Twitter Diplomacy in the UAE and Saudi Arabia: Managing Media Crises

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ABSTRACT

The study explores Twitter diplomacy as a tool for managing media crises in the mainstream American and British media, with a particular focus on four significant political topics concerning the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia. These include the Qatar diplomatic crisis, the Yemeni war, Iran, and the Muslim Brotherhood. The study evaluates the impact of Twitter diplomacy on media coverage of these issues. It covers three new research areas: Arabian Gulf Twitter diplomacy, the influence of Twitter diplomacy on American and British mainstream media, and examine the utilization of traditional and social media in both Western and Arabian Gulf contexts. The findings of the study suggest that Twitter diplomacy

alone cannot address Western media crises. The study employed a qualitative descriptive methodology that utilized a combination of data collection techniques and qualitative analysis methods, including critical discourse analysis and elite interviews.

Keywords: Twitter diplomacy, Twiplomacy, digital diplomacy, e-diplomacy, public, media crisis management, mainstream media.

Introduction

Twitter diplomacy is a form of digital diplomacy, also known as e-diplomacy, which involves the use of social media and other technologies to engage in public diplomacy.[1] The rise of social media and digital environments have transformed the way diplomats communicate. Digital diplomacy also encompasses foreign ministry websites, smartphone apps, media analysis programs, and convergence management systems, all of which are equally important.[2]

Twitter was chosen because it is becoming a fast information network and is the most popular network among government leaders.[3] The study focuses on whether Twitter diplomacy can positively impact media crises in the US and UK related to political challenges concerning UAE and Saudi Arabia, namely the Qatar diplomatic crisis, the Yemeni war, Iran, and the Muslim Brotherhood, and examines its advocacy potential.

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[1] Saud Kateb, "Public Diplomacy: Saudi Soft Power in the Era of the Information Revolution [in Arabic]," *Saudi Arabia: Scientific Kawarizm for Publication and Distribution,* 2020, 104.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Burson Cohn & Wolfe (BCW), "Twiplomacy Study 2018," Twiplomacy, July 10, 2018, https://www.twiplomacy.com/twiplomacy-study-2018.

The study focused on US and UK media outlets because they are owned by influential institutions and media moguls and, being in English, have a global reach. The study analyzed tweets of political leaders and diplomats in Saudi Arabia and the UAE between 2015 and 2019, focusing on the four above-mentioned issues. Saudi Arabia and the UAE were chosen for the study because of their strong ties, particularly after the establishment of the Saudi-Emirati Coordination Council in 2016 and the formation of the Arab coalition (including the UAE) in Yemen in 2015.[4]

The study explores three areas not covered by existing research: Arabian Gulf Twitter diplomacy, the influence of Twitter diplomacy on the political agendas of American and British mainstream media, and examine the utilization of traditional and social media in both Western and Arabian Gulf contexts.

The main research question is: To what extent is Twitter diplomacy in the UAE and Saudi Arabia able to influence these four significant political issues, polarized in the American and British media? The secondary research questions are: Can Twitter diplomacy improve perceptions of Saudi Arabia and UAE in the USA and UK? If not, what other public diplomacy tools can? The study employs a qualitative descriptive methodology involving different data collection techniques and qualitative analysis methods, specifically critical discourse analysis and elite interviews.

Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

The key theories in this study are in Twitter diplomacy, digital diplomacy and public diplomacy. Power, including soft power, international relations theories, and key theories in communication, important for analyzing tweets, are also explored.

Basic Concepts in Twitter Diplomacy

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[4] Saudi Gazette, "Saudi-UAE Committee for Media Cooperation Meets in Abu Dhabi," Saudigazette, September 16, 2019, https://saudigazette.com.sa/article/577457.

Diplomacy is the management of international relationships through communication, and digital diplomacy as the use of technology, including social media, in this process.[5] Twitter diplomacy, also known as Twiplomacy, is the use of Twitter by heads of state and diplomats for diplomatic outreach – a growing trend in e-diplomacy.[6]

Public Diplomacy and its Importance to Saudi Arabia and the UAE

Public diplomacy involves various tools, with media monitoring, diplomatic exchange, and external media (international broadcasting) being the most significant.[7] Technological advancements have allowed politicians and diplomats to influence the news cycle, through platforms such as Twitter, by communicating directly with the public.[8]

While public diplomacy gained importance after the Cold War,[9] Saudi Arabia has only recently integrated it into its foreign policy strategy, establishing the Ministry's Deputy for Public Diplomacy Affairs in 2017.[10]

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[5] Michele Kelemen, "Twitter Diplomacy: State Department 2.0," NPR, February 21, 2012, https://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2012/02/21/147207004/twitter-diplomacy-state-department-2-0.

[6] Encyclopaedia Britannica. Quoted in Saud Kateb, *Public Diplomacy: Saudi Soft Power in the Era of the Information Revolution* [In Arabic], (Saudi Arabia: Scientific Kawarizm for Publication and Distribution, 2020), 17.

