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Digital celebrity diplomacy in the UN Security Council Elections

Digital Celebrity Diplomacy in the UN Security Council Elections: Canada, Ireland and Kenya

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Summary

The 2020 UN Security Council (SC) elections concluded during a historical period defined by the global COVID-19 pandemic. As officials scrambled to organise a socially distanced election, the final stage of the campaigns was forced into the digital realm. To bolster candidate states' chances of being elected to the SC, digital diplomacy became the primary mode of communication. Here we focus on the SC campaigns of Canada, Ireland and Kenya, which were defined by 'digital celebrity diplomacy'. U2 and Celine Dion supported the national campaigns of Ireland and Canada, while Kenya drew on the recognition of a number of celebrity athletes to bolster its campaign's national brand. Thus, we explore the convergence of celebrity and digital diplomacy in these SC campaigns, contributing to new understandings of the use of celebrity in transforming the projection and reception of strategic narratives when integrated with digital diplomacy during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords

United Nations Security Council (UNSC) elections – celebrity – digital diplomacy – visual diplomacy – Canada – Ireland – Kenya

1   Introduction[1]

> Let's make one thing very clear here. This is not a time for campaigning.
> This is a time to fight the coronavirus and to fight this pandemic and to
> win the war against this pandemic. This is not about campaigning for the
> Security Council.[2]

This quote from Canada's Ambassador to the United Nations (UN) Marc-André
Blanchard in March 2020 highlights the impact of the global COVID-19 pan-
demic on the UN Security Council (SC) elections scheduled for June that year.
Yet the elections and campaign happened, even if creative solutions had to be
found to enable them.[3] With the threat of COVID-19 looming, the campaigning
states had to search for 'improvised'[4] forms of diplomacy that had not been
employed before in the race for a seat on the SC. As the Canadian International
Development Minister Karina Gould argued, 'it [the global pandemic] just
demonstrates why it is important for Canada to sit on the UN Security Council.
That campaign carries on, but in a different way'.[5] Other candidates also rec-
ognised the need to adopt new modes of campaigning. The Deputy Head of
Norway's SC campaign, Meena Syed, stated that 'the pandemic has obviously
changed our campaign and the working methods of the entire Foreign Service',
and 'this has not been the time to focus on traditional campaigning'.[6] Ireland's
Ambassador to the UN Geraldine Byrne Nason stressed Ireland's dedication to
support 'the role of the UN in leading the global response to the pandemic'.[7]

Digital diplomacy therefore became the primary mode of communication,
representation and signalling in the final weeks of the UN elections campaign.
Our focus in this article is on the digital celebrity aspects of the SC campaigns
of Canada, Ireland and Kenya, all of which employed celebrities to attract
global support for their candidacies.[8] More specifically, we explore the use
of celebrity in the strategic narratives that informed the national campaigns,

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2   Carbert 2020.
3   UN 2020.
4   Cornut 2018.
5   UN 2020.
6   Fillion 2020.
7   Fillion 2020.
8   Cooper 2008; Wheeler 2013; Pace and Bergman Rosamond 2018.

rather than assessing the role of such campaigns in actually achieving a seat on the SC.

Underpinning our article is also the premise that the boundaries between popular culture, world politics, celebrity and digital communication are becoming increasingly blurry, producing new digital practices in global politics.[9] The use of celebrity and the reception of this aspect of the campaigns in the media[10] makes the 2020 SC elections an interesting case to explore. It can tell us about the representation of states' strategic narratives and marketing strategies during a time of global crisis.[11] Our study, moreover, shows how celebrity diplomacy both complements and challenges traditional forms of statecraft and diplomacy.[12]

We draw upon scholarship on the employment of celebrity to add strength and visibility to global justice campaigns.[13] In particular, we interrogate states' use of celebrity in acquiring more influence within the UN and the role of celebrity in making national digital diplomacy more visible. We also explore states' use of visual projections of celebrity diplomacy[14] – all three campaigns studied here were visual in their projection.[15] We argue that the national campaigns of the three countries reflected the projection of national strategic narratives, expressed in improvised efforts[16] to orchestrate identity narratives that centred on their dedication to the UN.[17] In the Canadian and Irish cases, the campaigns were fronted by celebrities known to mass audiences – Irish rock star Bono and Canadian pop singer Celine Dion. However, Kenya drew on celebrity sport stars to support its campaign. These national campaigns, we propose, are suggestive of an emergent normalisation of celebrity diplomacy through digital channels.

First, we reflect on the character of digital diplomacy, drawing upon scholarship in the field. We then identify a close relationship between popular culture and world politics and locate celebrity within that nexus. This is followed by an unpacking of the key features of celebrity diplomacy to capture the increasingly close relationship between celebrity and digital and traditional diplomacy in global politics. We then discuss our material and our strategic

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9   Bergman Rosamond 2016.
10   Murphy 2020; EURACTIV 2020; Al Jazeera 2020.
11   Crilley 2015; Pears 2016; Wright and Bergman Rosamond 2021.
12   Cooper 2008, 200.
13   Cooper 2008; Wright and Bergman Rosamond 2021.
14   Cooper 2008; Wheeler 2013; Pace and Bergman Rosamond 2018.
15   Cooper 2008; Wheeler 2013; Pace and Bergman Rosamond 2018.
16   Cornut 2018.
17   Miskimmon, O'Loughlin and Roselle 2013.

narrative approach to the analysis of national SC campaigns. This is followed by an analysis of the national UN campaigns, including identifying their location within popular culture and global power relations. To conclude, we argue that the combined use of celebrity endorsement and digital diplomatic tools in national SC campaigns can contribute to the projection of states' strategic narratives. Moreover, we posit that a successful SC campaign increasingly relies on nation branding to project identity narratives, and that the celebrity – digital diplomacy nexus can be an effective way to do this.

