

## EMERGING TREND OF DIGITAL DIPLOMACY IN PAKISTAN: IMPROVEMENT OR DECLINE

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### ABSTRACT

The study aimed to explore the role of diplomacy in shaping the foreign policies of nations amidst the rapidly evolving landscape of international relations. With the advent of advanced technologies, traditional diplomatic practices have undergone significant transformation. Employing a qualitative research approach with an exploratory method, the study delved into how Pakistan leverages digital tools to modernize its foreign policy initiatives. Specifically, it sought to examine the effectiveness of new digital diplomatic strategies in shaping Pakistan's foreign affairs. The research investigated the model of digital diplomacy within Pakistan's foreign policy framework, with a particular emphasis on the utilization of social media in diplomatic endeavors. It scrutinized both the advantages and drawbacks of digital services in diplomatic conduct, emphasizing that states cannot afford to overlook digital diplomatic practices. The study also highlighted the clear stance of the new democratic government in Pakistan on digitizing diplomatic trends. Furthermore, it underscored the supportive potential of digital diplomacy and internet services (ICTs) in bolstering the state's foreign policy stance among regional and international audiences. By carefully implementing these new trends in foreign affairs, the study argued, nations can mitigate instances of coercion and deterioration in diplomatic relations.

**Keywords:** Digital diplomacy, Diplomacy

### INTRODUCTION

"When discussing digital diplomacy, there's often a misconception that it solely involves government tweeting, but that's just one aspect known as public diplomacy," remarked Jared Cohen.

In the realm of international relations, diplomacy serves as a fundamental strategy in the interactions among nations, emphasizing dialogue and negotiation. Colin Powell, the former US Secretary of State, succinctly defined diplomacy as "listening to what the other guy needs. Preserving your own position, but listening to the other guy. You have to develop relationships with other people so when the tough times come, you can work together" (Martin, 2019).

Foreign policies are typically centered around two main agenda items: national objectives and the means to achieve them. These objectives guide states in determining the most effective approaches to

pursue their goals (Said, 2006; Manners, 2000), making diplomacy a perpetual art form of statecraft.

The advancement of technology and communication has significantly impacted diplomacy and international relations, making information readily accessible to the masses and influencing political and economic practices. Technology has democratized access to services across various spheres of life (Coccia, 2010), facilitating rapid information sharing and communication between diplomats and the public.

The widespread use of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and WhatsApp has created a global network, connecting billions of users worldwide (Snider, 2021; Yue, 2020). This digital connectivity has transformed the world into a "global

village," enriching lives and offering unprecedented access to knowledge.

Modern states are now interconnected through the internet, evaluating and aligning their policies with those of other nations. While some countries tightly control information flow to their citizens, many operate with fewer restrictions, embracing digital diplomacy as a means of engaging with the public (Hallams, 2010).

This study aims to explore the concept of digital diplomacy within Pakistan's foreign policy framework, examining its potential benefits and how Pakistan can leverage modern technological tools to enhance its foreign relations. While transitioning from traditional to digital methods may improve the country's image, extensive use of these platforms without adequate cybersecurity measures and diplomat training can pose risks.

Foreign policy, as defined by Padelford and Lincoln (1976), involves translating a nation's broad goals and interests into concrete actions to achieve its objectives and safeguard its interests. Feliks Gross (1998) provides a liberal perspective on foreign policy, suggesting that even a decision not to engage with other states constitutes a form of foreign policy. Depending on the outcome, foreign policy actions can have both positive and negative consequences, either reinforcing existing interests or prompting changes to benefit the nation.

Foreign policy serves as a critical instrument within the broader framework of international politics, intertwining with public policy objectives (Sadia, 2020). It encompasses a nation's strategic handling of its international relations guided by its national interests, a practice observed across nearly all nations worldwide, regardless of their developmental status. The scope of foreign policy extends beyond purely political interactions to encompass various non-political engagements as well.

