

Shaping Perceptions: The Taliban's Use of Digital Media for Public Diplomacy and Image Building After Seizing Power in Afghanistan

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18196/jiwp.v7i2.54>

Abstract

After 20 years of fighting against the invasion of the United States and its allies, the Taliban succeeded in taking power in Afghanistan on August 15, 2021. The return of the Taliban to power caused much controversy, especially regarding human rights. The Taliban tried to improve their negative image by increasing soft power through public diplomacy and utilizing digital media to strengthen their messages to the public. This study aims to analyze how the Taliban conducts public diplomacy through digital media to build a positive image after the takeover of power in Afghanistan. The method used was qualitative, using literature through online searches, especially digital media owned by the Taliban. This research found that the Taliban actively engages in public diplomacy by using digital media such as websites, YouTube, and Twitter to respond to narrative attacks and promote policies to build a positive image.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Public Diplomacy, Social Media, Taliban.

Abstrak

Setelah 20 tahun berjuang melawan invasi Amerika Serikat dan sekutunya, Taliban berhasil mengambil alih kekuasaan di Afghanistan pada 15 Agustus 2021. Kembalinya Taliban berkuasa menimbulkan banyak kontroversi, terutama terkait hak asasi manusia. Taliban berusaha memperbaiki citra negatifnya dengan meningkatkan soft power melalui diplomasi publik dan memanfaatkan media digital untuk memperkuat pesan mereka kepada masyarakat. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana Taliban melakukan diplomasi publik melalui media digital dalam upaya membangun citra positif pasca pengambilalihan kekuasaan di Afghanistan. Metode yang digunakan adalah metode kualitatif dengan menggunakan literatur melalui penelusuran online khususnya media digital milik Taliban. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa Taliban secara aktif terlibat dalam diplomasi publik dengan menggunakan media digital seperti website, YouTube, dan Twitter untuk merespons serangan narasi dan mempromosikan kebijakan dalam upaya membangun citra positif.

Kata Kunci: Afghanistan, Diplomasi Publik, Media Sosial, Taliban.

Introduction

Every nation employs different strategies to pursue its national interests, and one of those is through public diplomacy. Public diplomacy refers to the efforts made by governments to positively influence individuals or organizations outside their borders to alter their perceptions of the country (Melissen, 2006). Public diplomacy is transparent and encompasses a wider scope than traditional diplomacy, which tends to be

more closed and limited. Given its diverse target audience, public diplomacy utilizes various communication channels. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) advancement has further increased these communication channels' diversity, complexity, and intricacy (Hennida, 2009).

The Taliban recognizes the importance of digital media as a strategic tool in public diplomacy. Initially, the Taliban was a group of

students founded in 1994 and led by Mullah Mohammad Omar. After capturing Kabul in 1996, the Taliban implemented highly conservative Islamic laws, which sparked controversy and objections from the Afghan society and the international community (Aswar, 2021).

The negative image of the Taliban, especially in Western countries, is the reason why they employ public diplomacy through digital media. Through digital media, the Taliban seeks to change its image from being perceived as brutal and disregarding human rights to a more moderate and peace-loving image (Kompas.com, 2021). They aim to build positive relationships by disseminating positive values through their messages. This strategy is an effort by the Taliban to gain legitimacy from countries worldwide (Kumparan News, 2021). However, their past negative image remains a difficult hurdle to overcome.

After 20 years of war against the United States and NATO, the Taliban successfully seized power in Afghanistan in 2021. Under their new leadership, the Taliban seeks to present a more moderate, tolerant, and diplomatic image (Ahmadzai and Ghosn, 2022). They use digital media to improve their image both domestically and internationally. They express openness to cooperate with other countries, recognizing the importance of international support in the reconciliation and development of Afghanistan in the future.

The Taliban continues to develop digital media to enhance public diplomacy and improve its image. Their desire to enhance their positive image through media is not new. In 2005, the Taliban launched the official website of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 'Al Emarah,' which published content in five languages (Atiq, 2021). Additionally, they have been using the Twitter account @alemarahweb to post messages in English since May 2011 (Bernatis, 2014).

