

## **Research Project Summary**

### **Digital Diplomacy going Global: Social Media and International Organizations**

#### **Background**

Following the example of other private and public entities at national and sub-national level, regional and international organizations (IOs) such as the European Union and the United Nations have increasingly embraced social media as public diplomacy tools aimed at raising their profile and image vis a vis relevant stakeholders both locally and globally. Unlike their national and sub-national counterparts, however, IOs' 'digital diplomacy' has received limited academic attention. This is in part due to the fact these organizations tend to be relatively restrained and uncontroversial in their use of social media, and the feedback they receive from the wider public is typically more diffuse and indirect. Yet, the use of social media such as Twitter and Facebook, and digital diplomacy more generally, when applied to international organizations, raises relevant theoretical and empirical questions that the workshop seeks to address. These questions include, but are not limited to, issues of identity, legitimacy, ethics, and research methods. In terms of identity, since IOs are created, supported and directed by states, their ability to define themselves as autonomous entities on the world stage is constrained. Do social media provide a platform to increase IOs independence vis a vis states, or do they simply reproduce this subordinate relationship? With few exceptions, IOs do not obtain their mandate directly from citizens, as it is the case with elected bodies. As a result, IOs face particular challenges when it comes to issues of legitimacy and accountability. Can IOs use social media to increase their legitimacy and transparency? In turn, can popular engagement through social media contribute to these efforts? In an era of real or alleged 'fake news', social media has become increasingly the target of criticism because of their (mis)use by political agents with a mission to maliciously influence public opinion. Are IOs immune from this misinformation campaigns? How do IOs respond to these challenges? And how can they respond to the charge that their social media activity is merely a more benign and updated version of traditional propaganda? Finally, social media offer a rich and valuable source of data to study IOs and their activities. Research in fields such consumer research

has developed sophisticated and exciting new research tools to examine how individuals and firms behave and interact, research that has been applied to the political realm (e.g. political campaigns). Can these insights be used to the study of IOs? What are some of limitations of these applications?

This research project seeks to bring together a multidisciplinary and eclectic group of scholars and practitioners to tackle the questions outlined above, and to explore the current debates surrounding IOs' use of social media and the future of digital diplomacy.