[7] Nicholas J. Cull, *Public Diplomacy, Foundations for Global Engagement in the Digital Age*, 1st ed. (Newark Polity Press Ann Arbor, Michigan Proquest, 2019), 4.

[8] Ibid., 15.

[9] Nicholas J. Cull, "Public Diplomacy: Taxonomies and Histories," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no. 1 (March 2008): 31–54, https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207311952.

[10] Saud Kateb, "Public Diplomacy: Saudi Soft Power in the Era of the Information Revolution [in Arabic]," *Saudi Arabia: Scientific Kawarizm for Publication and Distribution,* 2020, 23.

Similarly, in the UAE a Public Diplomacy Office was established in 2014, the main goal of which is to consolidate the UAE's soft power in partnership with the media, government, and the private sector.[11]

Public diplomacy is important for countering detrimental media coverage and furthering national security. Public diplomacy is increasingly important due to social media's influence on public opinion, which is often based on false information.[12]

Twitter diplomacy or Twiplomacy, a term coined in 2012, refers to the use of Twitter by heads of state and diplomats ("Twiplomats") to engage directly with the public[13] and is a growing phenomenon.[14]

The first Twitter study by Burson Cohn & Wolfe (BCW) in 2012 is now conducted annually, examining the presence and activity of heads of state and government, foreign ministers and their institutions on Twitter. According to the *Twiplomacy Study 2020*, 98 percent of the 193 UN member states have an official presence on the platform.[15]

The Study also found that Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President of the United Arab Emirates; King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, King of Saudi Arabia; Sheikh

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[11] United Arab Emirates Ministry of Cabinet Affairs, "The Public Diplomacy Office," The Ministry of Cabinet Affairs, n.d., https://www.mocaf.gov.ae/en/about/the-public-diplomacy-office.

[12] Saud Kateb, "Public Diplomacy: Saudi Soft Power in the Era of the Information Revolution [in Arabic]," *Saudi Arabia: Scientific Kawarizm for Publication and Distribution,* 2020, 32.

[13] Burson-Marsteller, "Twiplomacy Study 2012," Twiplomacy, June 25, 2012, https://www.twiplomacy.com/copy-of-twiplomacy-study-2013.

[14] Maja Šimunjak and Alessandro Caliandro, "Twiplomacy in the Age of Donald Trump: Is the Diplomatic Code Changing?," *The Information Society* 35, no. 1 (January 2019): 13–25, https://doi.org/10.1080/01972243.2018.1542646.

[15] Burson Cohn & Wolfe (BCW), "Twiplomacy Study 2020," Twiplomacy, July 20, 2020, https://www.twiplomacy.com/twiplomacy-study-2020.

Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates; and Tamin bin Hamid Al Thani, Emir of Qatar; to be the most followed Arabian Gulf leaders on Twitter, with 10.2 million, 8.3 million, 3.6 million, and 767,000 followers, respectively.[16] However, some diplomats in the region have more Twitter followers than their heads of state, such as Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates, with 4.6 million followers and Adel Al Jubair, former Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs, with 3 million followers.

A study on 1.7 billion tweets and 54 million users found that having a large number of followers did not necessarily equate to being influential but those who focused on a single topic got more retweets or mentions.[17] In this study, influence is also measured by how frequently the tweets are reported in American and British media and how they are presented.

Soft Power and Theories of International Relations

Twitter diplomacy utilizes soft power to achieve certain foreign policy objectives. Soft power, as defined by Joseph Nye, is the ability to achieve desired outcomes through enticement – using a country's culture and beliefs, values and ideas – rather than military or economic coercion.[18]

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Joseph S Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009), 12, 32.

Nye discusses the concept of "smart power," involving both hard and soft power strategies.[19] For example, combating terrorism may require soft power to address the root causes of extremism and hard power to guarantee security.[20]

In international relations, power is a key concept, and the school of realism emphasizes the importance of hard power for sheer survival. Soft power has varying levels of importance in international relations theories.[21]

The school of liberalism believes that international institutions, open communication, and economic interdependence can decrease conflict by aligning countries' interests, making hard power less important.[22]

Constructivism is a school of thought that suggests the international system is shaped by ongoing social interactions between actors – states, international organizations or non-state actors – at the international level, giving agency to soft power.[23]

Theories of Communication

This study employs critical discourse analysis, discussing three communication theories for analyzing the tweets. The theory of 'mediatization' is the idea that different types of media

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[19] JOSEPH S. NYE, "On the Rise and Fall of American Soft Power," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (June 2005): 75–77, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5842.2005.755_1.x.

[20] Saud Kateb, "Public Diplomacy: Saudi Soft Power in the Era of the Information Revolution [in Arabic]," *Saudi Arabia: Scientific Kawarizm for Publication and Distribution,* 2020, 27.

[21] Abdul Salam Al Blooshi, "The Soft Power Strategy for the United Arab Emirates: Comparative Analytical Study [in Arabic]," *Strategic Insights Journal*, no. 18 (2019): 11.

