

Digital diplomacy during the first 100 days: How GCC ministries of foreign affairs and ministers tweeted the blockade

Tarfa Al-Mansouri¹, Haya Al-Mohannadi^{1*}, Mariam Feroun¹

¹Northwestern University in Qatar, Doha, Qatar

* Email: Hayaalmohannadi@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Since the sudden outbreak of what is known as the GCC crisis or the blockade on June 5, 2017, the four nations in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) involved in the conflict –the State of Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and the Kingdom of Bahrain – have found themselves in a diplomatic race for the support of their position on the rift in traditional media, as well as on social media platforms. This paper focuses on the different ways the ministries of foreign affairs (MOFAs) and the ministers of foreign affairs (MFAs) used Twitter as an instrument of digital diplomacy during the first 100 days of the GCC crisis. In general, states tweet on a daily basis, and the ways in which a sovereign state presents itself online offers an insight into the patterns of representation of state identity, strategy, emotional expression, and recognition of others. This study is based on the content analysis of tweets created by the MOFAs and their respective MFAs of the GCC, with a focus on Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain over the first 100 days of the crisis (June 5, 2017–September 13, 2017).

This paper uses different types of tweets to examine the various kinds of political and diplomatic discourses perpetuated on Twitter by the GCC officials, in order to engage the online public sphere and navigate the domestic and international discourses. For example, if ministers engage in dialogue with their followers, then they are exercising a two-way digital diplomacy approach via Twitter. On the contrary, when they tweet about their bilateral meetings, it is an example of a one-way digital diplomacy approach, since they do not require any response from their followers. It was of specific interest to examine the differences of topic, content, and frequency of tweets, through the communication in Arabic and English. The study shows that the countries engaged in discourse around the topic of the blockade, but the type of discourse differed significantly depending on the state itself. While some chose to focus on the idea of legitimizing their stance on the topic of the blockade (i.e. Saudi Arabia), others were more direct in voicing their viewpoint, creating specific hashtags such as “#boycottQatar” (i.e. Bahrain). In addition, Qatar differed significantly in terms of the volume of tweets and the topic, tweeting often in both Arabic and English and shifting their focus towards affirming their strong diplomatic relations with countries outside the GCC, such as the

[http://doi.org/10.5339/
connect.2021.spt.1](http://doi.org/10.5339/connect.2021.spt.1)

Submitted: 17 September 2020
Accepted: 25 October 2020
Published: 31 January 2021

© 2021 The Author(s), licensee HBKU Press. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution license CC BY 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Republic of Turkey. Overall, this study aims to compare the way the four GCC countries used Twitter, in order to engage their local and international communities to disseminate an image or a message.

Keywords: Twitter, Gulf Cooperation Council, Khaleeji, blockade, ministry of foreign affairs, Qatar

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital diplomacy as a branch of public diplomacy “involves the use of digital technologies and social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Weibo by states to enter into communication with foreign publics usually in a non-costly manner.”¹ In the case of the blockade, digital diplomacy was employed via the exclusive use of Twitter as the main social media platform by the four countries examined, in order to disseminate messages and share updates on the current strife to the audience (i.e. followers). The tweets were directed towards the local Khaleeji (Gulf) and Arab followers, as tweets were written in Fusha (formal and traditional Arabic) most of the time. However, some staff at the ministry of foreign affairs (MOFA), such as Bahrain’s Khalid Al Khalifa, communicated with their followers in the Khaleeji Bahraini dialect. The MFAs from the countries involved in the blockade, including Egypt, employed other approaches to standard public diplomacy such as multilateral meetings held by the blockading countries in different capitals, such as Riyadh, Cairo, Al-Manama, and Abu Dhabi. In addition, a series of visits and bilateral meetings were held by Qatar’s Minister of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Mohammad Al Thani as well as ministers from other countries, including, but not limited to, Turkey, Germany, and the United States. Nevertheless, such official meetings are usually held in an attempt to build their case and solidify the positions of the government, tend to be costly and protocol-heavy, which is in contrast to the case of using social media platforms such as Twitter.

1.1 The blockade

On June 5, 2017, blockading countries, namely Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, and Egypt, decided to sever diplomatic ties with Qatar, and isolate the Peninsula through land, air, and sea. Further investigation revealed that the crisis was initiated by the hacking of Qatar News Agency (QNA) and the publication of a fake statement on behalf of the Emir of Qatar, His Highness Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani. On the one hand, the allegations made by the Quartet were ‘Qatar’s continuous support for terrorism’ as well as ‘intervening in the countries’ internal affairs, hence affecting their internal and external stabilities’. The political rift substantially amplified after the American President Donald Trump tweeted accusing Qatar of supporting terrorism, which can be understood as a support of the blockading Quartet’s accusation. The tweet came the day following the blockade; however, President Trump was considered an active and prominent figure on Twitter, who at the time of writing had approximately 66.9 million followers. President Trump stated on June 6, 2017 that: “During my recent trip to the Middle East, I stated that there can no longer be funding of Radical Ideology. Leaders pointed to Qatar – look!”² The fact that the leader of the supposedly ‘free world’ tweeted about the issue has not only, arguably, influenced the narrative but also aided its prominence. Since Trump’s tweets were highly anticipated and closely monitored by millions of individuals, numerous international news outlets covered the story about the blockade and expressed their interest in it. The trip President Trump was referring to in his tweet was the two-day Annual Riyadh Summit on May 20–21, 2017. This occasion also marked Trump’s first visit to Saudi Arabia and was regarded as an opportunity for both the Saudis and the Emiratis to influence the administration’s perception of the region, as they believed that Trump’s administration was ‘uninformed,’ in comparison to Obama’s administration.³

1.2 Ministers

In order to understand the blockade, it is crucial to consider the diplomatic facet. In this case, traditional diplomacy failed in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) after the manifestations of unresolved political differences bottled up, leading to a de facto blockade of one of the member states. For the purpose of this study, we examined the ways MOFAs and their MFAs communicated with their followers, raised awareness, and shared viewpoints on the blockade via Twitter. Furthermore, due to the cold nature of the blockade, the media’s attention focused on ministers more than the monarchs themselves, since the ministers acted as spokespersons for their countries, which signified their authority and political legitimacy in defending their role in the political strife. What made the

blockade an issue of international concern was the talk on terrorism, mainly because the parties were accusing each other of supporting and incubating terrorism, which will be discussed later in the Results section.

The ministers were either engaged in a dialogue or a monologue on Twitter, or with their own citizens as well as international audiences at large. This essentially means that ministers used social media platforms to their advantage by voicing the opinions and concerns of their governments. The targeted audience (i.e. followers) varied in terms of local, regional, and international, and the type of tweets that the ministers were communicating through was distinguished by analyzing the choice of the language of tweets, whether it was traditional Arabic, the local (Gulf) dialect, or the English language.

We monitored the accounts of ministers and their ministries and the countries' embassies. However, for the purpose of this research, we solely analyzed the Twitter accounts of four ministers (Table 1): (1) H.E. Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Qatar; (2) H.E. Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bahrain; (3) H.E. Dr Anwar bin Mohammed Gargash, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the UAE; and (4) H.E. Adel al-Jubeir, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia.

