




# Listening in a Masspersonal Context: Examining Professional Diplomats' Interaction Involvement on Twitter

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## ABSTRACT

Listening has become a key concept in practicing public diplomacy on social media. This study explores professional diplomats' listening on Twitter, operationalizing their listening behavior as interaction involvement (II). II is related to knowing when and how to use language in social situations, and it covers three crucial aspects of listening: attentiveness, perceptiveness, and responsiveness. The present study examines the relationship between diplomats' interaction involvement and their perceptions of how their goals are being met by their use of Twitter. Survey data were collected from participants ( $N = 108$ ) who were diplomats from five Northern European countries stationed at each country's foreign embassies. As hypothesized, the data revealed a positive association between II and perceived goal attainment. Moreover, active tweeting and the following of other users do not alone determine successful impact, but listening skills related to relational awareness and responsiveness are at least as important, if not more important.

## Introduction

This study focuses on listening within social media. More specifically, our emphasis is on public diplomacy (PD) and professional diplomats who use Twitter in their work. While listening on social media has been an ascending theme within listening research, recent studies on PD have called for more attention to be paid to the social media practices of diplomats (e.g., Dodd & Collins, 2017; Rikkonen, 2021; Tam, 2019). Twitter diplomacy has become an important form of PD, likely because Twitter's dialogic nature meets PD's requirement of bi-directional engagement (Yepsen, 2012). Indeed, listening and engagement in two-way communication with foreign publics are widely seen as key principles of modern PD conduct (e.g., Cull, 2008; Melissen, 2005; Pigman, 2010). Furthermore, listening has been touted as desirable behavior by many PD scholars, but less attention has been paid to its definitions and what can be achieved through better listening (see Di Martino, 2020). The present study addresses this gap in the current understanding of online listening in a professional PD context and demonstrates how listening and active involvement can help diplomats achieve their goals on Twitter.

Listening in social media has been theorized to an increasing extent by communication scholars who have, for instance, conceptualized it as online listening (Crawford, 2009; Wise et al., 2014), or social listening (Stewart & Arnold, 2018). Defining the phenomenon has not come without problems, likely because social media are made up of a wide variety of sensory stimuli and interactional forms. Indeed, the challenges of definition have become more complex as mass personal communication has become an increasingly common way to communicate—to share information, build identities, and maintain relationships—both personally and professionally. According to O'Sullivan

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and Carr (2018), masspersonal communication is associated with environments where interpersonal and mass communication intermingle, such as social media. Their theoretical understanding acts as a bridge between these two levels of communication and conceptualizes mass personal messages as both personalized and highly accessible. The concept is closely related to Castells (2013) idea of mass self-communication, which refers to communication that can be considered mass communication because of its large audience and as interpersonal communication because of its highly personal practices.

In the present study, listening is conceptualized as a communicative process of sense-making, relationship maintenance, and overt behavior. The goal is to increase understanding of this process in the context of masspersonal communication. Given the diversity of sensory stimuli in such a context and the conceptual complexity of listening (see e.g., Bodie, 2019; Bodie et al., 2008), we operationalize listening as interaction involvement (II). II means “the extent to which an individual partakes in a social environment” (Cegala, 1981, p. 112). While examining the relationship between diplomats’ II on Twitter and their perceptions of how well their use of Twitter meets their goals, we are also testing a validated and well-studied research instrument, the Interaction Involvement Scale (IIS), in the context of social media. We will begin by clarifying the context of PD and making remarks about listening as part of it.

## Theoretical Framework

### *Listening as an important part of diplomacy*

Skillful communication and listening have been at the heart of the profession for diplomats since its inception. In his well-known *Guide to Diplomatic Practice*, Satow (1917) defined diplomacy as “the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between . . . independent states” (p. 1). Indeed, tact as a “sense of what is fitting and proper in dealing with others . . . [and] the faculty of saying or doing the right thing at the right time” (OED Online, 2021) is central to communication between states. Sir Harold Nicolson (1942), a distinguished diplomatic thinker, specifically conceptualized diplomacy as the management of international relations by negotiation between states, but also acknowledged that its connotation as the ordered conduct of relations between groups of human beings preceded the existence of states. Thus, listening and diplomacy, as two distinct concepts depicting human activity, share the same ethical undercurrent.

Other listening aspects have also been crucial in diplomacy. Acquisition and assessment of information is one of the key diplomatic tasks, along with ceremonial representation, relational management, and negotiation tasks (Barston, 2019, pp. 2–3). Embassies, sometimes referred to as listening posts, have traditionally performed this task. Technically, this duty relates to Satow’s (1917) first doctrine, intelligence, as embassies openly gather important information about the political position and public opinion of the host country, with the head of mission acting as the chief listener.

