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Vol: 03, Issue: 01(2022) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58669/jspga.v03.i01.06>**Digital Diplomacy as New Face of the Diplomatic World: Pakistan's Adaptability Challenge**

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of globalization and new public diplomacy, digital diplomacy contemplates new avenues of international relations and communications. ICTs provide ever-growing opportunities in this regard. Demonstration of digital diplomacy is overriding the traditional diplomatic practices. Internet and social media are particularly important for realizing the advantages of digital diplomacy. The application of these tools for diplomacy requires technological as well as diplomatic competence. This paper underlines the dynamics of digital diplomacy as new tool for the conduct of foreign policy. Further, the paper explains Pakistan's politico-diplomatic imperatives of adopting digital diplomacy and the challenges that the country faces in this regard.

Keywords: Digital diplomacy, globalization, international relations, advantages, challenges

Introduction

Digital diplomacy is a new and groundbreaking way of building international relations. Diplomacy is a state's foreign policy tool to pursue national interest and harmonious relations vis-à-vis other states through negotiations. As technology has revolutionized all aspects of human life, it has also diversified the ways and meanings of diplomacy. Diplomacy is considered an elucidation of relationships with other countries. Digital Diplomacy is known in this era as a "mystery and magic" towards reigning foreign policy (Barston, 2014). The information and communication technologies (ICTs), particularly Internet, provide innovative ways to stir up international relations with no physical boundaries.

Historically, diplomacy has been transforming in terms of scope, practice and tools. At the beginning of the 20th century, it was mostly in the form of government-government direct communication. However, the widespread use and popularity of radio along with the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and Hitler-led Nazi's rise to power in 1933 altered the dynamics of diplomacy. Both Bolsheviks and Nazis made use of radio to speak directly to the populations of neighbouring countries. This was the beginning of public diplomacy. Public diplomacy led to the designation of Cultural Attache in embassies and creation of media channels by major powers like Voice of America and BBC World Service.

This research paper's main purpose is to emphasize the importance of digital diplomacy for Pakistan. Digital diplomacy through social media platforms can potentially help Pakistan in projecting its foreign policy perspectives to domestic and foreign audiences. This paper discusses how Pakistan can make best use of new media landscape for its public diplomacy urging that digital diplomacy should be

employed as an essential instrument to promote and project foreign policy interests.

Research Objectives

This paper seeks following objectives:

- To underline the factors of digital diplomacy regarding its practice in today's world.
- To identify the characteristics and associated advantages and disadvantages of digital diplomacy.
- To highlight the imperatives of digital diplomacy for Pakistan.

Research Questions

- Why is digital diplomacy gaining prominence in today's world?
- How digital diplomacy is being practiced by states?
- How can Pakistan benefit from the practice of digital diplomacy?

Key Argument

Digital diplomacy that entails transformation of public diplomacy from physical to digital domain, is increasingly gaining prominence. It involves soft and smart power elements and tends to be an imperative for building strong narratives and conducting effective international relations. Pakistan needs to develop expertise and infrastructures to undertake digital diplomacy effectively.

Methodological Framework

Based on interpretive paradigm, this study follows qualitative research approach that employs inductive reasoning to build a general argument in favour of digital diplomacy. Data has been collected from books, research articles and internet sources. Documentary analysis has been used as data analysis method.

Theoretical framework of 'change management' authored by Corneliu Bjola provides the conceptual orientation of this study. Bjola makes academic sense of

'digital diplomacy' as a mean for 'change management' in international politics (Bjola, 2015, P. 5). He argues that social media affects diplomacy in two ways—policy innovation and institutional adaptation. Policy innovation involves diplomatic functions related to representation, communication and relationship management. Institutional adaptation involves the ways and degree by which foreign offices adapt to the age of social media. These two interrelated concepts help understand the relationship between diplomacy and technology and then the understanding of digital diplomacy as means of change management in international politics in the context of globalized digital world.

What is Digital Diplomacy?

Digital diplomacy is the increasing application of ICTs and social media spaces by a country to pursue its foreign policy objectives and practice public diplomacy. Digital diplomacy has variously been referred to as e-diplomacy, cyber diplomacy, net diplomacy, #diplomacy, 21st century statecraft etc. Each term shares a common perspective: the use of ICTs, such as the internet, to achieve diplomatic objectives.

Digital diplomacy aims to influence the public attitudes regarding the formation and execution of foreign policies of a state. It is associated with the sociological dimensions of international relations. Beyond the conventional diplomacy, digital diplomacy refers to governments' efforts to influence public opinion in foreign countries; the interaction among private groups and interests across countries; the reporting of foreign affairs' reporting and its relevance to policy; communication between diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the activity of inter-cultural communications (Golan, 2015). It is a cost-free way of communicating with the foreign public. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram etc., are our favourite social media tools. Since every country is facing many issues regarding global diplomacy, public diplomacy, however, is a subtle solution (Cull, 2009).