The Taliban has become skilled in diplomacy. After taking over the government, Taliban members actively shared photos and videos to portray themselves as friendly and ordinary individuals, engaging in activities such as playing car games, eating ice cream, and

exercising (Setowara, 2021). However, their efforts at rebranding themselves are not easy. The resurgence of the Taliban raises concerns among the Afghan population and the international community due to their traumatic experience with Taliban rule in the 1990s. This situation poses a unique challenge for the Taliban, and their future remains unpredictable.

This article will discuss the Taliban's public diplomacy strategy through digital media to improve its image and seek international support after seizing power in Afghanistan in 2021. This topic is intriguing because previously, the Taliban rejected information technology and media as it was deemed incompatible with Islamic law. However, they now utilize digital media as an effective tool to confront opposition, consolidate power, and convey their political messages.

The role of social media by the Taliban has been extensively studied by various researchers, such as the study conducted by Hazrat M. Bahar (2020), which discusses how the Afghan government and the Taliban use Twitter to disseminate (mis)information, garner support, and manipulate public opinion. Almost all ministries, provincial governors, semi-government and independent organizations, parliament members, and politicians have social media accounts in Afghanistan. On the other hand, the Taliban is also highly active on social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook, reporting their attacks on security forces, making statements, and spreading propaganda (Bahar, 2020). The impact of social media on the Taliban has been analyzed by Ernesto Lee and Furqan Rustam (et al.), who examined the global public's positive and negative responses to the Taliban (Lee et al., 2022).

David Drissel (2014) examined the framing and communication strategies by analyzing the content of tweets and blog posts written by Taliban activists. By collecting, reviewing, and analyzing over 400 tweets and essay-style blog posts from February to June 2012, this research found that Taliban activists in Afghanistan utilized innovative communication modes such as social media to disseminate their political attitudes and frame their social movement in the phrasing of transnational radical Islamic, anti-

imperialism, self-determination, and universal human rights (Drissel, 2014). Another study that discussed the Taliban from a different perspective was conducted by Ujang Habibi and Hardinal Pratama (2021), analyzing two Indonesian public figures, Fadli Zon and Hidayat Nur Wahid, in shaping public opinion that built a positive image of the Taliban in 2021 (Habibi and Pratama, 2021).

Based on these studies, there has been no research that specifically discusses the Taliban's public diplomacy through digital media as an effort to build a positive image after returning to power in Afghanistan in 2021. Therefore, in this research, the authors will examine how the Taliban uses digital media as an instrument of public diplomacy to build a positive image after the takeover of power in Afghanistan in the period 2021–2022. In this research, the authors focus on digital media such as websites, Twitter, and YouTube, which the Taliban use to convey their political narratives.

METHOD

In this research, the authors employed a qualitative research method. Qualitative research utilizes inductive analysis based on facts discovered to explain individuals, actions, and events in social life. Qualitative research is descriptive, with data emphasizing words or images rather than numerical figures (Sugiyono, 2013). In this study, the authors utilized secondary data from various literature sources such as books, journals, documents, and relevant writings as references to explore the research object, including official websites, Twitter accounts, and YouTube channels owned by the Taliban. The authors obtained data from various Taliban digital media, including the Al-Emarah website, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, the YouTube channel of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Twitter accounts @Alemarahenglish, @Zabehulah_M33, and @QaharBalkhi, most of which are in English.

This paper employs public diplomacy to analyze the Taliban's efforts to influence global public opinion towards their cause. Public diplomacy builds relationships with other

nations by understanding their country, culture, and society. Public diplomacy aims to correct misperceptions in international relations (Leonard, 2002).

According to Mark Leonard (2002), states commonly employ three dimensions of public diplomacy as strategies. The first dimension is news management, where public diplomacy actors respond quickly and extensively to issues or news events through the media. This dimension involves the dissemination of information and responses to issues related to the country. The second dimension is strategic communication, which involves political campaigns to influence public perceptions by disseminating positive values through conveyed messages. Strategic communication aims to shape public opinion to support the state's interests. The third dimension is relationship building, which involves developing long-term relationships with specific actors through various activities such as scholarships, exchanges, training, seminars, conferences, and providing access to media channels. This dimension aims to strengthen bilateral and multilateral relationships with other countries (Leonard, 2002). However, from this third dimension, this research only focuses on one dimension considered the most relevant, namely strategic communication.