[22] Ibid., 11

[23] Ibid., 12

shape communication, and that politicians' discourse on Twitter must conform to the social norms of the platform.[24]

The theory of framing focuses on embedded themes in political communication.[25] Framing theory is used to examine how tweets are covered in the media – positive, negative or neutral – compared with the public response to them.

The theory of agenda-setting discusses whether politicians' tweets have achieved their goals with the public.[26] In this study, this is measured by number of interactions and the positive or negative sentiment expressed towards tweets.

Methodology

This section discusses the difference between "method" and "methodology",[27] adopting a qualitative descriptive methodology and a mix of data collection techniques and qualitative analysis methods, including critical discourse analysis and elite interviews.

The study used two data collection methods, including secondary data collected from tweets of selected Emirati and Saudi Twiplomats between 2015 and 2019. The study focused on active Twiplomats, who tweet at least monthly, and official Twitter accounts of the UAE and Saudi Arabian political leaders, diplomats, Saudi lobby founders situated in Washington

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[24] Ana Adi, Kristofer Erickson, and Darren G. Lilleker, "Elite Tweets: Analyzing the Twitter Communication Patterns of Labour Party Peers in the House of Lords," *Policy & Internet* 6, no. 1 (March 2014): 1, https://doi.org/10.1002/1944-2866.poi350.

[25] Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (December 1, 1993): 51–58, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x.

[26] Ibid., 7

[27] Ann Gray, Research Practice for Cultural Studies: Ethnographic Methods and Lived Cultures (Los Angeles: Sage, 2007).

D.C. – who often act as de facto diplomats for the state[28] – and official Twitter accounts of the UAE and Saudi Arabian foreign affairs ministries.

The study used a computational method to analyze large datasets of digital media (tweets published in US and UK media 2015 – 2019). Locus Elite[29] software was employed for sentiment analysis, interactions, and tweet count.

For qualitative analysis, the study used critical discourse analysis – mediatization, framing, and agenda-setting theories – to analyze tweets. The researcher also conducted elite interviews with experts in academia, law, human rights, diplomacy, and media

Selected Twitter Users:

Table 1: Emirati Twiplomats[30]

UAE	Position	Twitter ID
Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed	Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces	@MohamedBinZayed

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[28] Fadi Salem, "Social Media and the Internet of Things: Towards Data-Driven Policymaking in the Arab World Potential, Limits and Concerns," *Arab Social Media Report 7th Edition* (Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government, 2017), https://mbrsgcdn.azureedge.net/cmsstorage/mbrsg/files/13/1383b88a-6eb9-476a-bae4-61903688099b.pdf.

[29] This is system of media monitoring, analytics and digital media insights founded by Ashwin Reddy Gayam. The company made a customized demo for the researcher of this study, in collaboration with the ECSSR, in order to extract the information needed.

[30] The Twiplomats have solely official accounts; no private accounts exist for them.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid	Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai	@HHShkMohd
Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed	Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation	@ABZayed
Dr. Anwar Gargash	Minister of State for Foreign Affairs	@AnwarGargash
Dhahi Khalfan	Lieutenant General and Deputy Chairman of Police and General Security in Dubai	@Dhahi_Khalfan
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation	@MOFAUAE

Source: Compiled by author

Table 2: Saudi Arabian Twiplomats[31]

Saudi Arabia	**Position**	**Twitter ID**
Prince Khalid bin Salman	Former Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the United States and Deputy Defense Minister	@kbsalsaud

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[31] The Twiplomats have solely official accounts; no private accounts exist for them.

Adel Aljubeir	Minister of State for Foreign Affairs	@AdelAljubeir
Ali Shihabi	Washington-based Founder of the Arabia Foundation.	@aliShihabi
Salman Al-Ansari	Founder and President of the Washington DC-based Saudi American Public Relation Affairs Committee (SAPRAC)	@Salansar1
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Saudi Arabian Ministry of Foreign Affairs	@KSAMOFA @KSAmofaEN

Source: Compiled by author

Quantitative Analysis of Leaders' Tweets

Analysis of tweets by UAE Officials

Table 3: Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed's tweets

Tweets	Qatar	Yemen	Iran	**Muslim Brotherhood/ Khashoggi**
In English	11	21	2	0
In Arabic	12	25	1	0

Source: Compiled by author

Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed's tweets (relating to the four issues) had 788 interactions overall (likes, replies, and retweets) and 127,583 impressions. Public sentiment towards the tweets was 100 percent positive. Only one tweet on September 9, 2019[32] was published in the London-based *Middle East Online* and it was about the war in Yemen – the article was entitled: "Yemen's government starts indirect talks with STC forces."[33]

Table 4: Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid's tweets

Tweets	Qatar	Yemen	Iran	Muslim Brotherhood/ Khashoggi
In English	0	2	0	0
In Arabic	6	4	0	0

Source: Compiled by author

According to Locus Elite, none of the tweets were published in the US or UK media.

Table 5: Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed's tweets

Tweets	Qatar	Yemen	Iran	Muslim Brotherhood/ Khashoggi

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[32] Middle East Online, "Yemen's Government Starts Indirect Talks with STC Forces," MEO, May 9, 2019, https://www.middle-east-online.com/en/yemens-government-starts-indirect-talks-stc-forces.