Digital diplomacy tends to empower both bilateral and multilateral relations among countries. It is a platform where a diplomat can directly relate to one or more countries with the help of social media tools. Diplomats with proper planning and strategic approach can achieve various objectives for the betterment or growth of countries within a short time. Digital diplomacy is a time and cost-effective approach for diplomats to speak, engage and influence the audience directly and to rectify their own memoranda in international relations. However, proper check and balance is required to justify such an open narrative in public (Melissen, 2005).

The objectives of Digital Diplomacy

Digital technology affects diplomacy from three angles:

- As an instrument for diplomacy and foreign policy
- As a subject for diplomacy and foreign policy
- As a phenomenon that defines the diplomatic

environment

The remodeling of digital diplomacy has the motif of engaging in international relations by using digital tools. The main objectives of digital diplomacy are as under:

- **Knowledge management:** The efficient conglomeration of knowledge and dissemination of the required information/narrative among different states.
- **Public diplomacy:** To have interaction with people worldwide as they relocate online using new digital instruments to reach out significant crowds with key messages and to impress important online influencers.
- **Information management:** To collect, store and analyze data and utilize this for improved policy making and better response to new social and political developments.
- **Supervisory of Foreign communications and its correspondence:** To build a connection with the people living/travelling abroad and help them communicate during the cataclysm's time.
- **Catastrophic response:** To utilize disaster control strategies with the help of new technologies to control or manage unpredictable disastrous trauma.
- **Internet freedom:** To provide internet for free. People can use it the stronger the regime of their country.
- **External resources:** Developing digital contraption to raffle on and inculcate globalized expertise to attain national objectives.
- **Foreign Policy Planning:** Digital diplomacy helps the state to develop strong and effective foreign policies. It helps the departments to evaluate those factors that can help in vigorous planning and stupendous implementation of strategies in international relations (Rana, 2011).

Advantages of Digital Diplomacy

The topographical remoteness between MFAs and embassies is not important in building the required and smooth international relations. The ICT tools like websites, blogs, and social media have got more attraction to politicians and ambassadors to develop the desired narrative structure with other country audiences. States at long-distances easily and effectively reach out to audiences when such advanced ways are adopted to gain political, socio-cultural and economic goals (Snow & Taylor, 2009).

- Blogs about different states, politicians, Foreign Offices, corporate players, ambassadors, scientists etc., serve the purpose of projection, debate and information dissemination.
- Social media is an instant source of conveying message to large audiences. However, this needs both diplomatic and technological skills and

competence to be effective.

- Digital media gives access to large audiences to information and debates formerly difficult to know or speak about on part of masses. Same factor exposes common people to information propoganda and warfare and hence false narratives.

Fast and Effective Communications

Every country is in needs to be in a strong position in terms of proliferation of information in the context of its national interest. Niccòlo Machiavelli classifies politics as an Art (Machiavelli, 2003). Machiavelli was an old-age diplomat and politician who faced failure in attaining the targeted goals. He introduced many sumptuous strategic policies but all went in vain. The rationale for his failure was that in the sixteenth century, a political strategy lacked a merging solution as it was not influencing others and could not pave the way for communication. Machiavelli was unable to understand the reason for his failure. He did not know about the magic of Facebook, Twitter and other ICT apps to communicate the narrative with the general public (Sandre, 2015).

Digital technologies are immensely useful for the congregation and rectifying information, including diplomatic events and fast communication in urgent situations. These technologies enable the states of thinking about the repercussions of events that happen in different parts of the world and their impacts on their country. For example, in times of natural disasters, relevant ministries make WhatsApp groups of ambassadors, government officials and citizens to connect and share all the available information for further necessary actions. Such groups serve as source of ideas and suggestions for crisis management and enable real-time information collection for decision-making and publicizing information. Whereas people working under autocratic mechanisms lemmatize their communication ability nationally and internationally. Digital technologies provide solutions for this type of constraints, empowering the free articulation of criticism on certain issues. This helps minimizing authoritarianism (Mc Glinchey, 2017). Media coverage becomes expeditious through gadgets, smart phones, social networks and new ICT tools. For instance, Arab Spring uprisings of 2011 saw a massive transformation of information across the globe. Social media helps in rebooting events promoting tourism in countries. Further, social media has now become an important source for promoting and controlling soft power. In sum, it has made societies more techno-diplomatic and accountable too.

