

DIGITAL DIPLOMACY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS IN THE 21st CENTURY

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The rise of digital diplomacy in the past decade cannot be separated from the technological context in which it has developed. Three features of the process of digital transformation stand out, among others, for understanding the evolution of digital diplomacy and the challenges it continues to face under the influence of the changing technological landscape. Speed is the first one and refers to the fast rate at which new digital technologies enter the market and the swiftness by which they are adopted by individuals, companies and institutions.

In modern diplomacy the art of shaping and promoting a country's image abroad is often referred to as nation branding. And digital tools have proven themselves a powerful medium for nation branding. One interesting example is Finland's national emoji application now available on the App Store. The application enables users to use a variety of emoji's, or images that are representative of Finland's culture and history. Through this project, which attracted mass media attention, Finland was able to brand itself as a vibrant, technologically oriented and humoristic nation challenging the common perception of Finland as a dark and desolate country.

Digital diplomacy as a "strategy of managing change through digital tools and virtual collaborations", adding an emphasis to the inherent collaborative nature of diplomacy both online and off line, which the digital does not affect in any way. One of the salient tasks of diplomacy is the gathering of information and reporting, by lawful means, on conditions and developments within the host country for the sending government as well as the promotion of friendly relations between the two states. Information may be gathered from an array of sources and the use of experience and expert knowledge is essential in identifying, analyzing and interpreting emerging key issues and their implications for peace and progress as well as for the security and other benefits for the sending state. In order to provide both information and policy advice to their governments, foreign ministries have relied on the expertise of their staff, their network of diplomatic missions, the confidentiality of diplomatic communication, and their access to foreign decision-makers. Governments in turn have come to rely on their foreign ministries for both providing their national viewfinder for events in the world and for conducting foreign policy in a way that best advances the national interest.

The digitalization of diplomacy has deeply affected diplomacy with its four different dimensions. These dimensions can be specified as the institutional structure of diplomacy, diplomacy executives, those affected by diplomacy and the method of execution of diplomacy. First of all, the digitalization of diplomacy leads to the change and transformation of diplomatic norms and customs. For example although the US President Trump's Twitter diplomacy has been criticized

for not being suitable for diplomatic practices, it is also a harbinger that the diplomatic institutional structure will change with the digital age. In addition, digital diplomacy provides both challenges and opportunities for diplomacy leaders. Although reaching large audiences and communicating with them provides advantages for diplomacy executives, the lack of return of a mistake makes it difficult for them. In addition, the distinction between those who are affected by diplomacy and those who carry out diplomacy becomes blurred with digitalization. Finally, important changes are taking place in the method of execution of diplomacy. Nowadays, with the effect of the pandemic, the density of online conversations has increased and digital technologies have started to be used more frequently in diplomacy.

World leaders and diplomats use social media, and Twitter in particular, to speak and engage directly to the audience they seek to influence. Also, diplomatic activities are increasingly supported by Internet tools. The Internet can be considered by governments as a unique diplomatic instrument; through its proper use they can “advertise” not only their positions on different issues, but also promote their ideas worldwide. Such a function, if used in the right way, helps the embassy, and as a result the state that it represents, to create a positive image in the host state”. Diplomats rely on the Internet to find information, communicate with colleagues via e-mail, and negotiate draft texts in electronic format; diplomats are also increasingly using new social networking platforms such as blogs and Facebook. Social media have added an important real-time dimension to diplomacy, making communication ultra-fast and, by necessity, often less precise.

Digital diplomacy, which occurs with the use of internet, communication and information technologies, has many benefits, as well as some risks. The benefits and risks of digital diplomacy are briefly as follows: First of all, thanks to digital diplomacy, states have the opportunity to address a wider network in international politics. By using digital diplomacy, states find the opportunity to influence many actors such as international institutions and individuals, non-governmental organizations, ethnic groups, supranational movements and even individuals. In this sense, it is possible to have the opportunity to conduct public diplomacy with large audiences without space limitations through websites, blogs and social media. In addition, the fact that digital diplomacy is very effective and fast and becomes profitable if a certain infrastructure is provided financially constitute another advantage of digital diplomacy. Moreover, digital diplomacy can be seen as an important tool for states other than the great powers to express themselves. On the other hand, it should be underlined that digital diplomacy has some risks and dangers. Above all, digital diplomacy can also become an important weapon for radical organizations, terrorists and foreign ideologies. In this sense, states must have a certain power in digital diplomacy, just like other power types. In addition, cyber attacks constitute one of the biggest weaknesses of digital diplomacy.

Thus, diplomacy has always had to adapt and change to the particular communication forms of its environment. In a world where everyone is increasingly connected, the ability to gather and share information to wide audiences at unprecedented rates has created new opportunities for policy leaders and government departments to share messages and set political agendas beyond traditional channels. While conventional forms of diplomacy still dominate both the domestic and foreign policy landscape, an increasing number of governments are utilizing technology as a new tool for communication, information gathering, and the promotion of values both at home and abroad. Digital diplomacy is precisely designed to promptly provide adequate information, refute incorrect information, and confirm information from official sources.

Today, digital diplomacy is a foreign policy essential. The world is such that state and non-state entities all compete for influence and power in the same online space. That space now hosts more than 3 billion people, most of whom only access the internet through their mobile phone. When used properly, digital diplomacy is a persuasive and timely supplement to traditional diplomacy that can help a country advance its foreign policy goals, extend international reach, and influence people who will never set foot in any of the world's embassies.

The advantage of social media provides the opportunity to reach citizens of other countries in near real-time. Social media platforms also provide spaces for interaction, increased engagement, and thus furthering the goals of diplomacy. The potential ease with which social media can be accessed and the low cost in comparison to other methods make it an attractive tool for many embassies, as well as other government offices, that are facing budget cuts and demands to increase engagement. Numerous platforms allow for the use of more dynamic content, such as videos, photos, and links, than traditional methods of giving lectures or passing out pamphlets. In addition, social media are key channels in reaching youth populations, a major goal of current public diplomacy efforts.

Digital technologies can be particularly useful in public diplomacy in the field of information collection and processing, in the field of consular activities, and for communications during emergencies and disasters. International practice shows that competent use of digital diplomacy tools can bring big dividends to those who invest in it. Moreover, digital diplomacy does not always require financial investments. On the contrary, it is often aimed at reducing costs. Much of the work of foreign ministries around the world continues to be managed through the normal processes of diplomacy: instructions to embassies in foreign countries; meetings and negotiations which are not in the public focus; collecting, reporting, and disseminating relevant information; patient and slow building of constituencies of interest; and the resolution of many technical issues through intergovernmental procedures, such as international conferences, international and regional organizations, or technical working groups. Thus, digital diplomacy will not replace classical diplomacy, but, if handled with skill, this tool can strengthen the work of the state in international relations and foreign policy in a faster and more cost effective way.