

The Strategy of Taiwan Digital Diplomacy Association (TDDA) for Taiwan's International Presence

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Eva Ermylina

Department of Taiwan and Regional Studies,
National Dong Hwa University
61110A007@gms.ndhu.edu.tw

Abstract

This paper examines Taiwan Digital Diplomacy Association (TDDA) 's strategy for gaining public awareness of Taiwan's international presence. As a non-governmental and non-profit organization, TDDA can be classified as a civil society that has a pure interest. Unlike other civil society organizations which focus on human rights, justice, or environmental issues, the goal of TDDA is to promote Taiwan on the global stage. By using digital platform and actively campaigning on social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, TDDA acts as a part of citizen diplomat and helps the country reaches its goal which is to be present in the international community since Taiwan is isolated by China due the Cross-Strait issue and One China Policy. Moreover, this paper is descriptive and qualitative research which is analysed by using the concept of civil society. The data is collected from interviewing the project manager of TDDA, research journals, and the internet sources such as official websites and social media. It can be mentioned that TDDA uses two main strategies to get its aim namely advocating and networking. For advocating, TDDA focuses on using social media to promote all good things about Taiwan, mainly using hashtag activism. For networking, the TDDA intends to build a strong relation with every stakeholder both in Taiwan and abroad as much as possible. However, how effective this strategy is not explained in this paper, the research about that topic might be done in the future.

Keywords: Civil Society; Digital Diplomacy; Taiwan's International Presence

Introduction

As a ghost island, Taiwan's presence in the international community is limited. Taiwan is claimed as a part of the People's Republic of China (PRC), even though Taiwan is a de facto sovereign and self-ruled country. Taiwan is cornered and isolated internationally due to China's claim and in 2023 only left 14 diplomatic allies (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China (Taiwan) 2023). China has a One China Policy which countries may only have official relations with either China or Taiwan, on the other name, Taiwan cannot have political relations with most countries in the world. China also tends to block Taiwan from international organizations, for example excluding Taiwan from World Health Assembly (WHA), Civil Aviation Organization (CIAO), and Interpol. Besides, Taiwan's presence in the public sector is gradually demolished. In 2016, a K-Pop Idol "Chou Tzu-yu" needed to make an apology video after she waved Taiwan's flag on South Korean national television, and her band "Twice" was banned to perform in China (Buckley and Ramzy 2016). An American actor "John Cena" also apologized after mentioning Taiwan as a country during an interview to promote the "Fast Furious" movie (Tian 2021). Those make Taiwan not widely recognized in the global community.

Aware of Taiwan's situation, a Taiwanese, Kuo Chia-yo established a non-governmental organization called Taiwan Digital Diplomacy Association (台灣數位外交協會, TDDA). Since its establishment in 2018, TDDA aims to promote Taiwan's presence and voice on the international stage through digital diplomacy (Tham 2020). In the beginning, the goal was to support Kosovo in getting its national internet domain back and then the organization was developed to boost Taiwan's soft power and promote Taiwan globally (Office of International Affairs, Taiwan Tech 2022).

TDDA is run by young Taiwanese who acts as citizens or public diplomat which help the country to reach its national interests. It is obvious that TDDA takes a role as a subject or actor of public diplomacy that contributes to Taiwan's foreign policy goals from the grassroots. The movement focuses on digital platforms, especially social media, and initiates real-life events (Taiwan Digital Diplomacy Association 2018).

As a non-governmental and non-profit organization, TDDA can be classified as a civil society. Civil society is a group whether a movement, a community, an organization, an association, or a foundation that has a pure intention toward some issues (Jezard 2018). However, unlike other civil society movements or organizations that aim mostly for social or environmental issues, TDDA intends to help

the government reach its national interest, which is to be heard in the international community. This public diplomacy action is grounded from the grassroots by the youth, and it becomes the spirit of TDDA's movement. Therefore, this research tends to analyse the strategy of TDDA on sounding about Taiwan in the international world. It is important and interesting to examine how the non-state actor especially non-government organizations help the state to reach its national interests. The paper will discuss TDDA as a civil society actor and analyse the strategy of TDDA for Taiwan's international presence.