Table 1. Usernames of the minister of foreign affairs (MFA) and the ministry of foreign affairs (MOFA) on Twitter.

Country	MFA	MOFA
Qatar	@MBA_AlThani_	@MofaQatar_AR
Bahrain	@Khalidalkhalifa	@bahdiplomatic
UAE	@AnwarGargash	@MOFAUAE
KSA	@AdelAljubeir	@KSAmofa

1.3 The founding of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the blockade

In late 1981, the political and economic alliance of the GCC was officially established, comprising six main states: the State of Qatar, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), the Sultanate of Oman, the State of Kuwait, and the UAE.

According to Matteo Legrenzi,⁴ the two main reasons for the inclusion of these six countries and exclusion of other 'Gulf states,' such as Iraq and Yemen, was because the GCC acted as "a grouping of 'similar regimes,' a clear reference to the hereditary Shaikhly political systems of the member states."⁴ What these countries have in common is the fact that they share a similar governmental structure. Furthermore, most of them are rentier states, which are rich because of petrochemicals found on their lands. Finally, these countries share the same culture and set of dialects. Moreover, "the GCC is not a political or military alliance; therefore it is not a supranational decision-making body,"³ the feature that should allow for the enrichment of public diplomacy when dealing at multiple levels.

The key to understanding the importance of the GCC as a regional organization lies in understanding the events that led to its incubation in the first place: events such as the Iranian revolution and the subsequent Iran–Iraq war. However, Legrenzi⁴ expresses how these two events are counted as internal and external security threats to neighboring countries, and the only solution towards eliminating such threats is through the cooperation of the GCC states –political, economic, and militant, if needed.⁴

What changed after June 5, 2017, was the fact that the blockade took its toll on the GCC as an organization, where half of its members are now blockading a fellow member.³ In the intra-GCC relations, we need to recognize that there is a "core-periphery imbalance at the heart of the GCC between Saudi Arabia, on the one hand, and the five smaller Gulf states, on the other."³ This is quite evident as most of the GCC countries "have had territorial disputes with Saudi Arabia at varying points over the past century... [which] served as a reminder of the power imbalance between the kingdom and its neighbors and contributed to a reluctance to see the GCC become too Saudi-centric."³ Moreover, according to Al Shammari and Al Mohannadi,⁵ one of the characteristics of the organization is that there is an imbalance between its nations; the GCC deals with nations that are unequal in their 'potentials and geopolitical weight.'⁵ The main reason for such an imbalance among the nations is the existence of Saudi Arabia within the GCC. Accordingly, "Since Saudi Arabia is the most significant in terms of geopolitics, surpassing all other GCC states; making mutual engagement between the Gulf states based on the logic of domination rather than the peer cooperation."⁵

Moreover, the GCC has seen changes in the political leadership of two of the blockading countries where “the elevation of Mohammed bin Salman to crown prince of Saudi Arabia, several weeks into the standoff, and the close bond he has formed with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed of Abu Dhabi, suggest that the thrusting assertiveness of Saudi-Emarati policymaking looks set to define an ‘inner core’ within the Gulf for years, if not decades, to come.”³

On the one hand, the crisis “threatens to inflict generational damage on the social fabric of Gulf societies.”³ On the other hand, before the crisis, and in regard to non-political issues, there was a “growth of a distinctively Khaleeji (Gulf) identity throughout the GCC.”³ This aspect was diminished during the crisis after the parties accused each other of being less Khaleeji than each other. Thus, this was perceived as threatening the collective identity each hold of themselves, and the main reason they are in the GCC, alluding to kick out Qatar from the organization for its supposed ‘lack of the collective identity’ that holds all of the GCC countries together.

This has also led to what Ulrichsen calls vicious attacks “on Qatar in sections of the Quartet’s media routinely refer to the ‘Qatari regime’ in language hitherto unprecedented against a fellow ruling family in the Gulf,”³ which has seen new trends in the intra-GCC relations: the “recent attempts to present Sheikh Abdullah bin Ali Al Thani as the ‘legitimate’ ruler of Qatar represent an inflammatory attempt to intervene in the domestic affairs of another GCC member state; ironically one of the main charges on the list of grievances made against Qatar by the quartet.”³ However, what has considerably changed is that, at the present time, the security threats presumably originate from internal sources within the GCC and such a change in the origin of threats “stunted and directly caused a radical shift in the security perception;” however, the GCC saw the collapse in the notion of “regional security during the Gulf crisis and its later transformation into national security, forcing the Gulf states to redefine their own national security measures.”⁵

The longer this crisis takes, the weaker the GCC becomes, since it is less likely for the organization to survive, “at least on paper, but to become far less relevant as policymaking is driven in individual capitals.”³ The GCC “is likely to divide informally into an inner core of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE, counterbalanced by an outer grouping of Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar.”³

1.4 Regional political history and turmoil

Al Shamari and Al Mohannadi⁵ believe that the main goal behind the incubation of the GCC was to defy imminent threats originating mainly from Iran. Subsequently after the Iran–Iraq war, “Iraq had risen as a threat to the GCC states after the Iraq invasion of Kuwait, turning Iraq from an ally to a direct enemy.”⁵ Later on, the GCC was supposed to unite in order to stand in the way of “threats emerging from armed groups, starting with al-Qaeda up to the founding of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.”⁵

The buildup that led to the blockade lies mainly in the sharp disparity in the position on Arab Revolutions, signaling “the real beginning of the collapse of the concept of a regional ‘Gulf Security,’ because the establishment of a unified security vision cannot be executed until after the agreement on the source and the nature of security threats.”⁵ The notion of a unified regional security vision that was long sought was diminished due to the disagreement of the parties on the originating source of the threat.⁵

On the contrary, the security situation post-blockade within the GCC changed drastically from merely posing a security threat to each other, into a pretext for war, which was evident soon after “Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates publicly advertised an alternative to the Qatari regime and promoted its implementation by military force.”⁵ This only adds a further burden to the GCC as an alliance. However, the Gulf crisis and the disregard for the unified GCC regional security, the geopolitical weight was split back to the size of each country, especially in the case of Qatar. The fragmentation and shift from regional to national geopolitics apparently “indicates that Qatar had lost the most in this aspect. Since the UAE and Bahrain depend mainly on Saudi geopolitics and still consider it an extension and a base for their geopolitical weight.”⁵

Assessing the blockade from an international law perspective, from the alienation to the 13 demands placed on Qatar, both the demands and the blockade were incompatible with international standards, and with respect to Qatar as an independent and sovereign state. The demands were after all a 13-point list handed to Qatar two weeks after the announcement of the blockade by the Quartet, insisting that within 10 days Qatar must commit to it in order to reverse the blockade. The most significant of them were cutting ties with Iran and other political organizations in the Middle East, as well as allowing access to the blockading countries to interfere and ‘audit’ for the next 10 years in an effort to inspect the state’s loyalties. The Quartet also demanded that Qatar shut down the Turkish

base, which at the time was under construction. It was conditioned that after the 10 days' period, the demands were no longer valid if Qatar did not comply with them within the time frame of issuance. They also asked for the complete shutdown of the country's famous media network, Al Jazeera. During the crisis, the perspective of the United States and the GCC think tanks were taken into account by the United States. However, from the European perspective, and more specifically the Italian perspective, "restrictive measures could be justified under Article XXI of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which allows states to waive the rules of free trade to protect essential security interests in time of war or other emergencies."⁶ This was acted upon by Qatar, as well as the blockading countries, as both parties stopped importing each other's goods, increasing the turmoil and fueling the ongoing cold war.