Diplomacy, on the other hand, entails the art of engaging with other nations through negotiations and discussions aimed at achieving mutually beneficial outcomes. However, it's important to note that diplomacy is not always conducted on an equal footing among all stakeholders. More powerful states may wield their influence to gain advantages, albeit within the realm of diplomatic decorum. Despite this,

diplomacy serves as a means for nations to influence the decisions of others through diverse channels of communication.

Diplomatic activities encompass a wide range of engagements, from high-level meetings between national leaders to the exchange of diplomatic correspondence. The individuals responsible for carrying out these diplomatic functions are known as diplomats. Equipped with specialized training and diplomatic etiquette, diplomats employ diplomatic language as their primary tool of communication. Diplomacy encompasses various forms, including unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral approaches, serving as an alternative to hard power dynamics in the interactions among nations (Ghouri, 2021).

### **Significance of Diplomatic Practices:**

Diplomacy's part in the foreign policy of a State is predisposed by several precepts of what diplomacy is and what role it plays in foreign affairs. In the broader description, diplomacy covers more than the backing of diplomatic intercontinental relations. In its place, it affects relations nonviolent, antagonistic, and all in between. Thus, foreign relations comprise the benefits, course, and measures of sovereign State power (Kardas, 2020). It can also be understood as an alternative of diplomatic relations, through which the foreign policy linked with the theory and carries out diplomatic priorities in practice, precede strategic measures, outfitted, and strategic diplomatic objectives and add up with foreign constraints. Crabb (1972) has pointed out that,

“Reduced to its fundamental ingredients, foreign policy consists of two elements: national objectives to be achieved and the means for achieving them” (Crabb, 1972).

The essential arbitrate rationale of diplomacy, is to carry on with institutional apparatus, embassies, ambassadors, and settlements etc (Adesina, 1917). Faye (2000) has described ICTs are offering opportunities to every person, everywhere and supporting them to renovate economic plans into advanced information economies and they can compete with the highly developed economics on the world market (Ogunsola, 2005). Technological up gradation has added up globalization by giving communications for trans-boundaries connections

and not a single nation can and cannot miss out these given opportunities by these technologies. People at all age groups in every continent are using social media and sharing information, they are also interested in world and domestic politics as it is linked with their economic interests. Foreign ministries (MFAs) ought to clinch conception of technological tools that do not take apart substance from skill and language ([Olubukola, 2016](#)). The diplomats must apprehend digital diplomacy makeup rendezvous with how traditions, information and dealings are standardized in software, like algorithms that do not practice in one's goodwill. As diplomacy is increasingly enacted in a digital environment, diplomats should be critical of real-life actors behind software, of their intentions and how they pursue their aims, and with what effect.

The foreign affairs officials have competency to design software for ambassadorial purposes. The adopted mechanisms making for digital technologies can also be used as a source for political and diplomatic interests. These personnel must effort to find out all this and bring into practice for an improvement in policy-making processes ([Stanzel, 2018](#)).

### **The Objective of the Study:**

The study has set objective to high light the significance of the digital devices and their advantageous use in diplomacy and foreign relations. The use of digital devices is growing higher gradually and the diplomats and heads of the States using them on the daily basis. The significance use of these IT devices can also use by the Pakistan foreign diplomats to inform the people about the State polices .

### **Digital Diplomacy: A Step towards Rejuvenation of the Foreign Affairs**

The digitization and its growing impact on diplomatic practices are taking prominent place in worldwide diplomatic services. It is essential to coherent the politics following digital diplomacy. The digital apparatus appliances to contemporary practices are raising the strength of the diplomatic rendezvous in the digital world ([Stanzel, 2018](#)). Advanced media studies required to comprehend current issues provide the stuff on diplomacy and

plan modernized and effective diplomacy tactics for the foreign ministries, diplomats, and officials ([Tsvetkova, 2019](#)).

