

Presidential Public Diplomacy 2.0: Seven Lessons to Prevent Fire in Cyberspace

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ABSTRACT

The Amazon fires in summer 2019 triggered an incendiary Twitter debate between French president Emmanuel Macron and Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro that engaged political leaders, celebrities, and audiences worldwide. Currently, diplomats-in-chief connect to the global public through completely open debates, often without proper advice from foreign-affairs ministers, which may result in misunderstandings and conflicts among world leaders. Hence, this study argues that these interactions must be supported by Nicholas Cull's seven lessons in public diplomacy. The main topic on hand is presidential public diplomacy performed through digital means in cyberspace. Thus, after distinguishing cyberspace, digital diplomacy, and cyberdiplomacy, the literature review focuses on presidential public diplomacy, presidential diplomacy on Twitter, and Cull's seven lessons. Subsequently, the case study method provides a snapshot of the debate between Macron and Bolsonaro over the Amazon fires. This study concludes by answering the research question and indicating grist for the mill with regard to future developments.

Key words: presidential diplomacy, public diplomacy, cyberdiplomacy, Cull's seven lessons, Twitter, France, Brazil, Amazon wildfires

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Introduction

In August 2019, the presidents of France and Brazil had lit an incendiary debate on Twitter about the Amazon fires. Both are prominent world leaders; *Time* magazine named French president Emmanuel Macron as one of six leaders who shaped the world in 2019 (Campbell et al., 2019), while Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro was among the 100 most influential people in the world in 2019 and 2020 (Bremmer, 2020; Stewart, 2021). Moreover, with a combined 13 million followers, they are among the 20 most followed world leaders on Twitter (Burson Cohn & Wolfe [BWC], 2020b). Presidential Twitter diplomacy has increased since 2007, when U.S. president Barack Obama created his Twitter account. Other political leaders and governments have since joined the cyberspace; by 2018, six G7 leaders have set up personal social media accounts (Lüfkens, 2018). Two years later, 98% of all 193 UN member states had Twitter accounts (BWC, 2020a, para. 14). As Wang states, “diplomacy – the way governments and countries build and manage relationships – is rapidly changing to keep up with technology (and) isn’t just state-to-state now” (as cited in Clay, 2019, para. 3). Hence, the interaction between diplomats-in-chief and foreign audiences has been more intense than ever, challenging diplomatic traditions, a development that involves presidential public diplomacy performed digitally in cyberspace, raising discussions about cyberdiplomacy.

Traditional presidential public diplomacy, led by heads of state or government, had been conducted through personal contacts and speeches and predominantly had involved a degree of secrecy (Bjola, 2016). However, the “information revolution” put social media into the diplomatic toolbox (Nye, 2019, pp. 9–11) and introduced new paradigms to traditional presidential diplomacy. Currently, statespersons often use digital tools to communicate with both the domestic and foreign public. Presidential exchanges through social media are public and immediate, usually without the support of diplomatic staff, particularly on Twitter, which favors “simplicity, impulsivity, and incivility” (Ott, 2017, pp. 60–62). Notably, the “government’s use of social media for PD [public diplomacy] purposes, increasing two-way communication forms such as dialogue and interaction” corresponds to Public Diplomacy 2.0 (Ingenhoff et al., 2021, p. 1). From a broader perspective, Public Diplomacy 2.0 is digital diplomacy that entails conducting diplomacy via digital tools such as artificial intelligence, big data, and social media. While often used interchangeably, digital diplomacy differs from cyberdiplomacy, which refers to state and nonstate actors’ performance in cyberspace using diplomatic tools such as public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and so on (Riordan, 2019, pp. 5–7). Against this backdrop, when using diplomatic tools, presidential interactions on social media or presidential public diplomacy in cyberspace constitutes Public Diplomacy 2.0, which entails digital diplomacy and cyberdiplomacy.

This study fills a literature gap by linking Cull’s seven lessons to presidential public diplomacy on Twitter. Scholars have recently studied Public Diplomacy 2.0 (Arsenault, 2009; Cull, 2012; Kampf et al., 2015; Sevin & Manor, 2019; Ingenhoff et al., 2021) and have also highlighted the presidential use of social media (Pain & Chen, 2019), including potential risks (Kromphardt & Salamone, 2020). They have mainly focused on the performance of former

U.S. president Donald Trump on Twitter (Ott, 2017; Miller & Roberts, 2021). While this work discusses these topics, it also draws from another perspective; it proposes reinvigorating the traditional concepts of public diplomacy for guiding presidential performance on Twitter. This study argues that presidential public diplomacy could avoid incendiary debates in cyberspace by following Cull's lessons in public diplomacy (2010), a set of guidelines on the pivotal role of foreign affairs ministers in supporting diplomats-in-chief, which may sustain constructive cyberdiplomacy by world leaders.

