



Hafiza Saba Ashraf*

Digital Diplomacy in Pakistan: Prospects And Challenges



Abstract: This article explores the prospects and challenges of digital diplomacy in Pakistan. In recent years, Pakistan has recognized the importance of harnessing digital tools to enhance diplomatic engagement, both domestically and internationally. By analyzing the current landscape and examining case studies, this article highlights the potential benefits of digital diplomacy for Pakistan, including improved public outreach, increased transparency, and enhanced soft power projection. Additionally, it discusses the challenges that may impede its successful implementation, such as limited internet access, cyber threats, and institutional resistance. By addressing these challenges and capitalizing on the opportunities presented, Pakistan can leverage digital diplomacy to effectively represent its interests in a rapidly evolving global arena. Ultimately, this article serves as a comprehensive resource for policymakers, diplomats, and scholars interested in understanding the potential of digital diplomacy in Pakistan and its implications for foreign affairs.

Key Words: Digital Diplomacy, Pakistan, Technologies, Diplomacy Efforts, Cyber Threats, Foreign Affairs, Global Arena

Introduction

Evolution in the field of information technology has influenced every aspect of life. Diplomacy being an integral part of statecraft also underwent a transition from traditional means to highly advanced one- digital diplomacy. With the advent of technological advancements job pattern of a diplomat has widely changed, as the number of stakeholders due to the digitalization of diplomacy has increased manifolds (Baissultanova & Baktybekova, 2020). In addition to that public participation via social media tools has broadened the horizons of influence over foreign policy affairs. Thus, to deal with emerging technological trends, Foreign policy officials need to equip diplomatic missions with digital means to pursue foreign policy appropriately. The developed countries of the globe that were up to the mark in the field of information technology quickly adapted to this new mode of diplomacy in pursuing their foreign policy objectives. However, developing countries like Pakistan could not seize this opportunity effectively, in an attempt to pursue their national interests in the international realm by utilizing a digital mode of diplomacy.

Diplomacy in Pakistan is in its nascent stage. Although the rising population of Pakistan is also expanding the volume of internet users, its usage among politicians and foreign policy officials is still limited.

Pakistan resorted to digital means of information and communication on the diplomatic front after the outbreak of COVID-19 in the year 2019. After the inception of COVID-19 and the subsequent enforcement of lockdowns all over the world, diplomatic activities shifted from traditional means to digital means. As traditional physical means of diplomacy were no longer viable, Pakistan also had to follow the trajectory of the rest of the world. Thus, Pakistan resorted to digital means of diplomacy to effectively carry out its diplomatic activities in a periodic manner. According to Aftab et, al., (2020), despite the fact that Pakistan maintained its virtual diplomatic presence at every global forum, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs along with associated embassies could not play a vigilant role in terms of digital diplomacy. This can be ascertained by the fact that despite the continuous presence of COVID-19 over the past three years, the Ministry of Foreign

* Research Assistant, Center of Pakistan and International Relations, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Affairs of Pakistan could not establish any policy document that could serve as a directive for digital diplomacy in Pakistan. Pakistan is far behind its regional competitor vis-à-vis digital diplomacy. An objective analysis of the social media accounts of top officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs depicts that there is a lack of consistency in the tweets and posts of these officials. Diplomats don't have verified social media accounts, and they do not share any creative content rather a majority of content is comprised of retweets. Due to the lack of an effectively organized system under the umbrella of MOFA. These embassies often have to face multiple challenges. Digital diplomacy is beneficial for developing countries like Pakistan in several ways. However, there exists a lack of seriousness among authorities in uplifting this style of diplomacy due to multiple reasons, which will be discussed in this paper.

In Pakistan, digital diplomacy is at its early stage. The increasing trends of social media platforms and their penetration in the domain of diplomacy are full of opportunities and challenges. The peculiar aspect of digital diplomacy is the widespread availability of social media platforms to ordinary citizens. Pakistan has youth more than half of its population and this emerging youth is fully acquainted with the use of social media tools. This emerging youth in the coming years will harness these technologies to mould the decision-making of Pakistan's foreign policymakers.

Digital media provides embassies and associated diplomats with a diverse set of digital diplomatic tools, predominantly Twitter and Facebook that enables citizens to get easy access to their higher authorities (Bjola, 2016). These digital means of communication allow states to establish direct links with foreign audiences without taking into account any third party. Moreover, digital diplomacy has brought an unprecedented transformation in the field of traditional diplomacy where the pattern of work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has changed from traditional means of diplomacy to innovative ones. Social Media on one side can be utilized by a large number of people to create awareness and help them in solving societal problems. On the other side, digital diplomacy is full of risks associated with its adoption in the field of diplomacy.

However, the utilization of social media for diplomatic activities is more beneficial. Hence, developing countries like Pakistan are not in a position to be left behind in the field of digital diplomacy as it provides an effective way of carrying out diplomatic activities without pressure on the national treasury.

