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DIGITAL DIPLOMACY: INDIA'S INCREASING DIGITAL FOOTPRINTS

Social media has revolutionized the world from the lowest to the highest strata of the society. Diplomacy is one such aspect of the globalized world that social media has transformed. The foreign policy of any state can only be achieved through the practice of diplomacy. When states practice diplomacy with the help of social media to achieve facets of their foreign policy, it is known as Digital diplomacy. This paper tries to examine the use of social media in the domain of diplomacy and trace its roots in history by focusing on how the concept of digital diplomacy has evolved and accustomed to 20th century trends. It also explores the various components of digital diplomacy that are persistent in today's world. Additionally, this paper tries to differentiate between the term(s) cyber diplomacy and digital diplomacy, which are used interchangeably quite often. It also tries to analyse how and why digital diplomacy is an emerging component of foreign policy. This paper also attempts to identify and understand the changes, practices and challenges that conventional diplomacy is experiencing with the changing times and how it is overcoming these problems. This paper also discusses the Indian view point on digital diplomacy, along with the achievements and advancements made by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) over the past few years. It highlights the factors that are responsible for MEA being able to perform extraordinarily well in the online space.

Saurabh Singh

In its broadest sense, diplomacy refers to the conduct of human affairs through peaceful means by employing techniques of persuasion and negotiation.¹ It is the means by which states around the world conduct their affairs in tactical ways to ensure peaceful relations. The most important function of diplomatic services is to safeguard the interests of their respective states in foreign lands. Other forms of diplomacy, such as political, economic, cultural or public relations promote international cooperation, peace, human rights and seek ways to resolve a particular conflict. With the changing world scenario, leaders from different parts of the world are employing as well as developing a new form of diplomacy that they consider as a critical and strategic element in the conduct of contemporary international relations.

With advancements in the practices of states to achieve their interests, new circumstances have arisen in the realm of world affairs - circumstances that demand new methods and priorities. History has witnessed some remarkable changes in diplomatic practices adopted by states to encounter new challenges meet national interests. "Digital diplomacy" is one such tool that is being used by various states across the globe. It can be defined as the use of digital means to promote and support traditional diplomatic practices used by states for its diplomatic services. It is a form of public diplomacy which involves the use of digital technology and social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. in order to communicate and connect with public and with the country's diaspora.

Often, people confuse digital diplomacy with the cyber diplomacy even though both of these are completely different in nature. The latter relates to problems in the cyber world in a diplomatic manner. It addresses issues of cyber security, cyber-crime, or any other threat induced in the cyber world. The former can be defined as the conduct of diplomacy in the digital age, where everything that belongs to the digital sphere is utilized as an instrument of diplomacy. According to Manor and Segev (2015), digital diplomacy refers to the growing use of social media platforms by a country in order to achieve its foreign policy goals and proactively manage its image and reputation.² In their work, the authors describe that digital diplomacy works at two different levels which are interconnected. The two levels are – first, the ministry responsible for foreign or external affairs and the second, the embassies of respective states in foreign lands. With these two bodies functioning together, states can successfully achieve their national interests without coercion, threats or use of force while also promoting a friendly and respectable image to the world.

¹ Lee, Donna & Hocking, B., "Diplomacy", in Bertrand Bardie, Dirk-Berg Schlosser & Leonardo Morlino (eds.), International Encyclopedia of Political Science, Sage, 2011. See, <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/38123/3/IPSA%20Encyp%20Diplomacy%2028%20April.pdf>

² Manor, Ilan & Segev, Elad, "America's Selfie: How the US Portrays itself on its Social Media Accounts," in Corneliu Bjola and Marcus Holmes (eds.), Digital Diplomacy Theory and Practice, Routledge, New York, 2015. Full Text can be accessed at <https://digdipblog.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/americas-selfie.pdf>

Origin and Evolution of Digital Diplomacy

“My God, this is the end of diplomacy!” – these were the exact words of Lord Palmerstone, British Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, on receiving the first telegraph message in the 1850s. It’s a remarkable statement which changed the nature of diplomatic course. He is not with us anymore but diplomacy has survived the phase of innovation in technology. Digital diplomacy as a concept is very new for the globalised diplomatic world. With the changing face of foreign policy and the adoption of transparency in its manner of operations, digital diplomacy has become very useful in this moment. It can be defined as one of the most innovative forms of diplomacy and is quite elegant in its working style. Digital diplomacy can be traced back to the year 1984, when Allen C. Hansen first wrote an analysis on diplomacy in a computerized world. His work “Public Diplomacy in the Computer Age” explores the public diplomacy exerted by the United States Information Agency (UEIA).³ If one closely studies the historical development of technology one can surmise that every major innovation in the field has been a threat to the existence of diplomacy, however, the reality could not be further from such a statement.

