Working Paper

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Emotion, Identity & Social Media: Developing a New Awareness, Lens & Vocabulary for Diplomacy 21

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In looking ahead to Diplomacy 21, the challenge of digital and social media is not the technology itself or its impact on diplomacy, but rather, its impact on the public arena in which diplomats operate. Increasingly emotion and identity are becoming the defining features of publics and the public arena. Emotions will challenge the "rational" state actor and state-centric assumptions about diplomacy, including a reliance on "pragmatic rationalism".

The concurrent rise of emotion, identity and social media are inter-related and feed off each other. Whereas states are rapidly integrating digital tools to conduct "digital diplomacy" with each other and publics, publics are using the digital tools to emotionally connect with others and emotionally self-identify with others.

The social media tools driving this emotion-identity connection among publics will mean a shift in how state actors view and respond to publics. Governments will be challenged by domestic and global publics in emotionally-charged scenarios. Diplomats will be forced to respond, *and* how they respond will have consequences domestically and repercussions globally.

Diplomacy needs to expand its lens and vocabulary for viewing emotion in the public political area so that it can develop effective and strategic responses.

From "Digital Diplomacy" to Diplomacy within the Public Domain

In Diplomacy 21, strategic thinking means moving beyond the new communication tools to the new communication *dynamics.* Social media has not only empowered state and non-state actors, it has empowered publics, creating new power and relational dynamics with the states. Diplomatic spaces are enmeshed with public spaces.

Currently, the focus appears limited to the digital tools, specifically, how the digital tools are changing the practice of diplomacy. On the negative side, the digital tools are overwhelming diplomatic practice by the sheer speed and volume of information. On the positive side, the digital media represent an enticing new tool for "informing,

influencing, or engaging publics." Networks represent an even more enticing structure for circulating information and reaching publics. Appreciating the advantages and disadvantages of the technology is an important first step.

The next step is moving from how the tools are changing *diplomatic practice* to changes in the *diplomatic spaces* in which diplomats operate. Here the digital media have brought state and non-state actors into reciprocal contact with the very same publics they are trying to influence.

Several scholars have suggested that diplomacy is becoming "more public" – not necessarily in terms of the audience (i.e., diplomacy directed at the public), but rather the context (i.e., diplomacy conducted in the public arena or public sphere). Brian Hockings and his colleagues suggested "integrative diplomacy" to capture the complexity of the public stage that diplomats must now share with a broad range of actors.[1] Gregory has suggested the "public dimension" of diplomacy.[2] Kelley has perhaps been the most forceful, stating that "diplomacy is well beyond the point of opening itself to the public – it is becoming enmeshed within the public domain"[3]

Emotions within the Public Domain

As diplomacy becomes enmeshed within the public arena, emotions and identity have become defining features of the public arena. "Pragmatic rationalism"[4] that has defined traditional diplomacy among state actors in the past may be less effective and strategic in the future.

The rational approach that assumes a focus on information may obscure relational dynamics that privilege emotion.

Emotions of State & Non-State Actors

The study of emotions has been called the "new frontier" in international relations

[1] Hocking et al., »Futures for Diplomacy«.
[2] Gregory, »The Paradox of Public Diplomacy: Its Rise and 'Demise'«.
[3] Kelley, *Agency Change*.
[4] Kelley, »The New Diplomacy«.

study.[5] Although "emotion is everywhere in international relations,"[6] scholars appear to only awaken to the impact of emotions over the past decade with several path-breaking studies of emotions of state actors in international relations[7] and diplomatic studies.[8] Emotion per se is not new to diplomacy. The instrumental use of emotion as a tool to persuade goes back to Aristotle's *On Rhetoric*. Emotion has also been studied in political decision-making,[9] negotiations,[10] mediation,[11] conflict studies,[12] and even soft power.[13]

What appears new are the efforts to understand the expression of emotion and its impact.[14] As one scholar noted, "Emotions have consequences."[15]

Once the blinders of "rational" actor come off, the array of "emotional" actors and events appear to be everywhere. We see emotional displays and even outbursts in national leaders. For example, the Philippine's president uses not only highly charged emotional language but also draws upon emotional references to justify and explain his shifting posture.