Low Financial Cost

Technological advancements are decreasing the cost of new ICT tools and making them easily available for governments and the public. International practices show that fair use of digital diplomacy tools accompanies great remunerations to those who invest in it. Moreover,

Digital diplomacy itself is not in dire need of heavy financial investments. In fact, it is most of the time aimed at reducing costs. For example, single Twitter post sometimes helps to identify a social issue and leads to solution through public, media and politico-diplomatic espousal to attain a positive change in the society. This factor makes digital diplomacy more appealing to governments; MFAs and embassies are now expanding their work and lowering their financial cost through digital rather than physical outreach.

Challenges of Digital Diplomacy

Openness and the Internet and Social Media

Globalization has opened up the gates of information connections, particularly about benchmarks elsewhere and comparing corresponding policies and practical actions. However, new communication has left sound negative ramifications for international relations. Terrorist and jingoism groups also activate and motivate adherents (Kinsman & Bassuener, 2010). The internet has also been a platform to proliferate extremism, terrorism and the obtruding of foreign ideologies. Social networks have become mouthpieces for various extremist organizations to spread their norms, values and objectives, and whatever they are (Kalathil, 2013). From August 2015 till December 2017, Twitter had to close 1.2 million accounts of terrorists as they were prevailing and poisoning the mind of the public with racism and extremism. Twitter, Facebook and YouTube are facing criticism and pressures from many governments, as they lack effective policies to stop terrorist propoganda because these platforms merely depend on followers and rating.



Lack of Training/Information about the Use of Internet and Social Media

In reality, the internet does not hold any secrecy policy. Social media has revolutionized people's thinking and has introduced many diversified communication methods. A single word on tweet or a Facebook comment or a video/image can create a delusion between negative and positive narratives. The absence of adequate knowledge about using new technology, social media platforms and ICT tools can bring severe consequences

and backlash; even it can change the fortune of any politician by its dismissal. Ministries must properly train diplomats in this regard. They must know how to use digital communication tools wisely without committing any mistakes. Diplomatic missions of developed countries and their foreign ministries permanently train staff for specialization in managing OSINT database systems and highly confidential cloud computing files (Ruffini, 2017). This fast-spreading essential digital diplomacy needs users who are fully trained and professional. They must opt for new technologies at a much-awaited fast pace. They should be holding maximum updated knowledge of this new technology as the nature of tech-global is quite aberrant.

The Culture of Inconspicuousness

Another provocation of digital diplomacy is the environment of anonymity because anyone can profess a fake identity and spoil the image of other persons. The culture of anonymity is more obvious in the opportunities for false publications. A reader can easily be misguided through information propaganda without knowing the truth behind it. Such type of extensive misleading information on the internet can hamper the potential of leaders to control consequential crises. Social media are criticized for not having fixed the ambivalence of the source of various posts. Facebook has faced worse criticism of its 14-year historical Metaverse Ambiance this year. Cambridge Analytical Data Scandal has opened its secluded approach to dealing with users' data.

Cyber Security

The burgeoning iniquitousness of the digital world has created the trepidation of future attacks on sensitive institutions and has turned much cyber elation into cyber sceptics. Hacking is a menace that has emerged with the coinage of the internet. With no excuse, it has shown multiple risks of digital diplomacy. Many countries, governments, politicians and diplomats tend to become the blind victim of it. This is imperiling their future. Diplomatic antagonists make utmost efforts to grasp other rival countries' confidential information and use it according to their desires and propaganda. ICT era makes very difficult the secrecy of information; however, the skill of using these ICT tools can save diplomats from big disasters. Nowadays, it is a piece of cake for private information to become a public discussion. It has a sagacious approach to shattering the image of leaders and states in international relations and affairs (Westcott, 2008).

Cyber security has now taken the top position in UN, NATO, ITU, OECD, OSCE, Commonwealth, G7 and G20 and many other countries' foreign policy agendas. Many countries are opting for necessary national cyber security maneuvering and required policies. The challenges are rising daily as black-hat hackers openly and successfully exploit cybernetic vulnerabilities. Secret and treacherous criminals often target the financial and

defense systems of states. Things get more cumbersome; most of the frameworks, ICT tools, apps and internet companies provide services but lack in the reliability of cyber security.

Importance of Digital Diplomacy for Pakistan

Pakistan must utilize this new media environment for its public diplomacy and adopt digital diplomacy as a larger aspect of the core part of foreign policy goals and decisions. Pakistan is in the process of centralizing social media policy to realize the benefits of digital diplomacy platforms.

