THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION MEDIA IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: PUBLIC DIPLOMACY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

Due to the pandemic, the mobility of the world community must be limited to stop the spread of COVID-19. However, the country's need to fulfill its national interests, especially in handling the pandemic, must still be met. Conventional diplomatic practice by sending official diplomats to one country is certainly limited this time. The growth in information and communication technology make it easier for every country to be able to carry out public diplomacy as a new diplomatic practice through digital communication media. By using a qualitative approach and descriptive method, the author tries to explain the role of communication media in international relations with a focus on discussing public diplomacy during a pandemic. Through this study, the author finds that social media is very useful in implementing public diplomacy between countries such as South Korea and its entertainment industry actors and China, which is trying to improve its image in order to gain international public support. Both countries fulfill their national interests through electronic communication media.

Key Words: Pandemic, Communication Media, Public Diplomacy

INTRODUCTION

On December 31, 2019, the Chinese Government officially reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) the presence of the corona virus (COVID). Since then, the detected virus spreads very quickly and massive infecting areas in and out of China. The speed of human mobility which travel from one area to another is one of the reasons for the rapid spread of this virus. Until March 2020, for the first time the Indonesian government officially announced that the corona virus had infected Indonesian territory. Paying attention to this condition, by this issue each country carried out a policy of caring and protecting for its people. These changes affect many norms in aspects of human relations. Face-to-face meetings are also very limited, not only academic and social activities, meetings between countries to conduct diplomacy must also be limited to electronic screens. By this situation, each entity is required to adapt to the existing changes. Meetings that should have been held in person and physically have turned virtual, including meetings for decision-making. This limitation of mobility certainly affects how humans communicate. And changes in the way humans communicate certainly give changes to the communication tool itself.

The development of information and communication technology at this time has a very vital role in the sustainability of human relations in meeting their needs and interests in the midst of a world situation hit by an epidemic. As a result of the pandemic, human relations with electronic communication media such as social media are increasing, this is verified in a journal written by Mohammad Naim Rahim in an article entitled The Effect of Using Social Media on Academic Performance of Faculty Members during the Covid-19 Pandemic (Rahim, 2021).

This increase occurs because social media is a means of fulfilling human needs to continue to interact, although not directly, with other humans. Also as a medium of communication between countries to establish cooperation and decision-making processes in various sectors, especially regarding the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of writing this journal is to find out how communication media play a role in diplomacy between countries.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.   Communication Media

As social beings who need other human roles, communication is the main asset for humans to interact with other humans to meet their needs. Communication in its simplest form is defined as the process of transmitting roles from one source to a receiver. Stanton (1982) formulated the five most basic goals of human communication, namely to influence others, build or manage interpersonal relationships, discover different types of knowledge, help others, play and joke. (Liliweri, 2011).

To achieve the goal of communication, it takes a media as a means of communication such as magazines, radio, television, films, posters, banners. However, along with the development of information and communication technology, communication media have also developed into digital media such as Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, official websites, and other influential social media. The process of sending information in this digital era is also very sophisticated because just by holding a device in hand, information can spread quickly, easily, and cheaply. This communication media will be a means that can be used to produce, reproduce, distribute and convey information.

Media comes from Latin with the origin of the word "medium" with the singular form "medium" and the plural "media". Literally, the medium is defined as an intermediary, transmitter, or distributor. When two people meet directly in a room and have a conversation without any intermediary, then the communication activity is a communication activity without media. However, when the communication activity is carried out by one or each party using loudspeakers because of the wide range of distances, then the communication is called communication through the media. (Batubara, 2011). In international relations, communication with the media is often carried out in the practice of public diplomacy. Where one country disseminates information through their social media in order to influence the public's perspective in positive ways. Communication media is defined by experts as (Melati, 2021)

- Blake dan Horalsen: Communication media is a channel used to deliver messages from the messenger to the recipient of the message.
- Cangara (2006): Communication media is a means of delivering messages from the communicator to the audience.

The functions of communication media are to:
  - o Production function, which is useful communication media to produce information. Examples are computers and word processing machines (word processors).
  - o Reproductive function, when communication media is used to reproduce and reproduce information. For example voice and video recorder.

o Information delivery function, namely the media used to disseminate and convey messages to the target recipients of the desired information. For example, communication by telephone.

2. *Public Diplomacy*

In theory, public diplomacy is defined as a communication process between the government and the foreign public as a form of effort in realizing an understanding of ideas, values, norms, culture, to national goals and policies owned by the country. From this presentation, it can be seen that public diplomacy actors are not only officially appointed leaders or representatives of countries, but the public also has the capability to be involved in this diplomacy through communication. The purpose of public diplomacy is to create a positive opinion and image from the foreign public regarding the country so as to facilitate the achievement of national interests through the country's foreign policy. Public diplomacy is considered more capable of having an impact than previous diplomacy which was more formal and rigid, this is because it is not enough to rely solely on government efforts to overcome various challenges and issues that are increasingly complex and diverse. Support from the international community is easier to obtain through positive approaches such as cultural recognition, involving actors in the entertainment industry, to the appropriate use of social media. (Susetyo, 2008).

