

CANADIAN DIGITAL DIPLOMACY ON THE FACEBOOK PLATFORM IN VIETNAM

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Abstract— 2023 has witnessed Canada and Vietnam’s relations turn 50 years old. Moreover, they have established and strengthened a comprehensive partnership since 2017. The world has changed due to the rapid development of digital platforms, and many countries have also applied digital technology to public diplomacy, and Canada is no exception. Canada has just conducted its digitalization of public diplomacy worldwide, namely digital diplomacy. Many citizens use social media platforms in Vietnam, which should be considered a primary target of Canadian digital diplomacy. This paper used a descriptive qualitative method with secondary data to examine how Canada promoted its national image on social media platforms in Vietnam. The paper is divided into three main parts: (i) identifying “digital diplomacy” and its importance in Canadian foreign policy; (ii) applying a rubric developed by Hassan M. Selim to determine Canada’s presence and content to evaluate Canadian implementation of digital diplomacy; (iii) giving some recommendations to promote Canadian digital diplomacy in Vietnam and point out the implications for Vietnam. It concludes that the Canadian government has applied digital diplomacy with many social media accounts, different languages, and diverse topics, and Vietnam also learned from this experience.

Keywords— Vietnam-Canada relations, digitalized public diplomacy, digital diplomacy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Canada and Vietnam officially established diplomatic relations in 1973. Then, Canada opened its Embassy in Hanoi in 1994 and the Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City in 1995. Two nations are marking the 50th anniversary of their diplomatic ties in 2023. Moreover, a Canada-Vietnam Comprehensive Partnership was formally established in 2017. Vietnam and Canada strengthen their cooperation in numerous fields, such as politics and diplomacy, trade and investment, development cooperation, defense and security, cultural and academic exchange, science, technology, innovation, and people-to-people ties [1].

Regarding scale in trade relations, Vietnam is Canada’s largest trading partner in ASEAN. Vietnam has been a member of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) since January 2019, and Canada is also a member of CPTPP. This opportunity advances Canada and Vietnam’s bilateral relations. Besides the strong ties in terms of trade, Vietnam and Canada have also strengthened their public diplomacy relations, primarily because Canada always promotes its image in Vietnam. On the occasion of Canada Day, celebrates the birthday of Canada on July 1, 2023, Ambassador of Canada to Việt Nam Shawn Steil pointed out some highlights of recent years between Vietnam and Canada, “I would like to recognize the many friends of Canada who – through civil society organizations, cultural and academic exchanges, the private sector, and other networks – have contributed to the development of the Canada- Vietnam relationship” [2].

Canada also supports and enhances digital technology to promote its national image in this new era. In 2014, Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird hosted an event at Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada (DFATD) headquarters, and he also mentioned a window into “everything Canadian” - a window to capture audiences’ interest in Canada. On the occasion of the Global Commission on Internet Governance summit in Ottawa in 2014, the Twitter account @Canada was launched. Moreover, this account was also considered a diplomatic toolkit to promote Canada’s strong values, rich culture, beautiful scenery, and active economy. In January 2014, over 290 new social media accounts were created for both tasks overseas and departmental initiatives. This also marked over 100 missions created by Canada regarding digital footprint worldwide. According to Global Affairs Canada, Canada does not endorse any particular social media site or tool. Canada uses a variety of social media platforms, namely Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, Weibo, WeChat, and Youtube [3]. The Canadian government has many channels, platforms, and occasions to promote its image in Vietnam. The Canadian government’s ten social media accounts in Vietnam are delivered in three languages (Vietnam, English, and French) [3]

Vietnam and Canada have strong relations, and now, they are also in a Comprehensive Partnership. Therefore, examining and learning from Canada’s experience conducting digital diplomacy might help Canada assess its

strengths and weaknesses when conducting this diplomacy in Vietnam. Hence, Canada can enhance and promote its image in Vietnam, and Vietnam can also learn from this policy.