Prospects of Digital Diplomacy in Pakistan

Pakistan is a country with 64% of the population below the age of thirty. This portion of society is getting equipped with advanced technologies in the field of information technology with time, and their technological know-how can be beneficial for Pakistan at an international level, as these adults can help Pakistan project its soft image. In addition to that, foreign policymakers in Pakistan realize that in order to cope with merging challenges in global diplomacy, Pakistan needs to utilize digital means of communication for effectively pursuing their foreign policy in this age of technological interconnectedness. There are certain prospects of digital diplomacy that support the idea of penetration of digital media tools while conducting diplomatic relations with the rest of the world (Iftekhar & Bokhari, 2022). Some of the prominent ones are discussed below.

Strengthening of Ties in International Relations

Diplomacy in its multiple forms is guided by heads of state and other sections, with military establishment and foreign office officials being the key players. Diplomacy in its all manifestations is aimed at strengthening relations between states and effectively pursuing and preserving the self-interests of states by establishing alliances at international forums. With the dawn of globalization, the socio-political and economic interdependence between states has been enhanced to a great extent, leaving behind territorial demarcations. With the inception of the 21st century, international relations witnessed the addition of multiple actors in regulating bilateral, regional and multilateral relations, predominantly involvement of Multi-National Corporations, international governmental and non-governmental

organizations, non-state actors, and military establishment has profoundly influenced interstate relations. According to Manor & Pamment, (2019), a widespread web of regional and multilateral organizations unites people. The rise of advancement in the field of information technology and the subsequent spread of these actors indicate that global interconnectedness and interdependence have been enhanced. The underlying principle behind the concept of digital diplomacy is quick responsiveness that enables states to foster strong relations.

Digital diplomacy is unique in the sense that it facilitates states in developing a broader array of alliances within a short span of time, and helps states engage foreign people who have never been in touch with embassies (Manor & Pamment 2019). In this era of a continuously evolving world, a digitally expanding network of non-state actors in collaboration with the foreign public can effectively utilize digital diplomacy and associated tools to develop cordial relations among states. Pakistan, where different actors are responsible for carrying out diplomatic activities, by effectively utilizing this style of diplomacy can also develop cordial relations with the rest of the world. Digital diplomacy in Pakistan can enable the literate fabric of society to become aware of domestic, regional and international affairs and facilitate its participation in foreign policy making. This particular notion of digital diplomacy will be the key driving force behind the transition of diplomacy from traditional to digital means in Pakistan.

Diplomacy and Proximity with Audiences:

In the past, traditional means of communication between states were quite lethargic and time-consuming due to the large geographic distances between states and embassies abroad. But, with the advent of technological evolution, this distance has become irrelevant, as diverse means of communication have made the rapid exchange of information possible. The digital means of communication enables diplomatic missions to participate in any particular event and instantly send feedback to the home state. Digital media also provides states with an opportunity to expand their

sphere of communication beyond territories (Bjola, 2016). Digital diplomacy enables diplomats to exchange their ideas and reevaluate their particular calculations. The best aspect of digital diplomacy is its accessibility to common audiences. People can easily participate in decision-making and influence the decision-making mechanism. Niccolo Machiavelli was a renowned politician, whose entire career ended up in failure due to severe miscalculations. Neither, his treacherous great strategies nor dubious plots proved to be fruitful. The fundamental cause of his utter failure was that his entire strategy was driven by his own interest, and it lacked public participation, thus, if there had been availability of social media platforms, he could have received a wide public opinion with which he could have made an effective decision. Advancement in the field of information and communication facilitates diplomats to assemble necessary information for their diplomatic activities within a short interval of time. Social Media is unique in its essence that its response is always quick, and instantaneous. According to Ahmed & Rafique (2017), in developing countries like Pakistan where electronic media is always under the shadow of blackout and censorship, digital media can play an effective role in conducting diplomatic activities and facilitating overseas Diaspora. In that regard, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan Niazi established a digital media wing that was aimed to promote the soft image of Pakistan on international forums. An increasing number of internet users in Pakistan will definitely influence the digital skills of diplomacy in Pakistan.

Low Financial Cost

In this modern age, continuous technological advancements are heading states toward less costly innovations. Digital Diplomacy is a cost-efficient tool for conducting diplomatic activities. It reduces expenses, while the traditional mode of diplomacy is quite expensive. In this particular aspect, digital diplomacy is attractive for the foreign policy elite as it reduces the cost of diplomatic activities. For instance, world leaders spend millions of dollars on their visits to address the United Nations General Assembly. Former Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan spent thousands of dollars on his first

visit to address the United Nations 74th session in 2019, while he delivered his speech virtually for the next two consecutive sessions in the year 2020, and 2021, with much less expenditure. Thus, ailing economies of the world like Pakistan can benefit by shifting to digital means of diplomacy. Small states are characterized by the size of their territory, population, size of economy and the military. According to Pipchinko (2020), in International Politics, small states that have no or very little say in international affairs face many challenges while developing their foreign policy. Due to financial constraints and a lack of sufficient economic resources, these states cannot afford to pursue traditional means of diplomacy. Thus, economically small states like Pakistan that have a very poor economic situation have to resort to digital means of diplomacy, to effectively pursue their foreign policy objectives.