Public diplomacy has also undergone significant changes in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) development era. Digital media and social media play a crucial role in enhancing public diplomacy activities at both domestic and international levels. Digital media enables the dissemination of information, the formation of positive country images, and influence over public perceptions. Through its interactive features, digital media facilitates two-way dialogues between governments and the public, aiding agenda-setting, reducing misinformation, and enhancing mutual understanding. In this way, digital media provides a distinct approach from traditional methods in achieving public diplomacy goals (Bjola & Holmes, 2015).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social Media and Politics Post-Taliban Overthrow in Afghanistan

During their rule from 1996 to 2001, the Taliban vehemently rejected information technology and modern media as they were deemed incompatible with Islamic law. However, the Taliban now utilizes the internet and social media as part of their campaign to regain power. For more than a decade, the Taliban has relied on technology for propaganda purposes and community engagement, but their use of social media has gained traction only in recent years (Bodetti, 2016). Over the years, the Taliban has demonstrated proficiency in using the internet and social media. Their social media campaign indicates their efforts to strengthen their message by building social media elements. Simultaneously, the Taliban aims to soften its harsh image both within and outside Afghanistan. The Taliban employs social media to influence global audiences with their positive content. This comprehensive social media campaign is designed to ensure the world is aware of its positive activities and to gain legitimacy in Afghanistan (Bodetti, 2016).

In 2005, the Taliban launched their official website called Al-Emarah, which is now published in five languages: English, Arabic, Pashto, Dari, and Urdu. Al-Emarah, meaning “emirate” in Arabic, refers to the sovereign state they once controlled. According to their English Telegram channel, Al-Emarah is the official channel of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, providing news updates, articles, and official statements (Bodetti, 2016). Al-Emarah can be accessed through <https://www.alemarahenglish.af/>. All content published on this official website is supervised by the Cultural Commission of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), led by Zabihullah Mujahid, the Taliban spokesperson (Detiknews, 2021).

In 2011, the Taliban began using Twitter to target Western audiences and quickly utilized the platform to spread propaganda, as stated in the Terrorism Research Initiative’s 2014 study. None of the Taliban accounts on Twitter are verified; however, the platform allows

numerous unverified accounts to promote Taliban policies and statements (Dawi, 2022). In 2019, the Taliban learned to hijack hashtags, incorporating popular hashtags with their messages (Timberg and Lima, 2021). The main Twitter account of the Taliban, @alemarahweb, was launched in December 2010 and started sharing English tweets afterward. Other Twitter accounts associated with the Taliban include @alemarahenglish, @Zabehulah_M33, @suhailshaheen1, @QaharBalkhi, @ammarzamarak, @Ahmadmuttaqi01, @HafizZiaAhmad1, @HabibiSamangani, and @leaOffice.

Twitter account @alemarahweb began posting in English in May 2011. However, only tweets posted after November 2011 are freely accessible. Most of the tweets from these Taliban accounts usually detail the methods of attacks, the number of casualties, destroyed equipment, and the location of the incidents. In their 2011 Eid al-Adha message, the Taliban also mentioned their official spokesperson, website, and press releases from the Islamic Emirate. Tweets posted by the Taliban accounts typically include links to official communiques, press releases, interviews, poetry, videos, and essay-style blog posts on the main Taliban website, including Al-Emarah (Drissel, 2014).

After successfully taking over Kabul, there were numerous tweets about the Taliban’s victories accompanied by hashtags such as #Victory_from_Allah_and_Conquest_of_Kabul, #westandwithTaliban, #kabulregimecrimes (Atiq 2021). Dozens of new pro-Taliban accounts emerged on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. These accounts openly stated their affiliation with the Taliban. They posted images, videos, and slogans to reinforce the claim that the Taliban has brought peace to Afghanistan and convey the message that they are the true rulers of Afghanistan, unlike the corrupt previous government (Ghaedi 2021). The Taliban has a volunteer team under Mujahid’s supervision that specifically promotes their ideology online. Qari Saeed Khosty, the social media director of the IEA, leads the team. Khosty explained to the BBC that his team consists of several groups focusing on Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp to spread their

message and strategically make Taliban hashtags trend (Kompas.com 2021).