### *Listening in public diplomacy*

Public diplomacy (PD)—communication between state actors and foreign publics (Pigman, 2010, p. 121)—has been widely recognized as an inseparable part of diplomatic conduct. Overall, in contemporary international relations the importance of both domestic and foreign public opinion and popular legitimacy is probably larger than ever (Melissen, 2005). To perform well in these matters, practitioners need listening skills. Altogether, an increased emphasis is put on listening within PD. For instance, Melissen (2005) suggests that PD differs fundamentally from

propaganda because “it also listens to what people have to say” (p. 18). However, it must be stressed that PD listening is a two-fold phenomenon. Van Maas (2015) has incisively pointed out that:

Listening has gone through a process of instrumentalization. Listening now sits on the side of power as a tool in the politician’s toolbox rather than as a contingent aptitude of a particular individual. It is no longer thought of as a quality belonging to the realm of the individual psyche but as something that can be projected, represented, performed, manipulated, communicated, shared, and monetized. (pp. 2–3)

This idea captures well the reality in which diplomats operate. According to Di Martino’s (2020), PD listening ranges from *surreptitious* listening and *background* listening, through *listening in* and *tactical* listening, to *active* listening and *apophatic* listening. In terms of goals, the first two concern surveillance and information gathering, the following concern assessment of message reach and correcting misconceptions and pursuing short-term goals, and the last concern promoting trust and understanding, as well as meditative or mystical experiences (Di Martino, 2020).

At the same time, listening is considered a well-fitting term to describe participation in online interaction because it highlights that such participation takes place within the limits of human capacities (Crawford, 2009). States’ use of Twitter occurs within these limitations because it is action carried out by people—either straightforwardly or by algorithms and data acquisition methods created and interpreted by humans. Maben and Gearhart (2018) emphasize that organizations should define listening in social media as more than simple monitoring or surveillance because followers expect to be heard and look for quality responses. This assumption also applies to nation states, considering that their general efforts in social media concern image cultivation and relationship building. Yepsen (2012) suggests that successful PD on Twitter requires both strategic and tactical listening. The former is a premise for policymaking, while the latter is a prerequisite for effective communication. This dichotomy replicates Satow’s (1917) definition of diplomacy: strategic listening implements intelligence and tactical listening implements tact. Ultimately, the manifoldness of PD listening seems to push diplomats to play a dual role on social media; on the one hand, they act as the representatives of a particular country with a variety of listening goals, and on the other, they represent themselves and are probably expected to engage and to be responsive.

While Cull (2008) argues that listening—“an actor’s attempt to manage the international environment by collecting and collating data about publics and their opinions overseas and using that data to redirect its policy or its wider public diplomacy approach accordingly” (p. 32), as he defines it—precedes all successful PD, it simultaneously tends to be the most neglected one of the essential elements of PD. Recently, Dodd and Collins (2017) identified listening as the least frequent PD strategy in embassy tweeting, accounting for only 2.5% of the tweets. However, it should also be noted that these remarks mainly concern strategic listening (Yepsen, 2012), which is not a topic of this study.

In this study, the focus is on tactical and active PD listening (see Di Martino, 2020; Yepsen, 2012), which is essential for diplomats’ effective communication. Thus, the center of attention is on the kind of listening that has been called for from organizations (Maben & Gearhart, 2018; Stewart & Arnold, 2018). As mentioned earlier, the mass personal communication model bridges the gap between interpersonal and mass communication (O’Sullivan & Carr, 2018). Twitter is a textbook example of such convergence, in which sender and receiver roles get easily mixed. This mixing of roles creates challenges to those practitioners who treat Twitter only as a one-way channel, because it is essentially an interpersonal context—or rather a mass personal context—in which “traditional views of audience analysis and rhetorical strategy are not capable of addressing well, if at all, how the persuader is to attain goals that arise during the course of interaction” (Cegala, 1979, p. 4). In such contexts, the importance of tactical listening is emphasized.

To clarify, listening must be seen above all as a receiving component of the communication process. Nevertheless, responding is crucial for completing the whole act of communication (Worthington & Fitch-Hauser, 2018). Also on Twitter, responsiveness is essential because “masspersonal

communication often facilitates either a private or public response from the (un)intended receiver(s)” (O’Sullivan & Carr, 2018, p. 1172). Research on PD has rarely addressed this issue. We now turn to interaction involvement as the guiding concept, as we focus on the relationship between listening and successful PD.

### ***Interaction involvement as a particular form of listening***

While the actual experience of good listening may be perceived as unidimensional, the actual process is anything but simple (Lipetz et al., 2020). Lipetz et al. (2020) demonstrate that good listening is generally perceived as comprising of three facets: attention, comprehension, and relational aspects. While all listening models assume that listeners engage in communication with speakers, it is important to consider the multidimensional aspects of listening competency; it has identifiable cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions (Bodie, 2019). Worthington and Fitch-Hauser (2018) emphasize that listening is a process that consists of mental stimulus, awareness, message translation and evaluation, recall, response, and aspects concerning staying connected and motivated. This multidimensionality implies that listening as such is difficult to measure. Furthermore, research is lacking a valid instrument to measure online listening.

