Tweeting for Democracy

Comparative analysis of British and Dutch tweets targeted at democracies and non-democracies

Bachelor's Thesis

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Abstract

When explaining the effects of social media like Twitter for diplomatic purposes, the current literature mostly focuses on the use of online strategies by government actors. In this way, numerous scholars have discovered which diplomatic strategies work best for government actors when trying to reach foreign countries. However, those studies do not go deeper into explaining how these online strategies might differ based on the aspects of the target country. This study aims to shift the focus of the existing literature; instead of exploring the impact of a country's online social media use on a foreign public, this research will examine whether the regime structure of a foreign target country influences a government's online diplomatic strategy. In order to do so, this study examines whether democracies might be more cautious in their digital diplomatic strategies towards non-democracies than towards democracies. In two separate Chi-Square Tests, the tweets of the Twitter accounts of various diplomatic actors, hailing from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, will be analyzed. The findings show that the theory outlined in the literature review does not apply to the practice; diplomatic actors actually generate more controversial tweets targeting non-democracies than targeting democracies. An additional qualitative analysis explains that this is because of the phenomenon of 'democracy promotion'. Scholars claim that democracies are overall eager to promote the democratic system and its values and thus find there is more need of controversy in their message targeting a non-democracy than targeting a democracy.

Keywords: democracy, non-democracy, digital diplomacy, Twitter, target country, regime structure

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1. Introduction

Over the past years, Twitter has become the indispensable social medium upon which a virtual diplomatic network is based (Hocking & Melissen, 2015). This virtual diplomatic network includes diplomatic actors, as well as non-official groups, organizations and individuals congregating online (Melissen, 2005, p. 5). Because of the increase in the variety of actors now engaging in the practice of digital diplomacy, governments are slowly losing the monopoly of information they once enjoyed (Nweke, 2012, p. 24). In order to filter the extreme amount of information exposed to the public in this time of digitalization, government actors have entered into dialogue with the public via social media accounts such as Twitter. As of today, this new phenomenon has been scrutinized by numerous scholars who claim that Twitter is particularly well-known for being a new instrument through which public diplomacy is being practiced (Fletcher, 2011; Lakomy, 2014; Romero, 2014).

Today's existing research in the realm of digital diplomacy has mainly focused on the potential of social media to reshape and innovate the practice of public diplomacy (Åström, Karlsson, Linde & Pirannejad, 2012; Bjola and Holmes, 2015; Nweke, 2012; Strauß, Kruikemeier, Van der Meulen & Van Noort, 2015; Su and Xu, 2015). For example, scholars have evaluated the impact of a country's social media use for diplomatic purposes and explored how state actors could benefit from it. By doing so, scholars have discovered which diplomatic strategy works best when trying to reach foreign countries. Yet, the target country itself may also prove to play a relevant role in how countries deliver their message and more importantly, in what type of information this message contains. Only a few studies to date confirm that countries might adapt their diplomatic strategies to the audience they target (Leonard, 2002; Potter, 2002). A reason for this might be that digital diplomacy research primarily focus on explaining the effects of social media for diplomatic purposes and the effects that a country's social media use has on the public. By examining this, many scholars succeed mainly in explaining how well an online strategy fits a country's online profile. Moreover, those researches mostly offer extensive knowledge solely on digital diplomacy between Western countries, so there is limited research available on online diplomatic messages targeted at non-democratic audiences. Altogether, current studies lack information on the target country itself as a possible factor which might greatly influence a country's online diplomatic strategy.

In an attempt to complete this apparent absence, the following research question has

been developed: *Does the state structure of a target country influence the digital diplomatic strategies that government actors conduct through Twitter?* Do online diplomatic strategies differ when targeting different audiences, how might the messages created by government actors differ when targeting different audiences and ultimately, why might they differ? This study aims to address these questions by shifting the current focus of the existing literature. Instead of exploring the impact of a country's online social media use on a foreign public, this research will scrutinize whether the aspects of a foreign target country influence a government's online diplomatic strategy. In order to do so, I will explore the difference in online diplomatic strategies when targeting various audiences. I will examine whether democracies might be more cautious in their digital diplomatic strategies towards non-democracies than towards democracies. For the comparative analysis, I will examine the tweets of diplomatic actors from two democracies: a global power, the United Kingdom, and a smaller power, the Netherlands. For each case separately, I will explore the difference between their online diplomatic strategies targeted at a democracy, Canada, and a non-democracy, China. Both the United Kingdom and the Netherlands have active foreign policies for the two targeted countries.

This study begins with a clarification of some of the most important terms for this research and an outline of earlier explanations on the impact of digital diplomacy. This is followed up by a review on the difference in targeted countries and possibly, the difference in online diplomatic strategies conducted upon them. Afterwards, the methods that I have used to collect and code the data are explained in detail, followed by a description of the various statistical techniques that I have used to analyze the quantitative data. The findings are presented afterwards and in the end, these findings are briefly explained by means of a qualitative research, forming a conclusion.