The innovation of telegraph was followed by the invention of telephone by famous scientist Alexander Graham Bell in the late nineteenth century. Such an invention completely changed the face of communication. With the invention of telephone, leaders could communicate and discuss matters over a phone call. Telephones also added to the accuracy and speed by delivering the message within a short period of time. With further advancements in science and technology, new inventions kept occurring and the ease of communicating kept becoming more accessible and cheap. After telephone, it was fax which was the most talked-about invention in the world for many years. The world leaders, in addition to easily communicating with each other now also found themselves closer to each other as the geographical constraints that earlier stood as barriers were not a challenge anymore.

With the changing face of technology, the Internet was born in 1983 and the world saw a complete transformation. It can be seen as the biggest revolution of all time. It affected every single dimension of the work-life aspect of this planet, and that included diplomacy. February 5th 1994 was no ordinary day in the world of diplomacy. The first ever official email exchange happened between two heads of state – Carl Bildt, Former Prime Minister of Sweden and Bill Clinton, Former President of the United States of America. This moment can be described by making a small modification to the iconic quote by the first man in space, Neil Armstrong – “That’s one small step for the diplomacy, one giant leap for the diplomats’. Diplomacy has always blended itself with the changing nature of forms of communication. One of the major milestones of digital diplomacy happened in the year 2007 with the Government of Sweden announcing that

³ Smith G, “USIA: Public Diplomacy in the Computer Age: Review”, Foreign Affairs, June 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/capsule-review/1985-06-01/usia-public-diplomacy-computer-age>

soon it will open a Virtual Embassy. The motive behind the opening of a virtual embassy was to host the first diplomatic representation for the online community. The Swedish Government basically wanted to promote Scandinavian culture and history among youth around the world. But somehow, Maldives became the first country in the world to achieve this milestone, before even Sweden could. In May 2007, Maldives officially opened up its very first virtual embassy in Second Life, the online virtual world.⁴

In 2006, four technocrats launched Twitter over the internet and since then, it has become one of the biggest social media platforms used by people all over the world to connect with each other. Diplomacy made its mark on the twitter in March 2008, with the United Nations (UN) sending its first tweet. The United Nations Twitter account has over 10 million followers and is also one of the most interactive twitter handles among various international organizations.⁵ Followed by the UN, the White House made its official twitter account in the spring of 2009 which further opened the doors of digital diplomacy. In the very same year in November, the then Mexican Ambassador to United States (US), Arturo Sarukhan became the first ever foreign ambassador in Washington D.C. to use Twitter in his official capacity. There are many such milestones which have contributed to the spread of Digital Diplomacy, like September 2010, when United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Administrator Helen Clark (former Prime Minister of New Zealand) became the first ever high-ranking UN official to open an account on Twitter. In order to achieve the public diplomacy goal, the Embassy of Israel in 2013 released an official video of President Barak Obama's visit to Israel.

In 2014, Former First Lady Michelle Obama's support for worldwide protest against the missing Nigerian schoolgirls, #BringBackOurGirls, brought the attention of a large number of masses towards the campaign. It is another example of digital diplomacy in order to achieve public support. In the same year, Republic of Estonia, a country in Northern Europe bordering the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Finland became the first country in the world to launch an E-residency programme by issuing a digital identity for non-residents. Till 2017, more than 30,000 people from 139 countries have signed up for this unique programme. With future advancement in technology, United Nations launched UN Virtual Reality Series in 2015. The idea behind this concept is to bring together the burning issues around the world and draw the attention of people towards issues that are neglected by big media houses.

Another great initiative is the Digital Public Square Project launched in the year 2015. It became an online platform for people around the world to participate in debates and discussions while expressing their ideas and views about the issues and problems that plague the world. Another significant milestone in the domain of digital diplomacy is the

⁴ "Maldives Unveils World's First Virtual Embassy", Diplo Foundation, May 22, 2007, <http://archive1.diplomacy.edu/pool/fileInline.php?idpool=463>

⁵ See, Official Twitter account of The United Nations, <https://twitter.com/UN?lang=en>. March 2008.

