

# DIGITAL DIPLOMACY AS A TOOL TO STUDY INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: AN APPRAISAL

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**Abstract:** Digital diplomacy is a rapidly evolving concept that has the potential to revolutionize the way international relations are studied. Digital diplomacy refers to the use of digital technologies, such as social media platforms, blogs, podcasts, and other digital tools, to support diplomatic objectives and practices. In recent years, social media platforms, blogs, podcasts, and other digital tools have become an essential part of diplomatic practice, enabling diplomats to communicate directly with foreign audiences, engage in public diplomacy, and promote their country's interests online in the context of international relations. It involves the strategic use of these digital platforms to engage with foreign audiences, promote a country's interests, and influence public opinion in other countries. Digital diplomacy can be used for a range of diplomatic activities, including public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, economic diplomacy, and political diplomacy. It also raises questions about the role of digital technologies in shaping international relations, such as the potential of digital platforms to facilitate conflict resolution, promote human rights, and foster international cooperation. This paper provides insights on different usages of digital diplomacy and assesses its potential to enhance people's understanding of international relations. It argues that digital diplomacy offers a unique opportunity to study the dynamics of diplomatic communication, the role of social media in shaping public opinion, and the impact of new technologies on diplomatic practice. This paper also highlights some of the opportunities and challenges of digital diplomacy. Overall, this work concludes that digital diplomacy is a promising tool for studying international relations and that scholars should pay close attention to its development and evolution in the years to come.

**Keywords:** International relations, diplomacy, online social media, digital platforms.

## INTRODUCTION

Digital diplomacy is a relatively new term created by the need to explain and analyse the effects of ICTs, especially the Internet and social media, on the conduct of foreign policy and diplomacy (Gilboa, 2016). Orhan (2023) defines digital diplomacy as the use of the Internet and new information communication technologies in diplomatic activities. Manca & Ranieri (2019) define digital diplomacy as "the practice of leveraging digital communication tools and online platforms to support diplomatic activities, foster dialogue, and promote a nation's interests in the global arena". Digital diplomacy is defined as the use of digital tools to manage international relations and influence public perception (Bjola & Holmes, 2015). It includes various forms such as e-Diplomacy, cyber diplomacy, and public diplomacy 2.0, all aimed at achieving foreign policy goals (Holmes, 2015). The primary functions of digital diplomacy are public relations and communication, allowing states to advance their foreign policy objectives effectively. It particularly benefits smaller states by providing them with platforms to amplify their voices on the global stage (Gabor, 2020).

In the book *Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*, Bjola, C. and Holmes, M., (2015) define digital diplomacy as the strategic use of digital technologies, including social media,

to manage international relations, shape public opinion, and project a nation's image and values. Similarly, Bjola (2018) describes it as the use of digital tools and channels to achieve diplomatic objectives such as facilitating communication, promoting dialogue, and conducting public diplomacy. According to Sharp and Salt (2019), digital diplomacy refers to "the application of digital technologies, including social media platforms, to conduct diplomatic activities, engage with foreign audiences, and enhance the practice of diplomacy in the digital age." Another definition was provided by DiploFoundation, an organization that focuses on the nexus between digital technology and diplomacy, according to which digital diplomacy "describes new methods and modes of conducting diplomacy with the help of the internet and ICTs, and describes their impact on contemporary diplomatic practices". Scholars have been using the terms "cyber-diplomacy," "net-diplomacy," "e-diplomacy," and "Twiplomacy" interchangeably (Lichtenstein, 2010).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the world shifted rapidly to virtual mode and it could be seen that many diplomatic events and summits also shifted to virtual platforms. These digital diplomatic gatherings provided opportunities for global leaders to engage in discussions, negotiate agreements, and address pressing international issues remotely (Bjola & Holmes, 2015). Some of the contexts where diplomatic entities have increasingly utilized social media platforms to engage with different audiences and promote their countries' interests in recent years are as follows:

- During the Syrian Civil War, governments used social media to spread propaganda and to try to win support for their side;
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, governments used social media to communicate with citizens about the virus and to provide information about public health measures;
- During the Arab Spring, governments used social media to communicate with protesters and to try to influence the course of events;
- The U.S. Department of State's use of Twitter during the Iranian Green Movement in 2009 allowed diplomats to communicate directly with Iranians and express support for their democratic aspirations (Seib, 2012);
- Digital diplomacy has proven valuable in disaster and crisis management. During the COVID-19 pandemic, diplomats used digital platforms to share timely information, provide consular assistance, and coordinate international efforts to combat the virus. Online platforms also enabled diplomatic entities to engage in rapid response and provide updates during natural disasters and humanitarian crises.