2   Digital Diplomacy

Governments, international organisations (IOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) employ digital methods to signal and represent their global commitments to mass audiences. Digital technology is also used to brand the nation, its people and its government, offering opportunities to explore its normative ambitions in global politics.[18] Digital diplomacy includes a variety of diplomatic practices and information technologies (ICTs), with public diplomacy and nation branding being increasingly conducted in social media.[19] Social media outlets are also used for interstate dialogue,[20] a trend reinforced by the COVID-19 crisis.[21] Moreover, such practices define non-state diplomacy and the diplomatic communication of IOs.[22]

States and other actors increasingly find themselves having to engage in the digital management of their diplomatic practices, with new digital technologies continuously changing the character of diplomacy, nation branding and the articulation of foreign policy priorities'.[23] Subject to scholarly investigation are also the ways in which digital technologies are used to influence global developments, enabling the delivery of political messages to vast audiences,[24] and seeking recognition for those.[25] Thus, digital tools enable innovative foreign policy initiatives to ensure visibility and interest among audiences.[26] Digital tools, moreover, offer innovative ways of communicating states'

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18   Manor 2019.
19   Manor 2019.
20   Duncombe 2019.
21   Bergman Rosamond and Hedling 2022.
22   Bos and Melissen 2019.
23   Bjola and Holmes 2015.
24   Wright 2019.
25   Adler-Nissen and Tsinovoi 2019.
26   Bos and Melissen 2019.

strategic narratives.[27] For example, states assign certain normative qualities to the self through the use of digital and social media. For some, this means narrating the self as capable of UN leadership and worthy of a non-permanent seat on the SC. By using a combination of digital technologies and visual and textual celebrity endorsements, states can add visibility to their strategic narration. However, diplomatic practices are never entirely 'digital'; rather, they are linked with, and constituted through, 'offline practices',[28] as we will show. Next we reflect on the character of digital celebrity diplomacy.

3   The Emergence of Digital Celebrity Diplomacy

Though there has been an upsurge in studies of digital diplomacy to explain the intersection between foreign policy and technology,[29] less has been said about the ways in which celebrities are used to digitally represent national quests for influence in the global order. While scholars have thoroughly investigated celebrity activism that takes place within the institutional frames of the United Nations,[30] less has been said about the ways in which celebrities are employed to endorse states' inclusion in the SC, effectively serving as diplomats. Yet Ireland, Canada and Kenya all employed celebrity in their quest for UN leadership.

Our reasoning here is informed by the premise that there is an increasingly blurry relationship between popular culture, celebrity, politics and digital communication.[31] Novels, documentaries, blockbusters, musical works, iconic photographs and celebrity images and texts are important sites of knowledge production, enabling public engagement with world politics.[32] Celebrities are part of such communicative processes, often employing entertainment techniques in their representation of particular global issues.[33] Our study is informed by scholarship on celebrity humanitarianism,[34] diplomacy[35] and

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27   Miskimmon, O'Loughlin and Roselle 2013.
28   Hedling and Bremberg 2021.
29   Duncombe 2019; Adler-Nissen and Tsinovoi 2019.
30   Alleyne 2005; Wheeler 2011; van den Bulck 2018.
31   Bergman Rosamond 2016; Hamilton and Shepherd 2016.
32   Hamilton and Shepherd 2016.
33   Pace and Bergman Rosamond 2018.
34   Kapoor 2013; Chouliaraki 2013; Richey 2015; Richey and Budabin 2021.
35   Cooper 2008; Wheeler 2011, 2013; Pace and Bergman Rosamond 2018.

security,[36] enabling the investigation of the intersection between digital and celebrity diplomatic practices.

The UN and some states have come to manage their diplomatic efforts within celebrity discourses and practice, which reflects contemporary diversifications of diplomacy.[37] Celebrity diplomacy is conducted by non-state 'non-orthodox agents' who help to 'shape the agenda of global issues'.[38] Andrew Cooper and others have noted that celebrity diplomacy is a 'cosmopolitan activity' which serves to 'further the oneness of humanity'.[39] Celebrities promote 'a universal ethos' which is 'at odds with parochial attitudes and the tight restrictions of sovereignty',[40] and their interventions are increasingly communicated digitally.[41] However, this ethical reasoning is refuted by Ilan Kapoor, who notes that celebrity humanitarianism is 'far from altruistic' but rather 'ideological', 'self-serving' and promoting the 'celebrity brand'.[42] Similarly, Chouliaraki has argued that celebrity diplomacy and humanitarianism build on 'the intensification of the relationship between humanitarian politics and commercial moralism' and as such it 'displaces public action in favor of personal diplomacy'.[43] Hence, 'most celebrities do not fundamentally challenge statist practices and discourses of sovereign integrity and capitalism ... but reproduce these through their privileged position in celebrity society', thus sustaining the status quo of world politics.[44]

While there is good reason to question the ethics of celebrity humanitarianism, not least its location within gendered and colonial power logics,[45] our ambition here is not to ethically evaluate states' employment of celebrities in communicating their brand and normative ambitions, but rather to shed light on the co-constitutive relationship between digital and celebrity diplomacy.

The UN in particular has a long history of using celebrities to project its commitments across the international community, with Danny Kay being appointed the first UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador in 1955.[46] The celebrity-endorsed diplomatic interventions of the UN are communicated on its online platforms and picked up by online editions of newspapers and magazines and other

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36   Wright and Bergman Rosamond 2021.