1.5 Public and digital diplomacy

Strategies of public diplomacy have developed over the years. Such improvement is evident in the way countries deal with public audiences. However, the original approach to public diplomacy is through the Government to Government (G2G) interaction where MFAs meet in real life and discuss bilateral matters. Over time, these strategies branched into Government to People (G2P), through which governments started "talking to global publics in support of national objectives and foreign policies."⁷ Lastly, during the past few years, a new type emerged in public diplomacy, which is People to People (P2P), where individuals and groups from both government and private sectors of the country tend to "influence directly and indirectly the public attitudes and opinions that bear directly on another government's foreign policy decisions."⁷

Snow and Taylor⁷ highlight the fact that there are two main schools of thought in public diplomacy: tender-minded and tough-minded; however, the first is demonstrated by G2P and P2P strategies. An example for the tender-minded is the International Visitors Leadership Program and the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) of the American Department of State, which was developed with the purpose of fostering a mutual understanding between the local community inside the United States and communities from other countries around the globe. On the contrary, the tough-minded school is the exact opposite of the tender-minded, exemplified by the Lincoln Group whose slogan reads: "Insight and influence anywhere, anytime," emphasizing on the fact that there is a lack of mutual understanding.⁷ During the GCC crisis, both sides appealed to communicate to their local as well as global audience, using digital diplomacy, traditional diplomacy, and think tanks.

Today, digital diplomacy is the most important type of diplomacy, which can be described as a means of soft power combined with smart power. The main goals of digital diplomacy are knowledge management, public diplomacy, information management, consular communication, disaster response, external resources, and policy planning. As Rashica⁸ emphasizes: "the fact that digital diplomacy does not always require financial investments and has low costs compared with the other diplomatic methods, makes it attractive for governments, MFAs and embassies because it does not cause budget damages. Digital diplomacy favors all kinds of states, but mostly small states, which helps them in achieving their goals in the international arena."⁸ Evidently, the MFAs included in the study have used the help and non-costliness of digital diplomacy to their advantage, outreaching and persuading a larger number of individuals, both inside and outside their territorial lines.

1.6 Soft power

The use of social media by diplomats for the purpose of public diplomacy is considered a soft power approach. This term was first coined by Joseph Nye⁹, who explains it as "the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment. A country's soft power rests on its resources of culture, values and policies."⁹ Although the study was conducted a decade ago, it is still relevant and applicable to digital diplomacy strategies today. Furthermore, it is established that the soft power approach can strongly influence an individual's choices.⁹ This is vital to consider as our study analyzes how the MFAs took advantage of Twitter to accentuate their stance and image.

It is of importance to note that "soft power as part of a broader national security strategy has grown in importance for Qatar lately, as it faces the most serious external threat since its formation as a nation state. Since June 2017, a land and sea blockade led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, including Bahrain and Egypt, has cut the state off from its neighbors."¹⁰ However, Qatar is currently using 'new' soft power strategies to stand out through the establishment of alliances with the big, international names, leading in soft power strategies. Examples of such soft power include the

buying of stakes in “French soccer team Paris St. Germain and London’s Heathrow Airport, along with global finance, health care, technology and auto companies.”¹⁰ This further emphasizes Qatar’s reliance on soft power and how soft power, in its different forms, can counter the resulting effects of the blockade. When comparing Qatar’s approach to the UAE’s soft power efforts, what both countries are doing is more similar than different, including Abu Dhabi’s Louvre Museum, an extension of the French museum, and more broadly a soft power strategy.

1.7 Digital application of soft power and diplomacy

Michael Vlahos¹¹ examines in his paper, titled “Public diplomacy as loss of world authority,” the varying approaches of public diplomacy used by the government of the United States when the Global War on Terror just arose from an idea on paper to a lived reality. Vlahos¹¹ claims that the reason for the success of this campaign in convincing the locals was the keen use of ‘new media’ whose efforts were focused on the so-called ‘private’ media such as radio talk shows, the Fox News Network and mass network sites such as Lucianne.com. Such coordination between the government and the private sector can be considered as G2P, and throughout the blockade, similar techniques were implemented by the Quartet. For example, other than the official spokespersons for the governments of the blockading countries, there was an advertisement of viewpoints allying with the government of Saudi Arabia from non-Saudi TV presenters at the MBC media corporation, headquartered in Dubai. The goal was to justify the role of the Quartet and rally people’s opinions in support of the blockade on Qatar. Similarly, this new public diplomacy technique proved its success on the American society’s consensus to approve the American invasion of Iraq; however, “daily message-coordination memos have been leaked and viewed across the web... throughout the war the administration was able to turn the vast majority of television’s military analysts into virtual retainers of the Pentagon.”¹¹

However, when dealing with other governments on a global scale, the goal of public diplomacy changes slightly, in order to “send the message that offers a better deal without submission.”¹¹ Evidently, throughout the blockade period, both parties sought the same goal as they wanted to show Western countries that they are the better ally and often bought their influence in support of, or against, the blockade. In other words, the soft power strategies employed by Gulf countries, pitted against each other, included, but are not limited to, improvements on women’s rights, sporting events, cultural incentives, as well as bilateral economic agreements.

When comparing the Arabic and the English content produced by the MFAs during the first 100 days, Akdenizli finds from the English tweets that “the Qatari ministry of foreign affairs was the most active of the four overall with 43.6% of all coded tweets in this time period,”¹² but this was not the case with the Arabic tweets where the Saudi ministry of foreign affairs took the lead tweeting in Arabic. The difference in language might also demonstrate a difference in content, or at least a slight change.

