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Foreign policy in an era of digital diplomacy

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Abstract: The Internet revolution has affected all aspects of life, including International relations. Diplomacy as a tool of foreign policy has also being transformed by this revolution. This paper examines the concept of digital diplomacy, focusing on the use of digital media in the field of diplomacy and how countries are utilizing these tools in the pursuit of their foreign policies. It examines the opportunities and challenges these media offer for diplomatic activities, and argues that countries cannot afford to be left behind in this era of digital diplomacy as they can greatly benefit from these emerging diplomatic trends. Digital diplomacy and Internet activities as a whole can greatly assist in projecting a state's foreign policy positions to domestic and foreign audiences.

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1. Introduction

Crabb (1972, p. 1) stated that "reduced to its fundamental ingredients, foreign policy consists of two elements: national *objectives* to be achieved and the *means* for achieving them. The interaction between national goals and the resources for attaining them is the perennial subject of statecraft. In its ingredients, the foreign policy of all nations, great and small, is the same." Thus, one of the

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Digital diplomacy is usually conceptualized as a form of public diplomacy. It involves the use of digital technologies and social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Weibo by states to enter into communication with foreign publics usually in a non-costly manner. This paper examines the concept of digital diplomacy, focusing on the use of digital media in the field of diplomacy and how countries are utilizing these tools in the pursuit of their foreign policies. It examines the opportunities and challenges these media offer for diplomatic activities, and argues that countries cannot afford to be left behind in this era of digital diplomacy as they can greatly benefit from these emerging diplomatic trends. Digital diplomacy does not actually replace the traditional face-to-face diplomacy. Traditional and digital diplomacy co-exist and complement, rather than compete with, each other. Digital diplomacy and Internet activities as a whole can greatly assist in projecting a state's foreign policy positions to domestic and foreign audiences.

elements of foreign policy is the means of achieving a country's foreign policy objectives, and one of the major instruments of foreign policy is diplomacy.

One major factor that has affected diplomacy in this modern age is the revolution in information and communication technologies (ICTs). ICTs have revolutionized the way people communicate and exchange information, changing political, social and economic landscapes across the globe. As noted by Faye (2000), ICTs are offering even less developed countries a window of opportunities to leapfrog the industrialization stage and transform their economics into high value-added information economies that can compete with the advanced economics on the global market. Technological innovation has contributed to globalization by supplying infrastructure for trans-world connections and countries of the world cannot afford to miss out on the opportunities these technologies are creating.

The Internet, especially, which has been defined as "a means of communication that enables the publication, exchange and storage of information" (Westcott, 2008, p. 3), has become central to public and private communication while contemporary tools, including social media, have brought millions into open conversation spaces. With more than 2 billion people using Facebook, Twitter, Qzone, Snapchat and other social media platforms daily, digital connectivity has made the world smaller and, in the process, changed the daily lives of billions of people. Now unmediated dialogue and information exchange between people from around the world is occurring 24 h a day, all through the year. The social media provide enormous opportunities and challenges for states and international organizations as they seek to engage with new policy spaces developing around the Internet.

Essentially, this revolution in ICTs has also resulted in fundamental changes in the conduct of diplomacy globally. In countries like Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen, the social media has become a platform to distribute uncensored public information among users. The social media aided Arab Spring activists in breaking down "the psychological barrier of fear by helping many to connect and share information"—and, in some cases, in helping to organise physical protests (Kassim, 2012).

Although, the traditional mode of conducting diplomacy, that is, interactions between representatives of sovereign states remains crucial, in today's interconnected world, individuals and organizations—not just countries—play a larger role in international affairs. This has given rise to what is referred to as digital diplomacy. However, as noted by Bjola (2015, p. 4), despite the promises that digital diplomacy offers for the conduct of international relations, little is known, from an analytical perspective, how digital diplomacy works, with what degree of success and what its limitations are. This paper explores the concept of digital diplomacy, focusing on the use of digital media in the field of diplomacy and how countries are utilizing these tools in the furtherance of their foreign policies. It examines the opportunities and challenges these media offer for diplomatic activities and how the digital media affects core diplomatic functions of representation, communication and relationship management.