37   Cooper 2008, 11.

38   Cooper 2008, 11; see also Street 2012, 352.

39   Cooper 2008, 91

40   Cooper 2008, 91; see also Bergman Rosamond 2020; Richey and Budabin 2021.

41   Bergman Rosamond 2016.

42   Kapoor 2013, 1.

43   Chouliaraki 2013, 79.

44   Bergman Rosamond 2015, 152.

45   Wright and Bergman Rosamond 2021.

46   Cooper 2008.

social media outlets.[47] Why, then, have the UN and states come to manage their diplomatic practices within celebrity discourse and practice, and what weight does celebrity add to such practice? Marsh, 't Hart and Tindall contend that celebrity politics has 'a unique capacity to reach out to and mobilise otherwise apathetic publics, and sometimes manage to give powerful voices to the disenfranchised in society and on the world stage'.[48] This is because celebrities 'are considered influential actors in international politics … particularly in the shaping of North – South relations'.[49] Yet, as Rojek notes, there are several categories of celebrities – 'achieved' (having accomplished something), 'ascribed' (having family relations bringing them fame) and 'attributed' (having enjoyed media exposure without achieving anything in particular) – with entertainers and sportspeople falling into the category of achieved celebrities.[50] Celebrity politicians also fall into this category – an example here is ex-president Donald Trump, a former reality star and entrepreneur, who is known for his prolific use of Twitter diplomacy to project his preferences worldwide.[51] Though we do not dismiss the celebrity status of politicians, our focus here is on states' use of entertainers and sportspeople to project their identity narratives. Celebrities, as embodiments of contemporary popular culture, add visibility and cultural appeal to states' diplomatic practices in ways that orthodox diplomacy rarely does. Though celebrity entertainers do not have access to political power in the traditional sense, given that the great majority of them will never enjoy higher office, their privileged position within the global economy and their wealth equip them with a great deal of influence that other people lack.[52] Moreover, some of them enjoy formal positions within the United Nations, having been granted the status of special envoy or goodwill ambassador.[53]

While digital technologies ensure that the messages of celebrities are speedily delivered to mass audiences, this does not mean that such individuals can exercise real impact on the global order or reduce the injustices within it. For example, Sean Penn's vocal opposition to the War on Terror did not change his country's interventionist ambitions.[54] Rather, celebrities are communicative agents who can enable audiences to envisage new political landscapes and

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47 Bergman Rosamond 2020
48 Marsh, 't Hart and Tindall 2010, 333.
49 Richey and Budabin 2021, 5.
50 Rojek 2001.
51 Duncombe 2019.
52 Bergman Rosamond 2015.
53 Wright and Bergman Rosamond 2021.
54 Bergman Rosamond 2011.

provide a sense of hope of a 'better society' and a 'just world'.[55] Thus, by adding celebrity to digital campaigns audiences can be politicised and more inclined to support new political initiatives.[56] Admittedly, not all celebrities make use of digital technology to promote a particular cause; in fact, many refrain from having personal social media accounts, yet their messages of peace and justice are recommunicated across digital channels.[57] This is because their visibility tends to ensure affective responses and 'appeal'[58] from their fanbase.

Andrew Cooper has observed that there is an 'advantage of linking individual star power to a collective project'.[59] However, states have been less inclined to forge such relations, with some exceptions.[60] Angelina Jolie's humanitarian endeavours are linked with her diplomatic role as a Special Envoy at the UN and, more recently, through her co-operation with NATO. In 2014 she paired up with the British government and former foreign secretary William Hague in seeking to eradicate sexual violence in conflict.[61] There are also celebrities who have rejected such partnerships – Sean Penn is known for his tendency to bypass formal political channels by launching his own charitable projects.[62]

Digital celebrity diplomacy then is a set of diplomatic practices that are highly visible, digitally communicated, signalled and represented, and located within contemporary popular culture. It is defined by the employment of entertainment techniques and communicated through digital means by highly visible individuals, often acting on behalf of IOs and, increasingly, states. Such digital communication is visual, with photographic imagery of the celebrity in question being key to the articulation of a particular set of priorities. Those visuals are intertextually circulated across digital platforms, aiming to achieve wide recognition of the diplomatic message being communicated. However, not all forms of visual representation of celebrity diplomacy enjoy the same levels of visibility.[63] For example, the circulation of iconic photographs[64] of Angelina Jolie and George Clooney visiting conflict zones or refugee camps are likely to create more attention than the humanitarian work of celebrities in the global South. Ministers of foreign affairs and top diplomats also engage in

55   Inglis 2010, 13.
56   Wright and Bergman Rosamond 2021.
57   Bergman Rosamond 2020.
58   Richey and Budabin 2021.
59   Cooper 2008, 7.
60   Richey and Budabin 2021.
61   Bergman Rosamond 2016; Wright and Bergman Rosamond 2021.
62   Bergman Rosamond 2015.
63   Callahan 2020.
64   Hansen 2015.

digital diplomatic interventions, and, at times, they employ visual imagery to heighten the significance of the cause they seek to promote.[65] However, when celebrities engage in similar diplomatic interventions, textually and visually, they are more likely to instil interest among policy-makers and previously apolitical audiences.[66]

The quest to acquire a seat on the SC is an instructive example of such a project, with Canada, Ireland and Kenya adding celebrity to their national campaigns to maximise their chances of achieving that goal. Our investigation of celebrity-endorsed national campaigns asks what texts and 'images actually do and enable through their circulation'.[67] Here we align ourselves with the position that 'visual representations matter for policy debates and policy-making' while conceding that 'it is very difficult … to prove that a particular kind of image causes' a particular outcome. Rather, 'images communicate particular representations of subjects, actors, events and processes … thus putting pressure on political actors'.[68] Such representations often are gendered,[69] assigning particular attributes to male and female celebrities. For example, textual and visual representations of Bono's activism employ tropes of masculinist protection, depicting him as a male rescuer of distant others.[70] Here Hansen argues that images can 'constitute something or someone as threatened and in need of immediate defence'.[71] Meanwhile, Celine Dion is celebrated for her provisions of maternal care, a 'global mother' of sorts.[72] We will show how texts and visuals, in particular those communicated digitally, help to sustain the strategic self-narratives of national celebrity-endorsed UN campaigns.