In recent years, diplomats across the globe began to use various social media platforms (Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook) to connect with fellow diplomats and to conduct digital diplomacy on the internet.¹³ The future of diplomacy seems to be moving forward and at a fast pace through these social media platforms, as we see a rise in the number of accounts of diplomats created to make use of this virtual space. Reasons as to why this space would be of significant advantage to these diplomats can be attributed to the fact that it enhances the image of their country by showing that they are at the forefront of technology and largely modernity.¹⁴ Some of the factors that influence the implementation of digital diplomacy are as follows: “operating in different cultures and traditions, citizen-centric policies, the digital divide, and social environments were identified as examples of relevant socio-cultural factors.”¹⁴ However, according to Al-Sayed,¹⁵ Twitter gained immense popularity in the GCC during the Arab Spring revolutions, especially among the masses. It was used by citizens to voice their opinions and concerns.¹⁵

It can be noted that even after the Arab Spring, “the GCC citizens are continuing to use social networking sites to express their opinions freely and fearlessly. Especially in Qatar, Twitter is widely used by citizens to express their opinions on issues which affect their daily lives.”¹⁵ Consequently, ministers and ministries are believed to have focused on Twitter because the majority of GCC nationals use this platform to comment on the events that occur around them, including, but not limited to, the blockade against Qatar. Collins and Bekenova¹³ took it one step further by analyzing how European embassies have used social media to interact with the audience and to persuade and shape public opinion.¹³ The study reveals how two categories, ‘self-presentation and agenda setting’ and ‘sense of belonging,’ played a major role in terms of how the embassies conducted digital diplomacy.¹³

When evaluating the role of the Gulf ‘information war’ and its impact on the region, it is crucial to first understand how GCC citizens and expats use Twitter as their favorite site for communication through the internet.¹⁵ In fact, during the first weeks of the blockade, “many users were quick to share songs and cartoons to manifest support for their respective leaders.”¹⁵ Here Twitter has played a vital role in the blockade. This is why GCC foreign ministers and ministries conducted digital diplomacy via Twitter as it was quite evident how citizens were influenced by the ongoing information war. On the contrary, Strauß et al.¹⁷ evaluate “empirical insights to the communication strategies used on social media by Western embassies in GCC countries.”¹⁷ Their findings show that “embassies and ambassadors failed to set up successful two-way communication,”¹⁷ since government actors have not yet developed appealing communication strategies to achieve their goals. Although their study was conducted in 2015, it can now be said that more government officials and diplomats have started to acknowledge the importance of Twitter when it comes to dialogue with other government actors or their local and global audiences.

It is also worth mentioning that Saudi Arabia has lost the most important element of the geopolitical weight that Qatar possesses and through which it benefits the GCC, which is its “soft power, especially in regard to the importance of Al Jazeera channels. Since Saudi Arabia aimed to use Al Jazeera to propagate in its favor regarding the war on Yemen and to overlook its side issues, Al Jazeera turned into an adversary of the Saudi state and its politics, and it started shedding light on every little detail regarding the Saudi–Yemeni conflict, which added burdens on Saudi’s foreign policy, especially relating to the ‘reputation risk’.”⁵ As there was a clear shift from formal to informal measures taken against Qatar during the crisis, it can be understood as “a reflection of the quartet’s failure to secure its support of the United States or broad sections of the Arab and Muslim worlds for isolating Qatar.”³ This also works to prove the point Vlahos makes about the new purpose of public diplomacy, convincing other countries to support the cause one is advocating for.

The objective of this paper was to examine the role Twitter played in digital diplomacy during the blockade by the MOFAs and MFAs. The blockade initiated a swift transition from standard diplomacy approaches among the parties to digital diplomacy that targeted governments as well as people. This is critical to monitor since the uprisings in the region, such as the Arab Spring revolutions, emerged from and were facilitated through social media. In the case of the blockade, Twitter mobilized the upheaval, leading to a virtual cold war that the world can observe as it develops. This was possible due to the ministers voicing their political stances on Twitter for the world to see and interact with.

2. METHODOLOGY

The tweets examined and analyzed in this study were captured by Qatar Computing Research Institute (QCRI), which helped in coding a total of 3814 tweets by means of their machine. It provided the date and actual text of tweets, as well as sorted the type and source of tweets.

In this study, we employed both quantitative and qualitative analysis for the tweets, emphasizing our focus only on the Arabic tweets. For this purpose, we examined a total of 3814 tweets for a period of 100 days, starting from June 1, 2017 to September 13, 2017. By translating, transliterating, and contextualizing these tweets, we were able to divide them into groups and sub-groups: Big-story and Sub-story. The reason for why our analysis was limited to the Arabic tweets was that our sample mainly communicated actively in Arabic during the first 100 days of the blockade, which were the most critical of the time span of the blockade, still in effect to this day.

The tweets were also assessed quantitatively by logging and categorizing the number of tweets and the main themes discussed by the MOFAs and MFAs based on additional variables. These variables were extremely vital to consider since they helped us distinguish whether the tweet was produced originally, which means that these individuals were actually producing data or retweeting. Hence, by looking at retweets and replies, we would discern the person we should focus on to analyze these variables and to gain insight into who was engaging with their public audience (i.e. followers) or other official accounts such as ministers. In addition, the source variable showed whether this tweet belonged to the Saudi or the Bahraini minister or ministry, since this was a clear indicator as to which official account was the most active on Twitter with regard to the blockade. Therefore, this research is exceptionally data-heavy which helped us rely on the numbers of tweets and the content, in order to investigate how each ministry and its respective ministers interacted and guided the dialogue on the blockade of Qatar.

We recoded the tweets to further analyze the topics that were related to the blockade, in terms of how they were composed, and how the blockade was framed. The rule we based our recoding on was

the 50 percent rule, which required looking at the tweet, word-for-word, and seeing how much of what was mentioned covered the grounds for being blockade-related. First, we used critical discourse analysis, whereby we transliterated, translated, and contextualized approximately 4000 tweets. A small group of these tweets were unrelated to the blockade, which were coded as 'Other.' An example of tweets that fell under this category was a tweet by the Bahraini Minister at the time, Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmad Al-Khalifa, in which he shared a link to a Bahraini traditional song on July 19, 2017.¹⁸ In addition, traditional proverbs and analogies were also tweeted by a few ministers, which we then analyzed for the context. Finally, based on the 50 percent rule, we evaluated whether the proverbs and analogies were blockade-related or general.

Our next move was, through the development of the codes, sorting the tweets into the categories that we thought were appropriate for the purpose of the study. These tweets were examined and analyzed for their content and messages in a qualitative manner. The reason as to why these variables were included in the study was that they demonstrated the events that occurred and their importance and repetitiveness. The first code created was Big-story, in order to capture ongoing stories that were either breaking news or important events. Second, we created the code Sub-story, which helped us to organize the different ways the ministers and ministries were discussing the blockade. On the one hand, the Emirati Minister of State for Foreign Affairs at the time, H.E. Anwar Gargash, tweeted on August 25, 2017: "The sovereign decision should not be confused, but it is the perseverance and adolescence that makes it so. When the media is your only tool, justification becomes an unconvincing noise."¹⁹ Such tweet was coded as having the blockade as the Big-story and Qatar-oriented as the Sub-story. On the other hand, the tweet by the Emirati Ministry of Foreign Affairs on July 30, 2017, which translates to "Statement of the Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Egypt in Manama #OFMUAE,"²⁰ was coded as having Visits/Meetings as the Big-story, and since it did not directly discuss the blockade, it did not have a Sub-story. The Big-story grouped all tweets by their main topics, topics that were expected and deemed relevant during the 100 days. Examples of the Big-story that were featured included, but are not limited to, the debate on immigration, the events in Pakistan and Iraq, bilateral meetings, Qatar 2022 bid, and the blockade. The tweets that did not contain a Big-story were thus excluded from being recoded for a Sub-story, which was our sub-category.