These examples highlight the diverse applications of digital diplomacy in recent years, including social media engagement, virtual diplomacy, crisis management, public engagement, and capacity building. As digital technologies continue to develop, digital diplomacy is playing an even more important role in international relations. It deals with the use of digital technologies by governments and diplomats for engagement at various levels, namely at the level of different states and organizations, and even institutions such as religion (Lövhelm, Jansson et al., 2013, p. 26; Lundby, 2009, p. 1). It has transformed the way that diplomacy is being conducted in the 21st century by lowering the barriers for states and other actors

with regard to their participation in international relations. In the past, diplomacy was largely conducted through formal channels, such as embassies and diplomatic notes. But now digital diplomacy has enabled a more informal and interactive style of diplomatic discourse. Diplomats and governments can use social media to engage with foreign audiences, build relationships with other governments, and shape public opinion. According to Kurbalija, J (2015), "Social media has become a crucial component of digital diplomacy, allowing diplomats to interact directly with citizens and build relationships with key influencers." By analysing various data sources such as social media, official statements, and news articles, diplomats can uncover patterns and correlations that provide valuable insights into public opinion, policy preferences, and emerging global trends (Reshetnikova, 2023). For example, governments can use social media to connect with foreign publics and stakeholders and to share information about their country's policies and priorities. It has now become very common for embassies and consulates to have interactive online websites, and for state departments to have Facebook and Twitter accounts. Digital diplomacy comprises all that is connected by the Internet (Miller, 2011, p.1; Choucri, 2012, p. 7). For example, the United States Department of State uses Twitter to communicate directly with foreign publics on a wide range of issues. It uses social media to engage with foreign publics and build relationships with key stakeholders. As another example, the Department of State has Twitter accounts in over 30 languages. China uses digital diplomacy to promote its own narrative about global affairs and to counter negative perceptions related to it. For example, China has invested heavily in developing its own social media platforms, such as WeChat and Weibo. The Chinese government uses WeChat to promote its foreign policy agenda to Chinese citizens living abroad. The Indian government uses social media to engage with diaspora communities and attract foreign investment. The European Union uses digital diplomacy to promote its values and interests on the global stage. The United Nations uses digital diplomacy to raise awareness of global issues and mobilize support for its programs.

Studies have found that mobile users usually spend at least 3.1 hours per week on social networking sites, feeling the need to stay updated on the latest news (Sandre, 2013). Therefore, these platforms can be used to analyse and identify everyday sentiments (positive or negative, or neutral) through machine learning as numerous posts, feedback, and reviews are posted by tens of millions of human beings on social media networks, formal websites, news websites, boards, personal blogs etc. The potential reviews cover a wide range of topics including international relations, consumer sentiment, movies, business and government intelligence, politics, etc. which can be analysed through sentiment analysis and which can be an important part of shaping digital diplomacy. Governments are now using advanced algorithms and analytics tools to process large amounts of data, such as social media posts and news articles, in order to gain insights into public opinion and sentiments. This analysis can be used to identify the discursive patterns in digital diplomacy, and to understand how these patterns are used to legitimize or challenge different perspectives on global issues.

It can also be used to find manipulative language in digital diplomacy and to understand how this language can be used to influence public opinion and policy decisions. It is used to analyse the communication strategies of different states in the digital public sphere and to understand how these strategies are used to promote or challenge different norms and

ideas. Sentiment analysis can also be employed to map and analyse the networks of actors engaged in digital diplomacy, and to understand how these networks are used for shaping public opinion and influencing policy decisions. It can be used to identify and analyse the key influencers in the digital diplomacy landscape, and to understand how their positions within these networks can amplify or diminish their influence. According to Pang, Lee & Vaithyanathan (2002), Sentiment Analysis is a topic-oriented polarity of public opinions and product-related summarizations.