2. What is digital diplomacy?

Diplomacy is the "engine room" of international relations (Cohen, 1998, p. 1). It is the established method by which states articulate their foreign policy objectives and co-ordinate their efforts to influence the decisions and behaviour of foreign governments and peoples through dialogue, negotiations and other such measures, short of war and violence. It is, in other words, the centuries-long means by which states seek to secure particular or wider interests, including the reduction of

frictions between or among themselves. It is the core instrument through which the goals, strategies and broad tactics of foreign policy are implemented. It strives to preserve peace and aims at developing goodwill towards foreign states and peoples with a view to ensuring their cooperation or, failing that, their neutrality.

As a recent development, digital diplomacy has been interpreted, defined and understood in different yet similar ways by researchers and practitioners alike (Sotiriu, 2015). Hence, there is no widely accepted definition or framework that covers the concept. It may, thus, be safe to assume that current studies have only begun to scratch the surface of what digital diplomacy means and how it works. This explains the absence in the current literature of a reliable conceptual framework for assessing the effectiveness of social media for public diplomatic purposes (Bjola & Jiang, 2015).

According to Manor and Segev (2015), digital diplomacy refers mainly 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. They noted that digital diplomacy exists at two levels: that of the foreign ministry and that of embassies located around the world. By operating on these two levels, nations can tailor foreign-policy and nation-branding messages to the unique characteristics of local audiences with regard to history, culture, values and traditions, thereby facilitating the acceptance of their foreign policy and the image they aim to promote.

Lewis (2014) defines digital diplomacy as the use of digital tools of communication (social media) by diplomats to communicate with each other and with the general public. To Potter (2002), digital diplomacy mainly refers to the diplomatic practices through digital and networked technologies, including the Internet, mobile devices, and social media channels. Hanson (2012) defines it simply as the use of the internet and new Information Communications Technologies to help carry out diplomatic objectives. He outlines eight policy goals for digital diplomacy:

(1) Knowledge management: To harness departmental and whole of government knowledge, so that it is retained, shared and its use optimized in pursuit of national interests abroad.

(2) Public diplomacy: To maintain contact with audiences as they migrate online and to harness new communications tools to listen to and target important audiences with key messages and to influence major online influencers.

(3) Information management: To help aggregate the overwhelming flow of information and to use this to better inform policy-making and to help anticipate and respond to emerging social and political movements.

(4) Consular communications and response: To create direct, personal communications channels with citizens travelling overseas, with manageable communications in crisis situations.

(5) Disaster response: To harness the power of connective technologies in disaster response situations.

(6) Internet freedom: Creation of technologies to keep the internet free and open. This has the related objectives of promoting freedom of speech and democracy as well as undermining authoritarian regimes.

(7) External resources: Creating digital mechanisms to draw on and harness external expertise to advance national goals.

(8) Policy planning: To allow for effective oversight, coordination and planning of international policy across government, in response to the internationalisation of the bureaucracy.

The United Kingdom's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) elaborates its definition of digital diplomacy on its website thus:

> What is digital diplomacy? Digital diplomacy is solving foreign policy problems using the internet. It is conventional diplomacy through a different medium. Through the web we can listen, publish, engage and evaluate in new and interesting ways. Crucially, we can also widen our reach and communicate directly with civil society as well as governments and influential individuals … Why are we doing it? Because we have to … Those whose ideals and objectives we oppose are active and highly effective at using the web. If we don't take up the digital debate, we lose our argument by default. Many of our partners, particularly those outside government, have an established digital presence, engaged audiences and expertise in achieving goals online. If we don't work with them, we're missing a huge opportunity. Our shift from one—way web publishing into active digital diplomacy reflects the changing way we all use the web—as a multi—way social medium as well as a source of information. We lose credibility and cannot claim to be an open organization if we don't take part.

Holmes (2015, p. 15) defines 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 (Grant, 2004).

Negotiation is also a key component of diplomacy. Diplomats are constantly negotiating something (both bilaterally and internationally) on a growing number of subjects: from the laws of the sea to immigration, from scientific and cultural cooperation to trade, tourism and technology transfers, from the environment to food security, from security to police cooperation, from medicine security to improved health services, from research to academic cooperation, from poverty to economic development, from children to women rights, and so on (Ritto, 2014). Often many of these negotiations take place simultaneously making it difficult for countries to send people to follow them. This is particularly true for small countries, which have limited means especially in terms of human resources and cannot pay for all the travelling costs associated with them. The internet, through Skype and the system of video-conferences, allows countries to overcome these problems and to follow far way conferences and seminars from capitals, making it possible also for the officials of those countries to intervene in them and to make their opinions known.