The final and critical part of our content analysis was the inter-coder reliability test, which can be understood as: "the extent to which two or more independent coders agree on the coding of the content of interest with an application of the same coding scheme."²¹ In the case of our study, the test demonstrated that there was a 77% agreement for the Big-story and the Sub-story. An inter-coder reliability test was crucial for our analysis, in order to validate our findings related to this research.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study focused mainly and solely on the first 100 days of the blockade: June 5, 2017 to September 13, 2017 (Fig. 1). These days were imperative to examine because foreign ministers and ministries used Twitter to communicate with the public sphere in the country itself, or broadly outside the country and towards nationals, GCC citizens, and expats. The study found that of the 3532 tweets, the majority were original and comprised a total of 2570 tweets, while 955 were retweets and seven were reply tweets. We also found that the 'mention tweets' accounted for 7.28% of the total number of tweets, with a total of 257 mention tweets.

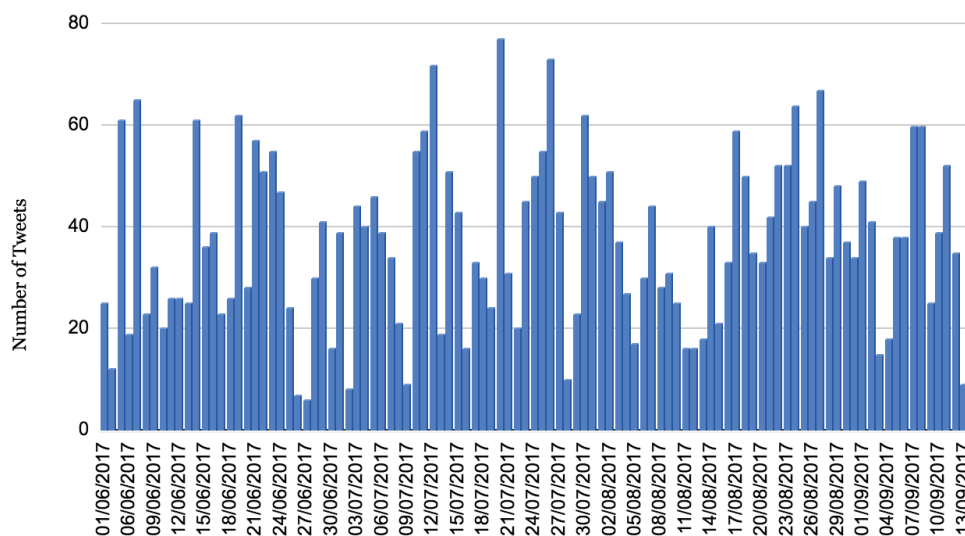


Figure 1. Peaks during the first 100 days measured by the number of tweets.

While examining the dates of tweets and the number of tweets sent, we noticed that some of the dates had a rather higher number of tweets than the rest; whereas the average number of tweets during the 100 days was approximately 37 tweets per day from all accounts. Thus, we decided to identify the days on which the tweets were higher than average. We discovered that, on the peak days, an event or two occurred simultaneously.

Starting from the highest to the lowest number of tweets in a total of five peaks, on July 20, 2017, of all accounts, 77 tweets were shared. On that same day, Qatar announced that they, with the help of the American FBI, found evidence of hacking, ‘confirming direct contact’ from one of the blockading countries, as well as the fact that hackers obtained the emails and passwords of QNA employees in order to plant and publish a fake statement of the Emir of Qatar.²² On the same day, the US State Department released its annual “Country Reports on Terrorism,” a topic discussed vehemently by the ministers on Twitter. In this report, the United States apparently ‘praised’ Qatar for actively fighting terrorism. At the same time, it mentioned that some individuals used the UAE as a channel to funnel money to terrorist organizations and that the UAE nevertheless was fighting terrorism. The report also claimed that a number of terrorist organizations had been funded by individuals and entities in Saudi Arabia; however, it also claimed that the Kingdom had progressed in countering terrorism.²²

Second, July 26, 2017, scored the second highest number of tweets with a total of 73 tweets from all accounts. This came six days after the first peak, and a day after Saudi-led bloc announced the blacklisting of a number of Qatari citizens as well as Kuwaiti and Yemeni citizens and organizations. The Al Jazeera channel also investigated the contract that SAPRAC or the Saudi lobby in America paid \$138,000 on anti-Qatar ads.²² Nevertheless, on June 26, the Qatari Minister of Foreign Affairs visited the United States to ‘inform politicians about the impacts of the crisis’ that was ongoing.²² Finally, the Qatari compensation committee announced receiving almost 3000 claims of human rights infringements from the blockading countries, infringements of individuals’ and merchant’s rights, as well as claims from institutions such as the Qatari Aviation.²²

Third, July 12, 2017, scored the third highest number of tweets, comprising a total of 72 tweets. Qatar announced on that day that the support Turkish troops had arrived at the Turkish base in Qatar; however, the number was not announced. This peak came a day after CNN published the leaked ‘confidential’ Riyadh Agreement, which was signed by the GCC leaders. Simultaneously, Tillerson arrived in Qatar for mediation on the 11th of July and was set to meet with the Emir and gave a press conference on the 12th of July to sign an MoU on ‘Terror Financing’ before heading to the Saudi bloc. It was noted that the timing of the leak of the Riyadh Agreement was doubtful, whereas the Qatari Minister claimed that “These are clear efforts to diminish ... the mediation by Kuwait, and the efforts of the United States to mediate this crisis.”²²

Fourth, June 7, 2017, was an interesting date with a total of 65 tweets. This came two days after the blockade was announced on Qatar. Three major events occurred on this day, starting with the brief

visits of Kuwait’s Emir HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah to two GCC capitals, Abu Dhabi and Doha, before heading back to Kuwait. Later on that day, the UAE banned their citizens and residents from “publishing expressions of sympathy towards Qatar and will punish offenders with a jail term of up to 15 years.”²³ Subsequently, a vital event occurred: the Turkish Parliament approved a bill to deploy troops to Qatar to establish a military base.²⁴

Finally, the least of the peak days was the day of the actual blockade, June 5, 2017 with 61 tweets from all accounts. There were numerous events occurring on June 5; of these, three events were the most important: Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain severed ties with Qatar. Qatar responded to the fact that there was “no justification for the cutting of ties.”²² On the same day, the Emir of Qatar HH Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani was set to give a speech; before doing so, Kuwait’s Emir HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah urged the Emir to postpone the speech. Sheikh Sabah then flew to Saudi Arabia for an urgent meeting with the King to help mitigate the situation at hand. Lastly, and later on that day, President Donald Trump tweeted for the first time since the crisis unfolded: “During my recent trip to the Middle East, I stated that there can no longer be funding of Radical Ideology. Leaders pointed to Qatar – look!”² However, a contrasting statement made by the Pentagon addressed the issue by saying that the American military was appreciative of Qatar’s role in supporting the army’s base on Qatari land and of the “enduring commitment to regional security.”²²

Table 2. Overall findings in terms of frequently tweeted blockade-related Sub-stories.