The Digital Diplomacy Index (DDI) 2023 ranking (Table 1) shows the United States as the world's most proficient country in digital diplomacy, followed by Russia, India, Indonesia and France. The top 19 countries in the index are all considered to be major powers in international relations.

**Table 1.** Digital Diplomacy Index (DDI) 2023, Ranking (Reputation Squad, 2023)  
(source: Reputation Squad. (2023) *Digital Diplomacy Index*. <https://digital-diplomacy-index.com/index/>“(Accessed 30th May 2025”))

Rank	Country	Digital Diplomacy Index
1	United States	8.61
2	Russia	8.37
3	India	8.21
4	Indonesia	7.87
5	France	7.66
6	Mexico	7.44
7	Saudi Arabia	7.42
8	Turkey	7.35
9	Canada	7.3
10	United Kingdom	7.23
11	China	7.06
12	Brazil	7.04
13	Japan	6.66
14	Australia	6.52
15	Italy	6.38
16	Argentina	5.77
17	Germany	5.34
18	South Africa	5.24
19	South Korea	4.21

The DDI shows that digital diplomacy is becoming increasingly important for countries of all sizes. The index includes countries from all regions of the world. The components of digital diplomacy are Diplomatic Network Reach, Diplomatic Weight, Vocality, Message Efficiency, Global Country Visibility, Format Proficiency, Momentum, Diplomatic Centrality, and Language Diversity.

The Diplomatic network reach indicator (Table 2) is based on the total followers of the diplomatic accounts of each country and it shows an interesting trend whereby India ranks first with the leader follower.

**Table 2.** Diplomatic Network Reach (Reputation Squad, 2023)

(source: Reputation Squad. (2023) *Digital Diplomacy Index*. <https://digital-diplomacy-index.com/index/>“(Accessed 30th May 2025”))

Rank	Country	Followers which are Leaders	Foreign Ministry Followers	Embassy Followers	Diplomatic Network Reach
1	India	90.9 M	4.30 M	927 K	10
2	United States	32 M	6.40 M	3.38 M	9.55
3	Turkey	24.9 M	4.13 M	47.3 K	9.35
4	Indonesia	19.9 M	371 K	48.8 K	9.16
5	Saudi Arabia	10.1 M	4.30 M	471 K	8.99
6	Mexico	10.1 M	4.07 M	169 K	8.96
7	Brazil	11.5 M	1.28 M	42.7 K	8.9
8	France	9.46 M	2.26 M	661 K	8.88
9	Canada	6.48 M	589 K	440 K	8.61
10	United Kingdom	4.72 M	365 K	737 K	8.47
11	Japan	724 K	3.32 M	184 K	8.3
12	Russia	0	2.16 M	951 K	8.13
13	South Africa	2.68 M	107 K	0	8.07
14	Argentina	2.31 M	336 K	33 K	8.05
15	Italy	1.19 M	1.08 M	203 K	8.01
16	South Korea	2.17 M	238 K	0	7.99
17	Germany	0	1.63 M	382 K	7.9
18	Australia	622 K	183 K	196 K	7.52
19	China	0	0	530 K	7.17