Digital diplomacy evolved from public diplomacy, a form of the diplomatic practice, which has been defined as an "instrument used by states to understand cultures, attitudes, and behaviour; build and manage relationships; and influence thoughts and mobilize actions to advance their interests and values" (Melissen, 2013, p. 436). Sotiriu (2015, p. 36) argues that, "bringing the public at large into the diplomatic equation has also increased the number of stakeholders participating in international diplomacy, from state-to-state interactions, to international organizations and international non-governmental organizations. More recently, this has included the everyday people, which diplomats in most cases have relied on for their reinforcing, or diverging, views on a number of issues". Essentially, a number of relationships between the government and other parts of society are affected by the way information of interest to foreign ministries is managed, analyzed, and broadcast. The relationships can be categorized as follows:

(1) citizens and the media;
(2) citizens and the Government;
(3) the Government and the media;
(4) the Government and non-state actors;
(5) the civil service adviser and the minister; and
(6) the Government-to-Government relationship (i.e. the formal channels of intergovernmental diplomacy) (Grants, 2004, p. 15).

Digital diplomacy has been used interchangeably with other terms—as digital diplomacy (Bjola, 2015), e-diplomacy (Hocking, Melissen, Riordan, & Sharp, 2012), cyber-diplomacy (Barston, 2014), diplomacy 2.0 (Harris, 2013), or twiplomacy (Sandre, 2012). The State Department of the United States calls it *21st Century Statecraft*; the UK Foreign Office calls it *Digital Diplomacy*; while the Canadians refer to it as *Open Policy*. Ben Scott, Innovation Advisor to former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, outlines three components of digital diplomacy:

(1) Public diplomacy, including the use of online platforms.
(2) Building expertise in technology policy and understanding the way the internet impacts international developments such as political movements.
(3) Impact on development policy and how ICT can be used more effectively to promote economic growth around the world (Funnell, 2014).

This study adopts Hanson (2012) definition of digital diplomacy as the use of the internet and new Information Communications Technologies to help carry out diplomatic objectives, including its related goals. Digital diplomacy is seen as an important tool in furthering a nation's foreign policy as it enables direct interaction and engagement with foreign publics.

Ross (2011) argues that the proliferation of communications and information technology was not only transforming the means of social protest, but that it also pointed towards an emerging revolution in diplomacy:

> Traditionally, diplomatic engagement consisted largely of government-to-government interactions. In some instances, it was from government to people, such as with international broadcasting in the twentieth century. With the advent of social media and the rapid increase in mobile [technology] penetration, however, this engagement now increasingly takes place from people to government and from people to people. This direct link from citizens to government allows diplomats to convene and connect with non-traditional audiences, and in turn allows citizens to influence their governments in ways that were not possible ten years ago.

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. Christodoulides (2005) noted that "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.

However, while some diplomats embrace change as an opportunity to reform their profession, to others it represents a challenge to established conventions and may simply be "dangerous" to proven and accepted forms of conducting international relations—or to their own self-interest.

The impact of the Internet and the rise of social media platforms, particularly Twitter and Facebook, are generating a wealth of reactions (Hocking & Melissen, 2015).

3. Theoretical framework

This paper examines digital diplomacy through the perspective of soft power, which Joseph Nye defined to mean the ability to set the agenda in world politics through persuasion, enticing and attracting others through the force of one's beliefs, values and ideas, and not through military or economic coercion (Nye, 1990, p. 176). Nye differentiates between two types of power: hard and soft power. Hard power is "the ability to get others to act in ways that are contrary to their initial preferences and strategies" (Nye, 2011, p. 11). This is the ability to coerce, through threats and inducements ("sticks" and "carrots"). On the contrary, soft power is the ability to get "others to want the outcomes that you want" (Nye, 2004, p. 5), and more particularly "the ability to achieve goals through attraction rather than coercion" (ibid, p. x). Finally, Nye introduces smart power as the "balance of hard and soft power" (Nye, 2005). He argues that soft power is as important as hard power, and even more so in international politics. Indeed, soft power enables a change of behaviour in others, without competition or conflict, by using persuasion and attraction. Essentially, as argued by Hallams (2010, p. 541), "the art of soft power in the twenty-first century is fusing the traditional tools of diplomacy and negotiation and the ability to harness the power and potential inherent in the new and emerging technologies that globalization has wrought".