[33] Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan (@MohamedBinZayed), "The UAE and Saudi Arabia are a one-trench partnership in facing the surrounding challenges…" Twitter, September 4, 2019, 11:16pm, https://twitter.com/MohamedBinZayed/status/1169328465184731136

In English	0	2	4	0
In Arabic	1	3	6	0

Source: Compiled by author

Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed's tweets had 354,972 impressions overall. Only one tweet covering one of the subjects of the study (Iran) was published by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty on January 14, 2016.[34] The tweet mocked the Iranian Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif, for his attack on Saudi Arabia's human rights violations in a New York Times op-ed.[35] Abdullah bin Zayed wrote in his tweet: "When I read the Iranian foreign minister's article in *The New York Times*, I thought it was written by the foreign minister of a Scandinavian country."

Table 6: Dr. Anwar Gargash's tweets

Tweets	Qatar	Yemen	Iran	Muslim Brotherhood/ Khashoggi
In English	45	94	58	5/0 on Khashoggi
In Arabic	103	98	53	11/2 on Khashoggi

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[34] Golnaz Esfandiari, "Iranian, U.A.E. Ministers Trade Twitter Digs in Saudi Standoff," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, January 15, 2016, sec. Persian Letters, https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-uae-minister-twitter-saudi-standoff/27488444.html.

[35] Mohammad Javad Zarif, "Opinion | Mohammad Javad Zarif: Saudi Arabia's Reckless Extremism," *The New York Times*, January 10, 2016, sec. Opinion, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/11/opinion/mohammad-javad-zarif-saudi-arabias-reckless-extremism.html.

Dr. Anwar Gargash had 130,038 interactions and 15.33 million impressions. Some 51.8 percent of his tweets are in Arabic, 48.2 percent in English. The majority of his tweets, 82.6 percent, are original (in his own words), and 16.3 percent are retweets. There was a 1.2 percent reply rate to his tweets. The sentiment of his tweets was 28.4 percent positive, 19.75 percent negative and 51.85 percent neutral.

Of all the Emirati Twiplomats featured in the media, Dr. Anwar Gargash holds the record for the highest number of tweets. According to Locus Elite, a total of 226 news articles have cited his tweets, 117 of which are in American and British media.

Table 7: Dhahi Khalfan's tweets

Tweets	Qatar	Yemen	Iran	Muslim Brotherhood/ Khashoggi
In English	0	0	0	0
In Arabic	904	300	714	25/66 on Khashoggi

Source: Compiled by author

According to Twitter Advanced Search and an empirical review of his Twitter account, Dhahi Khalfan does not tweet in English. According to Locus Elite, Dhahi Khalfan had 265,178 interactions specifically relating to the four topics of the study, with 51.89 million impressions, while 66.6 percent of his tweets are original and 27.2 percent are retweets. There is a 6.2 percent reply rate to his tweets and the sentiment of his tweets were 48 percent positive, 4.38 percent negative and 47.62 percent neutral.

Dhahi Khalfan has published the highest number of tweets of all Emirati Twiplomats, but only five news articles in the US and UK media referenced his tweets (about Qatar). This might be because all his tweets are in Arabic.

Table 8: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' tweets

Tweets	Qatar	Yemen	Iran	Muslim Brotherhood/ Khashoggi
In English	12	21	9	0/1 on Khashoggi
In Arabic	13	16	7	0/1 on Khashoggi

Source: Compiled by author

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs had 390 interactions with its tweets and 488,371 impressions overall, 54.5 percent of tweets were in English and 45.5 percent in Arabic. The sentiment of the tweets was 40.91 percent positive, 9.09 percent negative, and 50 percent neutral. According to Locus Elite, none of the Ministry's tweets that address the subjects of the study have been published in the US and UK media.

According to Locus Elite, Dr. Anwar Gargash is the most influential Emirati Twiplomat (1.2 million followers), based on the highest number of published tweets in US and UK media, followed by Dhahi Khalfan (2.8 million followers), who posted the most tweets on the four main topics.

Analysis of tweets by Saudi Arabia Officials

Table 9: Prince Khalid bin Salman's tweets

Tweets	Qatar	Yemen	Iran	Muslim Brotherhood/ Khashoggi
In English	0	43	51	0/3 on Khashoggi
In Arabic	0	28	33	0/2 on Khashoggi

Source: Compiled by author

Prince Khalid bin Salman had 176,054 interactions and 18.90 million impressions. Some 69.1 percent of his tweets were in English and 30.9 percent in Arabic, 41.8 percent of his tweets were original and 9.1 percent of his tweets were retweets. Overall, there was a 49.1 percent reply rate to his tweets. The sentiment of his tweets was 3.7 percent positive, 55.56 percent negative and 40.74 percent neutral. According to Locus Elite, 122 news articles referenced his tweets, of which 88 were US and UK media outlets, making him the Saudi Twiplomat with the most tweets published by the media.