Presidential public diplomacy in cyberspace is a complex, innovative phenomenon; thus, this study aims to answer the following question: how would Cull's seven lessons in public diplomacy enhance presidential public diplomacy in cyberspace? To this end, the case study method frames the subject of presidential public diplomacy in cyberspace (or presidential cyberdiplomacy or presidential Public Diplomacy 2.0). The object is the online tension between Bolsonaro and Macron on the Amazon wildfires. The primary source of data is Twitter, that is, tweets posted between August 22 and 27, 2019. In addition, data were collected from secondary sources to provide complementary information regarding French and Brazilian interests.

This study first contextualizes the contentious debate between Macron and Bolsonaro. Then, it reviews relevant literature to operationalize key concepts surrounding presidential public diplomacy 2.0 and Cull's seven lessons in public diplomacy. Subsequently, it presents the methodology. Afterward, it features a case study that analyzes the French–Brazilian case. Finally, the study concludes by answering the research question and identifying paths for future scholarship.

The Incendiary Debate Between the French and Brazilian Presidents Over the Amazon Fires

This case study involves two free-market-oriented democracies. France is a developed European country with about 67 million inhabitants (World Bank, 2021a) and is ranked 10th among the world's largest economies (World Bank, 2021b). Meanwhile, Brazil is the ninth largest economy (World Bank, 2021b), recognized as a developing economy, with a population of 211 million (World Bank, 2021a). France borders Brazil, South America, in the Amazon region through its overseas department La Guyane (Figure 1). Thus, both France and Brazil have sovereignty over areas of the Amazon forest within their territories.



Note: Author's work.

Figure 1. Map of South America featuring the Amazon, Brazil, and La Guyane

From August 22 to 27, 2019, French president Emmanuel Macron and Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro engaged in a diplomatic cyber clash over the Amazon fires. The debate took place after the European Union–Mercosur Trade Agreement announcement on June 28, 2019 (European Commission, 2019), and before the 45th G7 Summit, which gathered the heads of state of Germany, Canada, the United States, France, Italy, Japan and the UK in Biarritz, France, from August 24 to 26, 2019. Notably, during those weeks, farmers were protesting against free-trade agreements in France (Garcin-Berson, 2019). Incidentally, Bolsonaro was also facing a domestic economic and political crisis (Fernandes et al., 2019).

Understanding the Elements of a Potential Fire in Cyberspace

To contextualize the case study, the literature review focuses on presidential public diplomacy and discusses ways in which the information revolution, particularly with regard to social media and cyberspace, has affected traditional presidential public diplomacy. This section then operationalizes the concept of presidential Twitter diplomacy and features the seven public diplomacy lessons put forth by Nicholas Cull, which establish the main argument of this research.

Presidential Public Diplomacy: The Traditional Practice

Traditional presidential public diplomacy is conducted by heads of state or by governments toward foreign audiences, predominantly through direct contact and speeches. While ministers of foreign affairs are considered the main practitioners of diplomacy, some political leaders cannot avoid presidential public diplomacy (Kissinger, 1994, p. 756). For instance, the U.S. president cannot hide from the global public during international crises.

Presidential diplomacy has been practiced for a long time. For instance, in the Westphalian era, Napoleon visited world leaders to obtain their political support (Danese, 2017, p. 86). Some centuries later, the former U.S. President Woodrow Wilson came to be known as a president-diplomat or “prophet of the ‘open diplomacy’” (Nicolson, 1939, p. 83) who opposed secret diplomacy (Danese, 2017, p. 179). Similarly, Winston Churchill exchanged letters with Franklin Roosevelt and Dwight Eisenhower during World War II (Leutze, 1975; Danese, 2017, p. 384). Notably, written messages enabled writing, reading, rewriting, and even obtaining reviews from diplomatic staff. Therefore, traditional presidential diplomacy was strategically designed.

Presidential diplomacy includes not only presidents but also prime ministers and heads of state or government; it refers to a kind of diplomacy of statespersons. This case study specifically involves presidents who are the heads of state of Brazil and France (République Française, 1958, arts. 9, 10; República Federativa do Brasil, 1988, art. 84). Presidential diplomacy involves international negotiation, mediation, and communication directly conducted by world leaders.

Activities such as official visits, summits, and bilateral and multilateral meetings (Danese, 2017, p. 67) have confused presidential diplomacy with summit diplomacy. Nevertheless, bilateral or multilateral meetings among statespersons involve a wide range of apparatuses, among which is presidential diplomacy (Melissen, 2006, pp. 8–11; Danese, 2017, p. 33). Furthermore, summits also refer to international events that may not involve heads of state or government (Melissen, 2006, p. 13). Hence, presidential diplomacy and summit diplomacy are different concepts.