Yet face-to-face encounters still matter even if 'the normative values of the Westphalian diplomatic order are being placed under greater pressure through an escalation of less state-centric diplomatic practice'.[73] Thus, there is a relationship between offline and online diplomacy, as we will show.[74] However, in a digitalised global order it is almost unthinkable for states not to employ digital tools in communicating their agendas to global publics. The affordances provided by digital media are multiple, with Adler-Nissen and Drieschova

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65   Aggestam, Bergman Rosamond and Hedling 2022; Wright and Bergman Rosamond 2021.
66   Wright and Bergman Rosamond 2021.
67   Kearns 2017, 492.
68   Hansen Adler-Nissen and Andersen 2021, 368.
69   Clapton and Shepherd 2017.
70   Bergman Rosamond 2015.
71   Hansen 2011, 52.
72   Bergman Rosamond 2020.
73   Wheeler 2011, 6.
74   Eggeling and Adler-Nissen 2021; Hedling and Bremberg 2021.

highlighting the enabling effects (and constraints) of digital technology for global politics.[75] Social media platforms are frequently designed to appeal to users' emotions through sharing and liking, which can trigger responses across digital platforms and users.[76] Digital storytelling, meditated through celebrity, evokes responses by making use of texts and visuals that contain emotional content.[77] This is because celebrities engage in digital 'emotional bundling', evoking feelings that are shared by many people.[78] Thus, employing celebrities to front national campaigns to achieve UN influence seems a smart move, with digital platforms providing affordances that enable strategic self-narration and the projection of national priorities. We turn now to the race for a seat on the sc and then reflect on our methodological choices.

4   The Race for a Seat on the UN Security Council amid a Global Pandemic

The sc remains the only global body able to authorise the use of force. A seat on the sc is highly sought after; running for an Elected 10 (E10) seat is seen as an 'expression of a strive for power and influence'.[79] Yet non-permanent members are restricted in how much they can impact on the work of the sc, with the veto power being reserved for the Permanent 5 (P5): China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States. They have informal 'pen-holding' powers, institutional memory and experienced staff allowing them to engage in the drafting of resolutions.[80] The distribution of power within the sc does not reflect contemporary global politics and the rise to power of new regional actors such as India and Brazil – thus the calls for sc reform.[81] The sc is 'steeped in legacies of colonialism which greatly influence enduring power imbalances among members today'.[82] Moreover, the sheer size of the UN makes consensus building around potential candidates challenging.[83] The competition for an E10 seat remains fierce, with the 2020 contest being no exception.

75   Adler-Nissen and Drieschova 2019.
76   Duncombe 2019.
77   Papacharissi 2014.
78   Adler-Nissen and Drieschova 2019.
79   Ekengren, Hjorthen and Möller 2020.
80   Ralph and Gifkins 2017; Ekengren, Hjorthen and Möller 2020.
81   Hosli and Dörfler 2019; Gifkins 2021.
82   Swaine 2020.
83   Hosli and Dörfler 2019.

A number of studies have examined the motivations for running for an SC seat, including the potential to influence the UN agenda, to improve upon one's networks and the status of being awarded an E10 seat.[84] An SC seat provides opportunities to further the normative directions of the UN. Sweden used its tenure in 2017-2018 to promote the Women, Peace and Security agenda as part of the 'core business' of the SC.[85] Canada's wish to put human security on the UN agenda motivated its candidacy in the 1998 E10 elections.[86]

The SC seats are organised into regional groupings, with elections organised for each one of those. In 2020, the campaigns were for the seats of Western Europe and Others, which consisted of a three-way race for two seats between Norway, Canada and Ireland, with Norway, a favourite, and Ireland, with the least funded campaign, emerging as victors. Kenya managed to win the African seat. While it is rare for a P5 member to declare a preferred candidate, Kenya claimed that China backed its bid, with China responding by declaring neutrality in the contest.[87] Here we do not focus on the campaigns behind the uncontested seats in Latin America or Asia-Pacific, which were awarded to Mexico and India respectively. Of the five campaigns for the two contested seats, three – Ireland, Canada and Kenya – drew on celebrities in branding themselves as suitable non-permanent members of the SC.

The use of celebrity within digital campaigns is in line with the use of special envoys and the long-standing appointment of celebrities to the UN, dating back to the 1950s.[88] Nonetheless, such campaigners have tended to represent the UN system or to be messengers of one of its agencies, rather than acting on behalf of specific states. As supporters of national SC campaigns, celebrities make contributions to the self-narrative that their specific state seeks to put across. By adding visibility to national campaigns, celebrities help to attract journalists' interest and in so doing widening the reach of the campaigns beyond New York. This is particularly so when celebrity endorsement is paired with digital diplomacy, which, we argue, could influence the contest itself. Next, we reflect on our use of strategic narrative analysis and selection of material.

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84   Ekengren, Hjorthen and Möller 2020.
85   Chang, Olsson and Muvumba Sellström 2021.
86   Malone 2000.
87   Guerrero 2020.
88   Cooper 2008.

5   Methodological Considerations – Strategic Narratives

The strategic use of narratives enables states to settle their preferences globally and narrate a story about the self 'to construct a shared meaning of the past, present and future of international politics to shape the behaviour of domestic and international actors'.[89] Such narration increasingly is conducted in digital settings, not least during the COVID-19 crisis, which forced diplomatic negotiations into the digital realm. A narrative that enjoys widespread acceptance can determine what is imaginable or possible, for example by constituting a state as a 'legitimate and capable' diplomatic actor in the eyes of other states.[90] Such storytelling about the self is key to states' search for diplomatic influence and recognition at home and abroad. States seeking a seat on the SC need to constitute that desire as imaginable and acceptable among relevant actors. Here we draw on Miskimmon, O'Loughlin and Roselle's identification of three kinds of strategic narratives:[91] 'system narratives', which refer to the character and institutions of the international system; 'identity narratives'; and issue narratives. Identity narratives concern the identities of international actors including states and 'are in a constant process of negotiation and contestation'.[92] Issue narratives 'are strategic in the sense they seek to shape the terrain on which policy discussions take place'.[93] National governments have made use of celebrity in shaping their identity narratives;, for example, the singer Rihanna was appointed Ambassador by Barbados in 2018 to promote the nation's education and investment.[94] NGOs employ celebrities to shape a range of issue narratives that they seek to promote, in particular by raising awareness among donors.[95] Our analysis explores the efforts by Canada, Ireland and Kenya to craft an identity narrative conducive to UN leadership through a combination of online and offline communications, with all three nations making use of social media in their SC campaigns. For example, by pairing traditional diplomatic negotiations and lobbying with celebrity endorsement, Canada and Ireland added visibility to their national campaigns, enabling them to appeal to old and new audiences. The storytelling about their candidacies made use

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89   Miskimmon, O'Loughlin and Roselle 2013, 6.

