

Extended Abstract: Quantifying ‘Twiplomacy’ during the Ukraine War

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Research Purpose

Social media has upended how wars are fought in the twenty-first century (Patrikarakos, 2017). Leaders can share their messages at speed and scale, and engage in authentic dialogue during difficult times spent in bunkers, on the front lines, or at a negotiating table (Dinata, 2014). Theories of wartime communication styles posit that women and men approach conflict from different perspectives. Men are expected to be combative, and women seek compromise (Tessler et al., 1999). Women have been found to be more collaborative and interactive than men during high-stakes events such as wars, protests, and elections (Meeks, 2016; AUTHOR; Phillips, 2014; Sullivan, 1993). This study employs a novel mixed-methods computational analysis applied to a unique database of politician socio-demographic attributes to **understand the gendered dimensions of how international and Ukrainian politicians engage with each other on Twitter during wartime, and how ‘Twiplomacy’ translates into material support for Ukraine.**

The following research questions are asked:

- **RQ1:** When responding to Ukrainian politicians during wartime, how does the social media posting behaviour of international politicians differ over time and according to their gender and country?
- **RQ2:** To what extent do discussed topics and interactions between women and men international and Ukrainian politicians on social media during wartime fit expectations of gendered discourse?
- **RQ3:** Is there a correlation between international politicians’ public shows of support towards Ukraine and their country’s actual financial, military, and humanitarian donations?

This research follows an analysis on how Ukrainian women and men politicians used social media to communicate with international leaders during the Ukraine War (AUTHOR). The study found that women were more strategic in their use of Twitter, utilizing its interactive affordances to call for support from international leaders and share the negative impacts of the war on Ukrainian people. Taking a step back and analysing the engagement between Ukrainian and international politicians will shed light on social media’s place in diplomacy and political communication during war.

Theoretical Framework

This study engages with theories and literature on gendered discourse during conflict, gendered interaction strategies, and on the utility of social media in modern day diplomacy to understand how gender, social media, and diplomacy interact during the Ukraine War.

Studying the gendered dimensions of social media communication is a growing field of interest. A smaller field is the study of gendered political communication during wartime. The Women & Peace Hypothesis posits that women are more collaborative and pacifist than men, who are more combative and aggressive in their communication styles (Maoz, 2011; Tessler et al., 1999). Findings on gendered differences in social media use (RQ1) and discussed topics (RQ2) will be framed according to the Women & Peace Hypothesis.

Women and men are not only expected to approach conflict communication differently, but they are expected to have different approaches to interpersonal interaction in decision making. While men are expected to push through with a lone-wolf decision making style, women tend to use strategic interactions to form alliances and consensus towards their objectives (Gilligan, 1995; Sullivan, 1993). This strategic interaction has been found to be used more by women political candidates (Meeks, 2016), and this study will further assess whether women politicians are more strategic than men when using Twitter's interactive affordances (RQ2).

'Twiplomacy' merges traditional strategies of public diplomacy with the affordances of social media. Conducting public diplomacy on Twitter allows leaders to increase their influence with their own constituents, the international public, and other foreign leaders (Dinata, 2014). The theory that public diplomacy now plays out on social media will frame discussions on the relationship between international politician shows of Ukrainian support against their material financial, military, and humanitarian donations (RQ3).

Research Methods

To obtain the necessary data for this study, this author created a novel database of 121 Twitter profiles of Ukrainian members of parliament and cabinet, including metadata on their gender, political party, party lean, and politician prominence. In the first four months of Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine (February 24 – June 24, 2022), these politicians published 19,767 tweets, 79% of which were in English (AUTHOR). The 5,204 Twitter accounts Ukrainian politicians mentioned in these tweets formed the seed list of Twitter accounts analysed in this study.

To gather the final list of international politician Twitter accounts who engaged with Ukrainian politicians during the Ukraine War, the biographies of the 5,204 accounts Ukrainian politicians tweeted to were manually reviewed and a subset of international politicians was created. Their gender and country were also determined, and their tweets mentioning a Ukrainian politician were collected. To answer RQ1, international politician tweets were broken down according to their gender, country, and the month they tweeted in to observe high level patterns in tweeting.

To understand the discussed topics by international politicians (RQ2), a structural topic model (STM) was used in the R coding language. STMs can detect salient topics in groups of text, and break down topic usage according to text metadata such as gender and country of the

text author (Roberts et al., 2014). The STM detected differences in topic usage according to the gender and country of international politicians, as well as the gender of the Ukrainian politicians they mentioned on Twitter. To understand the interactions between international and Ukrainian women and men politicians, Twitter mentions (beginning with an '@' sign) were extracted from all tweets, and the number of mentions between women and men were decomposed in order to be discussed in the context of Interactivity theory (Gilligan, 1995).

To answer RQ3, occurrences of supportive tweets towards Ukraine (found using a STM in RQ2) were tabulated according to international politicians' countries and genders, and compared to their country's actual financial, military, and humanitarian donations (*Ukraine Support Tracker - A Database of Military, Financial and Humanitarian Aid to Ukraine*, n.d.). This study analyses whether there is a relationship between 'Twiplomacy' and concrete actions by international politicians, and whether women and men politicians engage in this new form of statecraft differently.

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