Two main characteristics make presidential diplomacy unique: (1) the representation of domestic constituencies’ interests (Melissen, 2006, p. 21) and (2) a statesperson’s own political project (Danese, 2017, pp. 79–82). Regarding the latter, presidents are considered human beings with personal goals beyond national interests and diplomatic concerns (Danese, 2017). Therefore, while engaged in international interactions, heads of state or government may worry about their personal branding or their historical footprint. In addition, one’s international performance attracts a larger audience than one’s domestic events do. In other cases, presidents may be highly interested in creating a good impression on electors. Notably, the powerful international presence of diplomats-in-chief often makes them stronger in the domestic dimension. Therefore, statespersons may act internationally grounded in personal interests in addition to or in place of national or public interests. It deserves to be mentioned that under international law, states are perhaps responsible for acts of statespersons (Nollkaemper, 2003). Therefore, some international actions of presidents may harm society at large, in which case, states and societies suffer the consequences.

The Information Revolution: Cyberspace and Social Media as a Flammable Environment

Cyberspace is a new terrain. First, humans conquered new territories by land and sea. Afterward, continents were connected by air and, in the '60s, people witnessed outer space when Neil Armstrong planted his left foot on the moon. Then, cyberspace was revealed as the fifth domain and an apparently endless territory (Puyvelde & Brantly, 2019, p. 11) where the McLuhanian global village is headquartered. The virtual world facilitated public mobilization, diminished the distance among people, and became a source of information for world leaders. Meanwhile, information warfare may commence in a split second (Manjikian, 2010, pp. 381, 385), and fields of cyberspace may burst into flames, with passions fomented, precipitated, and drummed up into a frenzy.

The term “cyberspace” was coined by the romanticist William Gibson (1984) in the 1980s but garnered broader attention only in the early 21st century. Currently, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) defines cyberspace as “a global domain within the information environment consisting of the interdependent networks of information technology infrastructures and resident data, including the internet, telecommunications networks, computer systems, and embedded processors, and controllers” (2020, p. 55). Remarkably, since people interact intensively in this novel space, the topic is relevant to the entire society (Kuehl, 2009) and not only to the DoD.

Cyberspace consists of virtual and physical layers; the first is hard to control, while the second is under the sovereignty of resource owners (Nye, 2011, pp. 122–132). However, the apparent distinction between physical and virtual spaces has been deemed nonexistent (Riordan, 2019, pp. 9–13). Cyberspace is a virtual world that operates with reality. According to Zaharna, it is still early to assess the impacts of social media on tangible diplomacy (2018, p. 63); however, cyberspace features vulnerabilities extrapolating to daily life. As a borderless territory that is free of hierarchy (Riordan, 2019, pp. 68–73), cyberspace remains untouched by global rules but does so seemingly under the control of owners of resources.

In a democratized virtual world, anyone can create public diplomacy content and communicate with a foreign audience (Ingenhoff et al., 2021, p. 1). In this scenario, social media becomes a tool for world leaders to advance policies by engaging foreign public in global debates on issues such as climate change, pandemics, and the war on terror (Collins et al., 2019, p. 81–82). Specifically, social media quickly reaches a wide audience (Zaharna, 2018, p. 63) and may therefore be a tool to win followers and electors through visibility and power. Meanwhile, heads of state and government are often spontaneous in cyber interactions, meaning that they are not supported by diplomatic staff and therefore characterized by impulsivity and incivility (Ott, 2017). This makes cyberspace prone to fiery debates involving world leaders.

Presidential Twitter Diplomacy: A Potential Fire Starter

Online communication may either benefit or damage presidential diplomacy. Social media is increasingly becoming an information platform (Sevin, et al. 2020, p. 112) as well as a pivotal instrument for advocacy. Meanwhile, the virtual world makes people feel closer than they actually are, something that may cause confusion and conflicts rather than mutual understanding. Twitter is particularly prone to these situations, given its inherent conciseness. The microblogging site was born in 2006 with “tweets” usually restricted to 140 characters and therefore vulnerable to misunderstandings. Even different languages have become a relevant issue in virtual contact among people from different backgrounds.

Presidents are opinion leaders, whose actions influence the international community. Therefore, the need for a debate on presidential Twitter diplomacy is paramount. Presidential diplomacy on Twitter falls under public diplomacy; it comprises dialogues among the government and the global public and is aimed at advancing certain policies and actions (Snow, 2020, p. 3; Melissen & Wang, 2019, p. 1) by presenting a good impression on the foreign public through soft power (Nye, 2019, p. 11). According to Ayhan’s taxonomy of public diplomacy, presidential Twitter diplomacy fits in the state-centric and neo-statist perspectives because of its diplomatic status and political agenda (Ayhan, 2019, pp. 68–70). In addition, diplomatic capabilities and representation make it suitable for nontraditional and society-centric perspectives (Ayhan, 2019, pp. 70–72). Finally, the accommodative perspectives frame presidential Twitter diplomacy as well, owing to its legitimacy and political agenda (Ayhan, 2019, p. 73). Hence, presidential Twitter diplomacy is within the bounds of public diplomacy.