90   Wellings et al. 2018, 34.

91   Miskimmon, O'Loughlin and Roselle 2013.

92   Miskimmon, O'Loughlin and Roselle 2013, 7.

93   Miskimmon, O'Loughlin and Roselle 2013, 7.

94   *BBC News* 2018.

95   Van den Bulck, 2018.

of discursive tropes that centred on their competence in resolving a range of pressing issues facing the UN.

The employment of visuals is key to digital storytelling, and here we will seek to 'see' narratives,[96] and to understand the meaning of their content, through their representation.[97] While scholars such as Wheeler and Cooper have thoroughly interrogated the character of celebrity diplomacy,[98] they have perhaps reflected less on states' use of celebrity imagery to narrate the story of the self.[99] Nor do studies of strategic narratives reflect much on the use of visuals, with the exceptions of Crilley's work on identity narratives and Pears's on issue narratives.[100] By focusing on the celebrity-endorsed self-narratives of Ireland and Canada as well as Kenya's construction of a sporty and resilient self, we show how visual representations become integral to digital celebrity diplomacy. We reference a range of materials, including traditional media and social media coverage of the campaigns, enabling us to illustrate our claims. We should note here that our study does not investigate individual celebrity interventions; rather, we focus on the ways in which national SC campaigns and strategic narratives are mediated through celebrity endorsement.

6   The Move to Digital Campaigns

Before we turn to the digital SC campaigns of Canada, Ireland and Kenya we should note that our ambition is not to provide an interrogation of the causal links between the use of celebrity in national campaigns and the final outcome of states' quests for UN influence. Nor do we investigate individual celebrities' narration of global issues in digital spheres. Instead, we focus on the use of celebrity in national identity narratives, in particular those communicated at the UN. More specifically, we explore how celebrities are employed, visually and textually, in the national campaigns as a way of constructing strategic identity narratives. However, we do not make any definite assumptions about the intended audiences of the campaigns; rather, we assume that the three candidate states sought to convince other UN states of their capacity to conduct themselves as responsible non-permanent members of the SC. We should also

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96   Crilley 2015.
97   Miskimmon, O'Loughlin and Roselle 2013, 125.
98   Cooper 2008.
99   Wheeler 2013.
100   Crilley 2015; Pears 2016.

reflect on the temporal aspects of national SC campaigns: unlike most forms of celebrity engagement, the time frame of SC campaigns is fixed, putting considerable pressure on the candidates, not least in times of a global health crisis. As such, they needed to engage in improvisation, with digital storytelling, sustained by celebrities, becoming a key feature of their campaigning. Indeed, major crises or 'changing circumstances' force diplomats to 'improvise' and 'adapt their ways of doing to cope with practical problems they face'.[101]

6.1   *Canada*

Canada had invested in digital diplomacy prior to the SC campaign, with then Foreign Minister John Baird launching an initiative in 2014 to push Canadian diplomats and diplomatic missions online – no fewer than 290 digital accounts were created that year.[102] Aside from engaging Celine Dione in its SC campaign, Canada capitalised on the personal celebrity brand of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, a charismatic young world leader with good looks, star quality and global and domestic appeal.[103] Trudeau's image as a celebrity politician builds on that of his father,[104] former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. Canada, then, has 'produced another debonair cosmopolitan who projects the idealism of the liberal elites who are largely concentrated in metropolitan cities. They care about Canada's international image and role in foreign affairs. These global thinkers find prestige in Canada having a seat on the United Nations (UN) Security Council'.[105] Despite domestic controversies having taken the sheen from many voters' perceptions of Trudeau, his celebrity credentials are important in promoting 'brand Canada' because 'external awareness of Trudeau is limited and familiarity is likely built through social media superficialities'.[106]

Canada had the most prolific social media footprint of the three campaigns explored here. To further the Canadian case, the hashtags #Canada4UNSC and #CanadaUNSC were used as well as a myriad of other social media accounts, including government ones and those of diplomats or diplomatic employees. Its social media footprint also included the voices of a wider range of Canadians, both positive and negative, marking Canada apart from its competitors. For example, the hashtag #NoUNSC4Canada was deployed by a range

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101   Cornut 2018, 726.
102   Adesina 2017, 8.
103   Marland 2018.
104   Wheeler 2013; Pace and Bergman Rosamond 2018.
105   Marland 2018, 141.
106   Marland 2018, 142.

of Canadians and organisations who opposed the campaign, creating a significant footprint – which is something that appears to be absent in the competitor campaigns.

Canada's use of digital diplomacy differed from that of Ireland, with the latter making use of one core video that underpinned its online messaging. Canada, however, sought to project customised videos based on particular issues and also in different languages; for example, @CanadaLebanon tweeted a video in Arabic.[107] It is interesting here to note that in the digital realm Canadian diplomacy focused less on values than Ireland did and more on its good relations with other states. A promotional video released in response to the pandemic featured Canadian ambassadors based around the world spreading the message of '#togetherness'.[108] During the crisis, the celebrity aspect, aside from Justin Trudeau himself, somewhat slipped from Canada's digital projection. In this sense, Canada's strategic narration of the self had more in common with Kenya's use of visuals, with the latter depicting the 'workings' of its diplomacy through showcasing meetings with global counterparts. Both Canada and Kenya sought to mirror traditional diplomacy in their digital efforts rather than engaging with Twitter as a separate public diplomacy platform.

6.2   *Kenya*

Kenya's campaign differed from Canada's; for example, tweets formed a smaller part of it. The few tweets that were projected to wider audiences were produced across a small set of accounts, with no apparent change in approach being observable as a result of the global COVID-19-related lockdowns. The Kenyan Foreign Office (@ForeignOfficeKE), Kenyan Mission to the UN (@KenyaMissionUN) and Ambassador Tom Amolo, Special Envoy for Kenya to the UN (@EnvoyUnsc), produced a few tweets related to the campaign. Rather than actively seeking to engage with wider audiences, these tweets followed more traditional diplomatic practices, showcasing support from other states for Kenya's bid (e.g., Fiji), illustrated by the use of images of diplomats at work at their desks, in meetings or outside the UN (see Fig. 1).