II. WHAT IS DIGITAL DIPLOMACY?

The term “digital diplomacy,” which is often used as an alternate word for “digitalized public diplomacy,” also advocates that the use of digital utensils is its subdivision of diplomacy [4, p. 14]. Diplomacy aims to promote integration among states within the international system. Public diplomacy involves the effort of the state to influence, inform, and engage with the foreign public [5]. Following their purpose and promotion of national interest in the international community, states employ their strategy and appropriate forms of diplomacy. In recent years, many governments worldwide have conducted public diplomacy. Public diplomacy is an effective means of influence; it is a two-way street involving listening and talking. The state must consider and conduct public diplomacy because public diplomacy can promote a nation’s image. The failure of one country in its foreign policy can be viewed as a reason for its communication and public diplomacy policy. The tools to conduct public diplomacy include public affairs, media relations, strategic communications, advocacy campaigns, cultural promotion, educational exchanges, and international broadcasting.

Moreover, some researchers also include global business promotion, tourism, and national branding as part of public diplomacy. These strategies aim to serve various purposes and goals multiple times [6, p. 1]. For example, the impact of public diplomacy is divided into several aspects. Public diplomacy can increase people’s familiarity with their country by making them think about this country or turning around negative opinions. In addition, public diplomacy can improve people’s appreciation of one’s country by creating positive perceptions.

There are three dimensions of public diplomacy. The first one is daily communication explaining the context of domestic and foreign policy decisions. The second dimension is strategic communication, in which simple themes are developed. The third dimension of public diplomacy is the development of lasting relationships with key individuals over many years through scholarships, exchanges, training, seminars, conferences, and access to media channels [7, pp. 108 - 109]. Public diplomacy in the digital world means everything done in private should be shared with the world, which means it should have to relinquish control over the communication process. The Foreign Affairs of each nation should consider a live update on diplomatic events and publishing international accords [4, p. 58]. Many terms describe the application of digital technology to diplomacy, such as digitalized public diplomacy, digital diplomacy, Facebook diplomacy, etc. The different names of this kind of diplomacy are based on the scope of one’s nation’s purpose. For example, if one country mainly focuses on the Facebook platform, then this application becomes a primary tool of its diplomacy. Henceforth, they might use the platform’s name to define digital diplomacy, such as Facebook and Twitter Diplomacy.

In this paper, the term “digital diplomacy” is used to describe an application of digital technology into diplomacy to promote the image of Canada in Vietnam, especially on the social media platform – Facebook.

III. HOW HAS CANADA CONDUCTED DIGITAL DIPLOMACY IN VIETNAM?

This paper focuses on the tools and contents that Canada applied when spreading their concerns in Vietnam to examine what Canada has recently conducted in digital diplomacy toward Vietnam. Regarding Canadian digital diplomacy tools conducted on social media in Vietnam, a rubric developed by Hassan M. Selim is employed as a guideline [8]. The primary focus of this research revolves around two critical criteria: coverage and currency, as well as the interactivity of this rubric, which can reflect the presence of Canadian missions in Vietnam. Coverage and currency relate to how information and content are presented across diverse topics on the platforms under examination. The following indicators are considered within this criterion: the comprehensiveness of data available and the frequency of updates made to the pages. Interactivity refers to the level of interaction facilitated between users and digital channels. For this reason, the interfaces provided must be user-friendly, convenient, and accessible. Factors such as language support and ease of access are considered while evaluating the interactivity of these platforms.

According to the Connected Consumer Q1 2023 report released by Decision Lab and the Mobile Marketing Association Vietnam, Facebook, Zalo, and YouTube are Vietnam’s most popular social media platforms in Vietnam [9]. This paper mainly focuses on the Facebook platforms of the Canadian government in Vietnam. Since Facebook platforms have official accounts and spread information daily. The following are pages examined in this paper (Table 1).