Thus, to overcome the challenges—including the ambiguities related to sensory stimuli—outlined above, listening is operationalized here as interaction involvement (II). II is an important cognitive dimension of communicative competency that Cegala (1981, p. 110) associates with “knowing when and how to use language in the social context.” It encompasses three crucial aspects of listening—attentiveness, perceptiveness, and responsiveness. Research has focused primarily on II’s relationship with personality factors, its linguistic markers, and its connection to message production and discourse strategies.<sup>1</sup>

II does not directly account for overt responsive behavior. Instead, it concerns the cognitive planning of such behavior. For instance, Nguyen and Fussell (2014), who studied lexical cues of II in instant messaging, concluded that in such conversations, involvement is related to how much people actively process information and respond to their partners. Crucially, such involvement can be seen as listening.

Two fundamental factors support the examination of II in the context of diplomats’ listening on Twitter. First, the original inspiration for II comes from Goffman’s (1967) view of an interpersonal society. The need for involvement as an important social competency derives from the notion of *a line* that the communicator acts out in every social encounter. Goffman (1967) defines this line as “a pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts by which [he/she] expresses [his/her] view of the situation and through this [his/her] evaluation of the participants, especially [him-/herself]” (p. 5). In tandem with the line, Goffman (1967, p. 5) defines the term *face* “as the positive social value a person effectively claims for [him-/herself] by the line others assume [he/she] has taken during a particular contact” (p. 5). Properties of involvement, such as attentiveness and perceptiveness, then, are crucial in communicators’ efforts to defend their own face and protect the face of others. This kind of face-work is presumably a central element of diplomacy. In fact, Goffman (1967, p. 13) points out that perceptiveness is likely to be high among individuals who act as representatives of broad social units, such as nations, because they are often involved in situations where the feelings of many people are attached to the face in play.

Second, II taps into three aspects that are fundamental to listening. According to Cegala (1981), *perceptiveness* involves the integration of meanings of the self in relation to another. He further suggests that perceptiveness, as a fundamental precondition to effective face-work, presupposes *attentiveness* to message sources. Similarly, attentiveness is also a critical starting point for any listening process. Cegala (1981) observed that perceptiveness was a two-fold factor, consisting of

<sup>1</sup>Unfortunately, due to space constraints, it is not possible to provide a comprehensive overview of the II research here. For a detailed review of the research, see Rubin, 1994; Worthington, 2017).

other-oriented and self-oriented perceptiveness. The latter was later named *responsiveness* and defined as “a tendency to react mentally to one’s social circumstance and adapt by knowing what to say and when to say it” (Cegala et al., 1982, p. 233). Perceptiveness, at first labeled other-oriented perceptiveness (Cegala, 1981), can then be defined as “one’s knowledge of the meanings that others apply to one’s own behavior and what meanings ought to be applied to others’ behavior” (Cegala et al., 1982, p. 242).

Although the II construct partially excludes some important aspects of listening—such as receiving sensory stimuli, memory operation, and motivation—it captures well many essential parts of the phenomenon. In fact, some scholars have equated II with active listening (e.g., Arasaratnam-Smith, 2016). As a clarification, when listening is operationalized as II, it is seen above all as communicative behavior through which a person attaches to a social situation and relates to others—as if listening as being present. Moreover, although II does not equal listening as a process, it is closely linked to the presages of the process and, above all, to its products (see Bodie et al., 2008; Worthington & Fitch-Hauser, 2018).

## Purpose of This Study

Assuming that diplomats’ social media engagement is strategic communication geared toward achieving certain outcomes, research needs to address the link between the achievement of goals and skillful communication which is “a process in which the individual implements a set of goal-directed, inter-related, situationally appropriate social behaviours” (Hargie, 2019, p. 15). Based on the theoretical background, we propose that II is a crucial listening-related competency that diplomats need as they engage with diverse Twitter publics. Thus, the purpose of this quantitative study is to explore the relationship between II—and its underlying dimensions—and goal attainment in diplomats’ use of Twitter.

For the most part, interaction involvement has been studied with the Interaction Involvement Scale (IIS) as the main research instrument. The instrument is validated and well-studied (see e.g., Rubin, 1994), and it was also recently profiled by Worthington (2017) as a potential listening measure. Because in this study the IIS is utilized to investigate communication on Twitter—in an environment where it has not been utilized before—attention needs to be paid to its underlying factor structure. Regarding IIS’s factor structure supported by earlier research (Cegala, 1981; Cegala et al., 1982), to assess diplomats’ listening as II and the operability of the IIS in Twitter communication, we hypothesize:

**H1:** The factor analysis of IIS variables (measuring diplomats’ interaction involvement on Twitter) will produce a three-factor structure comprising the dimensions labeled attentiveness, perceptiveness, and responsiveness.

Starting from this hypothesis, we begin to approach the key objectives of the study. Several studies have shown that high-involved communicators are more effective in achieving communication goals than low-involved communicators (e.g., Cegala, 1981; Frymier, 2005). Relying on these observations, we hypothesize:

**H2:** Interaction involvement is positively related to perceived goal attainment in diplomats’ use of Twitter.

While there is substantial knowledge about the positive relationship between II and goal attainment, previous studies have shown surprisingly little attention to the underlying dimensions of II on this issue. This is mainly because involvement has usually been examined based on

the composite scores of IIS. Therefore, to further increase understanding of the relationship between II--and its underlying dimensions--and goal attainment in professional communication on social media, we propose the following research question:

**RQ1:** What are the relationships between the underlying dimensions of interaction involvement and perceived goal attainment in diplomats' use of Twitter?