4. Evolution of digital diplomacy

On receiving the first telegraph message in the 1860s, Lord Palmerston, British Foreign Secretary was noted to have exclaimed, "My God, this is the end of diplomacy." Interestingly, diplomacy has survived the telegraph as well as subsequent technological innovations, such as the radio, telephone, television, and faxes. Every new major technological device has prompted reactions similar to that of Lord Palmerston. An astute analyst of diplomatic practice, Harold Nicolson, writing in the 1960s, also lamented the impact of the telephone as "a dangerous little instrument through which to convey information or to transmit instructions" (Hocking & Melissen, 2015).

Ritto (2014) described the transition in technical innovation. According to him, after the telegraph, the telephone, which was introduced in the later part of the nineteenth century, helped to further improve communications between countries and diplomatic envoys, thus adding to the speed and precision of communications. Then the fax system followed, especially after 1980. Fax, which means facsimile and can also be called telecopying or telefax, is the telephonic transmission of scanned printed materials (both text and images), normally to a telephone number connected to a printer. The receiving fax machine interprets the tones and reconstructs the original image by printing it on a paper copy. He noted extensively the importance of the fax system:

> The fax system was, before the internet arrived, a revolution in itself. The fact that it allowed for the transmission of documents and images from one part of the world to the other in a question of minutes, helped greatly to strengthen communication in the diplomatic world. For example, it become possible for a French Ambassador in Tokyo to sign a Treaty with the Japanese authorities and for the French Foreign Minister to receive a copy of it by telefax in Paris less than ten minutes later! Originals of important documents (briefs, minutes of meetings, legislation, speeches, official notes, treaties, protocols, verbal notes, press releases, cabinet memos, letters, reports of all sorts …) started to circulate by fax everywhere in diplomatic missions. Foreign Ministries in capitals made sure, using the fax, that Embassies in the five corners of the world received regularly (daily in many cases) updated information about the activities of the Ministries and the main decisions of the government. Indeed, the fax allowed Ambassadors to be informed promptly about any issue of importance for their work and to know the point of view of their governments on all issues of importance for their countries. Consular services also availed themselves of the fax system to receive copies of important documents from their capitals (birth and marriage certificates, passports and visas …), thus allowing those diplomatic missions to provide a faster and more reliable service to their citizens abroad.

The Internet has become a greater revolution. Friedman (2005) argues that the Internet has played a crucial role in leveling the playing field across the globe, enabling anyone, anywhere, to have access to the same information, to connect to and do business direct with each other. This enables an ever more efficient international division of labour to take account of the comparative advantage of different markets. This makes the world, in his term, increasingly flat. According to Abbasov (2007, p. 7), "it was a gradual shift from telegrams to mobile phones and more recently to Skype, postal letters to e-mails, short messages (SMS) to twitter posts, hard-copy invitations to Facebook events, TV announcements to Youtube channels, costly meetings to web-conferences and even from physical embassies to net-based virtual missions". The Internet is edging out newspapers, TV, radio, and conventional telephones as the primary communications medium. Current applications, featuring an emphasis on file sharing, social networking, interactivity, and downloadable audio and visual "podcasts," in contrast to the simple presentation of information, promise to accelerate this trend to warp speed. Also, according to Grant (2004, p. 6),

> The Internet has its effects in foreign policy as it does in every other area of government policy. The technology now controls the way in which information flows around the globe. This has enabled the "news", which is the base material of foreign policy and the way governments interact with each other, to become faster, more readily available, and able to reach almost every part of the world. The interactions of governments, which are the purpose of diplomacy, are being affected by these developments in significant ways. The prospect for even faster, and potentially more far-reaching, changes in the future will require foreign ministries to be nimble and informed in their responses.

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 (Bradshaw, 2015). Digital diplomacy is precisely designed to promptly provide adequate information, refute incorrect information, and confirm information from official sources.

5. Digital diplomacy around the world

Many countries around the world are seizing the moment and actively pursuing their foreign policy objectives and possibilities for positive outlook through the creation of websites, blogs and the use of social media platforms—Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, You Tube, Weibo, Flickr, Google+ and so on. Schwarzenbach (2015) noted that:

> The biggest change Twitter has brought to foreign policy has been greater access to unfiltered information and worldwide engagement regardless of nationality or political status. Additionally, the increasing number of cellphone users in the developing world further democratizes information-sharing. As a result, citizens and civil society are becoming increasingly able to hold governments accountable for policies and for statements made by politicians.