Since the emergence of new digital technologies MFAs, embassies, and diplomats are continuing to use the new tools and a podium to modernize the environment where diplomacy can be practiced. The diplomats use digital tools to keep connect with new audiences, trounce the constraint of conventional diplomacy, team up with new actors and endorse cross-cultural discourse. It is the insertion of a normative aspect in "the digitalization of diplomacy" that identifies the way where the culture can manipulate in carrying out diplomacy. Digital diplomacy has the capacity to improve two-way communication ([Saddiki, 2006](#)). The internet has now become an essential use for public and private communication while existing tools, like social media, have carried millions into, peer-to-peer, tête-à-tête spaces. It offers mutually massive chances and challenges for states and international organizations as they aspire to employ new strategy spaces growing around the Internet. The States and international associations have a need for newfangled skills to organizational revolutionize, and modern discourse of a move towards global policy.

Social media and popular networks are now in everyone's approach and a necessary part of daily life. Currently, Whatsapp, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook platforms are widely used as e-tools by common men, diplomats, foreign officers, and foreign ministries across the world. These networks provide fast information-sharing platforms. Twitter and Facebook handles are allowing their consumers to share opinions of the society on diverse matters, participate in discussions with others behind the screen and explain their own points of view.

Andreas Sandre's (Italian diplomat) in 2013 used Twitter for Diplomats and highlighted the tool as the most beneficial resource for the professional field ([De Franco, 2020](#)). Many other popular social media apps like LinkedIn, Pinterest, YouTube, Flickr, and Instagram are also in consideration for sharing information on local and international affairs ([Hocking, 2015](#)). Different blogs are also vastly trendy like wikis, which are at present

used for domestic use like knowledge sharing. The various digital tools lie in the digital devices with a competency which ambassadors and officials could carry out to join:

- Listening is the very initial expression. It is done by collecting knowledge.
- Cooperating with each other is a second utmost task, whilst officers collect information; they gradually start collaboration both within their own organization and outside his communities. They join the community by providing resources, such as asking some questions, etc.
- Correspondence is the third step where the official person starts conversation. This dexterity embodies comprehension to extend the visibility.
- Generate, it starts after collecting knowledge, cooperation, and correspondence, it makes the official person comfortable to reply by using different social media platforms, it enables him to create his online contents.
- Participation in Critique is the last step where the foreign officers or ambassadors have more social visibility, which allows him to give critical comments and take part in discussion. It will train him how to face and manage criticism.
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## History of Digital Diplomacy

The 20<sup>th</sup> century's hi-tech revolutions have changed the grounds of diplomatic communiqué ([Bajola, 2019, July](#)). In the 19th century the dawn of steamships and railways increased the diplomat's movements significantly. The telegraph invention made it easy to directly communicate with governments, foreign offices and embassies. The 20th century technology of aircrafts and IT made it more responsive and fast ([Christer Christer, 2015](#)). The few events in the world has changed the diplomatic mode that took place in 1920's and 1930's .The invention of radio and its broadcast services, Bolshevik revolution (1917), the Nazi's power (1933) and the massive use of radio services by Nazis and Bolsheviks ([Adena, 2015](#)). They used

it for propagation to support revolutions in adjoining countries. It gave birth to the public diplomacy in which countries seek to carry out their foreign objectives by corresponding with the foreign publics([Ogunsola,2016](#)).

The new revolution in communications that embarks on after the World War –II and it continues at present. It makes possible the instant spread of various types of information across the continents. The radios, TV, satellite broadcast, jet transportation, and Telefax facilitated people to get and spread information that may in the past was not so quick Joseph Nye in his famous book “Bound to Lead “1990, has elaborated the term “soft power” in the then conformist view of the rejection of the US power ([Desbiens, 1990](#)). After looking at the US armed forces and financial power resources, he endured that a little was still gone astray ,the skills to influence others by magnetism and influence rather than bullying and imbursement .He has mentioned the concept “soft power” to refer to nation’s power of influence that is largely based on perceived value, social norms and image. The “soft power” tactics practice to pressurize others not through coercion, but through debauch .The e-Diplomacy began in 1992 when at the “Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro” the emails of the civil society used in the negotiations and in Malta, at the “Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies” ([Kurbalija, 2013](#)).It was the first use of the computer appliances in diplomacy.