Analytical Framework

The topic of TDDA's strategy for enhancing Taiwan in the international community will be analysed using the concept of civil society. One indicator of a good democratic country is having strong civil societies. Civil society is any non-profit organization, non-governmental organization, voluntary citizen group, non-membership group, or mass social movement that is organized on the domestic or international level because of common interest (United Nations 1993). World Bank defined civil society as the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious, or philanthropic considerations (Jezard 2018). For most scholars and practitioners, civil

society is defined as an assortment of various interest groups and social organizations that possess enough strength to give individuals a degree of independence and shield them from governments' authoritarian and dominant tendencies. The main characteristics of civil society are independence, voluntary, and working on public issues. Civil society can play an important role in empowering people and gaining participation for development (Azis 2016) . Therefore, civil society can be mentioned as the third sector of society which includes the family and private sphere as distinct from government and business (Ghosal 2014).

However, civil society has evolved to be a more dynamic and diverse range of organized and unorganized groups as new civil society actors blur the boundaries between sectors and experiment with new organizational forms, both offline and online. Civil society can engage with government, business, and international organizations as well as provide the resilient dynamism the world needs. This means that the role of civil society is no longer only the opposition to the state or private but the glue that binds public and private activity together in such a way as to strengthen the common good even though the core of civil society cannot be abandoned namely independent, purposefulness, integrity, and high level of trust. Civil society can act as facilitators, innovators, conveners, service providers, and advocates. In more

detail, World Economic Forum classified the role of civil society into 10 categories as watchdog, advocate, service provider, expert, capacity builder, incubator, representative, citizenship champion, solidarity supporter, and definer of standards (World Economic Forum 2013).

The strategy of each civil society actor depends on what role it takes. The civil society actor who plays the service provider will provide the basic needs of the community needs such as running education programs or health care services, the watchdog will monitor the government or private sector with human rights or environmental treaties, and the expert will collaborate with government or private on advisory about some issues (Cooper 2018).

Moreover, for sustainable and functioning civil society organizations, some fundamental practices include networking, lobbying, and advocating. Networking is seeking multilateral cooperation with other persons or organizations. It can imply the possibility of exchange and sharing the existence of a common goal. Meanwhile, lobbying is an attempt to influence the regulation through negotiation. This is the core activity of civil society in the policy-making process to ensure the needs of communities. Lastly, advocating is the effort to raise awareness of the issues and give a voice to the marginalized. The form of advocating is various, it can be a campaign,

mass mobilization or protest movement, activism, and media advocacy (Wisser and Karam 2006).

In this case, TDDA can be classified as a civil society actor which is aiming to voice and raise global awareness toward Taiwan. As a non-governmental organization, TDDA acts as a public diplomacy actor. TDDA has a mission to help the country reach its national interest. Hence, how the strategy of TDDA achieves its goal is analysed by the concept of civil society.

Discussion and Analysis

Taiwan Digital Diplomacy Association (TDDA) as a Civil Society Actor

The cross-strait war between China and Taiwan that happened decades ago is still in the status quo and left some complex situations for Taiwan internationally. Taiwan's status in the international world is ambiguous because China claims Taiwan as its province even though Taiwan has been a sovereign and self-govern country. Taiwan is also excluded from most international organizations. Even this pressure is not only on the formal sector but also in the public area as what happened to John Cena and Cho Tzu-yu. It makes Taiwan struggling hard to be present in the global community. This situation has sparked

the spirit of young Taiwanese to create a non-governmental organization called Taiwan Digital Diplomacy Association (TDDA).