Initially, statespersons conduct public diplomacy on behalf of countries. Notably, given the instant online exchange, presidential interactions in social media usually do not observe diplomatic standards (Ott, 2017, p. 70), which Zaharna termed “DIY diplomacy” (2018, p. 67). Cyber movements divorced from diplomatic strategy may damage a country’s soft power and interests. In such cases, presidential cyberdiplomacy undermines the national diplomatic strategy.

Influence is a fundamental pillar of diplomacy. Virtues such as truthfulness, precision, good temperament, and patience characterize diplomacy practice (Nicolson, 1939, pp. 104–105). While professional diplomats are trained to employ the best techniques for each situation, not all diplomats-in-chief are experts in the art of diplomacy; a person can be a better diplomat than they are a political leader or vice versa. To illustrate, the French statesperson Aristide Briand served six terms as prime minister and only one as foreign-affairs minister; however, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize because of his role as a diplomat in the negotiations for the Locarno Treaty after World War I (Abrams, 1962, p. 232; Danese, 2017, pp. 103–104). In sum, while presidents are public diplomats, sometimes they are unprepared to execute effective diplomacy in cyberspace.

Statespersons generally attract attention as public diplomats in cyberspace. Indeed, they are more than ordinary social media users; they are political leaders with relevant messages to the international community (Golan & Yang, 2013). Hence, home nations bear the consequences of their presidents' tweets. Accordingly, this paper conceptualizes presidential Twitter diplomacy as public diplomacy that is personally led by heads of state or government through Twitter, reaching the global public but without guaranteed political influence on the international system or diplomatic outcomes to their countries. Under these circumstances, the debate around the parameters of presidential Twitter diplomacy deserves attention.

Cull's Seven Lessons in Public Diplomacy

British–American historian and public diplomacy scholar Nicholas J. Cull proposed seven lessons for the future of public diplomacy by examining its history. These lessons are as follows: (1) listening to foreign public opinion; (2) alignment with foreign policy; (3) engaging with the international audience rather than focusing on the domestic environment; (4) achieving credibility; (5) choosing the best voice for advocacy; (6) advancing foreign policy may not concern the image of the state; and (7) public diplomacy is everyone's business (Cull, 2010). Because presidential Twitter diplomacy is framed by public diplomacy, these lessons may be invoked as parameters or standards to avoid harmful debates in cyberspace.

The first lesson refers to listening (Cull, 2010, p. 12). Presidential Twitter diplomacy should begin with an understanding of foreign public opinion. This process must be genuine and effectively inform policymaking, otherwise it will be counterproductive. In this regard, social media provides two-way communication “across the blogosphere,” thus favoring listening (Cull, 2012, p. 5). Notably, social media implies the “fluid dynamics of publics” that should be constantly monitored as an adversarial public may “create a crisis by attacking state legitimacy” (Zaharna & Uysal, 2016, p. 117).

The second lesson states that public diplomacy must be connected to policy. As Cull argued, “the golden rule of public diplomacy is that what counts is not what you say but what you do” (Cull, 2010, p. 13). This means presidents must act according to public diplomacy policies and cultivate attraction through virtue and their “reputation for sound policy” (Cull, 2010, p. 13). This lesson is pivotal because of statespersons' proclivity to be driven by personal interests instead of foreign policy.

The third lesson asserts that “public diplomacy is not a performance for domestic consumption” (Cull, 2010, p. 13). Presidential public diplomacy is a tool with which to engage foreign target groups, such as foreigners and the diaspora (Zaharna, 2018, p. 68). However, because social media bridges the global and national public (Zaharna, 2018, p. 68), one must be aware that any tweet will likely reach not only a domestic audience but also a global one.

The fourth lesson pertains to the “value of a reputation for credibility” (Cull, 2010, pp. 13–14). Credibility may be achieved through tactics and strategies involving journalistic ethics, artistic integrity, symmetry of reciprocity, and others (Cull, 2010, p. 14). Nye stated that “reputation always mattered in world politics,” but in the new information age, “credibility becomes an even more important power resource,” and while “tweets can help set the global agenda [...] they do not produce soft power if they are not credible” (Nye, 2019, p. 11). On the other side, practices of disinformation, psychological warfare, or politicization may undermine public diplomacy (Cull, 2010, p. 14).

The fifth lesson argues that different causes require different voices for advocacy. This means that presidential Twitter public diplomacy must be associated with policies and restricted to certain issues. As presidents are opinion leaders, their voices have a high impact on cyberspace.

The sixth lesson is that public diplomacy may be directed “at engineering a general improvement of the international environment, or empowering indigenous voices within a target state or states” (Cull, 2010, p. 14). Public diplomacy is usually more effective in advancing global issues.