Emotions and the Public Domain

Expanding the emotional lens and vocabulary means incorporating public emotions into diplomatic spaces. Emotions has also been an increasingly salient feature of publics. Political and social movements have been described as "emotional move-

ments."[16] Among the notable trends are emotion-based content, personalized networks, and dominance of fear and hope.

From Affective News to Affective Publics

Traditionally, the public sphere like the ancient Greek agora represented a forum for debating information and positions. With the emergence of social media, initially scholars focused on information and the flow of information: who was winning in the information battle. Increasingly, scholars are noting that unique nature of the content publics are sharing. They are not simply publishing emotionally neutral "information," but rather sharing emotionally laden personal stories.

A vivid example is the Arab Spring of 2011. The public uprisings that swept through Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Libya and Syria were originally heralded as a "social media revolution."[17] Analysts and the majority of studies focus on the power of social media to enable people share information and organize.

Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira shifted the focus of their study of the Arab Spring from the communication tools to the content.[18] The dominant content was personal stories. People were "blending emotion with opinion, and drama with fact," creating "affective news." It wasn't the tools per se, it was the affective stories that nurtured and sustained involvement, connection and cohesion. In a later study, Papacharissi went further to suggest that it was not the new, but the publics who are emotional. In *Affective Publics*, Papacharisis highlighted the power of personal stories to create emotional connections: "The digital technologies network us but it is our stories that connect us to each other."[19]

[5] Reus-Smit, »Emotions and the Social«.
[6] Crawford, »The Passion of World Politics«.
[7] Ibid.; Mercer, »Rationality and Psychology in International Politics«; Bleiker/Hutchison, »Fear No More«; Ross, »Coming in from the Cold«.
[8] Hall, *Emotional Diplomacy: Official Emotion on the International Stage | Publications | News and Media*.
[9] Holmes, »Believing This and Alieving That«.
[10] Wong, »Emotions and the Communication of Intentions in Face-to-Face Diplomacy«.
[11] Capelos/Smilovitz, »As a Matter of Feeling«.
[12] Ross, *Mixed Emotions*.
[13] Solomon, »The Affective Underpinnings of Soft Power«.
[14] Hutchison/Bleiker, »Theorizing Emotions in World Politics«; Crawford, »Institutionalizing Passion in World Politics«.
[15] Crawford, »The Passion of World Politics«.

[16] Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*.
[17] Howard/Parks, »Social Media and Political Change«.
[18] Papacharissi/de Fatima Oliveira, »Affective News and Networked Publics«.
[19] Papacharissi, *Affective Publics*, 2015.

Personalized Political Networks: "Me & My Friends," "Do-It-Yourself" Politics

Emotion and political action in the public arena is personalized, which may have implications for professional or impersonal diplomatic response strategies. State-centric studies also tend to highlight the group or collective nature of emotion tied to the state.[20] Research on contemporary social movements reveal more personalized networks of emotional bonding and action. Social media researcher danah boyd says publics have shifted from being topically organized to being structured around personal networks, what she calls "me and my friends."[21] Another prominent scholar viewed the rise of "large-scale, rapidly forming political participation" and "personalized politics" one of the most notable trends in the first decade of the 21st century. He called the phenomenon "Do-it-yourself" politics.

Again, emotion is a dominant undercurrent in these phenomena. Bennett says these movements "invite highly personalized forms of expression against any number of *emotional targets. . .* Neither evidence nor reasoned debate often sway such emotional orientation."[22]

Fear & Hope in the Public Arena

In the public political arena, fear and hope repeatedly surface as the two most salient emotions and the two most relevant to social motivation. Diplomacy will be challenged to acknowledge and respond to these emotions.