Table 10: Adel Aljubeir's tweets

Tweets	Qatar	Yemen	Iran	Muslim Brotherhood/ Khashoggi
In English	0	5	14	0
In Arabic	4	20	25	0

Source: Compiled by author

Adel Aljubeir had 61,405 interactions and 6.92 million impressions. He publishes the same number of tweets in English as in Arabic, 21.4 percent of which were original, while 42.9 percent were retweets. There was a 3.7 percent reply rate to his tweets and 14.29 percent of them had a positive sentiment, while 14.29 percent were negative, and 71.43 percent were neutral. According to Locus Elite, three news articles mentioned his tweets, but none in the US or UK.

Table 11: Ali Shihabi's tweets

Tweets	Qatar	Yemen	Iran	Muslim Brotherhood/ Khashoggi

In English	9	10	27	0
In Arabic	1	0	2	0/1 on Khashoggi

Source: Compiled by author

Ali Shihabi had 5,706 interactions overall and 933,344 impressions. The sentiment of his tweets was 15.55 percent positive, 39.68 percent negative, and 44.77 percent neutral. His tweets were mostly in English (97.6 percent). Only 15.2 percent of his tweets were original, while 68.8 percent were retweets, and there was a 16 percent reply rate to his tweets. According to Locus Elite, none of his tweets on these subjects were published by UK or US media.

Table 12: Salman Al-Ansari's tweets

Tweets	Qatar	Yemen	Iran	**Muslim Brotherhood/ Khashoggi**
In English	104	62	77	10/1 on Khashoggi
In Arabic	114	66	138	0/3 on Khashoggi

Source: Compiled by author

Salman Al-Ansari had 16,610 interactions and 4.09 million impressions. His tweets were mostly in English (77.5 percent). Some 31.3 percent of his tweets were original and 66.7 percent were retweets, with a 2 percent reply rate to his tweets. The sentiment of his tweets was 11.45 percent positive, 34.04 percent negative and 54.52 percent neutral. According to Locus Elite, no news articles referenced any of his tweets.

Table 13: The Ministry of Foreign Affair's tweets

Tweets	Qatar	Yemen	Iran	Muslim Brotherhood/ Khashoggi
In English	33	83	38	1/41 on Khashoggi
In Arabic	123	183	138	0/60 on Khashoggi

Source: Compiled by author

As shown in Table 13, the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs has two twitter accounts, one in English and one in Arabic. According to Locus Elite, the Arabic account had 89,547 interactions overall and 14.42 million impressions. Some 66.1 percent of its tweets were original, while 25.2 percent were retweets, and there was an 8.7 percent rate of reply to its tweets. The sentiment of its tweets was 3.64 percent positive, 10 percent negative and 86.36 percent neutral. The Ministry's English account had 17,400 interactions overall and 2.01 million impressions. The majority of its tweets (58.7 percent) were its own, while 25.6 percent were retweets and there was a 15.7 percent rate of reply. The sentiment of its tweets was 21.49 percent positive, 38.84 percent negative, and 39.67 percent neutral. According to Locus Elite, none of the Ministry's tweets on the study's topics were cited by any US or UK media.

According to Locus Elite, the most influential Saudi Twiplomat, based on the number of interactions and the number of tweets published in the media is Prince Khalid bin Salman, even though he didn't post as many tweets on the study's topics as Salman Al-Ansari and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (in Arabic).

Qualitative Analysis of Leaders' Tweets

The study conducted a qualitative analysis of tweets in US and UK media using critical discourse analysis based on three communication theories: mediatization, framing theory, and agenda-setting theory. The most influential Twiplomats were Dr. Anwar Gargash and Prince Khalid bin Salman. Dhahi Khalfan was also selected as he is the most influential Emirati Twiplomat after Dr. Anwar Gargash and Ali Shihabi was also included due to his frequent

responses on Twitter to American news articles critical of Saudi Arabia and his articles about US and UK media attacks on Saudi Arabia published in US and UK media outlets.

Mediatization

Tweets by Dr. Anwar Gargash and Prince Khalid bin Salman published in the US and UK media were mainly written in English, while the tweets that received the most interaction from the public were written in Arabic. Their tweets have simple and focused language with clear political messages to appeal to both the general public and senior officials.

Dhahi Khalfan, on the other hand, always tweets in Arabic, uses simple, colloquial language, and deploys humor and sarcasm, which resonates well with his Arab audience. In contrast, Ali Shihabi's tweets are mostly in English and are more formal, sophisticated and intellectual since they are mainly responses to American politicians, writers, and researchers who attack Saudi Arabia.

Framing

In the case of *CNSNews.com*[36], Dr. Anwar Gargash's tweet[37] was cited without any positive or negative interpretation, likely due to its diplomatic nature that did not confirm or deny any involvement of Iran in the tanker attacks. However, in *The Washington Post*[38], a tweet[39] about

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[36] Patrick Goodenough, "US Officials Suspect Iran Is behind Tanker Attacks near Gulf," CNSNews.com, May 14, 2019, https://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/patrick-goodenough/us-officials-suspect-iran-behind-tanker-attacks-near-gulf.