The last lesson asserts that “public diplomacy is everyone’s business” (Cull, 2010, p. 15). As Cull states, every “citizen plays a role in promoting the message or image that the public diplomat is seeking to project to the world” (2010, p. 15). In some cases, small groups or opinion leaders can cause significant damage to the overall reputation of their countries. So that, the author concludes “the key battle in public diplomacy lies not in projecting a reputation overseas, but rather in persuading the population at home to live up to a reputation that they already have” (Cull, 2010, p. 15). Thus, statespersons are, perhaps, among the most important agents of public diplomacy.

Nye highlights that “today’s information technology introduces additional complication” to public diplomacy and the management of intangible assets because “persuasion involves choices about how to frame information” (2019, p. 18). Thus, it is relevant for presidential Twitter diplomacy to care about national and global interests.

Indeed, in the context of the role of communication in the contemporary world and with the burgeoning numbers of actors crowding the public diplomacy arena, Cull’s lessons are more significant than they ever were (Cull, 2010, pp. 15–16). Therefore, presidential Twitter diplomacy must be grounded in a set of guidelines, which Cull’s seven lessons may very well fulfill.

Methodology

This study seeks to demonstrate how presidential diplomacy could avoid intense debates in cyberspace by considering Cull’s seven lessons. Specifically, it aims to answer the following question: how would Cull’s seven lessons in public diplomacy enhance presidential

public diplomacy in cyberspace? To answer the “how” and gain a detailed understanding of the potential contributions of these seven lessons (Cull, 2010), the research adopted the case study as an inquiry strategy as it is an effective tool with which to understand the details of a situation (Thomas, 2016, p. 37). This case study considers “presidential Twitter diplomacy” as its subject and the “debate between the presidents of France and Brazil over the Amazon fires” as its object (Thomas, 2016, pp. 15–16). The French–Brazilian cyber debate was chosen because it is a recent international “key case” (Thomas, 2016, pp. 98–110) that illustrates the usefulness of Cull’s seven lessons.

This case study focuses on events from August 22 to 27, 2019, involving the French–Brazilian discussion regarding the Amazon wildfires. Its sources include (1) primary data from eight tweets, one by Macron and seven by Bolsonaro; (2) primary data from five statements by both presidents, two by Bolsonaro and three by Macron, which represent the meeting of the virtual and physical worlds; (3) secondary data from tweets of authorities, such as the Brazilian minister of education; (4) secondary data collected from statements of political authorities, including then-president of the European Council Donald Tusk, Pope Francis, and G7 leaders. Information on these statements were collected from international media outlets such as *The Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, the BBC, *The New York Times*, and Forbes. These sources were selected alongside Twitter because mediated public diplomacy is a strategy that reaches a “vast majority of foreign citizens” (Golan et al., 2019, pp. 3–6). In addition, this potpourri of sources provides the triangulation that improves the case study quality (Flick, 2007, pp. 22–6, 75–90). Table 1 below presents the collected data to substantiate the case study, thereby setting a broader scenario around the cyber debate. Both presidents’ tweets and statements were screened via content analysis (Titscher et al., 2000, pp. 55–64) to support the interpretation of arguments according to Cull’s seven lessons.

Analysis was conducted using the soft systems methodology (SSM) (Dick, 2002), which compares “the world as it is and some models of the world as it might be,” providing insights into the improvement of the current situation (Dick, 2002, para. 6). In this research study, the “world as it is” is a snapshot of the debate between the French and Brazilian presidents on the Amazon fires. The “world as it might be” is illustrated by “Cull’s seven lessons in public diplomacy.” The final section highlights the findings and answers the research question.

Case Study: Seven Public Diplomacy Lessons to Prevent Fire in Cyberspace

Table 1 summarizes the facts surrounding the debate between Macron and Bolsonaro, which includes their tweets and correspondences as well as statements of world political leaders. The incident started on August 22, 2019, when Macron tweeted, “The Amazon rain forest—the lungs which produces 20% of our planet’s oxygen—is on fire. It is an international crisis. Members of the G7 Summit, let’s discuss this emergency first order in two days!” (Macron, 2019a). He then posted a photograph of a wildfire supposed to have been taken at that time in the Amazon. On that day, “#ActForTheAmazon” was among the most popular hashtags worldwide (Togoh, 2019a), prompting celebrities and other political leaders

to join the cause (O’Kane, 2019).

Bolsonaro soon replied by accusing Macron of political opportunism and attributed him a colonial mindset (Bolsonaro, 2019a, 2019b). Bolsonaro also retweeted a video titled “Macron is an idiot,” which his son had previously tweeted (Dalton, 2019). Both presidents did not seem to realize that they are diplomats-in-chief in charge of their countries’ diplomacy.