Noted sociologist Manuel Castells in *Networks of Outrage and Hope* explains the dynamics of fear and hope in creating "emotional movements." The emotions most relevant to social motivation are fear (negative emotion) and enthusiasm (positive emotion). He links enthusiasm to hope, goal-seeking action and fear, to anxiety and anger.

Castells aligns the extreme expression of anger to outrage. Outrage, he suggests, is the anecdote needed to transform fear into political action.

Digital Realm as an Emotional Space

Diplomats can expect the trend toward emotionality in the public sphere to intensify as the use of social media increases. Emotions permeate nearly every aspect of the online communication experience, from the hand-held nature of the technology, to the sense of personal immediacy, to the expression and sharing of emotions with others. These emotional connections are more important than mere digital connectivity in the utilitarian sense.

In acclimating themselves to the online environment, diplomats need to expand their attention from technology and information to the emotional dynamics. Social media are not just tools; they create an environment. Researchers have described the "the digital realm as an emotional space,"[23] and a unique laboratory for studying how emotions are activated and expressed.[24]

Earlier research on the social media also focused on information dynamics such as one-way flow or interactivity. Networks highlight the circulation of information and exchange of information. In contrast to scholar who use the term "networks" to study of people using the social media, the people actually using the tools refer to their interaction as "communities." Emotional connections and sense of belonging are their defining features.[25]

Emotional Attachments to Personalized Digital Technologies

During the mass media era, emotion was tied to persuasive messages and messaging

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[20] Mercer, »Feeling like a State«; Faizullaev, »Diplomacy and Self«.
[21] Boyd, »Can Social Media Sites Enable Political Action?«.
[22] Bennett, »The Personalization of Politics«, p. 23.

[23] Serrano-Puche, »Emotons and Digital Technologies: Mapping the Field of Research in Media Studies«.
[24] Benski/Fisher, *Internet and Emotions*.
[25] Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*.

strategies. New research suggests emotion is tied to the technology itself. Hand-held devices are literally becoming what McLuhan called "extension of man." The personalized nature of some devices, particularly mobile phones, contributes to the emotional attachment many people feel to their technology.[26]

The technology affords a sense of personal immediacy and presence.[27] Emotions not only happen in real time, they can be expressed in real time. Many users, particularly youth, have become addicted to the 'always on' aspects of social media platforms.

Intimate Interface Design & Expressing Emotions

Contrary to early expectations, computer mediated communication (CMC) can be just as emotionally and personally involving as face-to-face communication.[28] With anonymity, people are even more willing to display negative emotions.[29] The phenomena of "flaming" (the hostile expression of strong emotions) and text-based emoticons such as happy - :) and sad :(were documented early in Internet use. The trend in emotional expression appears global and growing. A couple of years ago, Japanese emoji creators introduce "kaomoji," new text-based reaction faces, such as the "shrug" for "I don't care" ¯_(ツ)_/¯ and ୧•·•୨ emotional shorthand for "I can't bear or endure it."

Users are creatively creating emotional expressions – and social media platforms are responding by developing more intimate interface design and ease in helping users "visualize their feelings" on the web. After years of only having a "Like" button, Facebook added new "Reaction" emoji's (love, haha, surprise, sad and angry) to capture "authentic" emotional reactions.
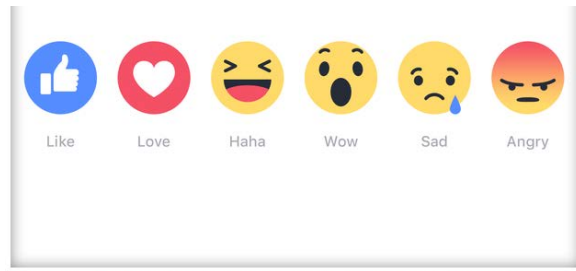
Facebook's new "Reactions" feature lets you express emotions beyond "Like." A new patent reveals that -- down the line -- Facebook may consider using technology that could use your own face into an emoji. / FACEBOOK

