



Advocating the Use of Social Media by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Brunei Darussalam

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Synopsis

This working paper seeks to recommend that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brunei Darussalam consider utilising social media as part of its public relations strategy, as social media use has become more prevalent.

In particular, the working paper calls for the use of social media to engage with the people to help them understand the objectives of the Ministry, to have an inside view on what happens during international meetings/ visits, as well as what benefits are provided through the free trade agreements that have been agreed upon.

This paper also call for the use of social media in consular related affairs, such as announcing that no Bruneians were involved in any disasters or mishaps abroad.

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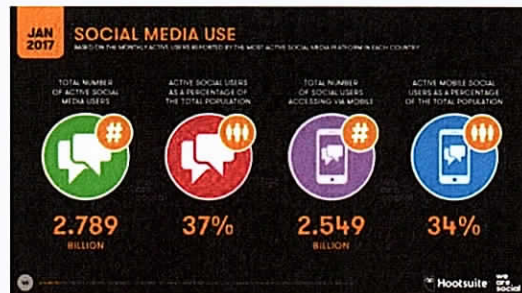
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A. Introduction

1. The rise of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Tumblr and WordPress has changed the way people communicate and share information. Social media has enabled its users to interact, share and discuss information by use of multimedia like text, pictures, video and audio.
2. According to a report¹ conducted by “We Are Social” and “Hootsuite” in January 2017, there were 3.77 billion global internet users in 2017, and 2.80 billion global social media users.



3. According to the same report, Brunei Darussalam has the third highest social media penetration in the world with 370,000 users which accounted for 86% of the total population. Brunei Darussalam also fared high in terms mobile social media use with 76% of the population using it. For these reasons, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Brunei Darussalam (MOFAT) may wish to consider utilising social media as a means to relay information, as well as become more “people-friendly”.

¹ <https://www.slideshare.net/wearesocialsg/digital-in-2017-global-overview>

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Why Use Social Media

4. As the internet has become an important channel for communication and engagement, nowadays, people prefer to visit website pages of their respective Government agencies to access information. Around the world, Governments (including respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs) and citizens are also increasingly engaging on social media.

5. While typically, Government Ministries have information on their websites, **social media have a wider audience** and is more convenient. The MOFAT may wish to use this media strategically, whether to provide information on the day-to-day work of the Ministry, convey emergency information that would be useful for the public, or to share photographs of the various visits/meetings attended by its officials. This platform can also serve as a venue for the public to raise questions and seek clarifications on foreign affairs and trade related issues under the purview of MOFAT.

6. Through this platform also, MOFAT can shape its public image as the front-liners of the country's diplomacy, provider of consular assistance to Bruneians abroad, as well as open up opportunities to develop our economy further. This is an innovative way to improve awareness and engagement with the people.

7. It will require a bit of work to establish the standard of procedures (SOP) of the social media accounts. However, there are a lot of points of references as MFAs around the world have begun using it. By keeping up with trends in digital engagement, government agencies can help transform public perception of the public sector.

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8. All this will contribute to improved transparency in the Brunei Darussalam Government decisions and policies as a whole. **Optically**, it will seem that a Government agency, is accessible and gives the public a forum to provide their views on certain issues.
9. Furthermore, social media is an efficient and low-cost distribution channel. The information collected through interaction with users can be used as data, which can be analysed, both within and across individual government agencies, in order to enable whole-of-government decision-making that can better serve the public.
10. His Majesty in his Titah during the 17th Civil Service Day celebration on 21 October 2010 said, among others:

“Perkhidmatan Awam tidak diragukan lagi adalah sangat penting untuk kelicinan pentadbiran kerajaan. Ia berfungsi untuk mengetahui sejauh mana keupayaan dan kualiti pentadbiran kerajaan.....”

*“.....Selain kita perlu memperkasa sifat-sifat jati diri ini, warga Perkhidmatan Awam juga **mustahak menguasai kemahiran-kemahiran pengurusan moden, seperti penggunaan scorecard, penggunaan teknologi maklumat, penyeliaan dan lain-lain.***

Mengenai penggunaan teknologi maklumat, beta telah pun memperkenalkan perlaksanaan Strategik E-Kerajaan semenjak dari tahun 2000 lagi, dengan budget sebanyak B\$1 bilion. Namun penggunaannya pada setakat ini, masih sahaja di tahap yang rendah.