Table 1. Canadian Diplomatic Missions in Vietnam

(Source: Facebook Pages of Canadian missions in Vietnam)

Name of platform	Creation date	Language	Follower	Link	Verification
Đại sứ quán Canada tại Việt Nam	30 August 2010	Vietnamese	154.000	https://www.facebook.com/CanadaVietnam	Verified page
Tổng lãnh sự quán Canada tại TP. HCM	18 July 2014	Vietnamese	116.000	https://www.facebook.com/CanadaTaiHochiminh	Verified page
Embassy of Canada to Vietnam	6 March 2013	English	42.000	https://www.facebook.com/CanadaInVietnam	Verified page
Consulate General of Canada in Ho Chi Minh City	5 November 2015	English	8.000	https://www.facebook.com/CanadaInHoChiMinhCity	Verified page
Ambassade du Canada au Vietnam	16 August 2013	French	9.000	https://www.facebook.com/CanadaauVietnam	Verified page
Consulat général du Canada à Hô Chi Minh-Ville	5 November 2015	French	980	https://www.facebook.com/CanadaaHoChiMinhVille/	Verified page

A. COVERAGE AND CURRENCY

This criterion evaluates the *comprehensiveness of data available* and the *frequency of updates* made to the pages. The accounts of the Canadian government were created and used more than a decade ago. Their accounts are all verified. The meaning of the verified badge is to represent authenticity. A Facebook Page with a verified badge confirms that it is an authentic presence, and this one is to help people find actual pages and profiles. Therefore, with the verified badge, the Canadian government could reduce the crisis caused by fake pages or fake news since the audiences only trust the verified page. This is a strength of Canada since its Facebook pages are seen as a national representative office on the Internet.

The platforms cover their messages and deliver them on various pages. The data on these Facebook pages are diverse topics about the economy, lifestyle, education, and cooperation between Vietnam and Canada. Facebook pages almost meet the criteria of one quality channel. The pages are updated frequently, and the content is diverse. The information is updated continuously in real-time. There is more than one post updated daily. With this average updated post, Canada could keep their pages working and reach a certain number of audiences daily. Canada's Facebook pages exhibit a diverse range of status updates. With the support of digital technology, press releases, speeches, remarks, new policies, and advice are broadened to the people on social media. They encompass two main themes: one is dedicated to informing the public about events organized by the Canadian government in Vietnam to celebrate special occasions in both Canada and Vietnam, while the other focuses on announcing new policies introduced by Canada in areas such as the economy, education, immigration, and so on. These posts typically share information sourced from official Canadian government websites and highlight new events in Vietnam organized by the Canadian government or events in which Canadian foreign affairs teams actively participate. Regarding content, most of the posts examined do not follow any trend on social media. The audiences on social media nowadays are young, so the more one page creates or follows the trend, the more followers increase.

B. INTERACTIVITY

This criterion evaluates the level of interaction facilitated between users and digital channels, which are user-friendly, convenient, and accessible. Factors such as language support and ease of access are considered while evaluating the Facebook platforms. The information spreads on the pages *Đại sứ quán Canada tại Việt Nam*, *Tổng lãnh sự quán Canada tại TP. Hồ Chí Minh*, *Embassy of Canada to Vietnam*, *Consulate General of Canada in Ho Chi Minh City*, *Ambassade du Canada au Vietnam*, and *Consulat général du Canada à Hô Chi Minh-Ville* are updated with the same content and same timeline and information delivered in English, Vietnamese, and French which are main one used in Vietnam and Canada. With the diverse languages delivered on its Facebook pages, Canada aims to approach Vietnamese citizens in Vietnam and other audiences who speak French or English - Canada's official languages. With many languages, Canada can reach different audiences who can get the content in their favorite languages besides Vietnamese citizens. However, it should be noted that the content provided depends on the Facebook admin's idea and context and the use of different photos or videos to illustrate their posts. For

example, October 20 is Vietnamese Women’s Day; most posts have the same content and photo sources. The page of Tổng lãnh sự quán Canada tại TP. Hồ Chí Minh (in English: Consulate General of Canada in Ho Chi Minh City) got the most reactions and likes with 156 likes and loves. This can be understood since this page is written in Vietnamese and has many followers.