2. Literature Review

2.1. From Soft Power to Digital Diplomacy

Because of the extension of globalization after the Cold War, the use of soft power became more popular among states than the use of hard power (Cha, Yeo & Kim, 2014, p. 175). In Nye's definition (1990, p. 156), soft power is the ability of states to shape the preferences of other states through appeal and attraction, rather than coercion. According to Sun (2008, p. 166) nation-branding, exchanging mutual

interests, lobbying and communication strategies are all kinds of actions that states use to appeal and attract others' preferences. Nowadays, states are also entering into dialogue with the public due to new resources of soft power. In order to mobilize those new resources, governments make use of public diplomacy. Nye (2008, p. 95) defines public diplomacy as an instrument that governments use not only to communicate with the public of other countries, but also to attract them. Several countries had introduced the concept of public diplomacy already in World War I, in order to convince other countries' public of ideological support (Cha et al., 2014, p. 175). The characteristics of a country like culture, political values and foreign policy have become important dimensions in public diplomacy (Nye, 2004). As of today, an attempt at public diplomacy is an "attempt to reach publics and influence public opinion" (Henrikson, 2006, p. 1). However, a new form of public diplomacy has occurred lately, mainly referred to by scholars as 'digital diplomacy' (Bjola and Holmes, 2015; Hocking and Melissen, 2015; Kampf, Manor & Segev, 2015; Ritto, 2014; Westcott, 2008). In their book, Bjola and Holmes (2015, p. 35) define digital diplomacy as a "strategy of managing change through digital tools and virtual collaborations". Most scholars are positive about this digitalization, stating that it has made the practice of diplomacy more efficient and cost-effective, towards openness and transparency (Ritto, 2014). Some others are more skeptical, claiming that these new technologies undermine the nature of diplomacy by threatening the traditional roles and instructions of it (Gregory, 2014, p. 11). However, these differing conclusions can not deny the fact that the practice of diplomacy has endured major changes in the past few years, with new available technologies making way for states to digitally reach out to citizens world-wide (Lichtenstein, 2010). Previous research has come to find that this revolution has now introduced the public as integral part to public diplomacy (Cha et al., 2014; Kampf et al., 2015; Su & Xu, 2015). Digital platforms like social media allow governments to enter into active dialogue with this public. A platform that has especially been useful to governments is the online microblog Twitter.

2.2. Twitter

As mentioned in the introduction, the social medium Twitter has become an indispensable digital instrument for public diplomacy (Hocking & Melissen, 2015, p. 9). Scholars have introduced 'Twiplomacy' in their research as a term for Twitter

being a digital diplomatic tool of communication (Fletcher, 2011; Lakomy, 2014; Romero, 2014; Su & Xu, 2015). These Twiplomacy studies claim that Twitter as one of many social media has given the public an open access to public diplomacy. Some scholars refer to this as 'two-way communication' (Payne, Sevin & Bruya, 2011). Twitter works in such way that any individual with or without a Twitter account can read the messages that government actors publicly tweet. The ones who do have a Twitter account can also respond to those tweets and therefore, scholars suggest, can engage in public diplomacy. Accordingly, former research gives the expectation that Twitter is a tool which successfully integrates the public into diplomacy.

However, when exploring the success of dialogues with the public in digital diplomatic practices, most studies tend to focus on the government actors still. They either look at how state actors could benefit from it (Romero, 2014; Todorovska, 2015), or which ways would be the best for state actors to communicate with the public online (Khatib, Dutton & Thelwall, 2012). For instance, Todorovska (2015, p. 33), examined that the new available communication technologies have given government actors a wider reach for promoting their public diplomatic objectives. She then claims that "it generates positive outcomes in terms of engaging with foreign audiences" (2015, p. 35). Bjola and Holmes (2015, p. 72) also evaluate digital ways in which states could exert their influence successfully. On the other hand, Khatib et al. (2012) examine different digital platforms which, in their case, empower the US government to engage directly with citizens in the Middle East. They claim that government actors with an online presence require "strategic thinking about how to implement and use these new communication technologies" (2012, p. 471). Other studies also express the need of having an online presence for government actors in order to matter in the digital world of diplomacy (Leonard, 2002). Because, as Leonard (2002, p. 50) underlines, diplomatic actors should have control "over the way media present their countries". Or they argue that diplomatic actors are best in understanding how information should be presented in relation to their country's policies and objectives (Cha et al., 2014; Nweke, 2012, p. 24). In the realm of digital diplomacy studies, many more scholars did an attempt to explore online diplomatic strategies from the angle of the government actor itself (Bjola & Holmes, 2015, p. 71). For example, Bjola and Holmes (2015, p. 72), observed the effects of social media for diplomatic purposes. Another example is the study of Hocking and Melissen (2015, p. 53), who claim that "the digital age influences governments in

terms of more effective top-down delivery of services". Those scholars only focus on the impact that the digitalization of public diplomacy has on government actors.

The conclusions which the scholars mentioned above draw from their studies all indicate a top-down approach, explaining why and how government actors could influence or should influence a foreign audience, in order to conduct digital diplomatic strategies successfully. Most scholars have not done further research to explain why and how government's conducted digital strategies might eventually differ, based on aspects of the targeted country. Therefore, it is safe to say that in the light of the new area of digital diplomacy, current literature lacks research on ways in which the foreign target country might have an influence on the digital diplomatic strategies of government actors. More specifically, little is understood about how the regime structure of a target country could play an important role in explaining the difference in government's strategies when targeting distinctive foreign audiences digitally. As Potter (2002, p. 3) confirms, it is a requirement for governments to strive to understand every aspect of the country in which their target audience lives, in order for public diplomacy to succeed. Ross (2003, p. 27) agrees, stating that governments are responsible for understanding their targeted countries to be able to genuinely commit to dialogues with its corresponding audience. Although a few public diplomacy scholars do mention that social media could be used for exerting influence from both the angle of government actor and the angle of target country (Romero, 2014, p. 2), they do not go deeper into explaining the impact that a regime structure of a target country might have on the online strategies conducted upon its public. This will be justified further in the next section.