Table 1. Timeline of events related to the Macron-Bolsonaro debate over the Amazon wildfires in August, 2019

Date	Actor	Description/Source
22	Emmanuel Macron	Tweet: “Our house is burning. Literally. The Amazon rain forest - the lungs which produces 20% of our planet’s oxygen - is on fire. It is an international crisis. Members of the G7 Summit, let’s discuss this emergency first order in two days! #ActForTheAmazon.” Additional information: A supposed photograph of the wildfire was attached to that tweet, but the photographer had died in 2003. The hashtag #ActForTheAmazon” was among the most popular worldwide (Macron, 2019a; Togoh, 2019; O’Kane, 2019; France 24, 2019).
22	Jair Bolsonaro	Tweet (**): “I regret President Macron seeks personal political gains by using a regional issue. Sensationalism towards Amazon forest (with fake image) does not solve the issue” (Bolsonaro, 2019a).
22	Jair Bolsonaro	Tweet (**): “Brazil is open to respectful dialogue grounded on reliable data. The French attempt to discuss Amazon at the G7 forum in the absence of countries of the region evokes a misplaced colonial mindset in the 21st century” (Bolsonaro, 2019b).
22	Son of Jair Bolsonaro	Tweet: Shared a video of the yellow vests movements, under the title “Macron é um idiota” [Macron is an idiot] (Dalton, 2019).
23	Emmanuel Macron	Official statement: “In light of Brazil’s attitude over recent weeks, the President of the Republic cannot fail to realize that President Bolsonaro lied to him at the Osaka Summit... President Bolsonaro has decided not to respect environmental commitments and not to stand by biodiversity. Given this situation, France will oppose the trade agreement with Mercosur in its current terms” (Corbet & Leicester, 2019).
23	Jair Bolsonaro	Official statement (**): “We are open to a respectful dialogue which must be aware of our sovereignty. Other countries will support Brazil in fighting wildfires and advocating the Brazilian position in the G7 meeting. Forest fires exist around the world and cannot justify international sanctions. Brazil will remain a friendly country and responsible for protecting its Amazon rainforest” (Corbet & Leicester, 2019).
24	Jair Bolsonaro	Tweet (**): “See the Brazilian C-130 Hercules aircrafts flying from Porto Velho (RO) to fight wildfires! Via @DefesaGovBr.” Additional information: He attached a photograph that was supposedly current but was later revealed to be an old one (Bolsonaro, 2019c; Globo, 2019).
24	Donald Tusk	Official statement: “The burning Amazon rainforest has become another depressing sign of our times. We of course stand by the EU–Mercosur agreement, which is also about protecting the climate and environment, but it is hard to imagine a harmonious process of ratification by the European countries as long as the Brazilian government allows for the destruction of the green lungs of Planet Earth” (Tusk, 2019).
24	Emmanuel Macron	Official statement (**): “Amazon is our common good. We are all concerned. No doubt France is even more interested because we are Amazon: Guyana is in the Amazon. Thus, we launch an appeal for investments in Amazon to support Brazil and affected countries in firefighting and reforestation.” Additional information: The Irish prime minister put the EU–Mercosur agreement in check. Finnish authorities suggested a ban on the importation of Brazilian beef (Macron, 2019b; Borger et al., 2019)

Date	Actor	Description/Source
24	Angela Merkel	Personal communication in the G7 meeting: “I announced to call him in the next week so that he gets the impression we are not working against him.” (Then, when asked “Who?” she replied, “Bolsonaro.”) Additional information: The English prime minister agreed it would be important (Bloomberg Quicktake, 2019).
25	Pope Francisco	Official Statement (**): “We are all concerned about Amazon wildfires. Let’s pray. With an overall commitment, we will put out wildfires. The forest lung is vital to our planet” (Pope Francis, 2019).
25	Abraham Weintraub	Tweet (**): “Macron was elected by French people, but we already elected a thief who is imprisoned” (“the thief” referred to former president Lula da Silva). Differently from French people, Macron is a cretin” (Weintraub, 2019a). Tweet (**): “France is a land of extremes, produced men like Descartes or Pasteur, but also the volunteers of the Waffen-SS Charlemagne. Country of the enlightenment, but also land of communists. Macron is not up to this debate. It’s just an opportunist bastard looking for the support of the French farm lobby” (Weintraub, 2019b).
25	Jair Bolsonaro	Tweet (**): “Don’t lower the guy, ha ha ha.” Additional information: This was a reply to a follower who had posted an image comparing wives of French and Brazilian presidents, mentioning Macron would be jealous. The hashtag #DesculpaBrigitte [Sorry Brigitte] went viral in Brazil (Chrisafis, 2019).
26	Emmanuel Macron	Official Statement (**): “Yesterday, [Jair Bolsonaro] thought it would be a good idea (...) one of his ministers to insult my wife. Brazilian women are undoubtedly ashamed to read this about their president. Brazilians are undoubtedly a little ashamed to see this behavior. (...) And how much I have friendship and respect for the Brazilian people, I hope they will have a new president very quickly who is up to the task” (France Télévisions, 2019).
26	G7 leaders	Announced a €20 million plan to support firefighting and reforestation in Amazon. Additional information: The Brazilian president rejected the idea (Henao & Souza, 2019).
26	Jair Bolsonaro	discussed with the President of Colombia, Iván Duque, a common plan among Amazon states to protect environment while guaranteeing our sovereignty” (Bolsonaro, 2019d).
26	Jair Bolsonaro	Tweet (**): “We cannot accept the hidden intention of Macron (a president) towards Amazon with a so-called G7 alliance to save the forest like if the region was a colony or nobody’s land” (Bolsonaro, 2019e).
26	Jair Bolsonaro	Tweet (**): “Other heads of state support Brazil because we are in a civilized world were people respect sovereignty” (Bolsonaro, 2019g).
27	Jair Bolsonaro	Tweet (**): “I Statement at interview (**): “First, Mr. Macron must remove the insults he has done to me. He called me a liar and then attacked our sovereignty over Amazon. So I only will accept anything from France, if he withdraws those words.” Additional information: Some Brazilian governors (provinces) agreed to receive G7 support, while the national government refused it (Togoh, 2019b).