The Taliban continues to find ways to flood social media with their content despite technology companies like YouTube and Facebook banning Taliban-related content on their platforms (Ikhsan 2021). Facebook has labeled the Taliban as a “dangerous organization” and regularly removes accounts and pages associated with the group. Facebook has stated that it will continue to ban Taliban content on its platform (Atiq 2021). On the other hand, Twitter has not suspended Taliban accounts, indicating that the company has a different assessment of U.S. policy and law ambiguity. Several official Taliban accounts have been allowed to operate on Twitter, including those used by the group’s spokesperson. Twitter permits these accounts to operate as long as they comply with the rules by not sharing inappropriate content, such as inciting violence through tweets. Therefore, the Taliban focuses more on spreading their message on Twitter (Timberg 2021).

Rita Katz, the executive director of the SITE Intelligence Group, stated that the Taliban is currently highly skilled in using technology and social media, unlike 20 years ago. The Taliban and its supporters have multiple linked accounts on various platforms to prevent their messaging channels from being easily eradicated by technology companies. On some accounts circulating on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, as well as in group chats on WhatsApp and Telegram, supportive messages for the Taliban usually reject the dominant Western view that sees the Taliban as an intolerant, cruel group seeking revenge (Timberg and Lima 2021).

The website is one of the platforms used by the Taliban to convey their messages to the Afghan people and the international community. The website named Al-Emarah was launched in 2005 and is under the supervision of the Cultural Commission of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, led by Zabihullah Mujahid, the Taliban spokesperson (Detiknews 2021). It contains a wealth of information presented in various content formats published in five languages: English, Arabic, Urdu, Dari, and Pashto. Visitors can access news, weekly

comments, statements, interviews, articles, and opinions here. This site also allows readers to share posts through Twitter, Facebook, and other social networking services.

In addition to the Al-Emarah website, the Taliban government has the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) website for the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. This site provides information about the Ministry of Foreign Affairs activities, especially the foreign minister’s meetings with various parties for bilateral discussions on inter-country relations. There is also information about the foreign minister’s visits abroad through videos. The information on this page is available in two languages, Dari and English. The page also contains links to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan’s Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram accounts (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, n.d.).

In addition to the official website, the Taliban government created its own YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/c/MinistryofForeignAffairsAfghanistanMFA/>, on November 2, 2021. The channel contains interview videos, speeches, the foreign minister’s visits to other countries, and some important meetings of high-ranking Taliban officials. However, the English-language videos on this channel are only interview videos conducted by Taliban spokespersons with foreign media. On the other hand, only a few videos have translations. This lack makes it difficult for foreign audiences to understand the messages conveyed through the uploaded videos on this channel ((687) Ministry of Foreign Affairs Afghanistan(MFA) - YouTube, n.d.).

Another media platform used by the Taliban in public diplomacy is Twitter. These accounts are created to fulfill the Taliban’s objectives and serve as diplomatic tools. However, none of the Taliban accounts on Twitter are verified. Nevertheless, the platform allows many unverified accounts to promote Taliban policies and statements (Dawi 2022). One Twitter account that shares Taliban activities is the @Alemarahenglish account, created in October 2010. As of November 10, 2022, the account has been followed by 10 thousand people. The tweets published in the @Alemarahenglish

account are in English. In general, the posts in this account contain the achievements of the Taliban government.

Additionally, it actively retweets posts from the Taliban spokesperson's Twitter account. Besides the official social media accounts of Al-Emarah, social media accounts belong to Taliban spokespersons. These accounts are also used to convey statements related to specific issues or current international cases and to promote the foreign policies of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan to the international public.

The first account is the Twitter account of Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid, created in April 2017 and currently has 756.1 thousand followers. This personal account is quite active in uploading content related to government activities and responding to specific issues or events. The next account is the Twitter account of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson @QaharBalkhi, created in August 2021, and as of October 2022, it has gained 177.6 thousand followers. Similar to Zabihullah Mujahid's account, @QaharBalkhi is also very active in uploading the foreign policies of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and responding to news or specific issues related to the Taliban government.