2.3. A New Perspective

Instead of scrutinizing how government actors make use of Twitter as a digital diplomacy tool to influence a foreign target country, this study seeks to explore how the regime structure of a target country may have an impact on a government's strategic use of Twitter. Firstly, Twiplomacy scholars generally agree that the targeted country has been given the possibility for active engagement into the practices of public diplomacy (Strauß et al., 2015; Su & Xu, 2015). This indicates that government actors must bear in mind the aspects of the audience they are targeting, like the country in which they live. Secondly, in the research of Hocking and Melissen (2015) on digital diplomatic practices, they have come to find that state's

foreign policy agendas change in the shift from offline public diplomacy to online public diplomacy. They state that the change in character of the policy agenda is reinforced by the dynamics of the targeted countries (Hocking & Melissen, 2015, p. 22). Holmes (2013) elaborates on this, stating that digital diplomacy requires adapted strategies and Leonard (2002, p. 56) agrees, stating that the strategy must also correspond with the grain of a target country's regime. Unfortunately, they elaborate on their arguments by only looking at how diplomatic actors should apply their skills to adapt their strategies for online foreign policy. Hocking and Melissen (2015), Holmes (2013) and Leonard (2002) agree that governments should bear in mind the audience they target when developing online strategies, but they put no effort into looking at how the aspects of the country of an online target audience might also play a role in developing online strategies. As of today, most studies in the realm of digital diplomacy have been focused on ways in which state actors could or should influence a foreign audience by means of social media. However, apart from mentioning that there are no 'one size fits all' digital strategies (Hocking & Melissen, 2015, p. 30), minimum research has been done to further explain how their digital strategies eventually might differ. The claims of the researches mentioned in this section confirm the expectation that a target country's regime structure might have an influence on government's digital diplomacy strategies. This generates the suggestion that there is a gap in the current literature. Some scholars do mention that governments might apply different online diplomatic strategies when targeting distinctive audiences. However, no efforts have been made to further explore what kind of role the regime structure of the targeted country plays in this. More importantly, as most of the research cover Western democracies, minimum research has been done to explore online diplomatic strategies targeted at non-democracies. This will be justified in the next section.

2.4. Target Audiences from Different Political Regime Types

Now that there are reasons to believe that the target country might also have ways of influencing the diplomatic strategies conducted upon them digitally, what type of influence would that be, and which factors does it depend on? In their book, Bjola and Holmes (2015) have done research on the effectiveness of social media for diplomatic purposes. They have examined what kind of digital strategies democratic countries use when exerting influence on the audience in a non-democracy. Accordingly, Bjola

and Holmes (2015, p. 87) came to the conclusion that "the more estranged the relationship between two countries, the more cautious the digital diplomatic strategy". The authors thus imply that democracies might generate less controversial tweets when targeting an audience from a distinct regime type. To support this argument, they claim that the type of relationship two countries have might influence the digital strategies they conduct upon each other's audience (2015, p. 87). Or as Bjola and Holmes (2015, p. 87) more specifically state, "the nature of the bilateral relationship between countries influences the way in which social media is being used for diplomatic purposes". In order to examine this statement and discover the inner workings of this reasoning, I involved studies on international relations, diplomatic relations and foreign policy literature outlining behavioral explanations.

In his research on friendships and rivalries in world politics, Bjola (2012) focuses on diplomacy's origins, seeking answers as to why relations between democracies are better established than relations between a democracy and a non-democracy. Bjola (2012, p. 14) comes to find that countries usually start developing good relations when they share the success of their collaboration. Great factors of good collaboration are shared beliefs, desires and intentions (Searle, 1995). Another important factor is the need for trust-building activities to support and promote joint policy goals (Cowan & Arsenault, 2008, p. 22; Melissen, 2005; Ross, 2003). Lastly, shared culture could also serve as a major driving force behind good collaboration (Cowan & Arsenault, 2008, p. 25). Given these factors, it is very likely that democratic pairings have a higher chance at good diplomatic relations than states that differ from regime type (Rummel, 1995, p. 474). To take this to the level of conflict in relation to regime type, the analysis of Benoit (1996, p. 654) has shown that two democracies were significantly less likely of having a dispute. These assumptions about bilateral relationships support the argument that democracies might digitally open up more to other democracies than to non-democracies.