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107   Canada in Lebanon 2020.
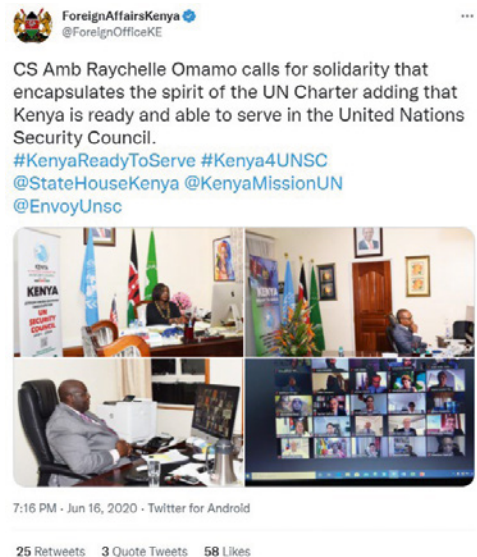108   Canada UN 2020.

FIGURE 1   @ForeignAffairsKE campaign tweet,
               16 June 2020[109]

Mboya's study of Kenya's use of digital diplomacy during the COVID-19 pan-
demic found that while Kenya was equipped to engage in diplomacy through
social media,[110] it had not sufficiently adapted to the new diplomatic environ-
ment, which required more engagement. Our comparison between Kenya,
Canada and Ireland supports this finding, with the latter two utilising their
celebrity connections in their strategic approach to digital diplomacy, which
contributed to their campaigns' wider reception in online media coverage.
Kenya's campaign was less defined by celebrity, at least in an orthodox sense;
therefore, the sportspeople fronting it were less visible. Celebrity voices were
largely missing from the digital footprint of Kenya's campaign. As a conse-
quence, global media coverage of the SC campaign tended to focus on Bono
and, to some extent, Celine Dion.[111] It is likely that the racialised and colonial
logics that undergird celebrity diplomacy and global politics obscured Kenyan
voices from the UN campaign, with leaders and celebrity activists in the
global North attracting more media coverage than their counterparts in the
global South.[112]

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109   Foreign Affairs Kenya 2020.
110   Mboya 2021.
111   Murphy 2020.
112   Richey 2015.

6.3   *Ireland*

The Irish's Government's Global Ireland 2025 strategy, launched in 2018, aimed to double 'the scope and impact of Ireland's global footprint', not least through digital diplomatic efforts. Ireland's global communication strategy aimed 'to increase visibility, raise awareness and enhance Ireland's reputation' among the world's nations. It saw the campaign for the SC as a means to promote 'Ireland's values of peace, humanitarianism, equality and justice'.[113] The country's digital engagement through its SC campaign built on these values, creating a global profile of responsibility.

Those tweeting about the campaign included the Taoiseach Prime Minister Leo Varadkar (@LeoVaradkar), President Michael D. Higgins (@PresidentIRL)[114] and the Irish Mission to the UN (@irishmissionun). Like Canada, Ireland effectively mobilised the tweets by staff based at the UN in New York and drew upon the voices of foreign affairs and ministry of defence officials. This gave a sense of a greater spread of voices engaged with the campaign, adding a human and sometimes humorous touch to Ireland's identity narrative. For example, one Twitter user commented along with an image of the inside of a full coach: 'Off we go with the @irishmissionun to #UNatU2. Starting Ireland's Security Council campaign on a musical note. Of course, creating harmony will be a key objective for Ireland 2021-22'.[115]

Tweets from institutional accounts focused far more on the approach and values Ireland sought to promote as a future member of the SC. This included a focus on quiet diplomacy, tying into Ireland's identity narrative as a small nation, supporting the Women, Peace and Security agenda. One Twitter user shared an image of a pair of Ireland SC 2021-22 branded socks in June 2020, demonstrating the potential for physical campaign memorabilia to be translated into digital capital, even if this particular tweet failed to capture headlines.

Of the three campaigns, Ireland's was the one most located within celebrity engagement – conceived by 'Uber marketer' John Concanoon, who is a celebrity in his own right, having starred on the *RTÉ*'s TV programme 'The Secret Millionaire'.[116] The launch of Ireland's campaign was supported by U2, with the group covering the cost of the 'UN at U2 launch' event in July 2018. The attendees at this face-to-face diplomatic event comprised 400 individuals,

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113   Irish Government 2018.

114   Doyle 2022.

115   We are mindful that while Twitter is a public platform, 'everyday' users (those without a public profile) increasingly expect anonymity if consent has not been obtained so we have not identified this particular user; see Williams, Burnap and Sloan 2017.

116   Carswell 2018a.

with every ambassador to the UN being invited,[117] setting the scene for Ireland's successful campaign. The launch was followed by the transformation of the UN Headquarters and surrounding area into an 'Irish Pavilion', showcasing Irish food and culture and with an installation paying tribute to Ireland's contribution to UN peacekeeping.[118] Ireland then rather skilfully combined online and offline strategies in drawing attention to its candidature. In what follows we specifically explore the ways in which celebrity was used to sustain the SC campaigns and the identity narratives that underpinned those efforts.

7   Celebrity-endorsed Campaigning

Governments, NGOs and IOs increasingly raise awareness of global developments by drawing on celebrities, making use of their appeal and using them to shape their strategic narratives.[119] However, as noted previously, it is rare that candidate states use celebrities to strengthen their SC campaigns. Yet Bono, Celine Dion and Kenyan sportspeople were attached to the national SC campaigns explored here, indicating an increasingly close relationship between celebrity, world politics and diplomatic practice. Both Bono and Celine Dion enjoy worldwide fame through their long-standing musical careers and therefore have access to global audiences. Bono, however, enjoys an arsenal of advisors and staff and a standing invitation to a range of world summits, having gained a reputation for his interventions on poverty, global health and more recently the war in Ukraine. Dion lacks Bono's elevated status as a celebrity humanitarian, though she is a UN Goodwill Ambassador. The sportspeople representing the Kenyan campaign lack the recognition of Bono and Dion and as such have less access to global audiences.