[37] Ibid

[38] Liz Sly, "Princely Feuds in the Persian Gulf Thwart Trump's Efforts to Resolve the Qatar Dispute," *Washington Post*, May 13, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/princely-feuds-in-the-persian-gulf-thwart-trumps-efforts-to-resolve-the-qatar-dispute/2018/05/13/7853cc88-39cf-11e8-af3c-2123715f78df_story.html.

[39] Anwar Gargash [@anwargargash], "There will be no non-Gulf mediation no pressure will work, and the media will not change your situation…" Twitter, May 1, 2018, 6.04am, https://twitter.com/anwargargash/status/991302321794580481

Qatar was misinterpreted, and the article showed apparent support for Qatar and criticism of Dr. Gargash.

On the other hand, Dr. Gargash's tweet[40] about peace in Yemen was covered positively and objectively by conservative online newspapers, television, and radio channel websites. Among mainstream media, only CNN[41] and *Reuters*[42] cited it. While CNN was neutral in its coverage, the overall tone of their story perpetuated long-running stereotypes about Emirati excess and extravagance, contrasting the Pope's "humble Kia" with the UAE's supposed "gold-plated lifestyle."[43]

Prince Khalid bin Salman's tweets[44] about the attack on Saudi Arabian oil infrastructure emphasized the destabilizing role of Iran in the region, but the mainstream media focused more

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[40] Anwar Gargash [@anwargargash], "Let us assure its implementation & make 2019 the year of peace in Yemen…" Twitter, February 3, 2019, 12;14am, https://twitter.com/AnwarGargash/status/1092139191327166464

[41] Delia Gallagher, Sheena McKenzie, "Pope Francis Arrives at Lavish UAE Palace in Humble Kia Soul," CNN, February 4, 2019, https://edition.cnn.com/2019/02/04/middleeast/pope-francis-arrives-uae-intl/index.html.

[42] Reuters, "Pope Arrives in UAE for Historic Gulf Visit, Condemns Yemen War," The Mercury News, February 3, 2019, https://www.mercurynews.com/2019/02/03/pope-arrives-in-uae-for-historic-gulf-visit-condemns-yemen-war/.

[43] Delia Gallagher and Sheena McKenzie, "Pope Francis Arrives at Lavish UAE Palace in Humble Kia Soul," WRAL News, February 4, 2019, https://www.wral.com/story/pope-francis-arrives-at-lavish-uae-palace-in-humble-kia-soul/18168455/.

[44] Khalid bin Salman [@kbsalsaud], "The attack by the Iranian-backed Houthi militias against the two Aramco pumping stations proves that these…" Twitter, May 16, 2019, 2.01pm, https://twitter.com/kbsalsaud/status/1128948693468680192

on Saudi Arabia's alleged push for a US-led strike on Iran.[45] Conservative media outlets presented both sides of the issue.[46]

Prince Khalid's tweet[47] about The Stockholm Agreement, written in support of the ceasefire in Yemen, was covered with suspicion by the mainstream media, especially *The Washington Post*,[48] which focused more on Saudi Arabia's alleged role in the murder of Khashoggi and the humanitarian crisis in Yemen than the tweet itself. Conservative media outlets, like the *Daily Press*[49], were slightly more balanced in their coverage.

Analysis of how Dhahi Khalfan's tweets were framed in the media reveals a misunderstanding of his sarcasm and humor. The media, particularly in the US and UK, also wrongly presented his tweets as official positions of the UAE government.

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[45] Patrick Wintour and Julian Borger, "Saudi Offers 'Proof' of Iran's Role in Oil Attack and Urges US Response," The Guardian, September 18, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/18/saudi-oil-attack-rouhani-dismisses-us-claims-of-iran-role-as-slander.

[46] Tsvetana Paraskova, "Saudi Coalition Targets Houthis in Yemen in Response to Oil Pipeline Attack," OilPrice.com, May 17, 2019, https://oilprice.com/Latest-Energy-News/World-News/Saudi-Coalition-Targets-Houthis-In-Yemen-In-Response-To-Oil-Pipeline-Attack.html.

[47] Khalid bin Salman [@kbsalsaud], "#KSA and the Arab Coalition strongly support the agreement announced in Sweden today…" Twitter, Dec 13, 2018, 8:11pm, https://twitter.com/kbsalsaud/status/1073233959880966144

[48] Kareem Fahim and Missy Ryan, "In Potential Breakthrough, Yemen's Warring Sides Agree to Halt Fighting in Port City," The Washington Post, December 13, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/warring-sides-in-yemen-agree-to-halt-fighting-in-key-port-city-un-says/2018/12/13/3773b832-fedb-11e8-a17e-162b712e8fc2_story.html.

[49] The Washington Post, "Warring Sides in Yemen Agree to Halt Fighting in Key Port City, UN Says," Daily Press, December 13, 2018, https://www.dailypress.com/nation-world/ct-yemen-hodeida-cease-fire-20181213-story.html.