Why would democracies then have a more cautious digital diplomatic strategy towards non-democracies? In their study on democracy and peace, Gleditsch and Hegre (1997, p. 286) found that "politically mixed dyads have a higher relative frequency of war than democratic dyads". However, democracies are generally assumed to nurture tolerance, trust and negotiation and maintain friendships in the international system (Bennet, 2006; Benoit, 1996; Gleditsch & Hegre, 1997; Yun, 2005). They tend to maintain respectful relations and ensure world-wide peace, also

in an attempt to enjoy legitimacy (Ikenberry & Kupchan, 2004, p. 45). "Democracies share the norms of compromise, respect for different opinions and criticism (developed through the institutions and values of democracies)" (Bennet, 2006, p. 7). Accoring to Bennet (2006, p. 7), these shared norms and values may lower the probabilities of conflict. Numerous scholars in the realm of peaceful democracy studies agree with Bennet (2006), however they also express that non-democratic regimes do not share those values (Gleditsch & Hegre, 1997; Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990), probably causing democracies to be more careful in their relationship with non-democracies. Or as Bennet (2006, p. 7) states, democracies practice policies that avoid costly and unnecessary military competition. Gurevitch and Blumler (1990, p. 25) elaborate on this with their claim that it is harder for democracies to conduct an honest and open online strategy when targeting a non-democratic country. Bjola and Holmes (2015, p. 76), for example, state that foreign diplomatic actors conducting digital diplomacy in a non-democracy must acknowledge the limits of what they can communicate publicly, otherwise severe consequences awaits them. These assumptions support the argument that democracies might be more cautious in their digital diplomatic strategies towards non-democracies, which could mean they might be less controversial in their Twitter-strategy when targeting an audience from a non-democratic regime type.

All in all, democracies are more open and controversial in their relations with other democracies, but more cautious when practicing public diplomacy in non-democracies. Digital diplomacy has given a new dimension to these existing bilateral relationships between countries in public diplomacy. Therefore, governments might adapt their online diplomatic strategies, when targeting audiences from distinctive regime types.

Altogether, these considerations suggest the following hypothesis:

H: Tweets sent by diplomatic actors will probably be less controversial in a non-democratic country than in a democratic country.

3. Research Design and Methodology

3.1. Case Selection

In this section will be given a justification for the case selection. This study will explore the tweets from the United Kingdom (henceforth referred to as the UK) and

the Netherlands. For each country separately, this study will compare the difference in its online strategy towards a democracy and a non-democracy. The UK and the Netherlands have been chosen due to four distinctive reasons. Firstly, they are experienced democracies. As this study seeks to explore whether democracies indeed apply different online strategies when targeting distinctive regime types, experienced democracies need to be analyzed. Semi-democracies like illiberal, partial, low intensity, empty democracies or hybrid regimes do not completely permit the expression of opposition in peaceful ways (Bennet, 2006, p. 7), so they are not relevant for this study. However, both the UK and the Netherlands have many diplomatic relations which they wish to maintain peacefully, and they have been doing so for many years according to their democratic norms and values. Second, both countries have well known advocacy campaigns. The digital developments in diplomacy opened up "new forms of engagement opportunities for Dutch transnational campaigning in favor of LGTB rights and UK actions aimed at the prevention of sexual violence" (Hocking & Melissen, 2015, p. 11). If I find out more on how the UK and the Netherlands conduct their well-known advocacy campaigns in non-democratic countries digitally, I could find out whether they are being more cautious targeting those countries or not. Third, they have multiple diplomatic actors with an active online presence on Twitter. In order to provide a larger image of a democracy's digital diplomatic strategy towards distinctive regimes, I will focus on the Twitter accounts of multiple diplomatic actors from each the UK and the Netherlands, all in different ways but supposedly conducting the same strategy. Fourth, they are two different kinds of democracies, but equally democratic. I have chosen to use two democratic cases, because I want to be able to extend the outcome of this research on other democracies as well. Having chosen a global power like the United Kingdom and a relatively smaller democratic power like the Netherlands, will allow me to perhaps extend the outcome on both large and smaller democracies in the world.

Moreover, former research on the use and effects of Twitter as a digital tool for governments practicing public diplomacy most often involve cases of Westernized countries. Those cases offer extensive research solely on digital diplomacy between Western countries. In an attempt to offer more completion to these studies, I have chosen to examine digital diplomatic strategies targeted at a non-democracy as well. As this study will examine the difference in online diplomatic strategies based on the

regime structure of the targeted country, the following cases are selected on their state structure. In order to determine if a country can be considered democratic or not, the Freedom House Index has been used. The Freedom House (2016) as a non-governmental organization, works to defend human rights and promote democratic change conducted through advocacy and action. Canada is a country that is considered democratic, hence this country is selected as the democratic target country. In the Freedom House Index of 2015, Canada is given the status of a 'free' country in the world, with its civil and political rights ranked 'most free'. On their website, the Freedom House (2015) mentions that Canada respects freedom of assembly and legally protects press freedom among other democratic values. More importantly, Canada is open and tolerant towards differences, opposition and criticism. As the non-democratic country, also selected by using the Freedom House Index, China has been chosen. China, on the other hand, is given a status of 'not free' in the 2016 Freedom of the World report. This annual report on political rights and civil liberties highlights significant disputed territories around the world. Civil and political rights in China are ranked 'least free' (Puddington & Roylance, 2016, p. 20). Furthermore, in the report (2016) is mentioned that the Chinese government does not tolerate any opposition and the media environment is extremely restrictive, giving China a non-democratic status. More importantly, China is less tolerant towards differences and opposition. The different regime structure of Canada and China allows for comparison in this study, because both have peaceful diplomatic relations with the UK and the Netherlands. This means that the UK and the Netherlands conduct active foreign policy in both countries (Savun & Philips, 2009, p. 890). This is relevant simply because comparative research on online diplomatic strategies could not have been done if the UK and the Netherlands did not have active foreign policies for both targeted countries.