Sub-story	Number of tweets
No Sub-story	2571
Qatar-oriented	278
Bahrain-oriented	18
UAE-oriented	19
KSA-oriented	53
Demands/penalties	81
Al Jazeera	11
International reaction	45
USA	22
Russia	4
Turkey	14
Food	6
Airways	12
Families	24
Oman	2
Kuwait	13
Terrorism	230
Workers	1
UAE ship attack	4
Other	123

The total number of Sub-story coding was 20, looking at an array of different facets of the blockade including the FIFA World Cup, Separation of families, Terrorism, or directly referring to a specific GCC country (Table 2). For example, this was a tweet by the Bahraini Minister of Foreign Affairs, which was shared on August 6, 2017, during the first 100 days, which translated to: “If Qatari officials insist on using the word ‘blockade’ and that their country is ‘besieged,’ then they should open an independent investigation into any case connected to such blockade.”²⁵ Thus, this tweet was coded as having

‘Blockade’ for a Big-story, and Qatar-oriented as a Sub-story. The ‘no Big-story’ category was the one that included tweets that did not in any way discuss the blockade, an example of such was the tweet by the Office of the UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Abdulla bin Zayed Al Nahyan, shared on July 12, 2017, which roughly translated to: “President of Lithuania receives Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed #OFMUAE.”²⁶

The scope of the study took into account the tweets that were published during the first 100 days of the blockade – June 5, 2017, to September 13 2017 – by the foreign ministers and foreign ministries of the GCC, excluding Oman and Kuwait (Table 3). It is very important to acknowledge the fact that most of the ministries, excluding Bahrain’s, tweeted more frequently than their ministers. In addition to the fact that the Saudi Minister tweeted only once, the account of Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs was quite active in tweeting and engaging in the virtual space of Twitter. The tweets mainly consisted of official statements regarding both domestic and foreign affairs. We decided to focus on the results by looking at the digital diplomacy strategy followed by the nation as a whole, analyzing the roles that they each played within the digital landscape of the blockade. Clearly, the most tweeted Sub-story was Qatar-oriented, which accounted for 29.5% of the tweets from all the four countries. Moreover, the second most tweeted Sub-story was ‘Terrorism,’ which comprised about 23.3% of the tweets.

Table 3. Overall findings in terms of stories covered.

	Saudi Arabia	Qatar	UAE	Bahrain	Total tweets
Visits/meetings	259	421	219	24	923
Blockade	311	342	138	170	961
No Big-story	179	116	117	194	606

3.1 Saudi Arabia

First, Saudi Arabia, unlike the other three countries, had the least active MFA on Twitter (Table 4). Their diplomacy was limited to the Twitter account of the MOFA, actively contributing to the conversation by addressing almost all of the Sub-stories. Their minister at the time, Adel al-Jubeir, did not contribute to the conversation whatsoever, something that all the other three ministers did. In fact, Saudi Arabia was the most active country on Twitter during the first 100 days of the blockade in general, with approximately 1250 tweets from the accounts of the minister and ministry combined. The topics of the tweets ranged between expressing solidarity with other countries and other international affairs, and reinforcing their stance against terrorism and against Qatar. A total of 69 tweets mentioned Qatar explicitly and directly. Another aspect that Saudi Arabia took the lead in was that, among all the four countries, they were the ones to tweet on terrorism the most. They were also the ones to tweet on the ‘demands’ the most; an example of some of these tweets is the hashtag used throughout the first period of the blockade: # قطع_العلاقات_مع_قطر which loosely translates to “#Cutting_Ties_With_Qatar,” and the tweet “we reject Qatar’s support for terrorism and extremism and the endangering of our security as well as the security of the region.”²⁷ Saudi Arabia also never referred to what we call the ‘Blockade’ as the blockade, but instead they called it the ‘cutting of ties.’ Although Saudi Arabia was the most vocal of the Quartet, they seemed to escape the topic of dialogue the most. The only thing that Saudi Arabia did not take the lead in was the timing of the first tweet announcing the ‘cutting of the ties,’ even though they were regarded as the virtual leaders later on through their tweets and engagements with Qatar.

Table 4. Type and number of tweets as the unique aspects of Saudi Arabia’s digital diplomacy strategy.

Type of tweets	Number of tweets
Original tweets	1193
Retweet	78
Mention	20

3.2 Qatar

The Qatari Minister, H.E. Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, is the second most engaging minister, along with the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with a total number of tweets within the first 100 days of the blockade combined being 1006 tweets (Table 5). Of the total number of tweets, Qatar's minister and ministry tweeted 36.1% of the time. However, on June 5, the first day of the blockade, the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its minister did not tweet whatsoever. Nevertheless, at 6 a.m., Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE announced their severing of diplomatic relations as well as the closing of airspace, land, and sea borders in the face of Qatar. The minister used multiple hashtags (such as #Qatar and #GCCCrisis), as well as mentioned certain prime ministers and presidents when he discussed meetings between the bilateral countries. An example of this is "pleased to see my brother @MevlutCavusoglu again, evaluated bilateral relations & efforts aimed at solving #GCC crisis."²⁸

With regard to 'terrorism,' which was the second most tweeted Sub-story, the tweets from the minister and ministry signified their stance on terrorism as most tweets suggested that the country was trying to combat terrorism and not funding it. This example was shown in the ministry's tweet as it states that "Special Envoy of the Minister of Foreign Affairs to combat terrorism: the blockade imposed on # Qatar did not succeed."²⁹ Qatar-oriented tweets encompassed all tweets that discussed Qatar in terms of the blockade. The ministry and minister referred to 'Visits and Meetings' between Qatar and other countries, as the foreign minister visited myriads of countries once the blockade was in effect, in order to strengthen Qatar's diplomatic ties with other countries. The Qatar-oriented Sub-story was extremely multifaceted as tweets that fell under this category were very general and non-specific to the blockade.

Table 5. Type and number of tweets as the unique aspects of Qatar's digital diplomacy strategy.

Type of tweets	Number of tweets
Original tweets	844
Retweet	160
Mention	155

3.3 UAE

The UAE came third as the most tweeting country in terms of the MFA and MOFA, with a total of 661 tweets; of which, 76 tweets were solely by the minister (Table 6). The tweets from the combined accounts accounted for approximately 18.8% of the tweets captured by QCRI. Both accounts did not share many original tweets, as there were only a total of 119 tweets within the first 100 days of the blockade. However, the number of retweets reached up to 542, which was considered the highest in comparison to the rest of the countries. The UAE's minister and ministry seemed to focus on the Sub-story Qatar-oriented, which was discussed the most throughout their tweets, followed by terrorism. This was a recurring theme within the examined nations.

Table 6. Type and number of tweets as the unique aspects of the UAE's digital diplomacy strategy.