Dhahi Khalfan's tweet about Al Jazeera highlights the issue of tone in translation. The media[50] coverage focused on the supposed tension between the UAE and Qatar, although Khalfan was highlighting Al Jazeera's biased reporting. Similarly, coverage of his tweets[51] about the Muslim Brotherhood by the Anti-Defamation League[52] (ADL) misunderstood his sarcasm, with the headline implying that he was linking Israel and Jews to the Muslim Brotherhood when, in fact, he was making a satirical comment on the Muslim Brotherhood's changing stance.

Agenda-Setting

Agenda setting is the process of determining which issues are important and should be prioritized in public discussion to generate support for the country's political goals. Dr. Gargash focuses on the UAE's role in promoting peace and stability in the region. His tweets[53] in Arabic emphasize Emirati patriotism and the UAE's role in peace-building, while his tweets in English focus on the impact of the Pope's visit and the value of tolerance. High levels of interaction with Dr. Gargash's most popular tweet reflect the Emirati public's concern with peace and stability.

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[50] Economist Intelligence, "Heightened Tensions between UAE and Qatar," country.eiu.com, November 28, 2017, https://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1566172140&Country=United%20Arab%20Emirates&topic=P_1.

[51] Dhahi Khalfan [@Dhahi_Khalfan], "Yesterday we were going with millions to liberate Palestine…" Twitter, January 4, 2013, 12:16am, https://twitter.com/Dhahi_Khalfan/status/287276415471194112

[52] Anti-Defamation League, "UAE Official Links Israel and Jews to Muslim Brotherhood Conspiracies via Twitter," *ADL* (blog), February 1, 2013, https://www.adl.org/blog/uae-official-links-israel-and-jews-to-muslim-brotherhood-conspiracies-via-twitter.

[53] Gargash, Anwar [@anwargargash], "From Yemen to Afghanistan to the Horn of Africa…" [In Arabic] Twitter, December 21, 2018, 2:32pm, https://twitter.com/AnwarGargash/status/1076047673826992128

Prince Khalid bin Salman's tweet[54] about Houthi militia's attacks on Saudi oil facilities depicted the Houthi militia as a terrorist organization, to create a sense of urgency and concern among the Saudi public about security and Iran's destabilizing role in the region. The Arabic tweet had a significant level of interaction among the Saudi public.

Prince Khalid bin Salman's tweet[55], with the second-highest level of engagement in Saudi Arabia, looked at the success of the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen and the role of the Iran-backed Houthis. The tweet aimed to present the coalition as a legitimate force in Yemen, employing an aggressive tone to provide an outlet for people's anger.

Dhahi Khalfan's tweets use sarcasm and humor to criticize Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood. He uses an informal tone that resonates with his predominantly UAE-based followers who oppose Qatar's support for militias in the region. In one tweet[56], he suggests that Arabs should recruit militias against Qatar and questions why Qatar supports militias in Arab countries while fearing their presence in their own country.

Similarly, Khalfan's tweets about the Muslim Brotherhood are popular with the Arab general public, particularly in the UAE, while they are criticized by Western media. The tweet that was criticized by the ADL[57] was well-received by Arab audiences because of its light-

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[54] Khalid bin Salman [@kbsalsaud], "The terrorist attack carried out by the Iranian-backed Houthi militia…" Twitter, May 16, 2019, 2:01pm, https://twitter.com/kbsalsaud/status/1128948693468680192

[55] Khalid bin Salman [@kbsalsaud], "The Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen has succeeded in achieving many of the objectives…" Twitter, December 5, 2018, 1:15pm, https://twitter.com/kbsalsaud/status/1070245295789887489

[56] Dhahi Khalfan [@Dhahi_Khalfan], "Qatar and Supporting Militias…" [In Arabic] Twitter, April 7, 2019, https://twitter.com/Dhahi_Khalfan/status/1114855979470839808

[57] Anti-Defamation League, "UAE Official Links Israel and Jews to Muslim Brotherhood Conspiracies via Twitter," *ADL* (blog), February 1, 2013, https://www.adl.org/blog/uae-official-links-israel-and-jews-to-muslim-brotherhood-conspiracies-via-twitter.

hearted style. Khalfan seeks to discredit the messenger to show that messages from certain sources cannot be trusted.

Ali Shihabi's tweets focus on promoting and defending Saudi Arabia's foreign policy to an American audience, using sophisticated English language. He tweets[58] about Iran and human rights issues, aimed at countering negative perceptions of Saudi Arabia, and seeks to clarify the country's political stance or respond to criticisms. Despite his efforts, responses to his tweets are largely negative; his defensive style is not convincing his target audience.

Interviews with Senior Professionals

To gain a better understanding of political polarization in American and British media, in-depth interviews were conducted with senior professionals in academia, law, human rights, diplomacy, and media. Interviews were conducted by email, phone, and video (Zoom). Structured interviews were undertaken by email, and a combination of structured and unstructured interviews were conducted by phone and video.