The Arab Spring is considered the foundation step towards digital diplomacy ([Akcay, 2021](#)). The recruitment of the terrorists in illegal activities made through the social media terrorist hidden pages. Al-Qaeda’s enrolment tactics, and its online campaign started before the 1980s .The then President Bush’s Undersecretary for Public Affairs started Public Diplomacy. The State Department went to Facebook, and the US has launched a departmental blog and the Digital Outreach Team assigned and tasked to encounter Al Qaeda’s online hiring. The “Wiki Leaks scandal” of 2010 which published 250,000 diplomatic messages and emails shared between the US mission and Washington ([Sifry, 2011](#)). It shocked the diplomats and aware them that online conversations in the digital age is a tough job with cyber at ([Hocking, 2015](#)).

## Digital Diplomacy use and Diplomatic Practices: A Risk Factors Analysis

The advanced technological tools offer multiple benefits but they also birdcage numerous challenges for the consumers. The diplomats and other foreign officials owing less proficiency in using social networking, it can elevate multiple issues. For illustration, they can face cyber security threats, hacking and bullying by the anonymous people staying any were in the world. This closer to the public can breed commotion and impediment in their authorized duties. Their statements and pictures can be manipulated by the people which can be a cause of dishonour and Lack of acquaintance regarding use of new communication technologies, the internet, and social media can result with terrible consequences, severe conflicts, even with removal from office of the politicians.

To avoid any critical situation the foreign office should train and equipped their staff for secure use of the social media. The is necessary to keep the foreign affairs restricted and at distance from the public as the public is sometimes take the maters in a wrong direction that can create problems for the officials. The strategic utilize of the digital technologies as a device to encounter propaganda by the specific governments and other actors in search of interests is extended these days. The following risks can be harmful for unlimited use of the social media

- **Secrecy Traditions:** The existing challenge to digital diplomacy is also the culture of secrecy. Where anybody can appear as an important figure and cause a big damage to a certain person whom he has targeted. It may lead to an intricate crisis as a result of the broadcast of some contradictory information, even fallacious. Such disinformation viral in seconds and damages the person's career and his national image too. Social media are now facing abused comments and posts, so they have to secure their pages to make it comprehensible whether a post comes from a reliable source. The "Cambridge Analytical Data Scandal" has created issues and raised question marks over the reliability and authenticity of these tools of social media [Boerboom, 2020](#)). This

firm has worked for the US "President Donald Trump's" electoral team. It had access to information about 87 million to the Facebook users with no permission of the account holders.

- **Free will from social media:** The negative and challenging situations are badly affecting the users of the different apps. Terrorist and racist groups try to mobilize and employ followers throughout them ([Mirhaydari, 2018](#)). It is also professed as a channel for the spread of radicalism; violence and the burden of foreign ideologies. The opponents of digital diplomacy deem it as a dangerous act.
- **Cyber Security:** Hacking is a growing threat to the digital world. The fear of the attacks on sensitive office accounts, has turned cyber optimists into cyber pessimists. It has existed since the contraption of the internet. The digital diplomacy is at risk because many states heads, governments, and diplomats in the world have been its sufferers, and it has put their jobs at risk. Diplomatic adversaries, like state and non-state actors, always try to hit government systems to take out information for certain purposes. The issue under discussion now has a major discussion part in diplomatic and political plans of the "UN, NATO, ITU, SARC, OECD, OSCE, Commonwealth, G7 and G20". The developed states and major powers have national cyber security strategies and legislative laws ([Turaev, 2020](#)).
- **Cyber Bullying** Technology's development is sometimes equated with the progression of human societies. The extensive use of social media may be face the cyber bullying by the terrorists and other groups specially the female officials from the foreign offices. The limited and purposeful use can only prevent these foreign officials.

## Digitalization and Diplomatic Trends: The Pakistan Outlook

Hoot Suite in its published reports in 2019 has mentioned that Pakistan has

44.61 million internet subscribers. In January 2019, they were 22% of the total world users while authentic figures for mobile and fixed broadband was up to 65.13 million (31.19%) since January, 2019. In Pakistan, the growth of the Internet has allowed it to proliferate. The start of LTE (Long Term Evolution) is the core aspect in the development of the Internet. The Internet users' ratio in Pakistan is now greater than before dramatically ([Jamil, 2020](#)).

