharest tweeted the following: "Our colleagues from the Embassy getting ready for the Romanian premiere of the Harry Potter spin-off series, namely *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald* are the living proof that #LiteratureIsGREAT" (UK Embassy Bucharest, 2018).

In a text-focused study, this post alone may not be viewed as interactive. But the hashtag stream generated across layers of social networks can form an interactive campaign that invites participation. The functions of hashtag have gone beyond discussion organization. In political participation, hashtags are often used for campaign mobilization. Public agencies are cautious in adopting emergent hashtags (Wukich & Steinberg, 2013), but they have started creating original ones. The GREAT Britain Campaign created a series of hashtags, such as #FilmIsGREAT, #InnovationIsGREAT, and #SportsIsGREAT, that can be connected to numerous current and future high-profile events. Strategically, the British government has partnered with influencers across sectors to promote these hashtags. Thus, although the hashtags carry a diplomatic connotation, the campaign can reach non-followers of diplomatic accounts. When sports fans retweet an Olympic medalist's #SportsIsGREAT tweet, they immediately participate in SNS diplomacy. Unlike in interaction mode, online diplomatic participation is not necessarily intentional in campaign mode.

The variety of campaign forms calls for creative adoption of mixed research methods. Diplomatic actors can initiate campaigns on their SNS pages but implement activities through others' social networks or via other channels. Online activities can be coupled with offline events. Instead of focusing only on profile

page content, researchers should also trace how diplomatic actors map out the SNS campaigns to reach audiences in layers of online networks and in real life. Individual actors can be in campaign mode, actively or passively, regardless of his or her SNS diplomacy membership status. Therefore, the analysis of campaign message reception and endorsement should not exclude non-followers of diplomatic accounts. Moreover, cultural and tourism campaign participants should be viewed as engaging in international politics, as long as the activities are at least partially foreign government sponsored. Once individual actors in campaign mode are properly identified, scholars can employ methods of survey and social network analysis to explore topics such as the impact of a campaign, the effectiveness of an activity, or the awareness or participatory behavior of followers and non-followers. SNS campaign is an emerging research area with abundant public diplomacy cases, which should be deservedly measured as a form of online diplomatic participation. It is a dimension where we can explore how diplomatic actors' agendas are crowdsourced to prominence through the engagements they digitally organize or enable (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013).

### **Conclusion**

My overarching goal in this theoretical article is to increase the conceptual clarity of public diplomacy in the digital context, as the landscape is continuously being reshaped by the adoption of social platforms. First, I raise a new concept, SNS diplomacy, which not only acknowledges but accentuates the role of public participation. Second, I summarize four modes of online diplomatic participation, which (1) connect SNS diplomacy with online political participation research; and (2) operationalize the empirical exploration of variable identification, research question formation, and study design specific for this expanding field.

The theoretical framework contributes to a better organized discussion in the study of public diplomacy and digital diplomacy, which currently lacks definitional consensus. It is built around a new focus on public participation, encouraging SNS diplomacy researchers to conduct behavior, motivation, or social network analysis, instead of or in addition to content analysis. The digitalization of public diplomacy has unleashed impactful political power within uncountable networks of global citizens. Social platforms enable people to take a more active and meaningful part in diplomacy than just one of the thousands of thumb icons under a tweet. Consequently, this emergent trend calls for more multilayered analyses on the flow of dialogue and action between diplomatic and individual actors, as well as the influence generated during the engagement and exerted on international politics and foreign relations.

This article is not without limitations. First, for conceptual clarity, I have mainly cited state-actor examples for explanation, whereas the framework can be applied to study public engagement with non-state actors, such as intergovernmental organizations. In some sense, non-state actors feature neutrality and universality. Their engagements are often multicultural. Such characteristics may affect individuals' participatory behaviors and motivations. Still, the four modes should be generic enough to depict the scenarios involving non-state actors, which can be evaluated in future studies. Second, I have touched on the difference between SNS diplomacy and domestic digital diplomacy, but in practice, the boundary can be blurry. World leaders frequently switch between their roles in domestic politics and foreign affairs when speaking on social media. The public engagement with these accounts, accordingly, needs to be further

classified. It will take more case studies to discover a systematic approach to identify the SNS diplomacy component in a scenario that is simultaneously domestic and international.

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