“World’s first Political Emoji Interview” by Julie Bishop, Foreign Minister of Australia.⁶ In February 2015, BuzzFeed conducted an interview with Julie in which she replied only with the help of ‘emojis’. In 2015, Tech giant Microsoft donated \$1 million towards the construction of a high-tech interactive exhibit at the US Diplomacy Centre (USDC). The plan to create such a state-of-the-art facility centre was to promote the nuances of digital diplomacy. In order to link up public diplomacy with digital diplomacy as a component, the U.K. foreign office opened a snapchat account to keep the public updated with their day to day engagements. It helped them engage with the audience at a formal as well as informal level. Following this, the United Nations made their official Snapchat account. In 2015, UNICEF and Snapchat together launched an initiative for the public to raise awareness for the hundreds of thousands of children that were the victims of militant group Boko Haram in Nigeria.⁷

Even Narendra Modi’s Prime Ministerial campaign in 2014 witnessed integrated and active usage of social media platforms to reach out to the public. He is one of the most active world leaders on social media with the third highest number of followers on Twitter.⁸ He makes sure that he always accessible and engages with people from different strata of Indian society. In 2016, according to the British Daily, The Guardian, WhatsApp is considered the best tool for digital diplomacy.⁹ Journalists have begun calling it the WhatsApp Diplomacy because of how revolutionary WhatsApp is as an innovation and how it is transforming negotiation strategies. It is considered one of the fastest social media platforms in the world.

World leaders and diplomats from across the globe have come to depend on the usage of social media platforms. Twitter is considered a social media channel which is favoured by almost every individual, despite it being a bit formal. Leaders use Twitter to communicate and connect directly with the audience they seek to influence. The face of technology is changing with time and social media platforms are undergoing tremendous makeovers almost every second day. From simple texting to the live streaming of an event – social media has completely transformed communication over the years. With such advancements, digital diplomacy too has moulded itself with the changing times. The objective of digital diplomacy is to engage and influence large masses in a short period of time with minimal cost of engagement. One cannot deny the fact that the traditional forms of diplomacy still govern both domestic and foreign policy engagements; however, there is a remarkable increase in the government utilization of technologies as a new medium of communicating to promote their values and traditions at home as well as abroad.

⁶ “Julie Bishop, Foreign Minister of Australia, Raises Eyebrows With Emojis”, New York Times, October 22, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/23/world/australia/australia-emoji-julie-bishop-diplomacy-vladimir-putin.html>

⁷ “UNICEF And Snapchat Join Together To Protect Children Affected By Boko Haram”, The Huffington Post, April 17, 2015, https://www.huffingtonpost.in/entry/unicef-snapchat-bring-back-childhood_n_7081708

⁸ “PM Modi third most followed leader on Twitter, Sushma Swaraj most followed foreign minister”, First Post, April 28, 2015.

⁹ “The rise and rise of international diplomacy by WhatsApp”, The Guardian, November 4, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/nov/04/why-do-diplomats-use-this-alien-whatsapp-emoji-for-vladimir-putin>

Digital Diplomacy: Emerging Component of Foreign Policy

No individual state can exist on its own. States always need something from each other, and are dependent on each other for food, water, energy, military, resources, and so on. In order to coexist peacefully, states need to lay down certain parameters to engage with each other. These set parameters are known as the foreign policy of a state, and play a critical role in pursuing its national interests. The foreign policy of a state acts as a vital aspect of channelizing its strategies and policies in order to put forward its best possible interest. The term 'foreign policy', according to the research staff of the Brookings Institutions, refers to the multifaceted and dynamic political discourse that a country follows in relation to other nation states. The foreign policy of a nation is more than the sum total of just its foreign policies, and also includes its commitments as well as the current forms of its national interests, objectives and the principles of right conduct that it professes.¹⁰ The foreign policy of a particular state is majorly dependent on its national policy. States are different from one another because of their diversified national interests and national and foreign policies. All these states are part of an international system and follow a certain set of rules to govern themselves. They respect each other's sovereignty and the idea of inter-dependence for growth and development. Foreign policies can be complex and at the same time, very simple, depending upon the nature, behaviour and proximity of the actors engaging in a particular domain of interest. It also depends on internal as well as external factors such as the history and geography of a particular country, their governing system and political structure, their national and military capacity and most importantly, the public belief and opinions in that country. The interdependence and relationship of a country with the international society defines how strong their foreign policy is.

With technology in play, the world is getting revolutionised day by day. Technology is making life easy and has touched almost all spheres of human life. The domains of diplomacy and governance have also been transformed by technology. Foreign policy has given adequate attention to issues like trade, economy, security, welfare of public and diaspora, and a country's position in the international arena, but it's time to give some consideration to its digital component as well. It needs to ponder on the fact that digital diplomacy is challenging the conventional parameters, ideas and practices of traditional diplomacy.