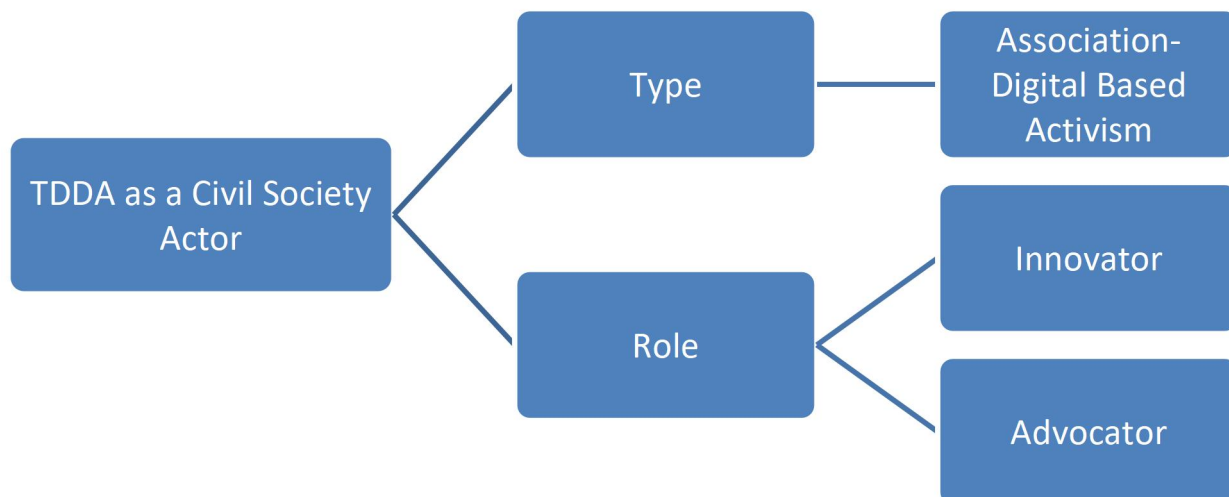
Taiwan Digital Diplomacy Association (TDDA) was initiated by Kuo Chia-yo in 2018. It started when Kuo sympathized with Kosovo which has almost similar international circumstances. Kosovo does not have an internet domain due to a lack of digital sovereignty. Then, she did experimental advocacy in Kosovo. She initiated a campaign “Domain for Kosovo” and hold an exhibition “Kosovo Next 10” (Ting-yen 2018) . This issue went viral and strengthened the relations between the Taiwanese and Kosovars. It proved how powerful the digital platform is in echoing a marginal issue and it affected a country’s soft power as a result of digital public diplomacy (Kuo 2018). After she returned to Taiwan, she invested her time to build an organization which initially to be called Taiwan-Kosovo Cultural Exchange Association. Nonetheless, the name sounds very specific and could not accommodate the goal to expand broader in many different directions. Therefore, it was decided to name the association, Taiwan Digital Diplomacy Association (TDDA) since it is still digital-centric activity and focuses on boosting Taiwan’s soft power (Chen 2021).

Characteristically, TDDA can be mentioned as one of the civil society actors. TDDA fights for the marginal issue, which is in this case, the marginal issue is Taiwan’s international circumstances. The TDDA

aims to enhance Taiwan's international standing and influence by leveraging digital technologies and innovative communication strategies. It is arduous for Taiwan to be present in the global community by using traditional ways, hence the people-to-people relations facilitate the government to build a positive image of the country and enhance its international presence.

TDDA appears as the glue that connects the goal of Taiwan's government, ignites the spirit of Taiwanese to be citizen diplomats and emerge Taiwan's awareness among the foreign public. In the digital era, especially in a democratic country that values transparency and citizen participation, the engagement of civil society has a big role in every element of policy (Bros 2017). TDDA might be an example of an effective combination between a government and civil society in the creation of public diplomacy.

Figure 1. Type and Role TDDA as Civil Society Actor



Moreover, as written in the name, the type of civil society actor of TDDA is association. Association means a group of people who gather and unite because of common purpose or interest which membership is voluntary and independent (Zimmer 2010). It is not as structured and bounded as formal organization but not as loose as movement. TDDA is led by a president which is currently hold by Kuo itself. Structurally, TDDA has several divisions such as social media and publication, Internet Influential Development, and Project Manager based on areas like Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Europe-America (Chu 2023) . It has 24 members from social and political backgrounds with an average age of 25. TDDA is also recruiting youth volunteers from various backgrounds interested in

international affairs to leverage the existence of TDDA (OIA NTU 2023).