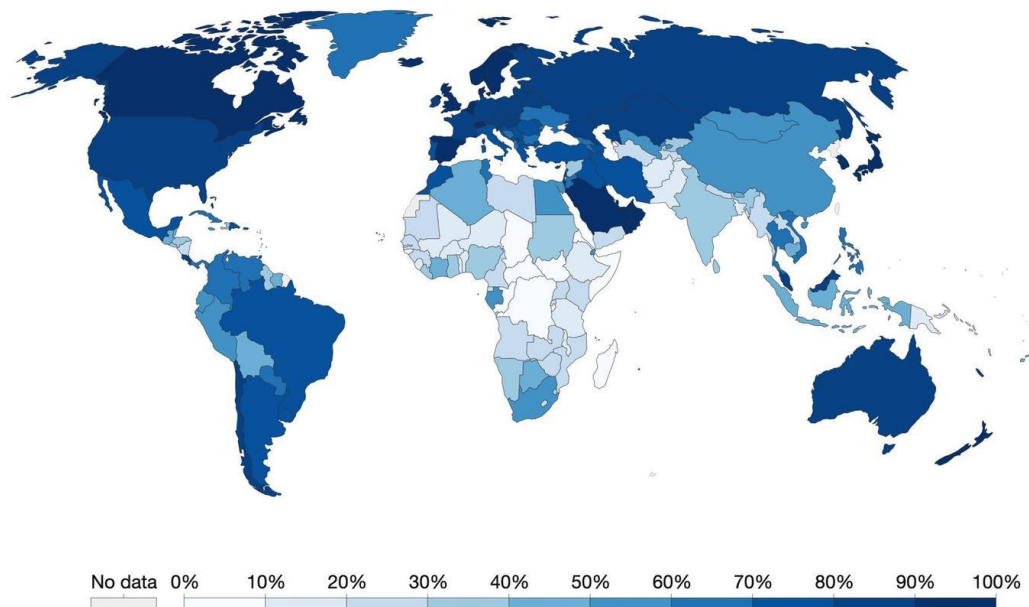
Table 2 shows that India ranks first with regard to the number of followers which are leaders, foreign ministry followers and embassy followers. It shows that there is a high level of awareness in the context of social media handles of Indian leaders, including the Prime Minister. It illustrates the effectiveness of India's digital diplomacy. It shows that India's efforts to reach out and connect with international audiences have been successful. This digital engagement not only enhances India's soft power but it also provides a platform for continuous dialogue and exchange.

To sum up, the above two tables show that these countries have strong track records of using digital tools to communicate with foreign publics and advance their foreign policy goals. These countries have efficiently incorporated digital tools into their statecraft. India seems to be leading the way in regions such as Asia, with its Ministry of External Affairs posting its first tweet in 2010. Some regions, like Africa, have yet to show progress/some progress with regard to moving in this direction (Hepp, 2012; 2013). It has to be noted that countries with low internet access feature low level digital diplomacy. In other words, not all countries or populations have equal access to digital technologies, which results in disparities related to the engagement and participation in digital diplomacy initiatives.



## Share of the population using the internet, 2019

All individuals who have used the Internet in the last 3 months are counted as Internet users. The Internet can be used via a computer, mobile phone, personal digital assistant, gaming device, digital TV etc.



Source: International Telecommunication Union (via World Bank)

OurWorldInData.org/technology-adoption/ • CC BY

**Figure 1. Digital Divide**

Taking the stated facts and figures into consideration, it becomes very interesting to analyse digital diplomacy through the lens of international relations. This paper aims to analyze the experiences of diplomats, academics, and other stakeholders with regard to digital diplomacy through multi-track diplomacy in international relations. It also aims to analyze how digital diplomacy is changing the way that states interact with each other. The present study is important as digital diplomacy has the revolutionary potential to improve communication, transparency, crisis management, and power dynamics.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Actor-Network Theory (ANT) can provide a useful lens for understanding the complex interactions between digital technologies, states, and other actors. ANT's emphasis on materiality, heterogeneity, and translation can help understand how diplomats use digital technologies to shape and navigate the complex social world of international relations. It provides a framework for analysing the complex interactions between humans and non-humans in the digital world, and it offers insights into how digital technologies shape international relations (Latour, 2005). This is relevant to digital diplomacy because digital diplomacy involves the interaction of a wide range of actors, including governments, businesses, non-governmental organizations, and individuals. For example, a government may use social media to communicate with foreign publics, while a business may use digital technologies to conduct e-commerce. John Law explores the heterogeneity of social networks, highlighting the diversity of actors and their relationships. He emphasizes the importance of considering

the agency of non-human actors and the dynamic nature of social networks. Law's concept of "heterogeneity" challenges the traditional notions of social order and highlights the fluidity of social structures (Law, 1994).