Diplomacy is the method or the channel through which foreign policy achieves its set motifs and goals. It is basically the concept of "what you do?" and "how you do?" States are really good at the 'what' part, but somehow lack the ability to fulfil the 'how'. Pioneer John Hugh Adam Watson, in his remarkable work "Diplomacy: The Dialogue between States," defines diplomacy as 'the negotiation of political entities which

¹⁰ Strauss, William L., Major Problems of United States' Foreign Policy: 1952-1953 (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1953), 373-75.

recognize the interdependence of each other'.¹¹ Considering the phase of century we are living in, it is much easier to connect with the world from the digital sphere than the physical one. The decree of diplomacy is to refine and accomplish an approbatory world view towards a state. Digital Diplomacy is the new way to channelize the arbitrariness of foreign policy.

Diplomacy is all about communication. Jonsson & Hall, in their work "Essence of Diplomacy," have clearly stated that "there has never been a good diplomat who was a bad communicator."¹² Diplomacy is based on the nuances of communicating with each other. A state as well as a diplomat should be able to express their concerns and interests effectively and efficiently without double standards. Internet and Communication Technology (ICTs) is the best means to express an idea or opinion.

Foreign ministries and missions should make sure that young diplomats are driving these social media campaigns and initiatives because they are well-versed in the situation, subject and platform they are handling. There should be proper training and support for these digital campaigns and diplomats should be thorough and equipped with modern day technology and knowledge of current trends in social media to make the best use of it. Language plays a very sensitive and important role in diplomacy, especially in the digital sphere. The apt and correct usage of language is a must for any social media arrangements. The best example of language being essential for diplomats is Sweden's Foreign Minister, Carl Bildt. On 25th January 2012, Carl made a very controversial tweet from his personal twitter handle. He tweeted, "Leaving Stockholm and heading for Davos. Looking forward to World Food Program dinner tonight. Global hunger is an urgent issue! #davos". What Carl didn't realize was that he was making an obnoxious statement when he was looking forward to a lavish dinner to discuss "global hunger," seeing as these two things don't exactly go hand in hand.¹³ At least this incident made us aware that language plays a crucial role in handling social media and one needs to be precise, fastidious and cautious of whatever is going up in the online space, or it might be disastrous.

The foreign policy of a state may not sound strong on paper but it can be effective if derived with passion and enthusiasm, the use of cultured and pertinent language, and with perseverance and practice of years. The ideas and beliefs are still the same; just the methods and channels have changed with time.

¹¹ Watson, John Hugh Adam, *Diplomacy: The Dialogue between States*, (Eyre Methuen Ltd., 1982), http://sipa.jlu.edu.cn/_local/9/3E/82/7BCA988D138310036A6510EB8BD_AC199787_214B5B.pdf

¹² Jonsson, C. and Hall, M., "Essence of Diplomacy," retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Martin_Hall7/publication/268051590_The_Essence_of_Diplomacy/links/54eed210cf2e2830865c0c0/The-Essence-of-Diplomacy.pdf

¹³ "Carl Bildt falls foul of Twitter" *Telegraph*, January 27, 2012, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/twitter/9045636/Carl-Bildt-falls-foul-of-Twitter.html>

The Changing Nature, Practices and Challenges of Conventional Diplomacy

Diplomacy has always been a tricky business. Its complexities, procedures and approaches towards criteria and policymaking make the task all the more challenging. The state of it at present is the same as it was several years back. The one thing that has changed over the years is the medium through which diplomacy is channeled, transformed and communicated to the world.

Governments, especially the heads of states, rely on the experience and knowledge of their foreign ministers and the expertise of their diplomats. Earlier, diplomacy used to be a sensitive subject and confidentiality played a very critical role in its dealings. Foreign policy, therefore, was not entertained in the media sphere. With the advent of technology and its increasing influence on modes of communication, various stakeholders can now be a part and parcel of the decision-making process. It is now possible for the public to influence policies and decisions by giving credible inputs and information to the government which can be beneficial for the country's national interest.