As the caption notes: The new "Reaction" feature lets you express emotion beyond "Like."[30] This trend of creating more intimate interface design includes Western social media platforms as well as popular Asian platforms such as Korea's KakaoTalk.[31]

Emotional Content – Storytelling & Creating Emotional Connections

Beyond the technology itself, is the emotional nature of the content shared on the internet. In human communication, sharing emotions is one of the most powerful ways to create emotional bonds or connections to others – including with absolute digital strangers. Chinese authorities have recently moved from monitoring public opinion to monitoring "public emotions" of its netizens and proactively taking steps to mediate possible "negative outpourings of emotions."[32]

In the online realm, marketers have found the most viral content is that which "connects emotionally." [33] This may also be the case politically as well. In early March 2012, a short documentary containing searing images of "invisible children" in their struggle against the Ugandan militia leader of Lord's Resistance Army, Joseph Kony.[34] Within days, "Kony 2012" became an inter-

[26] Vincent, »Emotional Attachment to Mobile Phones: An Extraordinary Relationship«.
[27] Lombard/Ditton, »At the Heart of It All«.
[28] Derks/Fischer/Bos, »The Role of Emotion in Computer-Mediated Communication: A Review«.
[29] Derks, Bos/von Grumbkow, »Emoticons and Social Interaction on the Internet: The Importance of Social Context«.

[30] Mastroianni, »Beyond 'Like'«.
[31] Yoon, »The Local Sociality and Emotion of Jeong in Koreans' Media Practices«.
[32] Ke Li, »Towards a More Proactive Method«.
[33] Dobele et al., »Why Pass on Viral Messages?«.
[34] This is an official rough cut gives a snapshot of the emotional intensity of the Kony 2012 video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cp3kgDVVEZo>

net phenomenon and remains one of the top viral videos to date.[35]

The predominance of emotional content may be also in part due to the narrative, storytelling format of social media. Despite the huge diversity and amount of communication on the Internet, Benski and Fisher (2014, p. 6) observed that "Much of that communication is emotional, reflecting immediate feelings, sometimes as they occur."[36] This observation resonates with the "affective news" storytelling style that mixed news with emotions and opinions. Papacharissi attributed the affective intensity of Twitter as a 'softer storytelling structure;' people expressed emotions in their stories, and others emotionally connected via those stories.[37] The high emotional tenor on Twitter was a similar observation of a recent SWP report of Twitter debates and networks in the MENA region.[38]

Social Media, Emotion & Identity: A Shared Feeling

Emotion and social media are the links that are creating a new way for publics to self-identify themselves in the political arena. The linking of emotional expression and emotional identification via the social media creates a tight circle: people are recognizing themselves in the emotions of the other.

In his work on emotions in international relations, "Feeling like a State," Mercer claimed that "identity is a feeling." In the online environment, identity appears to be a *shared* feeling.

Fixed labels for political actors and publics may not be as helpful as they were in the mass media era. Identity has long been recognized as a powerful force in political motivation and expression. Traditionally, identity for state and non-state actors as well as publics are often voiced as static features or fixed groupings. States are, for example, dominant powers, normative

powers or weak and rogue states. Publics are often categorized into demographic (age, income), geographic (domestic/ foreign, or Europe/Mideast) or socio-cultural groups (Latins or Asian).

When identity is linked to emotions, "the public" can become a fluid, changing entity. People identity with others based on shared feeling. In *Networks of Outrage & Hope*, Castells identifies outrage as the spark – but links the spark not to a cause – but another person with whom they identify.

And they overcome fear by the extreme expression of anger, in the form of outrage, when learning of an unbearable even suffered by *someone with whom they identify*."[39]

Social media has made possible for individuals to express their emotions, and for those emotions to be visible to others who are not in the same physical space. Emotional connection becomes a form of identity expression in the public political arena. One recognizes one's self in the emotional expression of the other. During the Arab Spring, people across the Arab world emotionally identified with the Tunisia vendor who set himself afire in a desperate expression of frustration.