Listening scholars share a general understanding of the importance of motivation regarding successful listening activity. Motivation can be seen both as a precondition for and a result of the listening process (see Bodie et al., 2008). II does not equal motivation, as the former concerns cognitive aspects of communicative competence while the latter refers to a mental state, but it may reflect individual's level of motivation to interact with others. Importantly, even the most competent and motivated communicators cannot be successful unless they put their skills into practice. Thus, we propose the following research question regarding relationships between an individual's Twitter activity--i.e., tweeting and following--and other variables:

**RQ2:** What are the relationships between Twitter activity, interaction involvement (including its underlying dimensions), and perceived goal attainment in diplomats' use of Twitter?

To test the hypotheses and to answer the research questions, a survey was conducted among professional diplomats who use Twitter in their work.

## Method

### *Participants and procedures*

The participants ( $N = 108$ ) were Danish, Estonian, Finnish, Icelandic, and Swedish professionals currently working at one of each country's foreign embassies. They were recruited by e-mail, with an invitation to respond to an online survey administered using Microsoft Forms. The participants were 62 women, 43 men, and 3 who preferred not to disclose their gender. The age groups of the participants were as follows: none were in the 18–25 years age group, 14 were in the 26–35 age group, 28 were in the 36–45 age group, 29 were in the 46–55 age group, and 37 were in the 56+ age group. Fifty-nine participants were acting as the head of mission (e.g., ambassador, chargé d'affaires), 40 had another diplomatic rank, and 9 had no diplomatic rank. Of the participants, 101 reported that they had a Twitter account in their own name that they were using in their work, whereas 7 only operated an embassy Twitter account.

Most participants, 83, were Finnish. Nine were Danish, 6 were Estonian, 6 were Swedish, and 4 were Icelandic. Regarding the regions where the participants were based, 44 were in an EU country, 13 were in a non-EU European country, 16 were in Asia (East, Southeast, and South Asia), 13 were in the Middle East or North Africa, 6 were in Sub-Saharan Africa, 6 were in North America or Oceania, 5 were in Latin America or the Caribbean, and 4 were in Russia or Central Asia. One of the participants preferred not to answer the question regarding the region.

Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS Statistics 27 and SPSS Amos 27. Regarding statistical power, a sample size of 108 had at least 80% power to detect correlations of .27 and larger at the significance level of .05.

## Measures

### *Interaction involvement*

Interaction involvement was measured using a modified version of the Interaction Involvement Scale (IIS, Cegala, 1981). The IIS consists of 18 items using a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all like me* to 7 = *very much like me*). While the original scale treats involvement as a trait, some studies (e.g., Frymier, 2005)

have measured involvement as a state-like construct as its level may vary depending on the context and the situation. Thus, for the purposes of this study, all 18 IIS items (obtained from Worthington, 2017) were reworded to apply to Twitter communication. For instance, the original item “I carefully observe how the other is responding to me during a conversation” was changed to “I carefully observe how others respond to me on Twitter.”

Reliability (Cronbach’s alpha) for the overall *interaction involvement* was .83. In this composite score, responsiveness, measured by eight items, conveys greater weight than attentiveness and perceptiveness which are measured by six and four items. The reliability for responsiveness was .84, which was acceptable, but the reliabilities for attentiveness and perceptiveness, .55, .37, respectively, were not. This three-factor model was subjected to confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), which indicated a poor fit:  $\chi^2(132) = 398.25, p < .05$ ;  $CMIN/DF = 3.02, CFI = .59, NFI = .50, TLI = .52$ , and  $RMSEA = .137$  (90 CI of  $RMSEA = .122-.153$ ).  $KMO$  coefficient was .75 and Bartlett’s test was significant ( $\chi^2(153) = 750.05, p < .001$ ), indicating that the data were suitable for factor analysis. Further investigation of the factor structure of *interaction involvement* is presented in the Results section.

### Goal attainment

To assess how well participants perceive the goals set for their use of Twitter to be achieved, two questions were included in the survey. First, respondents were instructed to assess on a 5-point scale (1 = *not well at all*, 2 = *not very well*, 3 = *somewhat well*, 4 = *very well*, and 5 = *extremely well*) how well their use of Twitter satisfied their personal goals. Next, they assessed how well their use of Twitter satisfied their organization’s goals. Spearman correlation between these variables ( $r(108) = .52, p < .001$ ) indicated that they are related, but do not necessarily measure the same thing. Subsequently, these two variables were added together to form a variable for *goal attainment*. Reliability for this sum variable was .62.