There are various stakeholders in play, especially non-state actors which are now becoming an integral part of the decision-making process. These non-state actors include big media houses, non-governmental organizations, non-profit organizations, think tanks, research institutes, academia and other civil societies. The purpose of these organizations or institutions is to draw the attention of the government towards sensitive issues and issues which are not being addressed properly or being neglected. Media houses and research institutions make sure that they explore areas for research and find out possibilities of cooperation. They also provide valuable data inputs and quality research and analysis to assist in policy-making as well as in planning and monitoring. They also act as watchdogs and bring to light possible unjust or biased approaches towards certain issues, events, groups or policies. These dynamic stakeholders are also a great source of networking and outsourcing and assist in fashioning new platforms for diplomacy, like Track 1.5 diplomacy.¹⁴ They hold formal and informal talks and discussions with people belonging to all spheres of life, from serving diplomats to academicians. Due to such platforms, various ideas and thoughts are exchanged and a number of significant issues are discussed which becomes the basis of policy framework.

Digital Diplomacy is on its way to overcoming the limitations faced by the conventional diplomatic practices. It's quite evident that the conventional means and methods of diplomatic practices have limitations which create hurdles while achieving set goals.

¹⁴ Grant, Richard, "The Democratization of Diplomacy: Negotiating with the Internet," OII Research, Report No.5 (2004), Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, <https://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/archive/downloads/publications/RR5.pdf>

Some features of digital diplomacy which overcome problems of conventional diplomatic practices are –

Cost-per-Engagement – Digital Diplomacy employs minimal cost-per-engagement compared to traditional practices of diplomacy. It uses social media to cut majority of the cost and still deliver the required message to the people. Discussions, conferences, summits and peace talks take place all around the world, throughout the year, which makes it challenging for small and developing countries to send officials and diplomats to attend such large-scale and important events since they lack the financial capacity and have a limited number of means and resources. With technology in the play, leaders and diplomats need not travel everywhere or even be physically present at a particular place. They can attend these events via video conferencing or over Skype. The cost of travelling, accommodation, food and other itineraries can be saved and employed for better usage.

Availability – Digital diplomacy employs the factor of availability - it can reach out to large masses of people in different strata of society in a very short period of time and is accessible at all hours of the day. The conventional diplomatic methods and practices used to be highly classified and not easily available to the general public. Digital diplomacy makes sure that people are a part of the process in which world leaders take part. It ensures accessibility to each and every individual as well as a sense of transparency, which in the long run makes it reliable and trustworthy and more connected to people, like External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj's twitter handle.

Accessibility – Digital diplomacy is making things easy and accessible, with virtual embassies being the talk of the town lately. Embassies are the most vital part of any state in a foreign land. Embassies are the office of a foreign country's ambassador in the host country. They also serve as cultural centres that showcase and promote the values, cultures and traditions of their countries in the host country by organizing events like art exhibitions, guest lectures, workshops, festival celebrations and musical concerts. They are also responsible for engaging with the diaspora and strengthening their ties with the government. Accessing the embassies physically, however, is challenging because of security reasons. Therefore, the concept of a virtual embassy is being propagated more and more. It not only gives access to the embassy virtually but is also interactive and engaging in nature. Maldives and Sweden are two countries that have successfully established their virtual embassies.

New Tool for Nation Branding – In diplomacy, the art of influencing and promoting a country's image in a foreign land is referred to as 'nation branding'. Digital diplomacy is one of the tools that help in achieving the dynamics of nation branding. A similar initiative was taken up by Finland. In order to promote its culture and values and also to engage with the public on a broader level, Finland launched a National Emoji

Application, which is available on Google Play Store and App Store.¹⁵ The idea behind the launch of this application is to engage with the general public using a variety of emojis that represent the rich heritage and royal culture of Finland. This way, people can connect with each other while also learning about the history of Finland. This is not only an interesting way to engage with the public but also promotes Finland Tourism.

Limited Human Resources – Foreign Ministries still have a huge deficit in terms of human resources and lack the required number of diplomats. One reason for this can be a lack of skills and training in aspirants and the unavailability of labour. The inadequate number of staff in various foreign ministries and missions has made the use of ICT technologies a necessary evil in order to keep pace with new and evolving communication technologies. Digital diplomacy comes handy in such situations where limited staff becomes an asset rather than a liability to the organization. Diplomats and foreign missions now use Internet in order to monitor and collect data in addition to other viable resources.