To run the projects and association's operation, the TDDA earns the fund from donations, crowd fundraising, corporate sponsorships, and government grants. For crowd fundraising, it is based on the project or issue that they highlight. The TDDA also gains funds from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Taiwan. The fund is not regular but based on their proposed project proposal. It is the same case with the New Taipei City government, the TDDA got support to hold a Football tournament in New Taipei City. Not only from the Taiwan government, the TDDA also gets funding from foreign countries especially foreign missions in Taiwan such as the Czech Republic, Saint Vincent, Norway, and Guatemala. This is mostly because of the collaboration between TDDA and those countries to promote cultural exchange. For corporation sponsorship, the most highlighted by the TDDA was a collaboration with Meta, the Facebook company (Chu 2023).

Additionally, the association works to promote Taiwan's democratic values, human rights, and cultural diversity through digital channels, such as social media, online platforms, and other digital tools. TDDA maximizes its movement by using social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. On the official Twitter account @digidiploTaiwan, TDDA has 12.4K followers, 33k followers on the fan

page Facebook and 4.8k members Facebook group (Facebook 2023) , and around 12.5k followers on Instagram. LinkedIn also becomes the main online platform for TDDA to engage with the public all over the world. TDDA is one of the civil society actors which is digital-based activism. Digital activism on the internet especially on social media enables reaching many audiences from various segments and countries, reduces campaign costs, and enables radical change (Earl and Kimport 2011) . After the success of the “Domain for Kosovo” campaign went viral, TDDA is certain that focusing on digital activism will bring a great impact on Taiwan’s international presence. Accordingly, TDDA as a civil society actor is an association based on online activism. How about the role of the TDDA?

TDDA plays a role as an innovator and an advocator. As an innovator, TDDA introduces new and creative ideas as the first civil society actor that takes part in Taiwan’s diplomacy voluntarily. It is not a common case because international presence and diplomacy is not an issue for a fully sovereign country. Digital diplomacy is not a major driven factor for citizens from other countries to form civil society. The TDDA proves that an independent organization can contribute to a country’s soft power. By empowering the youth, TDDA utilizes digital diplomacy to leverage its existence which is considered a new tool for public diplomacy. Moreover, The TDDA uses innovative

thinking to find new ways to present or repackage the concept of diplomacy. For example, the “Milk Tea Alliance Twitter Campaign” (Taiwan Digital Diplomacy Association (TDDA) 2003). This campaign went viral on social media by creating a cute meme and led to the transnational network.

Simultaneously, as a civil society actor, the TDDA takes the role of Taiwan's global existence advocator. The advocators act to raise awareness of social issues and build support for a cause. The main TDDA activity is promoting the existence of Taiwan in the international community. The association also collaborates with government agencies, academic institutions, and private sector organizations to develop digital diplomacy strategies and initiatives. TDDA plays a role as the bridge that connects Taiwanese to foreign audiences. As a civil society actor, the TDDA has the flexibility and independence to freely promote all positive information toward the world without worrying about the political issue of the One China Policy. This role has made the TDDA receive an “Award of Public Policy Contribution” from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Taiwan.

TDDA's Strategy for Gaining International Awareness of Taiwan's Existence

As TDDA aims to enhance the awareness of Taiwan, TDDA promotes Taiwan and strengthens the partnership between Taiwanese

and other countries through digital platforms. The TDDA aims to make the foreign community understand that Taiwan as a sovereign political entity exists as a part of the global community. There are people called Taiwanese as citizens of Taiwan. Promoting Taiwan's culture and leveraging Taiwan's soft power is also the goal of the TDDA to engage with the international community. TDDA actively updates its activity on social media, for example, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. TDDA becomes the third sector of Taiwan's government. TDDA helps the country sound what Taiwan has contributed to the world through its social media. By doing so, TDDA might boost the awareness of Taiwan's positive image in the global community. TDDA also tries to clarify the blurred information about Taiwan to make people understand clearly Taiwan and what Taiwan is dealing with nowadays (Taiwan Digital Diplomacy Association 2020). This is a part of advocating strategy when the tool is social media, and the activity is online campaigning based on social media.

Nowadays, social media cannot be separated from most people's life. Social media are effective tools to strengthen public engagement, organize grassroots movements, and promote civil society brands (Funds For NGOS 2022) . Therefore, the main activity for TDDA is engaging both domestic and foreign public through social media by posting many contents about Taiwan such as cultural exchanges, the

TDDA's presidential campaign about citizen diplomacy, and many more.