### Twitter activity

To assess participants’ activity on Twitter, they were instructed to report frequencies for five ways to use Twitter: tweeting, retweeting, replying to others’ tweets, following other accounts, and following news (items 1 to 5, respectively). They assessed each type of activity on a 5-point scale (1 = *less than once per week*, 2 = *once per week*, 3 = *multiple times per week*, 4 = *once per day*, and 5 = *multiple times per day*). A composite score representing overall *activity* was calculated by adding together the scores for each activity. Reliability for this sum variable was .74. However, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) suggested a two-factor model (factor loadings in parentheses) in which factor 1 consisted of items 1 (.793), 2 (.765), and 3 (.550), and factor 2 of items 4 (.826) and 5 (.826), with reliabilities .76 and .83, respectively. These factors were labeled *messaging activity* and *following activity*. They explained a total of 74.86% of the variance. CFA indicated a good fit:  $\chi^2(4) = 1.35, p > .05$ ;  $CMIN/DF = .337, CFI = 1.00, NFI = .99, TLI = 1.04$ , and  $RMSEA = .000$  (90 CI of  $RMSEA = .000-.080$ ).  $KMO$  coefficient was .66 and Bartlett’s test was significant ( $\chi^2(10) = 170.03, p < .001$ ).

Although the two-factor model was supported by both EFA and CFA, it should be noted that factors consisting of two items should be considered with caution (Costello & Osborne, 2005; Kline, 2016). However, Spearman correlation between items 4 and 5 was fairly high ( $r(108) = .66, p < .001$ ), while their correlations with items 1, 2, and 3 ranged from .14 to .32. These relationships further support the two-factor solution.

## Results

H1 stated that the factor analysis of IIS variables would produce a three-factor structure comprising the dimensions labeled attentiveness, perceptiveness, and responsiveness. As noted above, CFA did not provide support for the original three-factor structure of the IIS. Thus, H1 was not supported.

Consequently, the modified 18-item IIS was subjected to EFA and CFA. For theoretical reasons and as stated in H1, three was selected as the fixed number of factors. Results from the EFAs are presented in Table 1. The three-factor solution from Principal Axis Factoring extraction explained a total of 51.74% of variance. CFA indicated a poor fit:  $\chi^2(132) = 231.77, p < .001$ ;  $CMIN/DF = 1.76, CFI = .85, NFI = .71, TLI = .82$ , and  $RMSEA = .084$  (90 CI of  $RMSEA = .07-.10$ ). To refine the model, items with communality below .4 (see Costello & Osborne, 2005) were excluded. Thus, items 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, and 14 were deleted, and EFA was run again with extraction based on eigenvalues. The resulting two-factor solution explained a total

**Table 1.** Factor structure of Twitter Interaction Involvement after Varimax rotation ( $n = 108$ ).

Scale Item	Expected Factor	Initial three-factor model (18 items)			Subsequent two-factor model (12 items)		Final two-factor model (10 items)	
		F1	F2	F3	F1	F2	F1	F2
(6) Often on Twitter, I'm not sure what my role is: that is, I'm not sure how I'm expected to relate to others.*	R	.544	.121	<b>.579</b>	<b>.805</b>	.038	<b>.821</b>	.023
(3) Often on Twitter, I'm not sure what to say: I can't seem to find the appropriate lines.*	R	<b>.925</b>	.098	.004	<b>.660</b>	.082	<b>.700</b>	.035
(18) Often on Twitter, I can't think of what to say, I just don't react quickly enough.*	R	<b>.633</b>	.064	.280	<b>.669</b>	.047	<b>.687</b>	.028
(12) Often on Twitter, I'm not sure what others' needs are (e.g., a compliment, reassurance, etc.) until it is too late to respond appropriately.*	R	.471	.125	<b>.514</b>	<b>.706</b>	.080	<b>.683</b>	.054
(15) Often on Twitter, I feel sort of unplugged, I am uncertain of my role, others' motives, and what is happening.*	R	.456	.051	<b>.538</b>	<b>.666</b>	-.012	<b>.630</b>	-.053
(13) I feel confident on Twitter, I am sure of what to say and do.	R	<b>.433</b>	.152	.391	<b>.625</b>	.102	<b>.618</b>	.046
(11) Often I feel withdrawn or distant on Twitter.*	R	<b>.411</b>	.107	.311	<b>.547</b>	.055	<b>.547</b>	-.004
(10) I carefully observe how others respond to me on Twitter.	A	.004	<b>.750</b>	-.044	.003	<b>.792</b>	.041	<b>.848</b>
(4) I am very observant of others' reactions to my tweets.	A	-.083	<b>.849</b>	-.044	-.033	<b>.820</b>	.008	<b>.814</b>
(17) On Twitter, I am very perceptive to the meaning of others' behavior in relation to myself and the situation.	P	-.027	<b>.674</b>	-.039	-.015	<b>.667</b>	.013	<b>.633</b>
(16) On Twitter, I often do not accurately perceive others' intentions or motivations.*	P	.267	-.082	<b>.653</b>	<b>.596</b>	-.136	-	-
(5) On Twitter, I pay close attention to what others say and do and try to obtain as much information as I can.	A	.154	<b>.628</b>	.025	.200	<b>.627</b>	-	-
(9) Sometimes on Twitter, I'm not sure what the other really means or intends by certain comments.*	P	<b>.485</b>	.048	.157	-	-	-	-
(8) Often on Twitter, I feel like I know what should be said (like accepting a compliment, or asking a question), but I hesitate to do so.*	R	<b>.484</b>	-.164	.049	-	-	-	-
(14) Often on Twitter, I am preoccupied and do not pay complete attention to others.*	A	<b>.360</b>	.041	.315	-	-	-	-
(2) My mind wanders on Twitter and I often miss parts of what is going on.*	A	<b>.270</b>	.071	.219	-	-	-	-
(1) I am keenly aware of how others perceive me on Twitter.	P	.156	<b>.504</b>	.179	-	-	-	-
(7) Often on Twitter, I pretend to be listening to someone when in fact I'm thinking about something else.*	A	-.019	-.096	<b>.538</b>	-	-	-	-
Eigenvalue		5.092	2.890	1.331	4.146	2.577	3.717	2.164
Percentage of Variance		28.29	16.06	7.40	34.55	21.48	37.17	21.64
Cronbach's Alpha		.77	.80	.79	.86	.81	.85	.81