The United States Department of State has been described as the vanguard of digital diplomacy, which it refers to as *21st Century Statecraft*, using new technology to engage a growing, changing set of stakeholders across the globe. According to the U.S. State Department,

> The twenty-first century statecraft agenda addresses new forces propelling change in international relations that are pervasive, disruptive and difficult to predict. The distinctive features of twenty-first century statecraft point the way toward deeper changes that will gradually permeate all of foreign policy: expanding its scope, substituting new tools, and changing its values. We are adapting our statecraft by reshaping our development and

> diplomatic agendas to meet old challenges in new ways and by deploying one of America's great assets—innovation. This is twenty-first century statecraft—complementing traditional foreign policy tools with newly innovated and adapted instruments of statecraft that fully leverage the technologies of our interconnected world. (U.S. Department of State, 2014)

Thus, the first foreign ministry to establish a dedicated ediplomacy unit was the US State Department, which created the Taskforce on eDiplomacy in 2002. This Taskforce has since been renamed the Office of eDiplomacy, which has more than 150 full-time social media employees working across 25 different offices, about half of which are dedicated to ediplomacy-related work. The Office of eDiplomacy was established to overcome knowledge barriers contributing to the 11 September 2001 attacks and to improve the ability of the State Department to communicate and share knowledge. The State Department also has an internal version of Wikipedia called Diplopedia, which has more than 14,000 entries. To encourage internal networking, there is also an equivalent of Facebook called Corridor, which has over 6,500 members. The State Department also uses a form of crowdsourcing to come up with solutions to problems. For instance, it went online to ask its employees for cost-cutting ideas. A diplomat in China, who suspected that electricity was being stolen from the US embassy compound by nearby residents tapping into a wire, proposed setting up a meter to chart its usage. It not only showed that neighbours were stealing electricity, but that the energy company was overcharging. The discovery saved tens of thousands of dollars (Hanson, 2012). Thus, after 9/11 US foreign policy became more proactive and penetrating as a result of consistent digital diplomacy agenda.

Other foreign ministries have also begun to embrace ediplomacy. The UK FCO have an Office of Digital Diplomacy that is involved in a range of ediplomacy activities. Sweden has also been active in the promotion of digital diplomacy, especially through the online communication strategy of its foreign minister Carl Bildt who soon became "best connected Twitter leader". According to Lowy Interpreter (2015), France indicated in 2008 that its soft power relied on digital technologies, while Polish and Japanese foreign affairs departments employ an extensive collection of social media networks. Furthermore, Germany turned to ICT platforms to crowd-source opinion and new ideas from the public that fed into its 2014 foreign policy review. Israel has matched its aggressive traditional diplomacy with one of the most active digital diplomacy units in the world, which has worked hard to influence the outcomes of US-Iran nuclear talks.

Russia is also not left out in the usage of digital diplomacy. In 2011, Russia overtook Germany as Europe's largest internet market with over 54 million monthly users and is rapidly growing. Russia is one of the very few countries where the local search engine (Yandex) and social network (VK) beat foreign rivals in free unhindered competition (Yakovenko, 2012). According to Ambassador Alexander Yakovenko, Russia joined the club of "twiplomacy great powers" relatively recently, and in the London ranking of followers its Embassy is third after US and Israel who have invested heavily in this instrument of foreign policy over longer period of time. To describe the new phenomenon, the Russian Foreign Ministry came up with its own term—"innovative diplomacy"— which it interprets as a "tool of Russian foreign policy to exert influence on public opinion through the use of ICT" (Chernenko, 2013). At a meeting of ambassadors and permanent representatives in June 2012, Russian President Vladimir Putin designated digital diplomacy among the most effective foreign policy tools. The President urged the diplomats to more intensively use new technologies across multiple platforms, including in the social media, to explain the positions of the state (Permyakova, 2012).

In 2014, Canada's former Foreign Minister, John Baird, made some efforts in getting Canadian policy leaders and practitioners online. In a speech to the Global Commission on Internet Governance in November 2014, Baird noted that since January of that year, over 290 new social media accounts had been created for missions abroad and departmental initiatives, bringing Canada's digital footprint to over 100 missions around the world (Bradshaw, 2015).

