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## DIGITAL DIPLOMACY AS A FORM OF CHANGE MANAGEMENT IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN TIMES OF COVID-19

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**Abstract:** This paper analyses digital diplomacy in digital era, especially in times of covid – 19 pandemic. International relations have always been profoundly affected by technology, and the digitalization has a major impact on diplomacy. The application of the new communication technologies to diplomacy goes right to its core functions, including negotiation, representation and communication. The rise of social media is also a new information sphere that is used by the practitioners of diplomacy.

As the world is facing the tremendous pandemic, diplomats are facing multiple challenges too. Health and other sanitary measures, social-distancing, the need of ventilation machines, closed roads and airports, as well as closed borders in some of the states, created and demanded an urgent transformation of the diplomatic work into a digital one, using access to adequate technology and developing a new shape of communication protocols.

The pandemic demanded virtual meetings that have impact on reduced travel budgets and also a need for improving access to technological tools and improved skills of diplomats such as improved digital capabilities and experience in virtual negotiation rooms. Therefore, the way of realisation and presentation of diplomacy has radically changed and is increasing removed from the traditional diplomatic elements. At the end of the paper, we conclude that the tools of the digital age create new routines and simultaneously redefine existing ones, hybridity is the norm in the current media and diplomatic environments, as well as the challenges posed by digital technologies in future will demand strategies dealing with the integration of online and offline environments from diplomatic working. Once the crisis is over, the lessons learned are to train diplomats to think digitally “out of the box” and start upgrading their digital know-how and tools and strategies, so that they could be better prepared to help their national countries and easily to face the next global crisis.

**Keywords:** international relations, diplomatic relations, multilateral systems, corona virus

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Digital diplomacy is very important form of new public diplomacy. During the pandemic caused form Covid 19 the role and importance of the digital forms of communication, including social distance is steadily increasing, therefore digital diplomacy has become one of the most useful working tools for the diplomats. Digital diplomacy is characterized by the great influence on the realization of diplomatic practices, providing an influential space for information communication technologies, internet and social media, which are at the same time its core elements.

Hanson<sup>158</sup> (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.

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<sup>158</sup> Hanson, F. (2012, October 25). Baked in and wired: eDiplomacy@State, Foreign Policy Paper Series No. 30, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution (pp. 1–41).

consular services are a core task of government, and this is the area of diplomatic activity where the technological challenge is most palpable<sup>172</sup>.

The processes of diplomacy and the structures that exist to facilitate them are of course inextricably linked. Changes in the former require adaptation of the latter if the institutions of diplomacy are to remain relevant to the needs of local and global communities. The consequences of digitalization in this context are complex. It is not simply the case that foreign ministries and other diplomatic agencies have to function online. The challenges are much greater. The DNA of diplomacy is changing. Blends of offline and online strategies have to develop to deal with the character of each set of issues that it confronts. Becoming a ‘twiplomat’ will not of itself guarantee success, but ignoring the meanings and significance of digitalization will prove to be equally misguided<sup>173</sup>. Using the social media and platforms provide diplomats with the ability to extend their influence by being interactive, personal, and transparent. But, using digital diplomacy, the diplomats are facing many other challenges such as cybersecurity. Although there is no specific protocol on how to use social media successfully.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

As stated above, diplomacy is used to manage the goals of foreign policy focusing on communication. Traditional diplomacy relied on person-to-person communication, on both a bilateral and multilateral level. New trends affect the institution of diplomacy in different ways. Diplomacy has received an additional tool in the form of the Internet. In various cases of interdependence and dependence interference in a country's affairs is accepted. Multilateral cooperation has created parliamentary diplomacy and a new type of diplomat, the international civil servant. States and their diplomats are in demand to curb the excesses of globalization.

According to Crabb the “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 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.

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”<sup>174</sup>. We may conclude that the tools of the digital age create new routines and simultaneously redefine existing ones, hybridity is the norm in the current media and diplomatic environments, as well as the challenges posed by digital technologies in future will demand strategies dealing with the integration of online and offline environments from diplomatic working. Once the crisis is over, the lessons learned are to train diplomats to think digitally “out of the box” and start upgrading their digital know-how and tools and strategies, so that they could be better prepared to help their national countries and easily to face the next global crisis.

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<sup>172</sup> Hocking Brian, Melissen Jan, (2015), “Diplomacy in digital age”, link:[https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Digital Diplomacy in the Digital%20Age Clingendael July2015.pdf](https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Digital%20Diplomacy%20in%20the%20Digital%20Age%20Clingendael%20July2015.pdf) , last accessed: 27 July, 2020

<sup>173</sup> Hocking Brian, Melissen Jan, (2015), “Diplomacy in digital age”, link:[https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Digital Diplomacy in the Digital%20Age Clingendael July2015.pdf](https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Digital%20Diplomacy%20in%20the%20Digital%20Age%20Clingendael%20July2015.pdf) , last accessed: 27 July, 2020

<sup>174</sup> Olubukola S. Adesina | James Summers (Reviewing Editor) (2017) Foreign policy in an era of digital diplomacy, *Cogent Social Sciences*, 3:1, DOI: [10.1080/23311886.2017.1297175](https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2017.1297175)

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