Increasing Influence of Non-State Actors in the Online Space – As the internet is now accessible by everyone, there has been an increase in the online presence of many non-state actors. For example, ISIS is a prominent group that has used social media platforms to its advantage. ISIS has used social media to spread their ideologies and motives in almost every continent. These hostile non-state actors are now using media platforms to spread radicalism, extremism, xenophobia and all sorts of rational differences and false ideologies among various strata of societies. They upload inflammatory videos and messages which provoke people. These propaganda mongers are becoming a new challenge in the online sphere. These hostile groups spread false rumours which incite riots and violent clashes between different classes of society. Foreign ministries should be aware of the false and irrational propaganda which is spreading online and influencing a large number of people. They should employ measures to minimize the spread of these rumours. This stand as one of the biggest challenges in digital diplomacy after cyber threats.

Creativity and Uniqueness: Creativity is the key to survival on social media. The Internet is a huge place where one can easily wither, get lost and never be heard. With advancements in technology and plenty of distractive content on the internet, the average attention span of the human beings has shrunk to just 2-3 minutes. The challenge now lies in utilizing these few minutes to deliver the maximum amount of information without compromising on the essence of it and still be able to hold someone's interest. This means that content has to be extremely creative and attractive. Young officials and diplomats are best qualified to drive such initiatives as they are well-acquainted with recent trends on social media platforms. They also know what holds the attention of the audience and what interests them. Anything which is not creative or unique does not survive on social media platforms. A lot of companies are investing

¹⁵ "Finland Is Launching a Special Set of National Emoji", Times, November 4, 2015, <http://time.com/4100041/finland-national-emoji/>

heavily in advertisements and social media marketing because they want to stand out from their contemporaries. They want to make their mark on the public with their products and services. Ministries too should have a dedicated team of young officials to maneuvers and direct such initiatives through social media campaigns because being creative and unique is the need of the hour.

Components of Digital Diplomacy

Digital Diplomacy is a 20th century concept currently gaining momentum. It is now used by most of the states for nation branding and to reach out to the public domain. As fancy as the concept sounds, the more detailed and precise it is. It can be defined through the framework of 'smart power', a concept developed by the pioneer of International Relations, Joseph Nye. He defines 'smart power' as the "balance of hard and soft power."¹⁶ Digital diplomacy in its truest sense can be understood as the art of soft power in this globalised world, melding the conventional methods of diplomatic practice and the negotiation and capability to bind power that is characterized by innovative and evolving technologies.¹⁷ There are various policy goals or components associated with digital diplomacy. The important ones have been identified in this paper as follows:

Public Diplomacy – To engage with a large audience on an online platform, with the diaspora being the target audience. It is essential to deliver key messages to the public and involve public opinion in policy making as well as decision making processes while achieving national goals and interests.

Consular Services – To directly engage with the citizens at a personal level in a foreign land, along with developing communications channels and strategies. It also helps in developing and promoting a disaster and crisis response system for emergencies.

Planning & Framework – To coordinate with both domestic as well as foreign engagement in a transparent manner, without keeping each other in silos. It is also responsible for designing and implementing policies best suited for the government, along with promoting and propagating cultural values abroad.

Information Sharing – One of the best components of digital diplomacy is the concept of sharing information. States can share information with each other, which can further be utilized as data in future research and development. It can also be utilized in policy framework and planning to help the process of good governance.

Monitoring – To monitor online activities that can be perceived as a threat or used in a harmful manner. It also provides a safe access to information while respecting the right to privacy of an individual in the virtual world.

¹⁶ Nye, J., "On the Rise and Fall of American Soft Power," *New Perspectives Quarterly*, no. 22 (2005): 75–77, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/npqu.2005.22.issue-3>.

¹⁷ Hallams, E., "Digital Diplomacy: The Internet, the Battle for Ideas & US Foreign Policy," *CEU Political Science Journal*, no.5, 538–574.

Resource Sharing – To create an online database for public welfare through which individuals can use data to conduct independent research. It also helps in building expertise in a particular subject along with promoting research and development, as well as in sharing data which can be helpful for social or political campaigns.

Cyber Security – Although cyber diplomacy is a different field dealing with the security aspect of the digital world, it is still considered a component of digital diplomacy. It cannot stand alone, since diplomatic practices in the digital sphere are prone to cyber threats. Hacking, cracking, decrypting messages and monitoring data inflow are all serious cybercrimes which can jeopardize a nation state's security. The organization in charge should perform a risk analysis, on the basis of which they can decide how vulnerable they are to potential cyber threats or attacks. It is necessary to employ and develop cyber security measures in order to prevent cyber chaos.