Type of tweets	Number of tweets
Original tweets	119
Retweet	542
Mention	79

3.4 BAHRAIN

Bahrain came fourth as the least frequent tweeter in regard to addressing the blockade, with a total of 589 tweets during the first 100 days (Table 7). The tweets by both Bahrain's Minister and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs accounted for 16.7% of the total number of tweets among all the countries. However, among the ministers themselves, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs H.E. Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa was the most active minister in general, tweeting mainly about the blockade 356 times in an implicit manner. In relation to his counterparts, his tweets varied in content as he frequently tweeted on intra-GCC affairs as well as world affairs.

In terms of the most tweeted Big-story, the dominant was no Big-story with a total of 194 tweets, the second-most tweeted Big-story was the blockade with a total of 170 tweets. In regard to Sub-story, Bahrain mostly delved into three of the 20 Sub-stories, whereas they tweeted the most on 'Other' with a total of 419 tweets, considering that 'Other' is neither related to demands and penalties nor to terrorism, etc. Bahrain also tweeted 58 times on Qatar-oriented, which was mainly targeted at Qatar's government or towards the Qatari population. The third-most tweeted Sub-story was 'Other,' which was tweeted 32 times.

Table 7. Type and number of tweets as the unique aspects of Bahrain's digital diplomacy strategy.

Type of tweets	Number of tweets
Original tweets	414
Retweet	175
Mention	4

4. CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER IMPLICATIONS

This work was conducted to analyze the Arabic tweets in the first 100 days of the blockade that was initiated by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt against their neighbor Qatar on June 5, 2017, with the aim of examining how Twitter was used as a digital diplomacy tool in the midst of a cold war. The blockade was discussed vehemently via Twitter by the official mouthpieces, the MOFAs and MFAs themselves, which helped us to understand each country and analyze where they fell on the spectrum of digital diplomacy.

In conclusion, ministries and their respective ministers discussed the blockade through the use of Twitter as the main medium to voice the government's concerns and to defend their country's decisions and overall image. They were the official mouthpieces of the government; hence, their tweets were not only of legitimate concern, but also influenced public perception, especially regarding the status quo in the GCC.

Before June 7, 2017, the GCC citizens generally perceived Twitter as a platform where people could express their political or apolitical views, with minimal interaction with governmental representatives. Simultaneously, Twitter was also used by the same aforementioned ministers to post press conferences regarding bilateral meetings, new appointments within their respective governments, or to congratulate their citizens and residents during official holidays, etc. Although this pattern had persisted after the blockade, there were drastic changes in the diplomatic scene of the GCC post-blockade, whereby individuals within the Gulf region along with these governmental officials were using Twitter in a slightly unconventional manner since traditional diplomacy was insufficient in this day and age.

The GCC governments were well aware of the power of social media as they saw first-hand how social media enabled citizens to overthrow governments and monarchies in the region. The decision to take this strife and display it online, as well as engage in digital diplomacy at such a time was unprecedented. Therefore, the ministers used Twitter to announce the blockading countries' 'cutting of ties' and the escalation of the political strife, as well as the issuance of similar official statements, a job traditionally allocated to their news agencies. Furthermore, the ministers even began to express the official viewpoints regarding timely developments, for example, the Bahraini Minister's tweet in response to the Turkish troops deployed to the military base in Qatar, which reads: "The basis of our disagreement with Qatar has always revolved around policies and security concerns, and it never required military intervention. Bringing in foreign armies and their armored vehicles is the military escalation that Qatar bears."³⁰ This tweet has demonstrated how a government mouthpiece has directly stated Bahrain's concern about Qatar's decision via tweeting it. The shift in diplomacy is clear in this example, where the communication has transformed from traditional diplomacy to digital diplomacy. Hence, we did not see the interaction of Government to Government (G2G), instead we noted that by using Government to People (G2P), digital diplomacy was overwhelmingly imposing itself over the GCC crisis. Consequently, Twitter is now considered by the Gulf states as a better method of communication that successfully disseminates their message to the targeted audience instead of using traditional diplomacy that is limited to the targeted government.

In addition, it is important to acknowledge that although our research was mainly based on the findings of the first 100 days, the most important events occurred during that time period, which was regarded as the epitome of the GCC cold war in cyberspace.³¹

The tweets categorized under Big-story demonstrated how the ministers discussed certain topics, as they prioritized some topics over others. For instance, the tweets under the 'Qatar-oriented' Sub-story were the ones of the highest frequency, mainly discussing and examining the official Qatari stance on the blockade and pressing concerns at the time. On the contrary, the second-most tweeted Sub-story was 'terrorism.' This Sub-story demonstrated opposing agendas from the Qatari stance versus the Quartet's; the context of terrorism completely differed and various narratives were put forth. These tweets were either in support of the blockade against Qatar or proving that Qatar had no relations with terrorist organizations. Although the contexts differed, the frequency at which the word was tweeted, allowed for it to consistently be a part of the conversation. This was something we had seen happen in the traditional forms of diplomacy, but the phenomenon was definitely expanded on and obliterated digitally. In the era of an information influx, the numbers matter. The question now becomes "how do you control the narrative when everyone is part of the same conversation?"

Finally, while examining the pool of data, we noted a stark difference in the content of tweets between those composed in English and in Arabic — according to the research paper by Dr Banu Akdenizli, entitled "Twitter as an instrument of foreign policy: Qatar and the GCC,"³² which chiefly discussed the English tweets. Thus, the main differences between the English and Arabic tweets consisted of the frequency of tweets, the wording of statements, the targeted audience, as well as the topics discussed. Other areas that we found to be lacking were the topics mentioned within the chosen sample. The sample was limited in the sense that it contained only the Arabic tweets and only the tweets that were sourced back to the ministries – so any topic that did not relate to the MOFA and was instead focused on by another sector of the government was unintentionally disregarded. For example, Qatar National Rights Committee tweeted substantially on the issue of family separations post-blockade on Twitter, but this was not covered within our research due to the source that it belonged to. This research was conducted on the tweets published during the first 100 days of the blockade. The blockade is ongoing until this day; therefore, any updates that have occurred since then have not been included in this paper.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Funding sources

This research received no external funding.

The publication of this article was funded by the Qatar National Library.

Authors' contributions

T.M. contributed substantially to the conception and design of the study, as well as to the analysis and interpretation of data. T.M., H.M., and M.F. drafted parts of the manuscript. All authors critically revised the content. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Acknowledgments

This paper would not have come into being without the great help of our professor and mentor Dr. Banu Akdenizli. This research was based on the findings from the Undergraduate Research Experience Program (UREP) grant: 22-067-5-021, titled "Hashtag Blockade."