Online campaign is the main activity of TDDA, one of the significant campaigns is the #MilkTeaAlliance. The Milk Tea Alliance is an online pro-democracy movement that emerged in 2020 in response to political developments in Asia. The movement started when netizens from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Thailand began sharing their experiences and showing solidarity with one another online, often over a shared love of milk tea. The Milk Tea Alliance originated as a response to Mainland Chinese social media users who criticized two Thai celebrities for expressing support for pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong and advocates for Taiwanese independence. The Milk Tea Alliance emerged spontaneously in 2020 as a grassroots movement on social media and was primarily led by young people in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Thailand who shared a common interest in democracy and human rights (Leung 2022).

In 2020, the TDDA played a role in promoting the Milk Tea Alliance movement by providing technical support for the movement's online activities and facilitating communication among members of the alliance. The TDDA also helped to raise awareness of the movement among international audiences and supported the movement's efforts to promote democracy and human rights in the region. The TDDA

created a meme that later became famous and was posted by many people on Twitter using #MilkTeaAlliance (Teeratanabodee and Jye 2022). As of September 2021, there were over 11 million tweets using the #MilkTeaAlliance hashtag on Twitter, this number is increased since the hashtags were retweeted and endorsed by netizens across the region. This successful campaign increased TDDA engagement and made TDDA get a spot in international media, The Diplomat and Times Magazines.

Advocating strategy that TDDA has been doing is not only on social media. In 2020, the TDDA worked with Central and South American countries and helped plan the largest edition of the Copa America soccer competition held annually at Fu-Jen University. The event was attended by 4,000 people and was reported on by 28 media outlets. This football tournament “World Cup Taiwan” has successfully gathered teams from 12 countries every year, formed by international students and residents in Taiwan. It reaches 100,000 viewers in over 30 countries around the world through professional broadcasts.

The TDDA also organized a Norwegian parade to celebrate Norway's national day in 2020 and 2022, which was reported in Norwegian media and even shared with the Norwegian royal family (Chen 2021). In 2021, together with the Taiwanese Digital Ministry and Czech Republic Embassy in Taiwan, the TDDA held a Cooking

Diplomacy Project to strengthen relations between the Taiwanese and The Czech by sharing beloved food and democracy stories. Another culture project that held by TDDA is Caribbean Culture Festival in 2021. This “Culture Uma Fest” promoted Taiwan, Caribbean, and Latin America culture and cuisine which attended by 3000 participants from 11 countries.

In 2022, the TDDA launched a program called Cyber Defence Network. Inspired by Ukraine Crisis, the TDDA explores how the implementation of technology can encourage teamwork among various public and private organizations to safeguard the liberty and democratic principles that are cherished in Taiwan. The Cyber Defence Network held in person as well as virtual to raise the recognition of digital diplomacy as a weapon for cyber defence. This encompasses a set of training programs that assist governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and individuals in applying the following digital tools in practical settings (Taiwan Digital Diplomacy Association (TDDA) 2003).

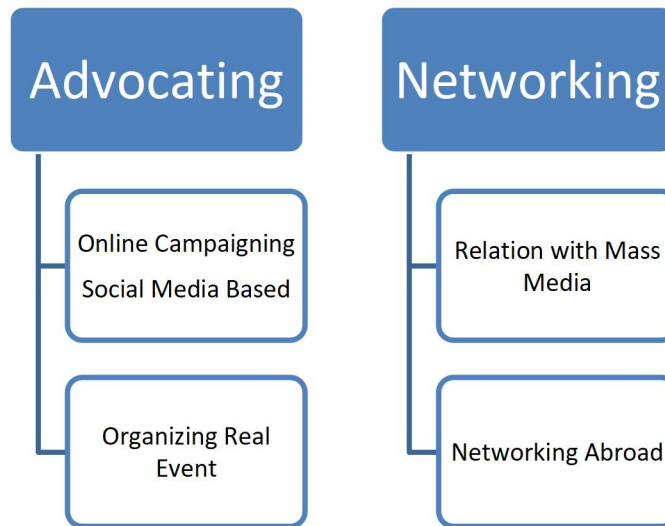
Furthermore, networking is part of TDDA's strategy to enhance awareness of Taiwan. TDDA has been building a strong connection with the conventional media to reach the spotlight. TDDA's effort has been reported in 80 international media so far (Office of International Affairs, Taiwan Tech. 2022). In the past four years, the TDDA build a