Table 2. Examples of updated content on the Canadian Facebook Pages
(Source: Facebook Pages of Canadian missions in Vietnam)

Page	Content	Photo
Đại sứ quán Canada tại Việt Nam	<p>Chúc mừng Ngày Phụ nữ Việt Nam 🌸🌸🌸</p> <p>Ai là người truyền cảm hứng cho bạn? 😊</p> <p>Trong ảnh là những nhà báo đã truyền cảm hứng rất nhiều cho chúng tôi tại Tọa đàm: Giới và Báo chí gần đây. Chúng tôi đã cùng chia sẻ việc làm báo về chủ đề giới và thúc đẩy việc đưa tin có đạo đức và toàn diện, hướng tới một xã hội công bằng và bình đẳng hơn, nơi mọi người thực sự có tiếng nói. 📺🗣️ #G4ForRights #CanadaForRights #Canadavietnam50</p> <p>In English (translated by author): Happy Vietnamese Women’s Day Who inspires you? In the photo are the journalists who inspired us a lot at the recent Discussion: Gender and Journalism. We shared gender journalism and promoted ethical and inclusive reporting, working towards a more just and equitable society where everyone truly has a voice. #G4ForRights #CanadaForRights #Canadavietnam50.</p>	
Tổng lãnh sự quán Canada tại TP. Hồ Chí Minh	<p>Chúc mừng ngày Phụ nữ Việt Nam! Bạn có biết tháng 10 là Tháng Lịch sử Phụ nữ ở Canada? Phụ nữ và trẻ em gái đóng vai trò vô giá trong việc xây dựng một tương lai công bằng và toàn diện hơn với cơ hội bình đẳng cho tất cả mọi người tại Việt Nam, Canada và trên toàn thế giới. Ảnh: Tổng Lãnh sự Annie Dubé làm giám khảo cuộc thi “Code Like A Girl” dành cho các bạn nữ phát triển phần mềm do công ty GeoComply tổ chức vào ngày 14/10/2023 tại TPHCM.</p> <p>The same content posted in English of the Consulate General of Canada in Ho Chi Minh City.</p>	
Embassy of Canada to Vietnam	<p>Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy recognizes that supporting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is the best way to build a more peaceful, more inclusive and more prosperous world. 🌍🌍🌍</p> <p>🌸 On the occasion of Vietnamese Women’s Day 20/10, Brian Allemekinders, Head of Cooperation/Counselor (Development) was proud to attend an event to honor the contribution of women working at the Coop Bank – an important partner for Canada’s international assistance in Vietnam.</p> <p>More than 300 employees of Co-op Bank of Vietnam and all of its 32 branches celebrated in an awarding ceremony “Proud to be Co-op Bank women”, with sharing on work and life of women in Co-op Bank to balance professional tasks and home responsibilities. 😊</p>	