Public diplomacy can be used to promote values that can improve state stability; create a sense of mutual understanding in order to prevent or even correct misunderstandings between countries; build the reputation and positive image of the country, so that the practice of public diplomacy can also be used in unusual conditions, such as during the global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis condition is defined by Boin and Hart through their book entitled The Crisis Approach. It is written that a crisis condition is a time when individuals, groups, organizations, regions (both cities and countries) feel an urgent threat regarding core values and must be resolved immediately in various ways such as holding meetings between countries which are expected to produce solutions, either in the form of agreements, guidance on offers of action that can be carried out by related actors, or agreements that have been mutually agreed upon (Boin & Hart, 2006).

METHODS

In writing this journal, the author will use a qualitative approach in providing an analysis of this research to answer the formulation of the research problem. Research with a qualitative approach itself has often been used to answer questions regarding the use of communication media. Through the descriptive method, the author will describe and interpret the role of communication media such as social media in supporting the success of public diplomacy during the COVID-19 pandemic.(Yin, 2009).

DISCUSSION

The development of information and communication technology that has occurred in recent years has brought changes to the use of communication media. The use of the internet as the main communication tool that people are interested in today shifts the use of mass media as a medium of communication. The change in conventional communication media to digital

is also used by the state to achieve national interests through public diplomacy in the digital era such as social media. The role of social media is considered to be very effective in conducting public diplomacy because the state can influence public opinion in positive ways, as well as the fact that social media users come from many backgrounds, like age, social status, to citizenship.

In times of a pandemic era, social media has a very important role. This is in line with the opinion of Nasrullah (2015) that social media is media on the internet that allows users to present themselves, interact, collaborate, share, and communicate with other users so that they can form a virtual social through introduction, communication, and cooperation (Setiadi, 2016).

In the study of diplomacy, social media is considered as a means that allows information to be reached by the wider community with ease of interaction to achieve the fulfillment of national interests in the economic, political, cultural sectors, as well as the formation of the state's image.

South Korea

South Korea is one of the countries that is most aggressive in conducting public diplomacy by cooperating with actors in the entertainment industry. For example, when South Korea showed their commitment to halal tourism. Through a drama series entitled "Lunch Box", South Korea shows how its country is concerned about halal food as an aspect of halal tourism in the culinary field. Not only through the drama, in the context of implementing the practice of handling the COVID-19 pandemic, South Korea also carried out public diplomacy by sending the BTS Music Group as a special diplomatic envoy to attend the 76th United Nations General Assembly last September in New York. On that occasion, BTS personnel gave a speech about the importance of unity and the role of the younger generation in handling the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only that, BTS personnel also talked about the role of youth in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). South Korean President Moon Jae-In realizes that the BTS has a massive influence in influencing public opinion, especially to convey messages to the younger generation.

China

The emergence of the COVID outbreak for the first time in Wuhan made China get a bad image in the international community. To erase this bad image, the Chinese government, which has been known to be rigid, for the first time used a Twitter account in October last year. Then increasingly active using social media since December. Previously, the Chinese government relied more on conventional diplomacy by officially sending diplomats to achieve its national interests. However, during this COVID-19 pandemic, the Chinese government seems to be actively using social media to achieve their national interests, namely changing the bad image of China as the country of origin of the outbreak, forming a positive image, and gaining international public support. China wants to appear as a rational, open, informative, and internationally responsible actor through maximum efforts to

provide assistance such as vaccines to countries in need. Through its tweets on Twitter, the Chinese government actively shares the latest information on diplomacy, policies related to political, social, cultural issues, to handling the pandemic.

The joining of China in conducting diplomacy through the communication media Twitter shows that public diplomacy through digital can make a real contribution to crisis management, both through the dissemination of information to the public and in supporting

communication between countries. The current limitation of mobility does not allow face-to-face meetings to carry out diplomacy, so public diplomacy through digital media is a solution for every country to continue to carry out its role as an actor in international relations. Through digital media, each country has access and means to convey their respective arguments without any diplomatic barriers like conventional diplomacy practices.

CONCLUSION

In the current pandemic era, where mobility is limited, digital communication media is very useful for the implementation of interactions, both between humans personally, and between countries. The aim of conventional diplomacy practices by officially sending diplomats by the state can still be fulfilled by public diplomacy practices that utilize digital communication media. The pandemic has succeeded in demonstrating the importance of each country's adaptability in carrying out digital diplomacy in an effort to handle crises that result in policies or cooperation in international relations. In addition, digital diplomacy also emphasizes the increasingly balanced condition of the international political arena for all countries in the era of globalization.

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