It has crossed the figure 76.38M in mid of the year 2020 and increasing day by day and it is

through the social media accounts and the general commitment of political leaders, foreign spokesperson, and diplomats on this platform. Pakistan positions on all well reputed social media, the stuff of tweets and the medium in which it is spending with accessible and predictable audiences.

The popular channels are managed by anti Pakistan agencies from RAW and MOSAD by India and Israel, these are presenting a negative reflection of Pakistan'. Pakistan's digital diplomacy is also in danger ([Asim, 2017](#)). The state well equipped and skilled leadership can play an imperative role in the triumph of political government modern policy and can also encourage the foreign diplomats to enhance their digital diplomatic posters. In contemporary Pakistan, the foreign ministers holds social media twitter accounts and upload re-tweet posts, however sadly having 3M followers, party issues and local issues are often discussed by them. This "blame game tweets" are devastating the state image in the world.

Embassies	Twitter Followers	Embassies	Twitter Followers
US in Pakistan	317.7K	Pakistan in US	30K
UK in Pakistan	78.2K	Pakistan in UK	2,213
China in Pakistan	90.4K	Pakistan in China	No account
India in Pakistan	3.8M	Pakistan in India	9,336

**Table 1: Social Media followers Statistics (Twitter) of Multiple Embassies Year 2020**

Source: Author's contribution

expected to touch the figure 12M at the end of 2020, the Pakistan's outlook increased up to 60% people below 25 years of age are the consumers, it means that more than half of the population is aware and are outfitted with digital natives ([Jamil, 2020](#)). These people in Pakistan are engaged with social media apps and persuade policy sound effects in the country, but not controlled to vigour the administration to provide the human Rights Bill, and execution of employment laws. The youth in Pakistan are unaware of the best use of the internet and the potential of these platforms. The different nations across the world are getting benefits from it and are earning through twitter, You-Tube channels, and YouTube on social and political issues. The engagement of youth with social media can help the country to indulge them in learning activities, inform and promote local culture within and worldwide.

The developed and developing countries are planning how to engage their youth in digital affairs, and convert governance into e governance and same as foreign affairs on social media apps to attach the world in such a broader perspective. The digital engagement of Pakistan in public diplomacy is

Pakistan's digital diplomacy stance can be marked through calculating ambassadorial tasks of its foreign office diplomats and staff presence hours on social media. The nonappearance of Pakistani embassies on twitter in Russia, china and Bulgaria etc shows their negligence and incompetence with the given tasks. The foreign office has 03 Million followers and the Sydney consulate's following is about 700 on Twitter. These low figures show a very isolated reflection of the account. Moreover, many diplomatic engagements with social media accounts reveal that the consulate's posts mostly consist of re-tweets that have no underlying basis for promoting cultural initiatives. It means accurate and targeted information are missing on these accounts ([Boyle, 2020](#)).

**Table 2: Head of the States on Twitter and their Followers Strength Statistics Year 2020**

Head of State	Twitter Followers	Head of State	Twitter Followers
US President	77.5M	Russian President	46.3K
UK Prime Minister	424.3K	Afghan President	693.6K
Indian Prime Minister	55.3M	Turkish President	15.6M
Pakistan Prime Minister	11.4M	Brazilian President	6.4M

**Source:** Author's contribution  
<https://twitter.com/home>

The engagement with digital devices for diplomatic purposes is very capacious. No doubt that the implementation of digital diplomacy would require a certain quantity of resources. Besides this, it is essential to develop an indispensable but unified and well-constructed plan that gives an idea and a set of guiding principles for the diplomats to keep their presence online. Pakistan has adequate followers and the diplomats can easily communicate with their followers in and outside the state about veracity and other international affairs.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government has a digital Pakistan vision for this it has established a digital media wing for defensive purposes on social media. All policy making practices for people by the government will be present on social media and it promotes the government's initiatives. It will engage in social media diplomacy, demystify fake news and optimization of the digital media plan, as well as marketing for campaigns for government and related agencies. The government will launch a social media policy for its subdivisions. The new digital team will check the implementation status of the policy. The digital media team will comprise of 23 members and a general manager, consultant, digital communiqué officers, video editors, videographers, photographer, graphic designers, uploading stuff writers and digital supply manager. The "Information Communication Technologies (ICT)" tools application to pull off diplomatic goals is the key focus of digital Diplomacy. Diplomatic functions in Pakistan that are unswervingly impacted owing to digital presence include:

## □ Mutual Relations

The social media in 21<sup>st</sup> century has become a mega platform where different nations and their representatives are busy expanding their image globally and get a global positive recognition. Pakistan can also use this platform to highlight the "China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)" project for multilateral trade agreements. It has geopolitical, economic thwacks on the South Asian region and its full coverage on social media offers a steady stream of knowledge for concerned stakeholders and the entire world.

## • Positive Image Building

The state diplomacy works for positive and peaceful image building in the world. The diplomacy is also used as a foreign policy tool to enable and enhance positive image .Pakistan has unluckily targeted by the Indian and Israel agencies on social media by promoting terrorism and violence across border and they have media teams for this purpose on Twitter and Facebook The "Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the United Nations" is a constantly uploading the critics and answers of all queries linked with Pakistan. It is the demand of the modern world politics to stick with these platforms and spread the goodwill in the world and give a very energetic tic image of Pakistan against terrorism and extremism. To share the stories and strategies' Pakistan adopted to tackle the terrorism and radicalism. Pakistan can also fight for Kashmir and its freedom by showing the unlawful and violence based Indian policies in the region .It can support Pakistan's stance to support Kashmiri people for freedom according to UN resolution.

## □ Consular Services Deliverance

The consular services have become imperative in the age of the internet. Several entrepreneurs have e-businesses and need digital diplomacy to enhance their presence. India is its best example where consular services provide facilities and digital Diplomacy to high up the state image. Pakistan can also use these strategies' and facilitate the entrepreneurs and business community by

offering services for investment in Pakistan, it will support the national economy that is falling in COVID-19.

## Conclusion:

The Internet technologies have revised conventional methods of diplomacy across the world, but the main and key objectives are still the same. Diplomacy remained an essential component of a state's capability to expand power in the intercontinental system. The advanced technological tools have introduced Innovations and converted things and services into a digital epoch, and now diplomatic practices are easier to execute. Social media sites have enlarged the communiqué from a monologue to a discourse, allowing public officials to be proficient to hold in two-way dialogue exchange with other individuals. Many social media sites have provided free access to and public officials to exchange and share opinions. But the social platforms are not secure and all diplomatic practices cannot be performed on it and replace with all parts of diplomacy. The traditional methods in diplomacy and foreign policy still have their significance. It seems that digital diplomacy will escort the globe in the coming future. The Pakistani diplomats and embassies need to focus on the effective use of new technological tools to modernize foreign affairs. The government has decided to formulate a 23-members media team to develop and direct a strategy about digital diplomacy and the cabinet had approved the supplementary amount of Rs42.791 million in the current fiscal year for the establishment of a digital media section under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Therefore, countries like Pakistan need to have a central social media plan to correspond with the distant public face; it is also required to build up a digital diplomacy platform.

## LIMITATION AND STUDY FORWARD

The study is narrow in the sense that it has focused on the Pakistan case and the significant use of digital diplomacy by the Pakistani diplomat's. The time limit and set objectives restricted the researchers. A more comprehensive advance research could be prepared on this issue, as it finds out that careful use of social media can help

the diplomats in Pakistan to answer the Indian Propaganda and Mosad activates against Pakistan.

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## AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION:

Farzana Zaheer and Asia Saif drafted the paper. Huma Shah and Messam Ali searched the related existing literature and worked on research lines. They carefully checked the cited sources and finalized the study. Sanwal Kharal has finalized the document and carefully edited the reference part according to his expertise.

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