A large number of embassies now have interactive websites, Facebook accounts and a growing number of ambassadors have an active Twitter presence; though, some social media accounts are doing better than others. A number of embassies have piloted small exercises. For example, Australia's High Commission in PNG attempted live topical Q&A sessions. Hashtags like #NewColomboPlan and #innovationXchange are used by the generic @dfat Twitter account to promote initiatives and link stakeholders. Recently, a blog was launched authored by Australia's Ambassador in Germany (in German). Leveraging off the success of "The Embassy" TV show, online forums were hosted on the Smartraveller Facebook page (there is also a Smartraveller mobile app) (Lowy Interpreter, 2015).

A Twiplomacy study, which is an annual global survey of the presence and activity of heads of state and government, foreign ministers and their institutions on Twitter, conducted by Burson-Marsteller, a global public relations firm and released in April 2015 analyzed 669 government accounts in 166 countries and revealed that 86% of all 193 United Nations (UN) governments have a presence on Twitter, while only 27 countries, mainly in Africa and Asia-Pacific, do not have any Twitter presence. According to the report, "Twiplomacy 2015 revealed once again that social media is an essential communication tool for governments and that Twitter has become the channel of choice for digital diplomacy. In fact, even real world differences are playing out on Twitter and sometimes end up in hashtag wars between embassies and foreign ministries" (Alexandru, 2015). The UK Prime Minister @Number10gov is the most followed EU leader with more than three million followers ahead of Italy's @MatteoRenzi with 1.7 million followers.

According to the comprehensive Twitter list on @Twiplomacy, more than 4,100 embassies and ambassadors are now active on Twitter and the list is growing daily. In London, New York and Washington, DC, foreign diplomatic missions can no longer ignore the diplomatic activity in the Twittersphere. Even the Chinese missions to the EU, Switzerland and Japan are now actively tweeting. The UK Foreign Office actively encourages personal engagement of its ambassadors on Twitter and it has become virtually impossible to become a Foreign Office diplomat if you are not using digital tools. The UK @ForeignOffice has probably the largest "twiplomatic" network and maintains a public Twitter list with a record 237 ambassadors, embassies and missions on Twitter. Canada's is second with 184 missions and heads of missions on Twitter, followed by the Russian Foreign Ministry (160), the Polish Foreign Ministry (157) and Israel (146). The State Department and the Foreign Ministries of France, the EU, Sweden and Ukraine each list more than 100 diplomats and missions on Twitter.

In Asia, India appears to lead the way in digital. It continues to invest heavily in building up its online reach despite resource constraints. Indian diplomacy officially went digital when the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) posted its first tweet in 2010. Initiated and led by Ambassador Navdeep Suri, then joint secretary and head of the newly-created public diplomacy division, the MEA quickly became a digital leader within the Indian government. It used Twitter to best effect to help facilitate the successful evacuation of more than 18,000 Indian citizens from Libya during the civil war in 2011 (Lewis, 2014). Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently called on his ambassadors to "shed old mindsets" and "remain ahead of the curve on digital diplomacy". Despite a small foreign ministry and competing development priorities, India is experimenting with different ways to reach and engage local and overseas audiences through mobile apps, live streaming video and a highly responsive social media presence (Cave, 2015).

In Africa, despite the apparent embrace of the new technologies by a large number of Africans, digital diplomacy is not yet catching on. According to an International Telecommunications Union (ITU) Report in 2013, Africa was the fastest growing region in terms of mobile broadband including 93 million subscriptions, 11% penetration and an 82% cumulative annual growth rate (CAGR) between 2010 and 2013. Although, nowadays, more and more African foreign ministries (MFAs) are embracing the internet and social media and using them as tools for the achievement of foreign policy goals, the percentage of African countries maximizing the potentials of digital diplomacy is

negligible. Many African leaders do not have Facebook or Twitter accounts. According to the 2015 Twiplomacy study, Rwanda's @PaulKagame is Africa's most followed president with 842,260 followers ahead of Kenya's Uhuru Kenyatta @UKenyatta (781,929 followers) and South Africa's presidential administration (@PresidencyZA (388,418 followers).

6. Benefits of digital diplomacy

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 (Lowy Interpreter, 2015).

As noted by Fisher (2013), 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. The human factor—the desire of employees to grow, master new technologies, spend part of their work time on working with the target Internet audience, processing electronic data, and creating information and reference materials—is very important (Permyakova, 2012). And as noted by Grant (2004), 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.