3.2. Data Collection

During the data-collection, the focus was on the Twitter accounts of multiple diplomatic actors from the UK and the Netherlands. The chosen British diplomatic actor targeting Canada is the account of the UK government called '@UKinCanada'. For targeting China, the British embassy in Beijing and the British consulate in HongKong were chosen. In Beijing, the British embassy is present on Twitter with an account called '@ukinchina'. The British consulate in HongKong has an account

called '@UKinHongKong'. For the case of the Netherlands, the chosen Dutch diplomatic actors targeting Canada were the embassy in Ottowa and the consulate in Toronto. The Dutch embassy is present on Twitter with an account called '@NLinCanada' and the Dutch consulate has an account called '@NLinToronto'. For targeting China, the Dutch embassy in Bejijing and the Dutch consulate in HongKong were chosen. The former has a Twitter account called '@NLinChina' and the latter has an account called '@NLinHongKong'. The analyzed timeframe for this study is exactly two months, running from the 1st of February 2016 until the 31st of March 2016. As the area of studies of digital diplomacy is not older than the public use of the Internet and social media, studies with this topic are relatively new in academics and still require deeper analysis, this study included. However, with the use of the Internet changing so fast in the interconnected and interdependent world of today, the practice and conventions of digital diplomacy is also subject to change. For this reason, it is important to choose a timeframe as close as possible to the date of this study. For both the UK and the Netherlands, the chosen timeframe passed without any striking changes in their diplomatic relations with Canada and China. This allows me to explore whether democracies would adapt their online diplomatic strategies to the target audience when the relationship between the two countries are diplomatically "normal". Or as better explained in the earlier sections, it is important that the UK and the Netherlands have the type of relationships with Canada and China that scholars would normally expect them to have. In this way, other circumstances like war and conflict would not be able to indirectly influence the outcome of this research.

The seven selected diplomatic actors use their Twitter accounts actively. '@NLinCanada' is the least active Twitter account in the given timeframe and '@UKinCanada' is the most active account. The least active account generates one tweet every week and the most active account generates two tweets per day, respectively. I have used Web Scraper (www.webscraper.io), an extension offered by Google Chrome, to retrieve the Tweets of the seven Twitter accounts. The company of Web Scraper advertises itself as specializing in data extraction from web pages, in this case, the web page of Twitter. Web Scraper automatically collects the data from Twitter that I have selected first. The idea is to manually make a slight selection of the type of data I would like to be collected, after which the system searches the rest of all the same data available on the webpage and collects it into one file. For example, I have been collecting data on account-name, date, actual text inside the tweet, tweeted

pictures, quoted tweets and links. I have done this for the actual tweets posted by the online diplomatic actors from the UK and the Netherlands. For all diplomatic actors, I made use of Twitter's Advanced Search option. This option allowed me to search tweets based on date and account-name, which helped me find all the Tweets posted by the embassies within the given timeframe. This was a total of 124 for British actors targeting Canada, and a total of 105 for British actors targeting China. The total of tweets of Dutch diplomatic actors within the given timeframe was 68 for targeting Canada and a seemingly even total of 69 for targeting China.

3.3. Data Coding and Analysis

The main unit of analysis for the hypothesis is diplomatic tweets, which are any tweets posted by either the three British diplomatic accounts or the four Dutch accounts in February and March 2016. As I seek to understand the difference between diplomatic messages targeting distinctive audiences, I have left out any 'Retweets'. 'Retweet' is an option on the Twitter website that allows people to re-post tweets to their followers which were originally written by another account (support.twitter.com). Only self-generated Tweets are relevant for this study. For the comparative analysis regarding the hypothesis, the independent variable I looked at was the regime structure of the country which the diplomatic actors target in their tweets. Thus, the collected tweets were firstly hand coded either "democratic" or "non-democratic". The dependent variable in the analysis was the controversy of the message in the diplomatic Tweets. For this I chose the most simplistic codes, either tweets collected were "controversial" or "neutral". Based on the topic and word-choice for the tweet, the messages delivered were either containing a 'softer' political message or a 'harder' one (Bjola & Holmes, 2015, p. 78). Since controversy is not simple to define and interpret, a codebook was used which guided me throughout the coding of the data. "Controversial" tweets are tweets that addressed issues such as international politics, human rights, criticism towards foreign governments, international disputes, discrimination, internet freedom, sexuality, equality, women's issues, ethnicity, climate security, proper governance, justice and wars. "Neutral" tweets were all other messages without a heated topic, like informative Tweets, 'thanking' people or organizations, nation-branding, mentioning good trade relations, congratulating foreign audiences for national holidays and special birthdays, and mentioning good collaborations. For example, when The Dutch consulate in China

messaged that anti-discrimination legislation is necessary in China, now more than ever, this was branded "controversial". When the same consulate informed the public that it is closed for passport and visa applications, the tweet was coded "neutral". This study explores the relationship between the controversy in the tweets and the regime structure of the target country. For the statistical analysis, I have merged the tweets of the the two British actors targeting China, the tweets of the two Dutch actors targeting China and the tweets of the two Dutch actors targeting Canada. This choice was made, because the difference between strategies are examined and not the difference between various actors.