This theory states that material objects are not simply passive to social action, but they are active participants in social networks. Bruno Latour's work also emphasized the importance of materiality in shaping social relations. He argues that non-human actors, such as technologies and objects, play an active role in shaping the social world. Latour's concept of "assemblages" highlights how networks of humans and non-humans come together to produce knowledge and social order.

The ANT argues that social networks are constantly being created and maintained through processes of translation, which involve the negotiation and interpretation of meaning. This is relevant to digital diplomacy because digital technologies can be used to translate meaning in new and unexpected ways. For example, a government may use social media to promote its foreign policy, while a non-governmental organization may use digital technologies to advocate for human rights. Michel Callon focuses on the process of translation, which involves the negotiation and interpretation of meaning within networks of actors. He argues that translation is essential for the success or failure of new technologies and social projects. Callon's concept of "sociotechnical systems" emphasizes the interdependency of social and technical components in complex systems (Callon, 1986, 2001).

The networks are not simply static structures, they are dynamic and constantly evolving. These networks can influence information flow, opinion formation, and decision-making. (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). This means that the relationships between actors are constantly being renegotiated and changed.

Digital technologies, through ANT, shape state power by enabling extensive surveillance and control, while simultaneously introducing vulnerabilities such as public resistance and data security concerns, illustrating a complex interplay between state authority and citizen agency (Henman, 2012). Kavanagh (2015) argue that digital technologies have enabled states to extend their reach and influence, but that they have also created new vulnerabilities.

Morozov, (2022), argues that social media offers states new opportunities for public diplomacy and two-way communication, but it also diminishes diplomats' autonomy and complicates reputation management, reflecting the challenges of cyber diplomacy in a decentralized online environment. ANT offers a lens to examine how non-human actors, such as social media, shape U.S. public diplomacy strategies. It emphasizes the intricate relationships between government agencies, private entities, and technological infrastructures in influencing global political dynamics through digital platforms.

Riordan, S. (2019) uses ANT to analyse the challenges of cyber diplomacy. He argues that the decentralized and anonymous nature of the cyberspace makes it difficult for states to attribute cyberattacks and to deter malicious actors. Marwala, (2023), uses ANT to examine the implications of artificial intelligence for international relations and argues that artificial intelligence has the potential to transform the way states conduct diplomacy, but that it also raises new ethical and security concerns. In *Reassembling the Social* (2005), Bruno Latour

presents the core argument of Actor-Network Theory (ANT), which fundamentally challenges traditional notions of “society” as a stable, bounded entity. He argues that the “social” is not a fixed structure or pre-existing force. Instead, it is the outcome of ongoing connections, constantly formed and re-formed through interactions among various actors. And these actors are not just humans, but also non-human elements like technologies, texts, infrastructures, and even policies. He focuses on how networks are built, how meaning is negotiated, and how power flows through both human and non-human links.

The present study views digital diplomacy as a networked form of diplomatic engagement, emphasizing the interconnectedness and interdependence of actors in the digital realm. It explores how digital technologies enable new modes of interaction and collaboration among state and non-state actors, influencing power dynamics and diplomatic practices (Bjola & Holmes, 2015; Seib, 2012). Therefore, in digital diplomacy, network theory can be used to analyse the interconnectedness of diplomatic actors, such as governments, international organizations, non-state actors, and the public, through digital platforms. It explores how these networks influence the flow of information, decision-making processes, and the formation of alliances and partnerships in the digital realm.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study was rigorously structured and is qualitative in nature. The study is based on both primary and secondary data. In-depth discussions and interviews with a diverse group of subject matter experts like diplomats, academics, consultancy firms, professionals with business interests etc. serve as the primary sources. The interviewees were chosen based on their expertise on the subject of digital diplomacy

These discussions were essential in providing comprehensive insights and diverse perspectives on the subject matter. The participants were carefully selected based on their expertise, availability and experience in relevant fields, ensuring an informed discourse. Each conversation was meticulously structured to elicit detailed responses, facilitating a nuanced understanding of the complex topics at hand. These interviews were conducted to learn about the practices and engagement in digital diplomacy. This approach significantly aided the research, offering a multi-faceted understanding of the study's scope of this study. Academic literature served as the secondary source of data for this paper.

## FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This research tries to capture the experiences of diplomats engaged in multi-track diplomacy at the international level of using the digital diplomacy. The findings of the research are as follows:

### A DIPLOMAT'S EXPERIENCE OF DIGITAL DIPLOMACY

**Ms. Anju Ranjan**, Deputy Director General of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), Former Consul General of India in South Africa, CGI Edinburg, previously posted as CG (Birgunj), Head (of Commerce), in Kathmandu and Indonesia:



“With the advent of digital technologies, the entire scope of diplomatic work has been affected. The speed at which one can disseminate information and the extent of information to be shared have been impacted. This has enhanced efficiency and brought transparency to the system. Wars can now be watched live online, making it impossible to hide events from the public. People can freely express their thoughts on social media. The way one responds to trolls is important. Every government organization takes clues from social media platforms regarding public opinion, which guides our subsequent actions. When I was posted in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic and the Indian consulate was closed until further notice, I faced severe criticism on Twitter. An Indian citizen had passed away, and the repatriation of the body to India was delayed due to the consulate's closure - a time when consular services were most needed by the citizens abroad. It was a significant challenge for us. Eventually, the Indian government allowed the consulate to operate with 50% of the staff, which enabled us to assist with all the clearances. Sometimes we take clues from these social media platforms about issues that require immediate attention, which might otherwise be overlooked, impacting the Indian overseas citizens.

I faced similar challenges in Nepal, where I served as the Consul General in Birganj. During the peak of the Madhesi movement, an Indian teenager was killed on the Nepalese side, and the situation required us to repatriate his body to his parents in Raxaul, a border town. Negative sentiments arose from both the Indian and Nepalese sides due to the boy's killing, and I was heavily criticized on social media.

These platforms are not just tools but active participants in the diplomatic process. Training on how to effectively use social media is essential, and it should be incorporated into diplomatic training courses. We must discern what to ignore and what to engage with on social media, which often leaves us overwhelmed and confused with a barrage of information.”



**Rahul Bist**, Consultant:

“The development of a digital online auditing tool by a small-sized Indian consulting firm and the growing interest for this tool among the Savings and Credit Cooperative Societies (SACCOs) in Kenya is a testament to India's capability in digital innovation and its application in international contexts. Its adoption in Kenya highlights the potential for Indian digital solutions to have a substantial impact on other countries”.

**Deepak Alok**, Consultant:

“The excellent reputation that India enjoys in these African countries is, to a large extent, due to its diplomatic efforts. By engaging constructively and respectfully, India has built strong relationships that transcend mere economic interests, encompassing cultural, educational, and technological exchanges. This positive image has been crucial in fostering trust and collaboration”.

**Ross T. Nathan**, Sr. Consultant - Access to Finance, SME and Organisational Development, Rwanda:

“The utilization of digital platforms for service delivery, especially in the context of international cooperation, showcases India's adaptability and innovation. India enjoys an excellent reputation in these African countries. By engaging constructively and respectfully, India has built strong relationships that transcend mere economic interests, encompassing cultural, educational, and technological exchanges. This positive image has been crucial in fostering trust and collaboration”.

**Prof. Kavita Arora**, University of Delhi, Expert in Geography of Strategic Minerals and International Relations:

“In the past, it could take days or even weeks for diplomats to communicate with each other and respond to international crises. However, digital diplomacy has made it possible for diplomats to communicate and coordinate with each other in real-time. This has improved the ability of the international community to respond to crises quickly and effectively. It has also created new opportunities for collaboration and problem-solving between diplomats and other stakeholders. It also allows to engage with other stakeholders and non-state actors such as civil society organizations and businesses, to play a more active role in shaping the global agenda. Non-state actors, such as civil society organizations and businesses, are also using digital diplomacy to advance their causes. For example, the human rights organization Amnesty International uses social media to raise awareness of human rights abuses and to mobilize public support for its campaigns.