The use of celebrity in the Irish campaign was more ambitious than that of Canada or Kenya, which explains why it was reported on more extensively in online editions of magazines and newspapers. *The Economist* noted in 2020:

> Any serious candidate for one of ten rotating seats on the UN Security Council will have to schmooze. Before the pandemic Canada entertained ambassadors to the UN with a concert in New York by Celine Dion, a

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117   Murray 2018.
118   Murray 2018.
119   Wright and Bergman Rosamond 2021.

> French-Canadian singer. Ireland induced U2, a rock band from Dublin, to give its candidacy a plug from the stage.[120]

Ireland's partnership with Bono is not surprising given his established status as a celebrity diplomat, having taken part in the Live Aid organised by Bob Geldof and partnered with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in launching the (Red) Campaign that sought to combat HIV-AIDS.[121] He has also figured at the World Economic Forum in Davos, alongside male leaders, advocating social justice and change. In many ways he is an archetypical example of a white privileged male rescuer, viewing it as his responsibility to protect distant others from suffering and poverty in the global South.[122] However, Bono has been criticised for some of his international engagements and statements – for example, his celebration of capitalism as a route to development and poverty reduction.[123] Yet Bono is one of Ireland's most known and vocal celebrity diplomats, being the front figure of U2 and a famous philanthrope.[124] Ireland capitalised on Bono's fame and visibility to draw attention to its value-driven SC campaign. In 2018, Irish journalist Simon Carswell highlighted the significance of Bono's star-power and diplomatic skills for the Irish campaign, pointing to the ease with which the latter pursued diplomatic dialogue with key actors in the UN.[125]

Bono appeared alongside Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, Tánaiste Simon Coveney, former Irish President Mary Robinson and Ireland's Ambassador at the UN Geraldine Byrne Nason at the high-profile event on the UN's North Lawn.[126] Notably, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar (@LeoVaradkar) tweeted a Reservoir Dogs-style image (Fig. 2) with a line-up of himself, Bono and former Robinson walking towards the camera on a New York rooftop to 'officially launch Ireland's bid'. The image projects the Irish leaders and team in the light of celebrity, with Bono leading the charge on an equal footing with Varadkar and Robinson, instilling Ireland's identity narrative with star power.

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120   *The Economist* 2020b.
121   Richey and Ponte 2011.
122   Bergman Rosamond 2015, 2020.
123   Bergman Rosamond 2015, 2020.
124   Richey and Ponte 2011.
125   Carswell 2018b
126   Carswell 2018b.

FIGURE 2   @LeoVaradkar tweets a picture of
              the launch of Ireland's SC bid[127]

The global celebrity power of Ireland's U2 far eclipsed that of Canada's repre-
sentative, as *The Economist* pointed out: 'Nor is Ireland shy about using its cul-
tural clout. Alongside more subtle overtures, the push for the Security Council
seat involved free tickets to Riverdance and a U2 gig. The best that Canada
could muster was Celine Dion'.[128]

The Canadian campaign, though relying on digital media, also organised
offline face-to-face celebrity events. It invited 100 ambassadors to attend a
Celine Dion concert in New York one week prior to the declaration of the global
COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. Like Ireland, the Canadian government
stated that no government funds were used to purchase the tickets, so it seems
likely Dion, also a UN Goodwill Ambassador, donated them in support of the
campaign.[129] For some guests, including India's Ambassador to the UN Syed
Akbaruddin, attending a Celine Dion concert was a new experience: 'I've never
been to a pop concert, or to any concert, so to me it was quite an experience'.[130]
This shows not only the value of the celebrity aspect of Canada's campaign, but
also that the true value of celebrity for SC diplomacy lies in its wider reception
in media and popular culture. Canada was late to the celebrity game, drawing
on Celine Dion in the final stages of the campaign prior to global lockdowns in

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127   Varadkar 2018.
128   *The Economist* 2020a.
129   Kent 2020.
130   Kent 2020.

March. Yet celebrity was at the heart of the digital media coverage of the campaigns, with the online editions of the *BBC*, *The Economist*, *Al Jazeera*, *RTÉ* as well as the news site *EURACTIV* reporting on the involvement of U2 and Celine Dion in the national campaigns.[131] As noted previously, media outlets were less attentive to the popular cultural aspects of the Kenyan campaign.

Dion, though iconic to some, is less known for her involvement in multilateral diplomacy than Bono, though in 1999 she was appointed United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Goodwill Ambassador for peace. Dion's appointment was motivated by her support for 'the ideals of the organisation by defending the values of the protection of childhood' and her 'assistance to the most deprived and the fight against exclusion through popular music'.[132] Since 2010 she has been a Goodwill Ambassador for the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the UN (FAO), adding visibility and legitimacy to her humanitarian brand. On the UN agency's website Dion's 'humble beginnings' and celebrity status are highlighted, contributing to her being granted a UN goodwill ambassadorship in the first place.[133] Moreover, on International Women's Day in 2021 Dion participated in the global initiative 'We all Rise', initiated by United Nations Human Rights and David Clark Cause, aiming to improve gender equality during the COVID-19 pandemic, a cause also supported by the likes of Cher, Cyndi Lauper and Naomi Campbell.[134] The digital storytelling surrounding Dion's activism across organisations and sectors tends to be couched within gendered language of maternal care, pointing to her care qualities rather than her diplomatic skills, setting her apart from male celebrities.[135] Indeed, Dion was not given the same platform at the UN during the Canadian SC campaign, nor did she figure as much in Canada's digital diplomatic efforts; rather, her musical creativity was used to treat UN diplomats to an offline concert as a cultural experience. In 2020, the online news site *EURACTIV*, reporting on the SC campaigns, wrote that 'Canada lost out to Ireland and Norway in a hotly contested election that included Ireland enlisting the help of U2 singer Bono and taking UN ambassadors to a U2 concert and Canada taking envoys to a Céline Dion concert'.[136]

The involvement of celebrity sportspeople in the launch of Kenya's campaign was picked up in digital coverage by *CBS Sports*,[137] though, as noted earlier, it did not have the same reception in wider media as the other campaigns.