Begitu juga aplikasi IT, untuk kemudahan orang ramai berurusan dengan kerajaan, adalah masih sahaja belum dapat dianggap memuaskan, jika dibanding dengan negara-negara lain di rantau ini.

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11. This excerpt of the Titah is significant because His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam himself acknowledged the important role information technological applications play in facilitating the public's interaction with the Government.

Suggested Social Media Platforms

12. Social media, in general, provide content management method that is easy. Social media administrator can upload information on various format like videos, audio, pictures and documents. Some platforms that MOFAT may wish to consider are as below.

13. **Facebook** is extremely popular among the people. It allows users to engage with each other through high-quality content in the form of posts, images, videos, info graphics, and links. Facebook has improved its search function that made public posts more accessible.



14. Twitter is another platform that is widely used, and is particularly great for making announcements to the public about practically anything, or to keeping followers updated during a crisis or an emergency.



15. One of the reasons behind the success of Instagram is its ease of use. All that needs to be done is click a photo and upload it. In addition, the "Search" and "Explore" functions turn the social network into an easy-to-navigate news source. The main



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objective of Instagram was to offer interesting accounts, photos and places to consumers. Features such as double-tapping and tagging people is a means to increase user virtual engagement as well.

Examples of Information to be relayed through Social Media

16. Usually when an incident occur in a country where Bruneians are known to study, reside or visit, MOFAT, through its embassies and missions abroad, will be expected to provide updates on the whereabouts and safety of Bruneians there. Missions abroad are also expected to provide updates on the prevailing situation, and to a certain point provide advice on how to move forward in terms of security.
17. In the past, for example, during the incidents at Westminster Bridge and surroundings of the Westminster Parliament House in London on 22 March 2017, updates of the situation and status of Bruneians were relayed through RTB news or through MOFAT hotline.
18. With social media accounts, information such as safety of Bruneians, status of the situation, contact number of officials at the Embassies/ High Commissions could be relayed to a wider audience, and will benefit those in the affected country and their families in Brunei. This is especially important for those who may not be registered with the Embassies/ High Commissions². This will also be very useful for countries in different time zones. Social media updates on the situation can be done accordingly.

² Students on Brunei Government scholarships or officials attending meetings/training overseas will be registered with the Embassies/ High Commissions. Therefore, should there be any emergency, the Embassies/ High Commissions would be able to contact them. The challenge for most missions was to ascertain if there were other Bruneians in that particular country who may be there for private visits etc.

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19. Another example for the use of social media is to share the benefits of the various agreements that Brunei Darussalam has signed on to through MOFAT, such as the free trade agreements. While outreach programmes have been conducted, occasional sharing of information through Facebook or Twitter posts, could generate interests from relevant stakeholders/parties. And through this, Brunei Darussalam truly benefit from the opportunities provided through these FTAs.

20. Other items that could also be shared through the proposed social media accounts will be as follows:

- Press Releases on the Ministerial activities and speeches
- Information on events and occasional live coverage of events
- Alerts about new content on MOFAT's website
- Other practical information on services available through the Ministry such as visa requirements, scholarships and career opportunities in MOFAT or international organisations.

The Challenges of Using Social Media in Government

21. One obvious challenge to the use of social media for the Ministry's purposes would be cyber-bullying or irresponsible users may abuse its use and criticise the Government. Threats, intimidation messages and rumours can be sent to create discomfort and chaos among the community. Be it as it may, the Brunei Darussalam Government has also laws in place to ensure responsible use of the internet. The list of laws related to IT appears in Annex A. These laws serve as



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deterrent to those who wish to abuse the platform provided to interact with a government agency.

22. Security issues and hacking of the social media account is also a risk. However, as this would be an official account for MOFAT, no personal information that could affect personal lives will be stored.
23. There will be expectations for questions from the public to be answered in a timely manner. However, at the planning stage, the standard operating procedures (SOP) can be clearly established, and can be improved over time through trial and error. This will also ensure MOFAT will be well-prepared beforehand on any issues which it deemed will generate interest from the public.
24. One recent example would be the situation in the Rakhine State in Myanmar, where MOFAT eventually issued a statement. This statement was also useful for MOFAT officials working at Brunei Darussalam's missions abroad as guidance for their engagement with their respective counterparts.