The former Director General of the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research (ECSSR) in Abu Dhabi, Professor Jamal Sanad Al-Suwaidi, now addressed as His Excellency Professor Jamal, deputy chairman of the board of trustees of the ECSSR, was interviewed for this study. The interview was conducted by email, with the questions sent in Arabic.

Dr. Saud Kateb, a former Undersecretary at the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Public Diplomacy, was interviewed by phone in Arabic. Irina Tsukerman, a New York-based American lawyer and researcher, was interviewed by email and phone.

Despite reaching out to a variety of newspapers, news channels, and magazines spanning the ideological spectrum of the industry, only a select few were willing to participate in this study. Hugh Miles, a renowned freelance journalist with an extensive background in covering

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[58] Ali Shihabi [@aliShihabi], "Here I explain why Iran is not trusted. From day one Khomeini…" Twitter, June 5, 2019, 5:24pm, https://twitter.com/aliShihabi/status/1136262431389474817

the Middle East, was interviewed by email and then a video call. Miles has contributed to *The Independent*, *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Newsday*, *The Sunday Times*, amongst others.

Experts agree that Twitter diplomacy alone is insufficient to combat Western media bias towards the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Professor Jamal Sanad Al-Suwaidi suggests that weak traditional national media and successful promotion of political opponents' agendas contribute to negative portrayals in Western media. Irina Tsukerman argues that social media may create echo chambers and polarization, and experts in information warfare and diplomacy should handle the issue. She also criticized expensive Saudi and UAE lobbyists, who lack grassroots support. Dr. Saud Khateb emphasizes the need to build global consensus around media law and use multiple entities, such as the Ministry of Culture, to combat attacks on Saudi Arabia.

Hugh Miles believes that the media may not deliberately present polarized or biased views on these subjects, but a lack of knowledge of Arabic and poor cultural awareness can lead to misinterpretation. Miles highlights the war in Yemen as a reason for media skepticism towards Saudi Arabia and the UAE, due to the humanitarian crisis and human rights violations. He also notes that the murder of Jamal Khashoggi has intensified the friction with Saudi Arabia.

Results and Discussion

Twitter diplomacy alone cannot address polarization and bias against the UAE and Saudi Arabia in American and British mainstream media. Because there is limited research on Arabian Gulf Twitter diplomacy, the study used various research methods to minimize errors.

Twiplomats with the most followers and the greatest number of tweets relating to the four key political issues examined, are not necessarily the most influential. Responses to Saudi Twiplomats' tweets directed at mainstream media have been predominantly negative, suggesting that either a defensive approach is ineffective, or that the media's negative stance against Saudi Arabia is not easily challenged.

Saudi Arabia is lagging behind the UAE in terms of Twiplomatic activity on the research topics. Emirati Twiplomats, notably Dhahi Khalfan who boasts 2.8 million followers, posted the highest number of tweets and Salman Al-Ansari, a Saudi Twiplomat with 142.8

thousand followers, had the most tweets among Saudi Twiplomats, totaling 561 tweets. However, this count pales in comparison to Dhahi Khalfan's substantial output of 1,918 tweets.

Dr. Anwar Gargash and Prince Khalid bin Salman are the most influential Emirati and Saudi Twiplomats respectively. Conservative media outlets presented more balanced coverage of their tweets, while mainstream media focused more on controversial or sensational aspects. Mainstream media coverage of Prince Khalid bin Salman's tweets was more negative than that of Dr. Anwar Gargash, mainly due to tensions with Saudi Arabia arising from Jamal Khashoggi's murder.

The Twiplomats have different agenda-setting strategies. Dr. Gargash emphasizes the UAE's role in promoting regional peace and stability, Prince Khalid bin Salman focuses on issues related to Saudi Arabia's national security, Dhahi Khalfan ridicules his rivals, and Ali Shihabi promotes Saudi Arabia's foreign policy to an American audience. The mainstream media's negative coverage of some of these diplomats is not in line with the positive reaction their tweets receive from the Saudi and Emirati public.

Interviews proposed additional tools for public diplomacy, including training nationals in public and digital diplomacy, citizen diplomacy, targeting media outlets, consolidating relationships with think tanks, establishing an English-language satellite news channel, creating media platforms to translate articles by radical political Islamists, and improving lobbying efforts.

From a liberal perspective, the study emphasizes the significance of public diplomacy and soft power in shaping global perceptions of states but acknowledges that Twitter diplomacy alone is insufficient for the task. From a constructivist perspective, the study reveals the role of language and discourse in shaping international perceptions. Media influences public opinion through framing and selective reporting, demonstrated in this study through analysis of commentary on, and coverage of Emirati and Saudi Arabian diplomats' tweets by American and British media.

Conclusion

This study highlights the limitations of Twitter diplomacy alone in addressing the media crisis and polarization faced by the UAE and Saudi Arabia in particular, in American and British mainstream media, and recommends exploring supplementary tools of public diplomacy. The study also indicates that the most followed and active Twiplomats on key political issues are not necessarily the most influential. The study's findings also illustrate the importance of understanding the role of public diplomacy and language in shaping global perceptions of states, which aligns with the concerns of both liberalism and constructivism in international relations.