The power of digital diplomacy is exemplified in the manner Vladimir Putin addressed the 15th BRICS summit in South Africa held between 22 Aug. 2023 – 24 Aug. 2023 through a video call.

The 15th BRICS Summit held between 22 Aug. 2023 – 24 Aug. 2023 was joined by the Russian president Putin online through video conferencing to conduct bilateral meetings between BRICS leaders. He avoided traveling to South Africa to avoid arrest under the directions of the International Criminal Court, of which South Africa is a member. In doing so, he ensured that South Africa did not face the dilemma of choosing between his arrest and his address.

This move underscores several key aspects of digital diplomacy. Putin's virtual appearance allowed South Africa to maintain its commitments to the ICC without straining the diplomatic relations with Russia. Had Putin travelled to South Africa, the host nation might have faced international legal pressure to arrest him, potentially causing a diplomatic rift between South Africa and Russia.

Another example of digital diplomacy at the BRICS summit was the use of social media to share information about the summit and to engage with the public. For example, the BRICS leaders used Twitter to share their thoughts on the summit and to answer questions from the public. The BRICS summit also had a dedicated hashtag, #BRICS2023, which was used by participants and observers to share information and comments about the summit. The Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi used Twitter to share his thoughts on the summit and to answer questions from the public. He tweeted: "The BRICS summit is an important opportunity for us to discuss global challenges and to work together to build a better future for our people".

## DISCUSSIONS

The findings suggest that digital diplomacy and traditional diplomatic practices are complementary to each other. However, digital diplomacy features various challenges and opportunities as well.

**Challenges:** With the proliferation of digital platforms, there is a growing concern about the spread of misinformation and the manipulation of information in digital diplomacy. The spread of misinformation through digital channels poses a challenge to digital diplomacy efforts, requiring diplomats to carefully navigate and counter false narratives. One issue has been that of false and misleading information on foreign labor mobility, in the absence of a timely communication between those affected and the embassy of the destination country. In recent years, there has been a growing concern among Indian students who have graduated from Canadian universities but are unable to find employment in their field despite the fact that Canada has a strong economy and a growing demand for skilled labor (FE Careers, 2023). **Damian Tambini** warns that, social media has enabled the rapid spread of false information, which can undermine trust and create tensions between countries and this can lead to the issue of credibility and trust. This can be a challenge for governments and organizations that are trying to communicate accurate information to foreign publics (Tambini, 2017).

Digital diplomacy operates within a complex regulatory landscape, including issues related to data protection, privacy, and Internet governance. The ethical implications of data collection and analysis in digital diplomacy have been a topic of debate (Kerr, 2019). Scholars highlight concerns about data privacy, surveillance practices, and the responsible use of personal information (Eggeling, 2023). Addressing the ethical and legal dimensions of digital diplomacy, including privacy concerns, data protection, information manipulation, cybersecurity and digital diplomacy norms and regulations is important. This is a pressing concern, involving the need to balance openness with the management of cyber risks. Given the potential cybersecurity risks associated with digital diplomacy, governments should prioritize the implementation of robust cybersecurity measures and data privacy protocols. This includes training diplomats in cybersecurity best practices, establishing secure communication channels, and protecting personal data in accordance with international standards (Bjola & Holmes, 2015).

There is also a need to invest in the necessary digital infrastructure and technologies to support digital diplomacy efforts. This includes ensuring reliable internet connectivity, providing diplomats with training on digital tools and platforms, and establishing dedicated digital diplomacy units or teams within foreign ministries (Seib, 2012). However, it has to be noted

that the ownership of data generated by digital diplomacy is a complex issue. In some cases, the data is owned by the government or diplomatic mission that generated it. In other cases, the data is owned by the private companies that operate the platforms or tools that were used to generate the data. And there are risks of data being manipulated.