REFERENCES

1. Adesina OS. Foreign policy in an era of digital diplomacy. *Cogent Social Sciences*. 2017;3(1):1. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2017.1297175>.
2. Trump D. RealDonaldTrump. During my recent trip to the Middle East I stated that there can no longer be funding of Radical Ideology. Leaders pointed to Qatar – look! [Internet]; 2017 Jun 6 [cited Jan 12, 2019]. Available from: <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/872062159789985792>.
3. Ulrichsen K. Can the Gulf Cooperation Council survive the current crisis? [Internet]. Arab Center Washington, DC; 2017. [cited Jan 15, 2019] Available from: http://arabcenterdc.org/policy_analyses/can-the-gulf-cooperation-council-survive-the-current-crisis/.
4. Legrenzi M. The GCC and the international relations of the Gulf: Diplomacy, security and economic coordination in a changing Middle East. 1st ed. New York: I.B. Tauris; 2015.
5. نايف الشمري & حمد المهندي. (2019). تحولات المشهد الأمني الخليجيّ بعد الأزمة الخليجيّة مقارنة جيوسياسية. مركز ابن خلدون للعلوم، جامعة قطر، الدوحة.
6. Giuliani C. The intra-GCC crisis: Qatari soft power and international law. *IAI Commentaries*. 2019;19:1–6. Available from: <https://www.iai.it/en/publicazioni/intra-gcc-crisis-qatari-soft-power-and-international-law>.
7. Snow N, Taylor PM. *Routledge handbook of public diplomacy* [Internet]. New York: Routledge; 2008. Available from: <https://www.routledge.com/Routledge-Handbook-of-Public-Diplomacy/Snow-Taylor/p/book/9780415953023>.
8. Rashica V. The benefits and risks of digital diplomacy. *SEEU Review*. 2018;13(1):75–89.
9. Nye JS. Public diplomacy and soft power. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 2008;616(1):94–109.
10. Paton E. Why soft power is in style in Qatar [Internet]. The New York Times; 2019. Available from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/04/fashion/qatar-luxury-fashion-national-museum-blockade.html>.
11. Vlahos M. Public diplomacy as loss of world authority. In: Snow N, Taylor PM, editors. *Routledge handbook of public diplomacy*. New York: Routledge; 2009. pp. 24–38. Available from: <https://www.routledge.com/Routledge-Handbook-of-Public-Diplomacy/Snow-Taylor/p/book/9780415953023>.
12. Akdenizli B. Twitter as an instrument of foreign policy: Qatar and the GCC. In: Miller R, editor. *The 2017 Gulf crisis: The view from Qatar*. Doha, Qatar: Hamad bin Khalifa University Press; 2018. pp. 147–156.
13. Collins N, Bekenova K. Digital diplomacy: Success at your fingertips. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*. 2019;15:1–11. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322601850_Digital_diplomacy_success_at_your_fingertips. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-017-0087-1>.
14. Al-Muftah H, Weerakkody V, Rana NP, Sivarajah U, Irani Z. Factors influencing e-diplomacy implementation: Exploring causal relationships using interpretive structural modelling. *Government Information Quarterly*. 2018;35(3):502–514.
15. Al-Sayed K. *GCC and Arab Spring*. 1st ed. Qatar: Dar Al-Sharq Printing Press; 2013.
16. Allagui I, Akdenizli B. The Gulf information war and the role of media and communication technologies: Editorial introduction. *International Journal of Communication*. 2019;13:1287–1300.
17. Strauß N, Kruikemeier S, van der Meulen H, van Noort G. Digital diplomacy in GCC countries: Strategic communication of Western embassies on Twitter [Internet]. *Government Information Quarterly*. 2015;32(4):369–379. Available from: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0740624X15300010>.
18. Al Khalifa K. KhalidAlKhalifa. يا دار بن حريان .. خماري ... خماري يا ذا الحمام [Internet]; 2017 Aug 6 [cited Oct 10, 2019]. Available from: <https://twitter.com/khalidalkhalifa/statuses/887428572952088576>.
19. Gargash A. The sovereign decision should not be confused, but it is the perseverance and adolescence that makes it so. When the media is your only tool, justification becomes an unconvincing noise [Internet]; 2017 Aug 08 [cited Oct 10]. Available from: <https://twitter.com/AnwarGargash/status/900953715988774912>.
20. Emirati Ministry of Foreign Affairs. OFMUA. Statement of the meeting of foreign ministers of the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Egypt in Manama #OFMUA [Internet]; 2017 Aug 25 [cited Oct 10]. Available from: <https://twitter.com/AnwarGargash/status/900953715988774912>.
21. Lavrakas PJ. *Encyclopedia of survey research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications; 2018. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412963947>.
22. Al Jazeera. Qatar's blockade in 2017, day by day developments. *Al Jazeera*; 2018. Available from: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/qatar-crisis-developments-october-21-171022153053754.html>.
23. Reuters. UAE bans expressions of sympathy towards Qatar – Media [Internet]. Reuters; 2017. Available from: <https://www.reuters.com/article/gulf-qatar/uae-bans-expressions-of-sympathy-towards-qatar-media-idUSL8N1J40D2>.
24. Reuters. Turkish parliament approves bill to deploy troops in Qatar – Media [Internet]. Reuters; 2017 Jun 7 [cited Oct 10, 2019]. Available from: <https://www.reuters.com/article/gulf-qatar-turkey/turkish-parliament-approves-bill-to-deploy-troops-in-qatar-idUSL8N1J45G5>.
25. Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, OFMUA. President of Lithuania receives Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed #OFMUA [Internet]; 2017 Jul 12 [cited Aug 14]. Available from: <https://twitter.com/OFMUA/status/88506370361179009?s=20>.
26. Al Khalifa K. KhalidAlKhalifa. If Qatari officials insist on using the word “blockade” and that their country is “besieged”, then they should open an independent investigation into any case connected to such blockade [Internet]; 2017 Aug 6 [cited Jan 12]. Available from: <https://twitter.com/khalidalkhalifa/status/89414777923624960>.
27. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Ministry of Foreign Affairs. KSAMOFA. #Cutting_Ties_With_Qatar we reject Qatar's support for terrorism and extremism and the endangering of our security as well as the security of the region [Internet]; 2017 Jun 30 [cited Jan 12]. Available from: <https://twitter.com/KSAMOFA/status/880855610023084032>.
28. Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani. MBA_Althani_. Pleased to see my brother @MevlutCavusoglu again. Evaluated bilateral relations & efforts aimed at solving #GCC crisis [Internet]; 2017 Jul 14 [cited Jan 12]. Available from: https://twitter.com/MBA_AlThani_/status/885901676368072705.
29. Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs. MOFAQatar_AR. Special Envoy of the Minister of Foreign Affairs to combat terrorism: The blockade imposed on # Qatar did not succeed [Internet]; 2017 Aug 14 [cited Jan 12]. Available from: https://twitter.com/MofaQatar_AR/status/897164094209503232.
30. Al Khalifa K. KhalidAlKhalifa. The basis of our disagreement with Qatar has always revolved around policies and security concerns, and it never required military intervention. Bringing in foreign armies and their armored vehicles is the military escalation that Qatar bears [Internet]; 2017 Jun 26 [cited Nov 4]. Available from: <https://twitter.com/khalidalkhalifa/status/879089591726346243>.
31. Middle East Monitor. Moves to end Gulf ‘cold war’ could kick off on a Qatar football pitch. *Middle East Monitor*; 2019. Available from: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20191113-moves-to-end-gulf-cold-war-could-kick-off-on-a-qatar-football-pitch/>.