Public Diplomacy as Counter-Narrative and Public Opinion Formation by the Taliban The Taliban actively responds through digital media due to the numerous controversial issues in Afghanistan that have gained international attention. Among the controversial issues still frequently discussed today are women's rights and minority groups. Over the past year, many local-level restrictions have been gradually implemented. Most of these rules restrict Afghan women's rights, from bans on traveling alone and limiting employment and education rights to dress codes (BBC 2022). These have sparked protests condemning the Taliban government (CNN Indonesia 2021). Here are some issues that have gained international attention since the Taliban regained power in Afghanistan:

1. Human Rights Issues

On September 12, 2022, the UN Human Rights Council released its first report on the situation in Afghanistan since the Taliban took over the country in 2021. Richard Bennett, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Afghanistan, stated that Afghanistan is experiencing a deepening human rights crisis under the Taliban regime (VOA 2022). However, the Taliban rejected the report, and it was responded to by Zabihullah Mujahid, the Taliban spokesperson, through his Twitter account on September 13, 2022. According to Mujahid, there is currently no threat to life in Afghanistan. One hundred eighty-one (181) public and private universities have been opened for men and women. Thousands of Afghan women can work in various fields, such as education, public health, media, and banking.

Additionally, the rights of minorities are also protected, with no one being killed, arrested, prosecuted, or prevented from practicing their religion. On the other hand, hundreds of attacks targeting minority places of worship have been successfully prevented. In some cases, the perpetrators have been arrested and heavily punished. Mujahid believes that these aspects were not highlighted in the UN report. He considers the report submitted by Bennett to be irresponsible. He also emphasized that the UN should respect the opinions and beliefs of people worldwide and not view international issues through the lens of specific countries, as such actions can damage the reputation of the UN as an international organization (Zabihullah (ذبيح الله م.) [@Zabehulah_M33], 2022b).

Furthermore, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement on October 28, 2022, through its official website. In the statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan considers the report on the human rights situation in Afghanistan presented by Special Rapporteur Richard Bennett at the 77th session of the UN General Assembly to be contrary to reality. The statement is deemed irresponsible and aimed at spreading falsehoods and division among Afghan society. During Bennett's visit to Afghanistan, officials of the Islamic Emirate

provided him with verifiable reports showing improvements in the human rights situation in the country, but they were ignored in his statement. This unprofessional action is seen as tarnishing the reputation of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan government and jeopardizing the spirit of cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, n.d.).

Regarding women's rights in Afghanistan, Zabihullah Mujahid stated that the Islamic Emirate is fully committed to upholding, defending, and protecting all women's rights according to Sharia law in Afghanistan. This statement was made through his Twitter account on March 8, 2022, observed as International Women's Day (IWD).

The Al Emarah website also published an article on October 26 titled "IEA is Not Against Girls Education." The article aims to provide information that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan does not oppose the education of girls, as reported by Western countries and their allies. Since coming to power in 2021, the authorities have been striving to establish principles, curricula, and educational institutions based on Islamic Sharia for girls. However, achieving these goals took longer than expected, as the system started from scratch after the corrupt regime's government (al Emarah 2022).

The Taliban also attempts to refute Western media's accusations that they suppress minority rights. On November 3, 2022, the Al Emarah website published an article titled "Deputy PM Meets Shiite Scholars, Elders." The article explains a meeting held by Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi, Deputy Prime Minister of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan Administration, with several Shia scholars and elders. The article aims to provide information that after the end of foreign occupation and re-establishment, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has treated all Afghan people, especially Shia individuals, well. The Shia people are fully satisfied and continue to support the government (al Emarah 2022).

The Taliban spokesperson also affirmed that Afghanistan is a home for all Afghan citizens, and there is no threat directed towards any Afghan citizen, regardless of their ethnicity,

religion, or region. The Islamic Emirate guarantees the security of every citizen. All Sunni, Shia, Sikh, and Hindu communities can freely practice their religions. This statement was made through the Twitter accounts of Abdul Qahar Balkhi and Zabihullah Mujahid.

2. Freedom of the Press

After the Taliban regained power, the media landscape in Afghanistan has undergone radical changes. One of the main causes of this change is the economic crisis and certain restrictions imposed by the Taliban regime. The media must adhere to the "11 Journalism Rules" version released by the Ministry of Information and Culture under the Taliban. These "Journalism Rules" enable censorship, persecution, and encroachments on journalists' freedom (VOA 2021).