3.4. Chi-Square Test, Qualitative Analysis and Variables

Two Chi-Square Tests are used to analyze the difference in controversy in tweets posted by the diplomatic actors, one test for the British actors and one test for the Dutch actors. A Chi-Square Test is able to determine whether or not there is a statistical significant relationship between two variables (De Vocht, 2013, p. 149). I have done a separate test for each case in order to avoid finding differences between the British and Dutch actors, this could unintentionally influence the outcome. The Chi-Square Test was chosen as consistency test, because the two variables in this research are categorical and dichotomous. Since I only work with two categorical variables, I am analyzing a 2x2 table with the Fisher's Exact Test. This test is able to determine the exact significance for 2x2 tables (De Vocht, 2013, p. 152). The binary independent variable I work with is *regime structure*, and is either 1 (democratic) or 0 (non-democratic). The binary dependent variable *controversy* is able to test the hypothesis. *Controversy* is either a 1 (controversial) or a 0 (neutral). Furthermore, the outcome of the Chi-Square test is not able to determine the strength of the relation between the two variables. For that reason, I have run the Cramér's V test to learn the strength of the association (De Vocht, 2013, p. 154). In order to provide a deeper understanding and interpretation of the outcome of the tests, I have combined this quantitative research with a systematic qualitative research. The qualitative analysis was able to help explain findings generated by the quantitative analysis (Bryman, 2012, p. 633).

4. Findings

Table 1 is a cross table which provides a summary of the count of tweets posted by the the diplomatic actors from the UK. As seen, the British diplomatic actors in Canada have jointly posted a higher total amount of tweets than the actors in China, though not drastically higher. However, the British actors in Canada and China jointly have quite an active presence on Twitter, with more than 100 tweets each within the two-month timeframe. Table 1 shows a very striking result when looking at the percentages; almost 25% of all the tweets targeted at China are controversial. To give a broader view, this means that approximately one out of every four tweets contained a controversial message. This percentage is surprisingly low for Canada; only 9% of all the tweets targeted at Canada address a controversial topic. These results evaluate that within the given timeframe, British diplomatic actors in China have jointly posted more controversial tweets than British diplomatic actors in Canada, respectively. This finding does not support the expectation that tweets targeted at a non-democratic country would probably be less controversial than tweets targeted at a democratic country. Table 1 shows that British diplomatic actors relatively post more messages with heated topics when targeting the audience in a non-democracy.

Table 1: Cross table for the UK

	Canada		**China**	
	Count	% within regime structure	Count	% within regime structure
neutral	113	91,1%	78	74,3%
controversial	11	8,9%	27	25,7%
total	124 tweets		105 tweets	

Table 2 is a cross table providing a summary of the count of tweets posted by the diplomatic actors from the Netherlands. As seen in table 2, the amount of tweets posted by the Dutch diplomatic actors in Canada jointly is almost exactly the same as the amount of tweets posted by the actors in China, with a difference of one tweet. Both the actors in Canada and China jointly have quite an active Twitter presence, with almost 70 tweets each within the two-month timeframe. But more striking again are the percentages; almost 22% of all the tweets targeted at China are controversial. To give a broader view, this means that approximately one out of every five tweets

address a heated topic. The same percentage is again, surprisingly low for Canada; only 6% of all the tweets targeted at Canada address a controversial topic. The findings for the Dutch diplomatic actors correspond with the findings for the British diplomatic actors and show that within the given timeframe, diplomatic actors have posted more controversial tweets in a non-democracy than in a democracy, respectively. Both the findings for the UK and the Netherlands cut against the hypothesis that tweets targeted at a non-democratic country would probably be less controversial than tweets targeted at a democracy. The results in both table 1 and table 2 clearly show this might be otherwise.

Table 2: Cross table for the Netherlands

	Canada		**China**	
	Count	% within regime structure	Count	% within regime structure
neutral	64	94,1%	54	78,3%
controversial	4	5,9%	15	21,7%
total	68 tweets		69 tweets	

Now that cross tables 1 and 2 have shown that the independent variable *regime structure* might not influence the dependent variable *controversy* in the way expected, tables 3 and 4 provide an overview of the significance of the relationship between the variables. Table 3 shows the outcome of the Pearson Chi-Square Test for the British diplomatic actors. As the two variables being scrutinized are both categorical, I work with a 2x2 cross table. Therefore, the Fisher's Exact Test has determined the exact significance for the relation, which is 0,001. For the interpretation of this value, I maintain the 5-percent rule, meaning that any value lower than 0,05 indicates that two variables are very likely to have a significant relationship (De Vocht, 2013, p. 151). For the variables *regime type* and *controversy*, this is the case and therefore there is a clear significant relationship between them. Now that the relation is found to be significant, the Cramér's V Test is able to determine the strength of the relationship, whether this association is strong or not. The value of this test is always between 0 and 1, with 0 meaning there is no relationship and 1 meaning there is a perfect relationship (De Vocht, 2013, p. 154). As seen in table 3, the Cramér's V value for the British diplomatic actors is 0,226. Accordingly, this value indicates that there is indeed a significant relationship, however, the relationship is not moderately strong.

All in all, the outcomes of the test support the expectation that the regime structure of the target country could be influencing the controversy in the tweets generated by British diplomatic actors.