Source: Charted by the author from referred sources. Note: ** Original translated into English.

Despite the controversy, Macron seemed to listen to public opinion. The international audience engaged in a debate regarding the wildfire. On August 23, 2019, an official statement by Macron claimed Bolsonaro had lied about environmental issues at the Osaka Summit; thus, he would oppose the EU–Mercosur Trade Agreement (Corbet & Leicester, 2019), wherefor he drew support from the president of the European Council and other political leaders (Borger et al., 2019; Tusk, 2019). Subsequently, Bolsonaro stated that Brazil would be open to a dialogue on whether sovereignty would be respected (Bolsonaro, 2019f).

He also tweeted a video of an aircraft supposedly flying over the Amazon and fighting the fire (Bolsonaro, 2019c). Considering retweets and likes, the international public was highly engaged in this presidential clash on the Amazon fires.

Nevertheless, both presidents' tweets lacked credibility. The wildfire image tweeted by Macron on August 22, 2019, was at least 16 years old and was taken by a photojournalist who died in 2003 (France24, 2019). Similarly, the aircraft video tweeted by Bolsonaro referred to another case (Globo, 2019). These tweets were classified as fake news and disinformation (France24, 2019), a scenario harmful to state diplomacy.

During the G7 meeting, other world leaders joined the debate. On opening day, with the concurrence of the British prime minister, Angela Merkel declared she would call Bolsonaro "so that he gets the impression we are not working against him" (Bloomberg Quicktake, 2019). This was an attempt by European leaders to align diplomacy to EU interests and foreign policy. On August 25, 2019, a new agent appeared on the Brazilian side—the minister of education—who called Macron an "opportunist bastard" (*bastardo oportunista*) who lobbies for French farmers (Weintraub, 2019a, 2019b). On the same day, Bolsonaro escalated the conflict to the personal sphere with pejorative, unsavory comments toward the French first lady (Chrisafis, 2019). Brazilians immediately engaged in the discussion, and the hashtag #DesculpaBrigitte (Sorry Brigitte) went viral in Brazil. Macron repudiated Bolsonaro's insults (France Télévisions, 2019).

On closing day, G7 leaders announced a €20 million plan to support firefighting and reforestation in the Amazon (Henao & Souza, 2019). Soon after, Bolsonaro emphasized that because of Brazil's sovereignty over the Amazon, he would not accept the support (2019e). However, the following day, Bolsonaro declared that Brazil would accept G7 funding if Macron apologized (Togoh, 2019b). All said and done, at the end of the day, the G7 did not finance any actions on the Amazon. Similarly, there were low expectations regarding the EU–Mercosur Trade Agreement (Boadle, 2020). In sum, this case study on the French–Brazilian debate over the Amazon wildfires shows the potential impact of presidential Twitter diplomacy on foreign affairs, diplomacy, international agreements, and domestic constituencies' interests. Consequently, the discussion on diplomatic standards for presidential cyberdiplomacy is timely and perhaps grounded in Cull's lessons in public diplomacy. The snapshot of these events is the "world as it is" within the SSM framework. Meanwhile, Cull's seven lessons in public diplomacy outline the "world as it might be." The contrast between these worlds through an SSM lens illustrates gaps in presidential Twitter diplomacy. Table 2 shows the soft-systems analysis. The third column provides insights into preventing heads of state from igniting fires in cyberspace.

While Cull states that diplomacy is everyone's business, several situations render presidents ineffective cyber diplomats. Some issues require the participation of the issue-related minister. In addition, presidential public diplomacy must always be supported by foreign-affairs staff or public diplomacy advisors as these professionals have the specific training and skills to listen to the international audience and suggest the most suitable solution

for each case according to foreign policy. Presidents will attract sentiment more effectively by advocating global issues supported by experts, such as climate change, environmental protection, health security, and control of corruption in social media. However, this case study showed that presidents may be driven by personal interests and instead focus on the domestic, rather than the international, dimension, which often does not result in desired outcomes. The analysis demonstrated the value of Cull’s seven lessons in public diplomacy in guiding and enhancing the process of presidential Twitter diplomacy.