7. Risks of digital diplomacy

This is not to suggest that digital diplomacy is immune from criticism. Criticisms of the use of social media in politics have included ineffectiveness and danger. According to Richard Solomon (2000), President of the United States Institute of Peace and a former US Foreign Service officer:

> Information about breaking international crises that once took hours or days for government officials and media to disseminate is now being relayed real-time to the world not only via radio and television, but over the Internet as well. Ironically though, for policy-makers, instant dissemination of information about events both far and near is proving to be as much a bane as a bounty.

In other words, digital diplomacy has its risks, which include information leakage, hacking, and anonymity of Internet users. A good example of information leakage is the Wikileaks episode. According to Manor (2015a), "on the 28th of November 2010, pandemonium spread among foreign ministries

throughout the world as WikiLeaks began publishing some 250,000 diplomatic cables sent between US missions around the world and the State Department in Washington. These cables included frank assessments by US diplomats of world leaders, governments and their host countries."

Hacking is another risk, which has existed since the advent of the Internet. A recent example is the case of a hacking attack on the personal website of Yuli Edelstein, Israeli Minister for Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Affairs. Commenting on this, the Minister said that nothing could stop him from performing public diplomacy on behalf of the State of Israel. He intends to continue to defend the interests of the state on all fronts, including in the Internet (Permyakova, 2012). Additionally, diplomatic rivals, including both state and non-state actors (such as terrorist organizations), may try to hack into government systems and extract information of use to themselves (Westcott, 2008).

Another challenge of digital diplomacy is the internet's "culture of anonymity"—anyone can adopt any persona, address or even attack anyone (Yakovenko, 2012). Anyone can mimic and pretend to be someone else, or actively seek to cause mischief. Interestingly also, sometimes, even digital diplomacy advocates and practitioners also commit blunders in their uses. For example, according to Permyakova (2012), on the eve of the 2012 World Economic Forum in Davos, the Swedish foreign minister, Carl Bildt, posted a very politically incorrect tweet, which caused a lot of criticism from its microblog subscribers: He tweeted "Leaving Stockholm and heading for Davos. Looking forward to World Food Program dinner tonight. Global hunger is an urgent issue! #davos". Tweeter users immediately condemned the minister and called his tweet a #fail. You would agree that hunger and a sumptuous dinner do not sit happily side by side.

8. Conclusion

The Internet (especially the social media) no doubt has transformed the international community today. It has become an unquestionable channel for diplomatic communication and has altered the practice of diplomacy. Ross (2011, p. 452) describes twenty-first Century Statecraft or digital diplomacy as an "agenda" that "complements traditional foreign policy tools with newly innovated and adapted instruments that fully leverage the networks, technologies, and demographics of our networked world". Nowadays, foreign ministries (MFAs) and embassies are part of a myriad of online social networks in which information is disseminated, gathered and analyzed (Manor, 2015b). The use of social media by diplomats has opened communication between policymakers and citizens. These tools, especially Facebook and Twitter, provide diplomatic missions with direct access to citizens, both inside and outside of their countries. This communication often bypasses state and media filters, potentially enabling countries to more effectively influence foreign audiences and achieve diplomatic objectives.

Essentially, digital diplomacy has brought about a transformation of the conduct of traditional diplomacy. It defines changes both in structures and processes of ministries of foreign affairs (MFAs). ICTs revolution resulted in the control of the way information flows everywhere, making the dissemination of information fast and wide, enabling people to make their own judgments, express their concerns and feelings, and even influence policymakers. Consequently, the way governments interact is faster and reaches more in almost every part of the world.

Thus, digital diplomacy brings with it both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, the social media, especially, is providing countries with more information to solve social problems. For instance, people in conflict areas use social media to garner support, organize protests, communicate, and inform the world of events in their countries especially where their media is often subjected to blackouts and censorship. On the other hand, however, a number of risks are associated with the use and reliance on the social media as a tool of diplomacy. Nonetheless, the opportunities appear to overshadow the challenges. Thus, countries, especially African countries, slow in embracing digital diplomacy cannot afford to be left behind in this tide of digital diplomacy as they can greatly benefit from these emerging diplomatic trends. Digital diplomacy and Internet activities as a whole can greatly assist in projecting a state's foreign policy positions to domestic and foreign audiences.

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