- Today, communication through new media are gaining importance for governmental and non-governmental organizations, corporate sectors and trade unions.
- Competition landscape for countries and institutions has shifted from the national to the international level.
- With digitalization, Pakistan has to evolve traditional media to modernize tools to build the positive public narrative to get real-time audience feedback on their agenda. Social media makes it easy to engage the public and observe their behaviours.
- People spend significant time on these social networking websites without realizing the purpose of their social media use; however, their presence on social networks can matter a lot for Pakistan's economic and cultural potential.
- They can advertise their beautiful culture to promote business. Different tourists' websites can motivate them to come and explore Pakistan.
- Women of Pakistan are no less than any woman on earth. They are showing wonders in every field of life. Women are taking charge of E-Business through social media platforms successfully. So, if Pakistan makes digital diplomacy a part of its foreign policy, it can surely show Pakistan's real potential to the world.

Pakistan's Digital Diplomacy Landscape

The evolution of digital diplomacy in Pakistan is quite slow. Pakistan is transforming its economy and social sectors towards digitalization. We live in the 4th industrial revolution era that is merely reined by ICT and technologies. ICT has changed the whole world domain. We are living in a time of Robotics and Artificial Intelligence. Countries advancing in technologies have an explicit edge in terms of national development and growth. Countries like China, Japan, Korea etc., are heading towards innovative inventions. These countries are expeditiously transforming their economies, social sectors and international relations into digitalization.

Pakistan is still standing among agricultural countries. The world is making robotics and manufacturing units, and Pakistan is still busy cultivating crops with old

traditional methods. We cannot compete with technologically advanced countries. However, we are undertaking certain efforts in this regard. Pakistan is counted among the states trying to enter the digitalized world. Unfortunately, Pakistan does not have well defined tenets and standard policy guidelines for digitalization and cybersecurity. Pakistan's Foreign Policy has gone through traumatic scenarios in post-9/11 period.

Pakistan's digital diplomacy is not up to the mark, especially when compared with many other countries. The speedy spread of Internet in Pakistan has raised questions about its use. The public plenipotentiary is perplexed about the broadcasting of news on Social Media. News media has become the constitutive way of communication for states, governments, and cooperative and non-cooperate sectors. Competition between two countries has been shifted from borders to Social Media Screens. Traditional communication has now evolved into digitalization, where states can get concertgoers' interpretations on their docket. Social media has accompanied the state to engross the public and behold their demeanour.

In 2017, Twiplomacy engaged more than 90 per cent of global leaders. This shows the emerging importance and impact of digital diplomacy on contemporary international relations. Pakistan needs to learn this new diplomatic tendency and take measures for adaptability. However, Pakistan's transition to digital diplomacy is not an easy task. The country still sticks to traditional practices of diplomacy and international relations. Therefore, first hurdle in this direction is the will for adaptability to the digital front. Secondly, Pakistan lacks in cyber security and, therefore, risks adverse implications for national interest and national security while practicing digital diplomacy.

Pakistan has faced derision at the start of digital diplomacy evolution. Planned campaigns have been premeditated in the virtual space to build negative narratives about certain countries. This denunciation has caused damage for Chinese Belt and Road Initiative including China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Social media platforms and websites were deluged with treachery and assuaged demography. Pakistan has a long list of such digital propaganda. These challenges are not difficult to overcome. Only a dedicated, consistent and institutional approach is required on part of all stakeholders in the country. Meanwhile, no one can deny the importance of digital diplomacy in upholding effective international relations in this digital world.

Digital Diplomacy for Pakistan

Pakistan should head towards formulating a comprehensive policy framework for digital diplomacy. There is a famous saying that goes "change or perish." Therefore, a strong digital policy for Pakistan is the need of hour. In this regard, policymakers should concentrate on the following:

- Mass Communication Experts

- Software Engineers
- Hardcore Diplomats

Given that states worldwide experience a shift towards digitalization, digital diplomacy is a compulsion for Pakistan, particularly because the country faces fifth generation hybrid warfare and needs to build effective narratives.

Conclusion

To sum up, demonstration of diplomacy has thrashed the old-traditional diplomatic practices. The benefits of digital diplomacy are purely dependent on the use of Internet and Social Media. The era of globalization is permeated with the high escalation of social, economic, political and cultural interplay beyond parochial boundaries. In the fourth Industrial Revolution era, international politics has mingled with various international performers, including states, ethnocentric elements, transnational corporations, geopolitical organizations, bureaucratic organizations, and numerous social movements. We are taking different leaps in this regard. Pakistan is counted among the states trying to enter the digitalized world. Pakistan faces challenges in this regard because it lacks a comprehensive policy framework for using social media platforms. Pakistan's digital diplomacy footprint remains poor in comparison with many other countries. As the news media becomes the constitutive way of communication for states, governments and corporate sectors, competition among countries and corporations has shifted to social media forums. Government should organize policies to use as well as protect the data. Pakistan's government should head towards the making of policy regarding digital diplomacy. Pakistan's preparedness in digital diplomacy is a matter of compulsion rather than choice given its needs to build effective narratives in pursuit of its political and economic interests.

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