Table 2. SSM Analysis of the French–Brazilian presidential debate on the Amazon fires

Seven lessons in public diplomacy (“world as it might be”)	Snapshot of the case study (“world as it is”)	Gaps (insights into presidential cyberdiplomacy improvements)
1 Listen foreign public opinion	Environmental protection is a matter of global interest. Since statespersons are increasingly becoming By advocating protection for the Amazon, Macron everyday public diplomats on social media, seemed to listen to public opinion. He launched the they need to be trained on diplomacy principles hashtag #ActForTheAmazon, which became popular. and guidelines to make best use of the Meanwhile, rejecting the issue, Bolsonaro repelled cyberspace. the international public instead of attracting them, thus losing sentiment.	
2 Alignment with foreign policy	First, as the debate on the EU–Mercosur Trade Agreement Presidents must work closely with foreign-affairs was ongoing, both presidents would have benefited ministries or public diplomacy experts and by focusing on the discussions. Second, offenses and preferably utilize their support and advisory. insults are not expected from heads of state and are In addition, cyberdiplomacy should use only thus detrimental to foreign policy. Third, building reliable and checked information. arguments on wrong information (e.g., old photographs) harms one’s reputation.	
3 Engagement of international audience rather than focus on domestic environment	In August 2019, both presidents faced domestic Particularly when domestic political crises are political crises. On those days, news outlets reported ongoing, presidents must balance the topics to that they were performing for the domestic public be discussed in cyberspace. and voters.	
4 Credibility	Both presidents used inaccurate information in an The support of foreign-affairs ministries is international debate. The international public accused pivotal to presidential cyberdiplomacy. They them of promoting fake news and misinformation. should consistently check the information and topics that statespersons will discuss in social media.	
5 Choice of best voice for advocacy	The debate on the Amazon wildfires occurred between Social media favors immediate contact between two important international events: the EU–Mercosur statespersons without proper reflection and Trade Agreement and the 45th G7 Summit. Low support. Heads of state or government must politics debates are better addressed by environment not address controversial issues on social ministries, while presidents debate high politics or media. even build joint solutions for global issues.	
6 Advancement of foreign policy may not concern the image of the state	Macron chose a good theme to start the debate. The object of presidential public diplomacy While advocating a topic of global interest such as must be outlined. Acting without planning environmental protection, he attracted sentiment usually produces out-of-control results. worldwide.	
7 Public diplomacy is the business of everyone	While statespersons are present in cyberspace, they Diplomats-in-chief need to interact with foreign- may not necessarily be real public diplomats. A affairs staff to discuss topics, roles, and ideal public diplomat employs strategies and tactics to agents for each situation. create a good impression on the foreign public, winning their support.	

Source: Author’s work on case study sources and Cull (2010).

Conclusion

Presidential cyberdiplomacy, particularly presidential Twitter diplomacy, is a contemporary trend. World political leaders are increasingly joining social media and becoming popular in cyberspace. This places presidents in front of an international audience, developing public diplomacy. However, sometimes, presidential interactions in cyberspace lack a diplomatic approach and may harm a country's interests such as in the French–Brazilian case. Thus, to benefit countries, presidential public diplomacy in cyberspace must be performed within the diplomacy framework, where ministers of foreign affairs play a relevant role, that is, to make political majors aware of foreign policy and public diplomacy pillars.

Minimum standards are pivotal to presidential public diplomacy in social media. The process should start by listening to foreign public to facilitate foreign policy. Diplomats-in-chief must perform cyberdiplomacy supported by professional diplomats or public diplomacy experts. Practices should also rely on reliable and verified information. In addition, heads of state must receive training in diplomacy principles and agree on guidelines to advance foreign policy in the cyber arena. The role of foreign-affairs ministers is particularly vital in this issue. By all means, public diplomacy is about engaging the global public; hence, credibility and the right choice of advocacy voice are crucial guidelines. It must be clear to presidents, prime ministers, and their equivalents that they are diplomats-in-chief; thus, they need to remember that public diplomacy is their business and must be led toward the best interests of the state or international society.

This study concludes that Cull's lessons enhance presidential cyberdiplomacy, the process of which is supported and organized by ministers of foreign affairs or public diplomacy experts, including training diplomats-in-chief. Foreign-affairs ministers, diplomats, and public diplomacy practitioners or scholars have an increasingly crucial role in setting out cyberdiplomacy guidelines and advising statespersons, which could be examined by further research. In addition, analyses of other cyber clashes among world leaders can complement this study's findings. Finally, the international environment would be more courteous and peaceful if it were grounded in Cull's seven lessons in public diplomacy.

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