Table 3: Chi-Square Test and Cramér's V test for controversy of British tweets

	Value	Significance
Pearson Chi-Square	11,654	-
Fisher's Exact Test	-	0,001
Cramér's V	0,226	0,001

Table 3 shows the outcome of the Pearson Chi-Square Test for the Dutch diplomatic actors. Yet again, the Fisher's Exact Test has determined the exact significance for the relation, which is 0,007. According to the 5-percent rule, this indicates a clear significant relationship between the variables in the Dutch case. The outcome of the Cramér's V Test is 0,229, indicating a slightly stronger relationship between the variables for the Dutch case than for the British case. However, the relationship itself is still moderately strong.

Table 4: Chi-Square Test and Cramér's V test for controversy of Dutch tweets

	Value	Significance
Pearson Chi-Square	7,209	-
Fisher's Exact Test	-	0,007
Cramér's V	0,229	0,007

5. Qualitative Analysis

Altogether, the findings indicate that the regime structure of the target country does influence the message in the tweets of diplomatic actors, only not in the way described in the hypothesis. A closer look at the type of strategic tweets that the British and Dutch diplomatic actors generate might be able to give an explanation for this outcome. Overall, it could be stated that the British diplomatic actors are relatively more active in using their Twitter accounts for diplomatic strategies than

the Dutch actors. Nonetheless, the diplomatic actors from both countries tweeted more about controversial topics in China than in Canada. Furthermore, the topics which the diplomatic actors tweeted about targeting foreign audiences did not differ so much. For targeting Canada, the diplomatic actors from both the UK and the Netherlands addressed topics regarding nation-branding, society, culture and traditions. Regarding "neutral" topics in Canada, the British for example messaged about classical music, famous British scientists, Shakespeare and British-Canadian relations. The Dutch addressed "neutral" topics like art, fashion, Dutch-Canadian relations, Dutch innovations, water, tulips and wind turbines in Canada. Moreover, both British and Dutch diplomatic actors gave away funny facts about their countries and its inhabitants on Twitter. The British even formed these facts into a quiz for the online public, showing their willingness to engage with their Twitter audience. Also, the actors from both countries targeting Canada used their accounts to inform the public about closing-times of the embassies and consulates or giving away tips on visa/passport applications and travelling. The only "controversial" topics which both the British and Dutch diplomatic actors addressed when targeting Canada were human rights like anti-discrimination, freedoms and equality for all. For targeting China on the other hand, both the actors from the UK and the Netherlands addressed topics regarding democratic values, but also nation-branding and trade relations. For instance, The British addressed "neutral" topics in China like China's new year, Easter celebrations, wildlife and British literature and science. Dutch diplomatic actors addressed "neutral" topics like new technologies, fashion, conferences, Dutch-Chinese trade relations, art and literature. The "controversial" topics being addressed in the Dutch tweets were surprisingly corresponding with those of British diplomatic actors. When targeting China, the diplomatic actors from both the UK and the Netherlands mainly addressed different democratic values like civil right's activism, social development, Internet freedom, climate security, proper governance, education, peace, international security issues and gender equality.

In comparison, diplomatic actors are willing to engage more different controversial topics targeting a non-democracy than targeting a democracy. However, the way in which they address controversial topics is different. For instance, diplomatic actors targeting Canada specifically name a case when they cover a controversial topic in their tweets. The diplomatic actors targeting China, on the other hand, do message about democratic values like human rights, but do not speak of any

case in specific in their tweets. Bjola and Holmes (2015, p. 6) explain this by stating that diplomatic actors have "creatively used social media to alleviate the suspicion of Chinese authorities". In this way, diplomatic actors targeting China still cover topics hinting on democratic change for the Chinese, without directly criticizing the Chinese government and therefore, are avoiding any conflict. The most striking difference in the tweets which diplomatic actors generated when targeting distinctive audiences, was the way they handled International Women's Day on March 8th 2016. This day is "an occasion for a sense of female consciousness and as sense of feminist internationalism" (Kaplan, 1985, p. 170), which contributes to world-wide women's rights advocacy. On this specific day, the diplomatic actors targeting Canada only mentioned International Women's day in a maximum of 2 tweets per actor. The diplomatic actors targeting China, on the other hand, have not only dedicated a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 5 tweets per actor to International Women's Day, but also put in the effort to explain the importance of this day to their audience. This finding is a great example of the way diplomatic actors are actually more controversial targeting a non-democracy than targeting a democracy. Explanations for these findings can be found in the realm of democratic peace studies.

In their study on democratic peace, De Mesquita, Morrow, Siverson and Smith (1999, p. 4) give an institutional reasoning stating it is a tendency for democracies to initiate against autocracies. Other scholars explain that this is based on the democratic willingness to 'sell' the world their democratic values (Blanton, 2005). For example, Layne (1994, p. 8) claims that democracies are always seeking for more allies for the groundwork of a more democratic world. Studies confirm that democracies engage in friendly relations with non-democracies, but nevertheless feel the responsibility to publicly nurture democratic tolerance. Robinson (1996) calls this phenomenon 'democracy promotion' in his study. According to Robinson (1996, p. 621), this promotion has been an integral component of a democracy's foreign policy, since the worldwide wake of the defeat of fascism. "Democracy is a universal aspiration and the claim to promote it has mass appeal" (Robinson, 1996, p. 623). For example, the United States government has used a lot of democracy promotion in their diplomatic strategies to help transition authoritarianisms in the 1980s (Robinson, 1996, p. 652). Also in the spirit of neoliberalism, the US government found the opportunity to promote democratic values (Blanton, 2005, p. 648). As of today, the digitalization process of diplomatic practices might be a helping hand in this. As Åström et al.