<p>Consulate General of Canada in Ho Chi Minh City</p>	<p>Happy Vietnamese Women’s Day! Did you know that October is Women’s History Month in Canada? Women and girls play an invaluable role in building a fairer and more inclusive future with equal opportunity for everyone, here in Vietnam, in Canada and around the world. Photos: CG Annie Dubé as a judge at “Code Like A Girl” contest targeted at female developers held by GeoComply on October 14, 2023 in HCMC</p>	
<p>Ambassade du Canada au Vietnam</p>	<p>La politique d'aide internationale féministe du Canada reconnaît que le soutien à l'égalité des sexes et à l'autonomisation des femmes et des filles est le meilleur moyen de construire un monde plus pacifique, plus inclusif et plus prospère. 🧑🏻‍🤝‍🧑🏻 🌸 À l'occasion de la Journée de la femme vietnamienne (le 20 octobre), Brian Allemekinders, chef de la coopération/conseiller (développement), était fier de participer à un événement visant à honorer la contribution des femmes travaillant à la Banque Coop - un important partenaire de l'aide internationale du Canada au Vietnam. Plus de 300 employés de la Banque Coop du Vietnam et de ses 32 succursales ont participé à une cérémonie de remise de prix intitulée "Fières d'être des femmes de la Banque Coop", avec des échanges sur le travail et la vie des femmes de la Banque Coop pour trouver un équilibre entre les tâches professionnelles et les responsabilités familiales. 😊</p>	
<p>Consulat général du Canada à Hô Chi Minh-Ville</p>	<p>Bonne journée de la femme vietnamienne ! Saviez-vous qu’octobre est le Mois de l’histoire des femmes au Canada ? Les femmes et les filles jouent un rôle inestimable dans la construction d’un avenir plus juste et plus inclusif avec des chances égales pour tous, ici au Vietnam, au Canada et partout dans le monde. Photos : CG Annie Dubé en tant que juge au concours « Code Like A Girl » destiné aux développeuses organisé par GeoComply le 14 octobre 2023 à HCMV</p>	

Besides posts and photos, visual aids that are consistently applied to increase engagement on Facebook pages are videos. The Embassy and Consulate General of Canada in Vietnam also frequently upload videos, clips, or reels to Vietnamese citizens. One of the videos that got tremendous attention from audiences is “A Têt message from G4 Ambassadors – Canada, New Zealand, Norway, and Switzerland” in 2020 with more than 4,000 views. They join Vietnam’s female footballers in empowering Tet’s message, especially to promote the power of females in Vietnamese society. In addition, this message is popular on social media platforms and mentioned in many official newspapers in Vietnam.

Although the Canadian government has created many platforms in three different languages to have a widespread presence, many Facebook pages also mean the distribution of followers. In addition, the limitation of Canadian digital diplomacy in Vietnam is that it cannot maximize its performance in terms of interaction. It should be noted that though there are many social media accounts, there are few interactions between diplomats and Vietnamese audiences. Facebook pages update status frequently, but there is not much interaction between the governments and the public. Most posts aim to announce one new policy/program rather than create an excellent dialogue opportunity with the audience. There is not much reply from the pages to any questions or comments from the audiences. The Canadian social media platform admin also does not

create any opportunity to engage Vietnamese citizens through mini-games, quizzes, or Q&A sessions on social media.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS TO PROMOTE CANADIAN DIGITAL DIPLOMACY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR VIETNAM

Information and communication technologies have enabled information to reach a much larger audience than in foreign affairs. It seems that the national borders and sovereignty have become blurred. Information and communication technologies present greater chances for diplomats who must stay informed and updated with changes in the international community. In addition, digital diplomacy helps the government transfer its information to broader audiences. The following recommendations could improve Canada's digital diplomacy operation in Vietnam, especially to promote two-way communication with the audience on Facebook pages.

- **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CANADIAN DIGITAL DIPLOMACY**

Firstly, the content that might attract more people is delivered in Vietnamese. Therefore, to decrease the distribution of followers, the Canadian government could consider a flagship page, which is a main page written in three languages rather than three pages in three languages. There are now many pages and languages to meet the target audiences, so the Canadian government should consider combining Vietnamese, English, and French pages into one page and simultaneously delivering a message or information in one status with three languages. Hence, the audience will focus on one page, and the interaction might increase. That means only the Canadian government in Vietnam needs to invest in one page to gain in-depth results and have comprehensive interactions.

The government should consider this vital issue since social media should be two-way communication. The audience needs the new information, and the government needs to listen and respond to their consideration. Moreover, posts that have good photos/ videos can attract audiences. The Canadian government should consider digital platforms as a place to share stories through real-time images/ videos captured from recent events rather than to share links or # only. Generally, when conducting digital diplomacy, primarily through social media, the government should consider the visual effects, such as photos and video, and deliver the message as concisely as possible. Hence, Canadian foreign affairs in Vietnam should consider creating content with the people involved.