1) Items marked with an asterisk (\*) are reverse coded.

2) For expected factors, R stands for Responsiveness, A for Attentiveness, and P for Perceptiveness.

3) Bold-faced type indicates the highest loading for each item.



of 56.03% of the variance. The CFA indicated an unsatisfactory fit:  $\chi^2(53) = 109.65, p < .001$ ;  $CMIN/DF = 2.07, CFI = .88, NFI = .80, TLI = .86$  and  $RMSEA = .10$  (90 CI of  $RMSEA = .07-.13$ ).  $KMO$  coefficient was .74 and Bartlett's test was significant ( $\chi^2(66) = 527.00, p < .001$ ).

As factor 1 consisted mainly of responsiveness items, item 16 was removed because its inclusion lacked theoretical support. Subsequently, factor 1 consisted of 7 responsiveness items (3, 6, 11, 12, 13, 15, 18), and is labeled *responsiveness*. Factor 2 consisted of four items, all of which relate to attentiveness and perceptiveness regarding others. Item 5 was removed, as the remaining three items all relate explicitly to attentiveness and perceptiveness regarding others in relation to the self. Consequently, factor 2 consisted of three items (4, 10, 17). The factor was labeled *relational awareness*, following Jordan's (2004) conceptualization of behavior related to "being attentive to self, the other, and the relationship" (p. 14).

This resulting 10-item, two-factor solution explained a total of 58.80% of variance. CFA indicated an acceptable fit:  $\chi^2(34) = 54.47, p < .05$ ;  $CMIN/DF = 1.60, CFI = .95, NFI = .87, TLI = .93$ , and  $RMSEA = .075$  (90 CI of  $RMSEA = .034-.111$ ).  $KMO$  coefficient was .78 and Bartlett's test was significant ( $\chi^2(45) = 406.23, p < .001$ ). We stress that this two-factor model of Twitter II does not describe the process of listening in its primary sense, but instead the products of listening. In this case, these products relate to the cognitive formulation of appropriate responses in relation to communication partners, context, and situation.

H2 stated that there would be a positive relationship between II and diplomats' perceived goal attainment. As hypothesized, the data revealed a positive association between II and perceived goal attainment (see Table 2). The association was even stronger when II was calculated by summing up the newly formed *responsiveness* and *relational awareness* variables,  $r(108) = .49, p < .001$ . Additionally, Spearman correlations indicated a positive relationship between *interaction involvement* and both *personal goal attainment*,  $r(108) = .33, p < .001$ , and *organizational goal attainment*,  $r(108) = .48, p < .001$ . Thus, H2 is confirmed.

RQ1 and RQ2 asked about the relationships between perceived goal attainment and the underlying dimensions of II (RQ1) and Twitter activity (RQ2). Correlations (see Table 2) and multiple regression analyses (see Table 3) indicated that both *Twitter activity* and *interaction involvement* made a considerable contribution to perceived *goal attainment*. In fact, utilizing their subcategories demonstrated even stronger relationships. *Responsiveness* was found to have a significant positive relationship with *goal attainment*. *Relational awareness* and *goal attainment* also had a positive relationship, though it was non-significant. Twitter activity and both of its subcategories were also found to be in positive relationships with *goal attainment*.

Higher *following activity*, *relational awareness*, and *responsiveness* all tended to lead to higher *messaging activity* (see Table 4). Thus, a path analysis with messaging activity as the mediating variable was conducted to investigate a causal model that could better explain the dynamic interplay of Twitter activity and II as the predictors of goal attainment. After a non-significant path between *relational*

**Table 2.** Correlation matrix of the variables ( $n = 108$ ).

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Interaction Involvement	85.51	13.48								
2. Relational Awareness	14.28	3.54	.38***							
3. Responsiveness	32.71	7.80	.90***	.05						
4. Twitter Activity	13.77	4.05	.45***	.17	.43***					
5. Messaging Activity	5.90	2.58	.44***	.29**	.36***	.83***				
6. Following Activity	7.87	2.41	.28**	-.02	.33***	.80***	.32**			
7. Goal Attainment	6.66	1.33	.45***	.16	.47***	.45***	.36***	.38***		
8. Personal Goal Att.	3.23	.77	.33***	.11	.37***	.29**	.21*	.29**	.84***	
9. Organizational Goal Att.	3.43	.79	.48***	.20*	.43***	.45***	.48***	.27**	.89***	.52***

Notes.