The Digital Footprint of India's Diplomacy

In recent years, India has pioneered the apt and precise use of technology, especially social media platforms, to engage with the public at a large scale. A study conducted by the Economic Times stated that the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) of India has been ranked among the top 10 foreign ministries in terms of usage of social media to conduct diplomatic practices as well as engage with people.¹⁸ The MEA has around 1.2 million followers on Facebook, whereas on Twitter the combined following of @MEAIndia (Official Spokesperson, Ministry of External Affairs, India) and @IndianDiplomacy (Official Account of India's Public Diplomacy, Ministry of External Affairs) Twitter handles has crossed 2 million. In recent times, the MEA has also made itself available on other popular social media platforms such as Instagram and Google+. According to the report, among all these platforms the MEA has a combined following of more than 4 million and monthly, an average of more than 20 million people engage with the Foreign Ministry in the virtual world.

MEA's digital diplomacy initiative has been really great in shaping up the foreign policy as well as building a strong and efficient network with the people, especially the diaspora. The Indian diaspora is present everywhere in large numbers, and connecting with them is a critical aspect of India's foreign policy. Whatever the policy represents, it is always in direct context of the diaspora. The policy makers and diplomats make it a point to ensure that the Indian Diaspora is a part and parcel of such discussion and debate.

In the digital sphere, the MEA's journey can be traced back to the year 2010, when the first twitter handle for the Ministry was set up under the username @IndianDiplomacy.

¹⁸ "India on top 10 ranking of global digital diplomacy: Diplomacy Live", Economic Times, April 06, 2016, [//economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/51715372.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst](http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/51715372.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst)

The account was basically set up to increase awareness as well as interaction with people regarding affairs of public diplomacy. After its huge success, official twitter account @MEAIndia was created in the year 2011. Both Twitter handles belong to the Ministry of External Affairs but tend to serve differently. @MEAIndia serves as the official Twitter handle of the Spokesperson of Ministry of External Affairs and is responsible for communicating all official announcements and statements issued by the MEA in public interest. These include photos, videos, press releases and graphic image formats (GIFs) of all engagements between the Prime Minister and other head of states, official visits and appearances by the President, Vice President, External Affairs Minister, Minister(s) of State and other senior foreign service officials. As a matter of fact, @MEAIndia is the second most followed foreign ministry handle in the world.¹⁹

The other account, @IndianDiplomacy focuses on completely different subjects and perspectives. It was basically developed for the purpose of nation branding and promoting the cultural narratives of India. It captures the essence of soft diplomacy, with prime focus on Indian culture and tradition, narratives of Indian accomplishments and success stories from around the world, amazing facts and information about India reflecting its rich and glorious history along with official statements, joint statements, appointments of new ambassadors and diplomats.

Along with Twitter, the MEA has left its mark on Facebook as well. The official Facebook page of MEA India was created in 2012. Among the Facebook pages of various foreign ministries in the world, MEA India is the most liked and followed page. The posts on Facebook are the same as Twitter, but much more detailed. With the Facebook's new Live feature, the Ministry now also has the option to broadcast its various events live, creating a whole new experience for its followers.

One of the most fascinating facts about the MEA's digital success story is that it was able to open up Twitter and Facebook accounts for almost all its embassies and missions. More than 170 Indian missions have verified Twitter and Facebook accounts. Even the Regional Passport Offices (RPOs) have made their mark on Twitter and are effectively using the social media platform to address queries and issues related to passport and visa services.

In order to expand its public reach, the MEA also operates two official YouTube channels with the same name as their Twitter account. Day to day conferences, media briefings, press releases, weekly media briefings and videos of miscellaneous events are uploaded on this channel. The MEA also has accounts on Google+ and LinkedIn in order to reach out to the professional strata of the society. These platforms are used mainly to keep the public informed about the plethora of opportunities that the MEA has to offer.

¹⁹ "MEA's Digital Diplomacy Footprint",
http://www.mea.gov.in/Uploads/PublicationDocs/29120_MEAs_Digital_Diplomacy_Footprint.pdf

Some years back, the MEA launched a unique initiative on Twitter, called #AsktheSpokesperson. The initiative serves as a platform to encourage young people to engage with the MEA regarding queries and questions on the Foreign Policy of India. Selected questions are answered live by the spokesperson of the MEA on Twitter. The purpose of such an initiative is to gather attention as well as develop an understanding of issues related to foreign policy by increasing awareness among different strata of society. In a pursuit to keep up with the tech savvy world, the Government of India along with the Ministry of External Affairs launched an android and IOS based application called 'MEA App' in 2013. The motive behind this techno-dexterous ingenuity was to expand their approach and keep in touch with the general public.