Last but not least, digital diplomacy is missing an ambassador on the Internet who can become a main KOL or influencer to tell people a story about Canada. Furthermore, the audiences who use Facebook are young and dynamic, so the content should be considered to attract them.

- **IMPLICATIONS FOR VIETNAM**

According to Resolution No. 52-NQ/TW (2019) of the Politburo on several guidelines and policies to proactively participate in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, Vietnam's goal is to take advantage of and effectively take advantage of the opportunities brought by the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Through that, "promoting the process of innovating growth models, restructuring the economy associated with implementing strategic breakthroughs and modernizing the country; Strongly develop the digital economy; Fast and sustainable development based on science - technology, innovation, and high-quality human resources; improve the quality of life and welfare of people; firmly ensure national defense, security, and ecological environment protection." [10] With the specific policy of "Determining the core content of our country's policy of proactively participating in the Fourth Industrial Revolution is to promote the development of science, technology, and innovation in all sectors." industries, fields, and promoting national digital transformation, with a focus on developing the digital economy, building smart cities, e-government, and moving towards digital government." The policy of promoting digital transformation in terms of human resources has also received attention from the Party and state: "Focus on building a team of cadres, civil servants and public employees to meet the requirements of the Fourth Industrial Revolution; standardize and strengthen the capacity of state management officials at all levels. Clearly define functions, tasks, and coordination mechanisms between state management agencies in implementing digital transformation". [10] Thus, the Politburo's resolution has demonstrated the role of digital transformation for Vietnam today and in the future. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs could not stand aside from the current development of digital transformation.

Through evaluation of, as well as the recommendation to promote digital diplomacy of Canada in Vietnam, there are some implications for the Vietnamese government as follows:

In terms of coverage and currency

- Canada has used Facebook pages in Vietnam for more than ten years to engage with audiences in Vietnam. Therefore, Vietnam should build up its official Facebook pages to not be leveraged behind other countries. Vietnam should create accounts on popular social media platforms such as Facebook and get verified for their pages to have online representatives of Vietnam on those platforms. Vietnam can take advantage of Facebook's official and verified pages to combat fake news or any misinformation that might hurt Vietnam's image. Facebook and digital diplomacy might become excellent strategies for promoting and spreading messages about Vietnam.
- Canada updates and has coverage of diverse topics on social media platforms. Vietnam should have a task force to survey and create content to attract its target audiences.
- Canada does not get involved in taking trends to attract young people on social media. Vietnam should note that trends and social media are primarily for the youth and take this opportunity to promote their images.

In terms of interactive

- When delivering the message and content, languages should be considered diverse and in real-time updates. In our case, it might involve having content in English and Vietnamese, which are widely spoken, and searching for information about Vietnam.
- Interaction is essential; therefore, when conducting digital diplomacy, Vietnam should consider having a team in charge of a real dialogue with the online audience.

V. CONCLUSION

Digital diplomacy can foster and connect states and the public around the world. By examining Canada's experience in conducting digital diplomacy, it could be concluded that Canada has used its Facebook pages in Vietnam as a digital platform to communicate and spread the image of its nation. Canada uses Facebook to practice its strategic approach to engaging with Vietnamese audiences. With more than ten years of conducting digital diplomacy in Vietnam, Canada has a chance to communicate with Vietnamese citizens directly to build its positive image in the Vietnamese community. With the strengths and weaknesses discussed above, it seems that to ensure the effectiveness of digital diplomacy, Canada, Vietnam, or any other country should consider building up their presence and interaction on online platforms. Digital diplomacy is a modern strategy to approach and promote relations with citizens of any country in the world. In conclusion, Canada's use of Facebook as a digital tool in Vietnam represents an innovative approach to contemporary international relations. Therefore, to ensure the effectiveness of this new strategy, Canada, Vietnam, and others should consider tools and content to reach target audiences when conducting digital diplomacy.

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