Case Study: Presidential Elections – Angry Like Me

The recent US presidential election is illustrative of the link between emotion, identity, and social media. Coincidentally, a US and French presidential candidate were former senior diplomats, and both struggled to emotionally connect with publics. In the wake of Clinton's surprising defeat, the U.S. president and pundits blamed "identity politics," or too much "messaging aimed not at voters broadly but at Latinos, women, African Americans and the LGBT community." When she lost the elections, prominent officials and pundits proclaimed "the death of identity politics."

On the surface, the "death of identity politics" appears compellingly logical and persuasive, especially given the growing cul-

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[35] Kanczula, »Kony 2012 in Numbers«.
[36] Benski/Fisher, *Internet and Emotions*, p. 6.
[37] Papacharissi, *Affective Publics*, 2015.
[38] Transfeld/Werenfels, »#HashtagIdentities: Arab Social Media and the Struggle over Religious, Cultural and Political Norms«.

[39] Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*, p. 15.

tural and ethnic diversity of many societies today, including the US.

Yet, there is an obvious contradiction. Even as the "death of identity politics" gains traction in explaining the defeat of one presidential candidate – the strength of "white identity" was tied to the victory of the other candidate. "Alt-right" groups such as the white-nationalist National Policy Institute headed by Richard Spencer dedicated to "promoting the heritage, identity and future of people of European descent in the United States" became more vocal and visible after the election.

Very early on in the election and throughout the campaign, US voters were described in emotional terms, as "fearful," "angry," and "anxious."

More than ethnic White resonance, the Trump supporters emotionally resonated with each other – and Trump as a person. They self-identified with each other: *Angry like me.* Angry at Washington. Angry at their perceived loss of opportunity. Trump in the form of a crude empathy, responded to the emotions of his supporters. "Build a wall" was an emotional shorthand for the resentment of immigrants. He tapped into voter dislike/hatred of Clinton with the chants of "Lock her up." His campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again" is interesting in that it came from an emblem from his hat. People responded to the hat and wanted one. [40] In a sense, he responded to sensing what his supporters wanted and reflecting it back to them.

In many ways, Bernie Sanders, like Trump, emotionally resonated with the aspiration of his young supporters. Sanders campaign dropped its initial non-emotional theme "People4Bernie" and adopted a more

emotionally expressive meme: "Feel the Bern".[41]

In contrast with the strong emotional tenor of Trump and Sanders as persons, Clinton struggled to display personal emotion, and when she did, it was news.

The dilemma of the former U.S. first lady and Secretary of State was echoed across the Atlantic in presidential primary bid of Alain Juppé, France's former prime minister and foreign minister. Like Clinton, Juppé was perceived as "aloof, standoffish, arrogant and cold." Both senior diplomats struggled and ultimately failed to gain emotional currency in the public space.[42]

Next Steps: Using Diplomacy to Navigate between the Rational and Emotional in the Public Arena

This briefing paper has sought to highlight the emerging emotional dimensions of the public arena in which diplomacy now operates.
Diplomacy may be actively using digital technology but it might be still relying on mass media era thinking that views the social media as a tool to communicate with an audience instead of an environment or domain.
Diplomats are now enmeshed in the public domain. Shared emotion and identity are the defining features of the social media and the contemporary public domain.

[40] http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/make-america-great-again

[41] http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/feel-the-bern
[42] Fouquet/Viscusi, »French Presidential Candidate Juppe Opens Up and Gets Personal: French Front-Runner Takes a Leaf Out of Clinton's Book«.

The rising prominence of emotional expression may clash with the diplomatic tradition of relational actor and reserved composure. Publics, however, conditioned by social media, expect emotional expression and emotional connection.

In looking ahead for Diplomacy 21, the next step is to outline options. If social media is creating a more emotionally-infused public domain, how can diplomats use that awareness to develop appropriate and effective strategies for navigating that domain?

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