The most recent and innovative initiative of the MEA is 'SAMEEP – Students and MEA Engagement Programme'.²⁰ The aim of this initiative is to foster interaction with young bright minds across India. The word 'SAMEEP' in Hindi means closeness and such an initiative will serve to bring the Indian public closer to the foreign policy of India. Under this programme, MEA officials will engage with school students across India and educate them about the foreign policy of India. Diplomats will present their ideas and understanding about India's position in the international arena and also encourage young minds to be interested in a diplomatic career. In recent years, the MEA have been very active in engaging with the public and educating them about issues of foreign policy as well as various career prospects in foreign services.

When it comes to the success of India's foreign ministry, certainly all credit cannot go to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It is equally shared by External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and the hard work and enthusiasm her ministry has shown. She is, without a doubt, one of the most admired ministers in the Modi Cabinet and also the most popular. The manner in which she governs her ministry is remarkable and well-regarded around the world. However, that wasn't always the case. During her first year at the MEA, she was hardly seen or heard and was not as famous as she currently is. Her very first press conference was not a great show, wherein she was bombarded with questions, accusations and allegations against her, causing her to consider resigning as the foreign minister. But Prime Minister Modi saw something in her that others could not.

Gradually, Sushma Swaraj emerged as a new, confident and admired politician. The foreign policy saw a makeover with her involvement. She really got into her role and took her job quite seriously by implementing the three-R strategy of MEA – rescue, relief and rehabilitation. According to her four-year report, the MEA have rescued close to 90,000 Indians from various depressing and difficult situations. Twitter has become the easiest way to connect to her and in a very short period of time, she has garnered a large following. Her tweet replies have often come as huge relief for distressed Indians

²⁰ "MEA launches SAMEEP to take Indian foreign policy to students across the country", DD News, December 21, 2017, <http://ddnews.gov.in/people/mea-launches-sameep-take-indian-foreign-policy-students-across-country>

in foreign lands, who had sent SOS tweets to her. She has clearly accomplished what she wanted to achieve and has been confident enough to foresee what sort of image she wanted to portray.

She became an iconic figure when she called out Amazon Canada on Twitter for selling products with the Indian Flag on them, as it is considered disrespectful. She demanded an immediate exclusion of all such products from the Amazon website and stated that no Amazon official will be granted an Indian visa if her demand was not met at the earliest.²¹ Her tweets became an incredible example of how effective and powerful a tool social media has become. PM Modi's visits to several countries were not successful just because he is a charismatic leader and he can persuade people easily, it was due to the fact that Swaraj herself used to look after the ground work scheduled before the meetings. One such example is the Wuhan Summit. While she was attending the SCO Foreign Minister meet, she was also preparing the ground for Xi Jinping and Modi's meeting. In the past few years, she has completely transformed the nature and scope of foreign policy and the functioning of MEA by giving it a new and strong identity.

The broad objective of MEA is nation branding through India's rich heritage, culture and traditions while also promoting Indian values across the globe. MEA India is persistent in achieving their set goals with modern day tools of connecting and communicating and keeping up with the changing phase of science and technology.

Conclusion

Our usage of social media is increasing day by day and connecting us with the world. It is an approachable and easy to handle new media platform that has become a revolutionary medium for channeling our thoughts and ideas. Digital diplomacy is a groundbreaking renovation in the methods of conventional diplomacy, with twitter poised to become the language of digital diplomacy. The functioning of foreign ministries around the world has completely changed. Now people address their concerns on social media, and ministers and diplomats address them there itself. Social media has also contributed to ease of doing business by allowing businesses to serve people around the world. It has overcome the limitations and conventional methods of traditional diplomacy. One of the best things about the advent of digital diplomacy is that it has completely changed the secrecy associated with traditional diplomacy. It is now all about influencing people and their decisions towards certain issues and policies. It is proven to be the best tool for campaigning and nation branding. Everything new on social media platforms is trending and commands attention. Likes and shares are two essential aspects of the online world. Social media has encouraged leaders and

²¹ "Sushma Swaraj's warning to Amazon over sale of tricolour doormat, Times of India, Jan 12, 2017, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/56488163.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

governments around the world to engage directly with the public everywhere in the world. It has brought forth the best practices and gathered the support of people. Nothing is hidden per se, everything is out in the open and accessible by all. With increasing activities in the virtual world, digital diplomacy has become the best tool to achieve the facets of foreign policies. Digital diplomacy and social media can together contribute in establishing and communicating a country's foreign policy implications to domestic and foreign audiences.

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