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131 *Al Jazeera* 2020; *EURACTIV* 2020; Murphy 2020; O'Donovan 2020; *The Economist* 2020a,b.
132 UNESCO n.d.
133 Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN 2010.
134 *Rolling Stone* 2021.
135 UNESCO n.d.; Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN 2010.
136 *EURACTIV* 2020.
137 Falk 2019.

This, we suggest, is illustrative of the global power hierarchies that undergird celebrity diplomacy and UN activism, as well as reporting of it in the media. Indeed, both scholarship on celebrity diplomacy and traditional and digital media tend to pay attention to celebrity-endorsed campaigns and calls for justice initiated in the global South.[138] Yet Kenya's campaign featured a number of different people, from activists, teachers and doctors to writers and business people, all of whom Rojek would define as achieved celebrities.[139] There was a particular prominence given to sports stars, for example former and current world marathon record holders Eliud Kipchoge, Brigid Kosgei and Tegla Loroupe, as well as the rugby player Collins Injera and the Kenyan women's volleyball team. Of these, only Loroupe had experience at the UN, having served as a UN Ambassador of Sport, while Loroupe and Kipchoge were honoured by UN Kenya as UN Person of the Year in 2016 and 2018 respectively.[140] Telling here is that Kenya's SC campaign was launched with an organised run with a group from the UN Permanent Representatives, with former world marathon holder Paul Tergat, his fellow marathoner Loroupe and rugby star Injera taking part in the run. Following Kenya's success in the New York Marathon that weekend, they ran at 6:30 am with the Thursday running group of the UN Permanent Representatives, self-titled the 'PRunners', established as a loose grouping in 2017, with 28 states being represented at one point or another.[141] As Kenya's then Ambassador to the UN Lazarus Amayo put it, '[w]e are launching our bid for one of the ten elected places – the Africa seat – on the U.N. Security Council for 2021-22 on Thursday evening, and our runners are our best Ambassadors'.[142]

Showcasing Kenya's sporting prowess was innovative and enabled the national campaign to tap into an emerging UN tradition while drawing on national sportspeople as celebrity diplomats to target UN delegations. This could be viewed as Kenya's attempt to shape its identity narrative in line with its success in developing globally competitive runners. It also fed into the digital sphere with the established Twitter hashtag #PRunners, which Ambassador Amolo used to tweet about the run, although not linking this to the campaign hashtags. Yet Kenya's use of sport diplomacy to further its campaign was less undergirded by digital activism. Nonetheless, celebrity athletes contributed to increasing the digital footprint of the aforementioned run (Fig. 3).

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138   Richey and Brockington 2020; Richey 2015.
139   Rojek 2001.
140   UNIC Narobi 2016; UNIC Narobi 2018.
141   Falk 2019.
142   Falk 2019.

FIGURE 3   @cinjera tweets about the run at the
UN as part of Kenya's SC campaign[143]

In sum, the distribution and reception of Ireland's identity narrative appeared to be wider than those of Canada and Kenya, particularly given how Ireland effectively integrated celebrity and digital diplomacy in a way that Canada's campaign, although well versed in digital diplomacy, did not. *The Economist*'s online coverage of the SC campaigns entirely missed Kenya's engagement with celebrity sports stars, perhaps because they were most visible at the launch of the campaign, rather than when it reached its crescendo, but also because Kenya did not seem to integrate the digital and celebrity aspects of its campaign and, as such, missed out on the opportunity to shape its identity narrative. While Kenya is well equipped to engage in digital diplomacy and has ambitions to increase its use, its approach was less instrumental.[144] The less visible projection of Kenya's identity narrative might be explained by lack of resources, reducing its ability to engage in more ambitious forms of digital campaigning.[145] The visibility of the campaigns also reflects global power hierarchies, which are likely to have impacted on Kenya's ability to draw attention to its campaign globally, whether online or offline.

143   Injera 2020.
144   Mboya 2021.
145   Kaneva 2016.

7   Conclusion

The 2020 SC election provided a unique case study for analysing the scope of digital diplomacy and the role of celebrity within it, against the backdrop of the global COVID-19 pandemic, necessitating improvisation and a move towards campaigning online. Our analysis therefore contributes to the digital diplomacy literature through a move beyond a focus on the deployment of digital and celebrity diplomacy by states in the global North to show how states such as Kenya are engaging in such strategies, showing innovation, even if in this particular case the celebrity element was more developed than the digital approach. We also show how global power dynamics, the reach and appeal of particular national celebrities, and how they are framed as part of the campaign, for example as partners,[146] shape the projection and reception by media of such strategic narratives. Bono's involvement in the Irish SC campaign was couched within masculinist tropes, pertaining to his statesmanlike qualities, while Celine Dion's involvement in the Canadian campaign was that of an artist alone, despite her holding formal UN appointments. Kenya's employment of sports personalities in its national campaign was less gendered, focusing more on the sporting prowess of its national athletes, which strengthened its identity narrative as a successful nation worthy of a SC seat.

Due to the secrecy surrounding SC elections we can never know if those states who proved more adept at digital celebrity diplomacy were able to garner more votes in the 2020 SC elections. What we can show is that not investing in the digital element of a campaign is a missed opportunity for projecting and shaping identity narratives. Moreover, utilising celebrity star power as an integral part of an SC campaign, and fully integrating this with digital diplomacy, can contribute to the projection of such strategic narratives, particularly through the use of visuals. This is likely to influence the perceptions of those casting a vote at the UN. A successful SC campaign relies on effective and improvised nation branding through the shaping of identity narratives, and the nexus of celebrity – digital diplomacy can be a powerful tool to help achieve this. That being said, global power relations and hierarchies also limit the scope and reach of strategic narratives, however cleverly they are designed, digitally or otherwise.

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146   Richey and Budabin 2021.

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