1) \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

2) Spearman's correlations are presented for variables 8 and 9. Otherwise, Pearson's correlations are presented.

**Table 3.** Multiple regression models predicting Goal Attainment ( $n = 108$ ).

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3*	
	$\beta$	$p$	$\beta$	$p$	$\beta$	$p$
Messaging Activity	.27	.004			.14	.147
Following Activity	.29	.004			.22	.016
Relational Awareness			.14	.112	.11	.215
Responsiveness			.47	.000	.34	.000
$R^2$	.21		.24		.31 (.28)	
Adjusted $R^2$	.19		.23		.29 (.27)	

Note. \* $R^2$  and Adjusted  $R^2$  in parentheses are extracted with Twitter Activity in place of Messaging Activity and Following Activity, and Interaction Involvement in place of Relational Awareness and Responsiveness.

**Table 4.** Multiple regression model predicting Messaging Activity ( $n = 108$ ).

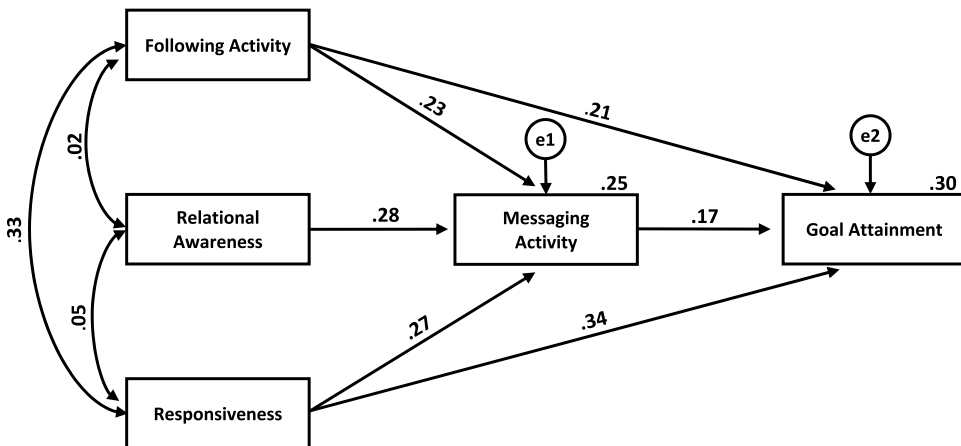
Model 1		
Variable	$\beta$	$p$
Following Activity	.23	.010
Relational Awareness	.28	.001
Responsiveness	.27	.003
$R^2$	.25 (.24)	
Adjusted $R^2$	.23 (.22)	

Note.  $R^2$  and Adjusted  $R^2$  in parentheses are extracted with Interaction Involvement in place of Relational Awareness and Responsiveness.

awareness and goal attainment was removed, the path model portrayed in Figure 1 could be identified. Overall, this model explains approximately 30% of the variance of goal attainment, exhibiting a good fit with the data:  $\chi^2(1) = 1.61, p > .05$ ;  $CMIN/DF = 1.607, CFI = .99, NFI = .98, TLI = .92$ , and  $RMSEA = .075$  (90 CI of  $RMSEA = .000-.282$ ).

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to increase understanding of listening in the context of mass personal communication, and more specifically in the context of public diplomacy on Twitter. The results support the importance of listening competency in professional Twitter communication in terms of



**Figure 1.** A path model showing relationships among diplomats' Relational Awareness, Responsiveness, Following Activity, Messaging Activity, and Goal Attainment on Twitter ( $n = 108$ ).

goal attainment. Activity, such as tweeting and following, does not determine successful impact alone; crucial listening skills related to relational awareness and responsiveness carry at least equal, if not greater weight.

Overall, the findings have both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this study has expanded existing research on online listening with empirical findings. We found that listening, operationalized as interaction involvement, helps communicators achieve their goals on social media, whether personal or organizational. Importantly, *following activity*, *relational awareness*, and *responsiveness*, mediated by *messaging activity*, together explained a substantive proportion of the variation of perceived *goal attainment*. On a practical level, the findings provide interesting knowledge to a wide range of professionals engaging in communication activities on social media. Competent responsive behavior is the key to success, and it requires a certain understanding of how to relate to others and to the situation. Despite the various goals and constraints of diplomats' communication on social media, the findings highlight the importance of listening on the very level of day-to-day individual practice. Relational aspects also set the standard for diplomatic communication on social media because judgments of listening competency are ultimately made by others (Bodie, 2019; Lipetz et al., 2020).