Apart from that, the vast amount of information available on digital platforms can make it challenging for diplomats to effectively navigate and prioritize messages and engage with relevant stakeholders. Social media can be overwhelming, with a vast amount of information available that can be difficult to filter and process. As Elina Lange-Ionatamishvili notes, "diplomats must navigate a complex digital environment with a constantly changing flow of information" (Lange-Ionatamishvili, 2018). It is also vulnerable to cyberattacks such as hacking, data breaches, and cyber espionage. This can be a challenge for governments and organizations that are trying to use digital technologies to communicate and engage with foreign publics (Azubuike, 2023). Nanette Braun states that "diplomats must be vigilant about protecting their personal and professional information online" (Rashica, 2018). There are also ethical issues of data privacy, information manipulation, and disinformation in digital diplomacy.

**Opportunities:** Digital platforms enable diplomats involved in multi-track diplomacy to engage with a wide range of actors and expand their diplomatic connections and it also provides opportunities for networking and building connections with a wide range of international stakeholders, including civil society organizations, academia, and non-state actors. The social media platforms give common people the opportunity to share their messages to different stakeholders. It also makes them feel recognised which is basic human desire. Each individual has various sets of networks on digital platforms.

There is also great scope for future research in this with regard to exploring the emerging trends, assessing the efficiency of digital diplomacy initiatives, and investigating the ethical and policy implications of its extensive implementation. The data generated by digital platforms is vast and it is being used in a variety of ways to shape international relations. It can be used to measure the effectiveness of diplomatic campaigns, for understanding the public opinion, for trend analysis etc. for which big data and analytics are used. It involves the collection, processing, and analysis of diverse data sources, enabling diplomats to make data-driven decisions and gain a deeper understanding of global trends and public sentiments (Hocking and Melissen, 2015). It also has a deep impact on the way how international relations are conducted.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure inclusivity in digital diplomacy, it is vital for diplomats to understand their audience and separate formal from informal communications.

**Engaging in active listening:** Diplomats should use social media as a tool for listening to and engaging with citizens, non-state actors, and foreign governments. According to David F. J. Campbell, "social media can be used to gather insights and feedback from a wide range of perspectives, which can inform policymaking" (Carayannis, Campbell and Efthymiopoulos, 2018).

**Using a human voice:** Diplomats should use a human voice when communicating on social media, as this can help build trust and understanding with citizens and other stakeholders. According to Ilan Manor, "using a conversational and authentic tone can help diplomats connect with audiences on social media" (Manor, 2019).

**Being transparent:** Diplomats should be transparent about their social media activities and the reasons behind them. According to Corneliu Bjola, "transparency can help build trust and understanding with citizens and other stakeholders, who may be skeptical of government activities on social media" (Song and Lee, 2016).

**Developing a clear strategy:** Diplomats and policymakers should develop a clear social media strategy that aligns with their broader foreign policy objectives. According to Corneliu Bjola, "a clear social media strategy can help diplomats and governments achieve their objectives, by ensuring that their social media presence is consistent and targeted" (Bjola and Holmes, 2015; Bjola and Kornprobst, 2018).

**Creating a dedicated digital diplomacy team:** Governments should create a dedicated team of professionals to manage their digital diplomacy efforts. This team should have expertise in digital technologies, public relations, and international relations.

**Investing in digital diplomacy training:** Governments should invest in training for their diplomats and other officials on how to use digital technologies effectively in diplomacy. This training should cover topics such as social media, online engagement, and cybersecurity.

## CONCLUSION

It can be stated that digital diplomacy has rapidly evolved over the past few decades, driven by the advances in technology and the changes in the international political landscape. Governments and diplomats engaged in multi-track diplomacy are increasingly using digital technologies to communicate with their domestic and international audiences, and to implement foreign policy. Digital diplomacy has led to new modes of communication, public engagement, and network-building in international relations which are more transparent, efficient and effective. It has become an essential tool for modern diplomats, who need to be proficient in the use of digital technologies to succeed in their work. It expands the reach and speed of communication, enabling diplomats to engage in real-time interactions and reach global audiences instantaneously. Therefore, it can help diplomats and policymakers achieve their foreign policy objectives while building trust and understanding with regard to citizens and other stakeholders.

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