good connection with the press and reported for around 300 domestic and international media. Not only the media, but TDDA also collaborates with universities and other organizations. The president often got invitations to be a speaker to talk about citizen diplomacy and encourage the youth to take part in Taiwan's diplomacy (@TaiwanDigitalDiplomacy 2022) . With other non-governmental organizations, TDDA and Facebook Taiwan collaborated to organize a set of workshops in 2022. It was attended by more than 100 local NGOs. The aim of these workshops was to enhance the proficiency of participants in utilizing social media tools and launching online campaigns for the purpose of advocacy and fundraising. This project was initiated to bolster the network of NGOs and enhance the resilience of Taiwan's civic society, especially in light of the impact of COVID-19 in recent years.

Moreover, the foreign missions in Taiwan also become the main partner of the TDDA. The TDDA's president visited the offices to communicate about collaboration in "Democracy and Digital Diplomacy" such as with Guatemala, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Honduras, Saint Lucas, South Africa, AIT, Peru, Mexico, ESwatini, Tuvalu, Saint Vincent, Nigeria, Canada, India, France, Malaysia, and Paraguay. Meanwhile, the networking strategy is not limited to Taiwan,

expanding the goal of TDDA is also being done by having abroad networking.

Figure 2. Strategy of TDDA



TDDA decided to expand into Vietnam in July 2019. Kuo Chia-yo as the president flew to Vietnam to find collaborative opportunities and ultimately decided to create an online show featuring Taiwanese and Vietnamese doctors sharing medical treatments for various ailments. Vietnamese people often search for cures for their illnesses on the internet rather than going to the doctor. She believed that an internet show hosted by actual doctors would be a safer and better resource for Vietnamese viewers. The success of the program led to talks with Ho Chi Minh City Television to develop a show about Taiwan-Vietnam relations. The TDDA and a local Vietnamese group namely Taiwan Diary create the "Taiwan Corner," which serves as a

public space for Vietnamese and Taiwanese to learn more about each other's countries.

Then, TDDA also links with foreigners and foreign organizations in the country to help foreigners interact with the Taiwanese government and help foreign organizations have exchanges with the Taiwanese public (Chen 2021). As Chiayo Kuo stated in the New York Times, to gain more international presence and keep Taiwan safe from China's threat is by spreading message how eager Taiwanese people are to build international friendships (Cave and Chien 2022). It can be mentioned that despite focusing on networking with the media, TDDA is expanding the organization's wings by networking abroad. By doing so, the goal to increase Taiwan's presence in the international world can be reached massively and permanently.

Conclusion

In conclusion, TDDA as a civil society actor takes the role as innovator and advocator based on digital activism. As the advocator, an online campaign is the main activity, it can be seen through their social media which is a tool to voice all about Taiwan and engage with the public. Engaging people's attention through social media is the way for TDDA to raise the awareness of Taiwan. It is the tool for TDDA to collaborate with other stakeholders and held real life event which support mutual interest among those actors. Networking is also the strategy for TDDA to gain Taiwan's international presence as well as expand the existence of the organization. The TDDA shows that a civil society actor can take a big role in the public diplomacy through digital platform. With the non-governmental and non-profit organization characteristic, it is relatively more flexible for TDDA to engage with many stakeholders to promote the positive image of Taiwan in global community when Taiwan's government cannot do the same due to China's pressure.

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Declaration of Conflict Interest

The Author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Biography

Author is a master's student in Taiwan and Regional Studies, National Dong Hwa University, and graduated from the International Relations Department, University of Muhammadiyah Malang in 2020. She was a young researcher at the Centre of East Asia Studies (CEAS) UMM and is greatly interested in Taiwan Studies, Cross-Strait Relations issues, and International Relations in Indo-Pacific.