According to a survey by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), since the Taliban took power on August 15, 2021, Afghanistan has lost 39.59% of its media outlets and 59.86% of its journalists, especially female journalists. Before August 15, 2021, Afghanistan had 547 media outlets. One year later, 219 ceased operations (RSF 2021). The Taliban has instructed local media not to broadcast music or entertainment programs, including foreign soap operas. In addition, private television stations in Afghanistan are prohibited from broadcasting news programs from Deutsche Welle (DW), Voice of America (VOA), and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). According to Enamullah Samangani, a Taliban spokesperson, the ban is due to foreign media not complying with Taliban laws (Noorzai 2022).

In that condition, Taliban officials are trying to inform the international community that they support press freedom and pose no threat to journalists (Tangen 2022). Hayatullah Muhajir Farahi, the Deputy of Publications at the Ministry of Information and Culture, rejected the claims made by the Media Freedom Coalition (MFC), stating that media activities have been restricted in Afghanistan. He stated that all media operates normally per the country's culture and Islamic values. Referring to some claims by foreign media stating that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has imposed

restrictions on the media, Hayatullah Muhajir Farahi emphasized that these claims are baseless and untrue (Daud 2022).

On May 19, 2022, the Al Emarah website published an article titled "Media Violation Commission Formed on Press Freedom Day." In the article, Zabihullah Mujahid stated that the reactivation of the media violation commission demonstrates the Taliban's commitment to supporting the media and addressing their issues. This statement was made by the Taliban spokesperson during a press conference held in Kabul to honor the Press Freedom Day. Previously, the Taliban had promised to respect press freedom and revive the Media Violation Commission to serve as a platform for journalists regarding attacks and imprisonment against them (Noorzai 2022).

According to the statement by Hayatullah Muhajir Farahi, the Deputy of Publications at the Ministry of Information and Culture, there are currently more than 300 domestic media outlets and 14 foreign media outlets operating in Afghanistan. Additionally, over 700 journalists, including 200 international journalists, are active and involved in reporting in Afghanistan (Daud 2022). In a meeting with Fiona Frazer, the head of human rights at the United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan (UNAMA), Farahi emphasized that national and international media should report the facts and realities in Afghanistan. He believed that some media and international communities worsen the situation in Afghanistan by publishing reports that are far from the truth (The Kabul Times, 2022).

Furthermore, Mujahid and Balkhi, through their Twitter accounts, conveyed that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is committed to ensuring the protection and support of all media activities in the country. Mujahid stated that they have not closed any media outlets since coming to power. Moreover, no journalist has lost their life, and no media outlet has faced security issues. Some media outlets have had to close due to a lack of funding from donor countries. The government is making efforts to assist them in resolving their financial problems. Meanwhile, Balkhi informed that as of November 2022, over 270 domestic and 14 international media outlets are

operating in Afghanistan. Since March 2022, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has granted permission to over 700 journalists from 196 media networks originating from Asia, Europe, America, and Oceania((1) Abdul Qahar Balkhi (@QaharBalkhi) / Twitter, 2023; Zabihullah (... ذبیح الله م...) (@Zabehulah_M33], 2022a).

CONCLUSION

The Taliban successfully seized power in Afghanistan on August 15, 2021, after 20 years of war against the United States and its allies. However, the relatively negative international public perception of the Taliban has led the new government to pay special attention to public diplomacy. To achieve its public diplomacy goals, the Taliban has optimized digital media to improve its image and international legitimacy. Some digital media platforms utilized by the Taliban to convey its political messages are websites, Twitter, and YouTube. The group actively responds to various negative reports related to the Taliban government in Afghanistan.

By the end of 2022, the author observed that the Taliban's digital media mainly focused on responding to negative reports about their regime. The information they disseminate through digital media is not programmed but adjusted to specific issues in international society's spotlight. The Taliban utilizes its digital media platforms, such as websites, Twitter, and YouTube, to respond to negative issues or reports originating from foreign media and anti-Taliban groups. Through various digital media platforms, the Taliban seeks to present its current government as more moderate and non-violative of human rights. Consequently, the Taliban continues to optimize the use of digital media to enhance their public diplomacy efforts. This strategy is one of the Taliban's approaches to seeking international legitimacy.

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