

Diplomats urged to be more active online

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Even though a recent global study shows that the official account of President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo has more than 10 million followers and broke into the top 10 most followed and most effective leaders on Twitter, Indonesia's Foreign Ministry has yet to fully maximize the potential of social media.

According to the "Twiplomacy" study by communications firm Burson, Cohn & Wolfe published on Tuesday, Jokowi ranked after Queen Rania of Jordan and Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj in terms of followers, while United States President Donald Trump topped the list, followed by Pope Francis and Indian President Narendra Modi.

The same study shows that few foreign ministries use the platform to establish mutual Twiplomatic relations. It named the official account of the European Union External Action Service, which has about 260,000 followers and is mutually following 132 foreign ministries and world leaders, as the best connected foreign

office. The official Twitter account of Indonesia's Foreign Ministry, with about 133,000 followers, was not listed in the top 10.

Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said the rapid growth in the number of social media users in Indonesia redefined diplomacy. "Diplomats and diplomacy must adapt to this new norm to utilize the technology if we want to stay relevant," she said at a seminar on digital diplomacy on Thursday.

In the past, diplomats used to be sent abroad to represent their country, said Jovan Kurbalija, director of DiploFoundation, a Malta-based NGO focusing on internet and diplomacy. "But now they also have to communicate with their audience back home because people access the information and they basically want to know what's the position of their country," Kurbalija said.

Foreign Ministry Director General for Information and Public Diplomacy Cecep Herawan said that in 2002 the Foreign Ministry only had a website, but now it also ventures on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. Cecep said diplomats compete with their colleagues in

terms of getting information out with the media, as well as racing against the spread of fake news.

Information gathering was a key solution, he said, especially on current issues. "For example, on palm oil we developed content to be very sharp, powerful messages to counter fake news," he said. "It's important for us to immediately react to fake news."

Cecep said in managing the official accounts it was quite challenging to transform foreign policy into content designed to be understandable by internet users with short attention spans.

Australian chargé d'affaires Allaster Cox said the Australian Embassy in Jakarta took serious measures to maintain its online presence in Indonesia.

"We don't necessarily use social media to promote policy but as a platform to raise profiles, particularly to young people," he said. Even though Indonesia and Australia's diplomatic relations had ebbed and flowed, Cox said surveys showed there was growing positive perceptions by the young generation in social media.

Meanwhile, Twitter Indonesia public policy lead Agung Yudha

said the most common mistake made by diplomats or government institutions on social media, especially Twitter, was they did not embrace how the younger generation communicates. "They use a language that the young target audience doesn't use," he said.

He explained there were three levels of progress for accounts in social media. The first was to broadcast, in which institutions set up an account to disseminate information. After that the account becomes conversational and responds to input and expressions from followers or other users, which makes the account the home of the topic.

"The most common mistake of mostly government agencies and diplomatic institutions is that they broadcast information and then hope to become the natural home to the topic without engaging the conversation," he said.

"That doesn't work. You have to engage the conversation. How can a consular office of a country become a natural home to a topic, for example, relating to visa submissions, if any question related to the procedures related to visas does not get answered?" he asked.