Listening may be a good metaphor for information gathering, but as a construct it is a broader phenomenon. For instance, the strong relational component may well be what most significantly differentiates listening from reading. Relational aspects are highlighted when listening is operationalized as interaction involvement, which deals with how communicators participate in social environments with others. This is particularly relevant for professional diplomats, who balance themselves over a variety of role expectations and constraints. Practically, it is especially important to be responsive in line with own role and with others' expectations. We encourage all professional diplomats using Twitter to critically consider their own role and interactivity in relation to goals. Ultimately, listening skills are crucial for them to know what to do and how to behave in certain situations to attain their goals.

However, we did not differentiate between goal types in this study. In fact, the realm of international relations combined with Twitter's masspersonal communication context may result in several intersecting sets of goals, and in listening goals alone (see Di Martino, 2020). The participants may have had different goals in mind. Furthermore, while goal attainment and interaction involvement are clearly connected, it is not certain that there is a one-way effect. Higher involvement may well lead into better achievements, but on the other hand, clearly defined and achievable goals can lead to higher involvement. The fact that II's association with organizational goal attainment was significantly stronger than its association with personal goal attainment appears to indicate that more emphasis is placed on interaction in organizational goals than in personal goals. This also seems to be true for Twitter activity. Diplomatic organizations are likely to place more emphasis on active tweeting than individual diplomats.

Because the factor structure of the original IIS (Cegala, 1981; Cegala et al., 1982) could not be replicated, further development of the scale within mass personal communication is recommended. Additionally, we suggest that in further research, self-report measures should be accompanied with other methods, such as textual analysis. Regarding CFA, EFA, and SEM, the relatively small sample size of the study needs to be addressed. However, the current understanding of statistical methods has questioned the applicability of general rules-of-thumb regarding adequate sample sizes (Kline, 2016). Preacher and MacCallum (2002) argue that when "communalities are high, the number of expected factors is relatively small, and model error is low . . . researchers and reviewers should not be overly concerned about small sample sizes" (p. 160). Statistical analyses conducted in this study fulfilled these expectations, but we still suggest that Twitter II's factor structure be treated with caution and subjected to further investigations.

Nevertheless, it was possible to extract two factors, *relational awareness* and *responsiveness*, which we interpret as closely related with the original II construct, and as such they cover substantial parts of the listening process. We labeled relational awareness according to Jordan's (2004) ideas on interpersonal competence. Relational awareness means an awareness of one's "own needs and the needs of

the other” and, together with anticipatory empathy, “it contributes to building relationships where neither person is at the center—relatedness is” (Jordan, 2004, p. 14). Responsiveness, then, refers to the knowledge and confidence regarding what and when to speak, as Cegala et al. (1982, p. 233) have suggested. Accordingly, II consisting of relational awareness and responsiveness depicts listening that moves from simple hearing to a more comprehensive level of listening. On that level, listening “connects and bridges” (Lipari, 2012, p. 233); it implicates a thirdness or mediation and “brings things into relation” (Bodie & Crick, 2014, p. 120). Relational awareness and responsiveness are both important parts of communication competence by which communicators attach themselves to social situations. Though being a mental process of an individual, such involvement is not self- or other-oriented. It is relationship oriented. However, we underline that this conceptualization only partly covers the broad construct of listening, and as it stands, it only concerns listening’s cognitive aspects. Future research on online listening should address this issue and complement the II framework with theoretically sound components that more comprehensively cover the listening process and its other presages and products (see Bodie et al., 2008).

Regarding the goal-directedness of PD, it is perhaps not surprising that listening—a construct strongly connected with relational matters—was found to be inextricably linked to successful activity. This lends support to previous finding that relational communication goals are emphasized in ambassadors’ use of Twitter (Rikkonen, 2021). Our results are also in good agreement with Tam’s (2019) notion that interpersonal approaches to diplomatic relationship building could fill gaps and fix constraints in the engagement at more formal state and embassy levels. She asserts that diplomats can make more informal progress by demonstrating four relational qualities: continuation, attentiveness, curiosity, and empathy (Tam, 2019). The path model portrayed in this study appears to reflect these features in Twitter interaction as interaction involvement and activity together cover a significant portion of them.

For the professionals working in PD, the findings of the present study provide a strong rationale for observing and developing their own cognitive ability with respect to Twitter. Particular attention should be put on the connection between interaction involvement and activity that is related to following other users and news on the platform. The finding that responsiveness is positively related with following activity is consistent with the findings of Wise et al. (2014) who observed that responsiveness in online discussions is associated with revisiting others’ posts. Clearly, the more carefully one follows the social environment the more confident one will be with respect to when and how one should interact in that environment. Thus, professional diplomats should focus on their listening competency not only because of their ethical responsibilities or information-gathering duties, but also because listening can lead them to better communication performance on social media. We believe that in addition to helping diplomats, this idea of the benefits of listening in mass personal communication can easily be extended to almost anyone who wants to engage in social interaction in an environment such as Twitter.

## Data availability statement

The data described in this article are openly available in the Open Science Framework at <https://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:fsd:T-FSD3658>.

## Open Scholarship



This article has earned the Center for Open Science badge for Open Materials. The materials are openly accessible at <https://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:fsd:T-FSD3658>.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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