Recommendations

25. Undoubtedly, buy-in from the senior management is important to be able to undertake a certain activity/project. The use of social media has not gained much traction among members of MOFAT in particular the senior management and line managers. There are several reasons for this which includes:
 - i. The question of content control;
 - ii. The question of compliance to confidentiality;
 - iii. The question of which who would manage the social media accounts; and

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- iv. Little understanding of how social media can be used.
26. A concept paper could be done for submission to the senior management for their consideration. The concept paper must be prepared with inputs from the stakeholders and led by the Information Technology Division of MOFAT. Preparatory and coordination meetings could be done in preparation of the concept paper.
27. The concept paper should include the following:
- i. Justification for the use of social media;
 - ii. Statistics: Number of Ministries of Foreign Affairs that make use of social media;
 - iii. List of social media platforms that are widely used by Ministries of Foreign Affairs all over the world;
 - iv. Draft/Suggested Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for the social media use. This should also include the suggested person/division who would manage the social media accounts, suggested guidance to seek approval to publish potentially sensitive information and suggested focal points from each departments/divisions who would relay the need to upload some information; and
 - v. A trial run for using social media accounts could also be done.

Conclusion

28. The digital era has transformed the landscape for public engagement across all sectors all over the world. It presented many opportunities for Governments to better engage the public. However, digital forms of engagement need to be integrated with physical

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platforms, and must be carefully managed in order to be inclusive and fulfil all the various objectives of public engagement and communication.

29. As there are challenges and risks for any public service to utilise social media, there will need to be a strong social media policy that integrate both online and offline strategies. Mindset and role shifts are also vital to ensure that MOFAT and the Public Service can truly reap the benefits of social media. But in any case, social media is a valuable platform that government agencies including MOFAT, can use to shape its public image and to raise awareness on the roles of Ministries.

END

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ANNEX A

Laws Relating to IT in Brunei

- i. Chapter 153 Official Secrets Act
An act to safeguard official and Government information.
- ii. Chapter 194 Computer Misuse Act
An Act to make provisions for securing computer material against unauthorized access or modification and for related matters.
- iii. Chapter 196 Electronic Transactions Act
An Act to make provision for the security and use of electronic transactions, electronic communications, electronic commerce and for connected purposes.
- iv. Chapter 197 Anti-Terrorism (Financial and Other Measures) Act
Interpretation of a Terrorist Act (Clause 2) to include “the action is designed to disrupt any public computer system or the provision of services directly related to communications infrastructure, banking and financial services, public utilities, public transportation or public key infrastructure.
- v. Chapter 180 Broadcasting Act - Internet Code of Practice
Act responsible for broadcasting matters, which includes online content, to ensure that nothing is included in any broadcasting service or content provider (including individuals) which is against the public interest or national harmony or which offends against good taste or decency.
- vi. Telecommunications Order, 2001 (s38/01)
An Order to provide for the operation and provision of telecommunication systems and services in Brunei Darussalam, and for matters related with it.
- vii. Chapter 108 Evidence Act
An Act to unify within Brunei Darussalam the law relating to evidence. This act touches on the admissibility of statements produced by computers as evidence in any proceedings in court. [S 29/97] (Clause 35A)

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viii. Copyright Order 1999

The Order that defines computer programs, database of data or other machine readable forms, original by reason of selection or arrangement of contents are considered as “literary work” entitled for copyright protection.

Other Laws of Brunei

Other laws related to IT but not directly:

- Chapter 22 Section 292 of the Penal Code
(Prohibits the sale or distribution of obscene articles)
- Chapter 28 Common Gaming House Act
(Illegality of online gambling)
- Chapter 69 Censorship of Films and Public Entertainment Act
(Regulate online content)
- Chapter 25 Undesirable Publications Act
(Regulate online content)

- Chapter 181 Public Entertainment Act
(Regulate online content)

- Chapter 24 Seditious Act
(Regulate online content)

- Chapter 192 Defamation Act
(Regulate online content)