(2012, p. 143) state in their article, the more vibrant the democratic practice is in using the Internet, the more vibrant the Internet will be used for political actions promoting democratic values. Promoting democracy is now also taken up in the public diplomatic strategies of democratic countries conducted through social media. Especially European countries have publicized the issue of promoting democracy in their diplomatic strategies (Olsen, 2000, p. 163). According to Olsen (2000, p. 143), democracies mainly address the prominent values of human rights and rule of law in their promotion of democracy. In their book on values and principles in European countries' foreign politics, Lucarelli and Manners (2006, p. 128) mention that promoting human rights and democracy abroad is an important characteristic of European diplomatic strategies. Regarding the non-democracies of nowadays, European countries assumes that their promotion of democracy will work as it did with Eastern Europe (Lucarelli & Manners, 2006, p. 131). The claims of the scholars mentioned above indicate that democracies truly believe in spreading their democratic values and therefore, 'helping' non-democracies. This can be seen in the topics that diplomatic actors from the UK and the Netherlands mainly chose to tweet about when targeting China. Moreover, the claims indicate that when targeting another democracy, democracies find there is less need of controversy than in targeting a non-democracy. The diplomatic actors from the UK and the Netherlands indeed chose to mainly tweet about neutral topics when targeting Canada. Accordingly, democracies feel less responsibility to promote democracy in a country which already nurtures democratic values.

6. Discussion

This study did an attempt to answer the following research question: *Does the state structure of a target country influence the digital diplomatic strategies that government actors conduct through Twitter?* As of today, existing research on digital diplomacy conducted through Twitter has been focused on explaining why and how government actors influence or should influence a foreign audience. Those studies tend to focus on government actors only by either looking at how state actors benefit from conducting public diplomacy through social media, or by looking at the best ways of communication which government actors could choose to interact with an online public. Although some scholars do mention that governments might apply

different online diplomatic strategies when targeting distinctive audiences, most scholars have not done further research to explain why and how these strategies might differ. Some studies, however, do indicate that the aspect of a target country like its regime structure might have an influence on digital diplomacy strategies. In order to fill this apparent gap in current literature, I involved studies on international relations, diplomatic relations and foreign policy literature outlining behavioral explanations. This research has found that there might be a difference in a government's strategy targeting a democracy or a non-democracy. More specifically, democratic countries would be more cautious in their digital diplomatic strategies towards non-democracies than towards democracies, because non-democracies do not share their values like nurturing tolerance, differences and criticism. To elaborate on this, I chose to analyze the tweets of diplomatic actors from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands for solid reasons described earlier. Eventually, I collected data on three British diplomatic actors and four Dutch diplomatic actors targeting Canada as a democratic target country and China as a non-democratic country. I have done two separate Chi-Square Tests, one for the British case and one for the Dutch case.

The findings of the tests surprisingly showed that the diplomatic actors from the UK and the Netherlands have posted more controversial tweets targeting a non-democracy than targeting a democracy in the given timeframe of February and March 2016. Furthermore, the relationship between the regime structure of the target country and the controversy in the tweets of the diplomatic actors seemed to be significant, though not very strong. As the findings of this quantitative research cut against the expectation given in the literature review, a systematic qualitative analysis was done to give an explanation for the outcome. This analysis showed that the controversial tweets targeted at China mostly issued democratic values, like human rights. Another striking finding was that although diplomatic actors targeting china were willing to talk about controversial topics, they would not name any case or issue in specific. Searching in the realm of democratic peace studies, some scholars might have given an explanation for this. They claim that democracies overall are eager to promote the democratic system and its values. Especially in their foreign policies towards non-democracies, democracies feel like 'helping' them and therefore, spread their democratic values. Democracies find there is less need of controversy in another democracy, because they already nurture the values. These claims support the finding that diplomatic actors from the UK and the Netherlands addressed a lot of democratic

values in their controversial tweets towards China and overall were more controversial targeting China than targeting Canada.

In conclusion, the findings indicated that the regime structure of the target country does influence the message in the tweets of diplomatic actors, though not in the way expected. Tweets sent by diplomatic actors are actually more controversial in a non-democratic country than in a democratic country. As the findings cut against the expectation of the hypothesis, deeper analysis on behavioral explanations for online diplomatic strategies is required to offer more completion to this research. Moreover, the difference in online diplomatic strategies could be further examined by looking at other aspects of the target country, or even by looking at factors regarding the online public. By examining other cases of global and smaller democratic countries as well, this study could be given a deeper understanding. Any further understanding of this study could also include analyses of non-democratic cases conducting digital diplomatic strategies upon targeted democracies. These are tasks for future research. Lastly, future scholars should bear in mind that with the use of Internet changing so fast in the digitalized world of today, the practice of digital diplomacy could also change relatively quick. Therefore, this study might be outdated faster than expected.

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