

# NATO Social Media Diplomacy: An Exploratory Study in Public Diplomacy and Alliance Building

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NATO places great importance on its public image. It established its Public Diplomacy Division (PDD) in 2003 which aims to “raise awareness and understanding of the Alliance and Alliance-related issues and, ultimately, to foster support for, and trust in, the Organization.”<sup>1</sup> This is paralleled by the rise of social media as an important medium through which the Alliance’s polity gather news and NATO’s adversaries attempting to sow division therein.

This presentation will consider the Twitter discourse held by NATO official pages (some 20 of them) between 2012 and 2023. This project will study social media discourse through the lens of natural language processing and discourse analysis in line with computational social science methodology. This presentation will focus on the impact of the Alliance’s geopolitical context in its public diplomacy with particular emphasis on Russia’s annexation of Crimea and invasion of Ukraine. I will present how discursive trends are representative of the Alliance’s operating context reflecting organizational priorities. Furthermore, I will show that the NATO, as an institution, uses its social media presence to signal organizational values and priorities as they evolved during the period of data collection. Since this research focuses on all NATO official pages, I will show how the messaging emanating from the military component of the organization differs from that emanating from the political component. I shall posit that the former will be more informative, drawing from strategic communication whereas the latter will be an example of public diplomacy proper.

The intent of this study is to ultimately determine how NATO uses social media. This can provide insight on the importance of narratives in contemporary security alliance systems and more generally in the hybrid conflict opposing NATO and Russia. The use of quantitative methodology can also serve to illustrate further avenues for researching public diplomacy.

Keywords: NATO, Public Diplomacy, social media, political narratives.

Proposed working groups: Security and Defense Policy Strategy; Military Strategy

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_69275.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_69275.htm).