The Inception of COVID-19 and Emerging Technological Trends in Pakistan

The evolving technological trends have transformed the style with which international relations are conducted. With the outbreak of COVID-19 and the subsequent enforcement of the lockdown, the entire diplomatic activities of the world came under immense pressure. Traditional means of diplomacy were no longer viable as sanctions on international travelling reduced the chances of any physical collaboration. Thus, the world resorted to digital means of communication and digital diplomacy appeared as a possible option for global diplomatic activities (Ahmed & Rafique, 2017). Pakistan also witnessed for the first time in its diplomatic history the utilization of digital means in pursuing its foreign policy. Due to the inception of COVID-19, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs started virtual training programs to make its diplomatic missions aware of digital platforms. Thus, during Khan's tenure, Pakistan started integrating digital means of communication in the realm of diplomacy to effectively pursue its diplomatic activities. For the first time, the People of Pakistan noticed the virtual participation of Pakistani leadership in diplomatic activities. From the United Nations Virtual Climate Summit to regional organizations'

virtual sessions, Pakistan effectively conducted its digital diplomatic activities. Pakistan's former Prime Minister strictly adhered to "Twitter Diplomacy" and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and foreign embassies also started focusing on social media tools while conducting diplomatic activities. The current government of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz under the premiership of Mian Shahbaz Sharif is also following the pedestals of his predecessor in pursuing digital diplomacy. However, Pakistan is still lagging behind other states in terms of digital diplomacy.

Challenges of Digital Diplomacy

Digital Diplomacy in Pakistan is in a miserable situation. Pakistani embassies in foreign territories do not effectively utilize social media platforms, which is considered an integral part of digital diplomacy that states harbour to develop a positive image of the country on foreign land. Digital diplomacy in all its manifestations not only helps states develop productive images but also facilitates states to strengthen their bilateral ties (Harris, 2013). Digital diplomacy in Pakistan is at its embryonic stage, indicating new trends and transformations in its foreign policy outlook. An objective analysis of the social media accounts of Pakistan's higher officials reveals that these officials do not effectively utilize their accounts to pursue the foreign policy objectives of Pakistan. According to sources from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pakistan is lagging behind regional and developed states in terms of its digital diplomacy due to the absence of any centralized system to regulate diplomatic activities. Although an innovative concept in the field of diplomacy, it brings opportunities and challenges, simultaneously. Social media being an integral part of digital diplomacy, on the one hand, facilitates states in solving social issues, for instance, it enables people to collaborate on a large scale for their rights, even when the print and electronic media face censorship and blackouts. On the other hand, using digital diplomacy as statecraft is not short of risks (Ismail, 2020). But digital diplomacy is more beneficial in its essence. Thus, countries like Pakistan cannot afford to remain behind in the field of digital diplomacy. Although this style of diplomacy is full of challenges for every state,

irrespective of its size and advancement, in the realm of digital diplomacy, countries like Pakistan can face multiple challenges which are discussed below.

Lack of Technological Advancement

The first and foremost impediment in the way of digital diplomacy in Pakistan is its miserable progress in the field of information technology. Pakistan has been ranked 99th out of 132 countries by Global Innovation Index in 2021. This GII takes into consideration more than eight indicators while formulating the ranking of states. One of the potent pillars which impact the ranking of states in the Global Innovation Index is “Human Capital Development and Research” and Pakistan is placed at 117th position in this index. The capability of any state in the arena of innovation also signifies its ability to exploit emerging technologies with time. Across the globe, developed countries of the world have efficiently harnessed the newly acquired technologies in the field of information and communication, but developing countries like Pakistan remained passive in their response to these emerging technologies (Shabbar, 2021). Pakistan due to its fragile economy and political order could not achieve considerable progress in the field of Information technology. In modern-day diplomacy, innovative tools have become the stratagem of states in their attempt to achieve national interests. Digital diplomacy revolves around the use of social media platforms, like Facebook, WhatsApp, Skype, Twitter, Instagram, and Weibo. Apart from that, it also includes Digital Media Channels, Print and Electronic Media, YouTube, Websites, and numerous Software applications. With the outbreak of COVID-19, the world witnessed for the first time the conduct of daily diplomatic activities digitally. Pakistan also shifted to digital means, as evidenced by its virtual participation in different regional and multinational conferences and summits being conducted online via Zoom Application. However, when it comes to the integration of digital diplomacy within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pakistan lacks any organized system for the regulation of diplomatic activities. The most obvious reason behind this centralized system is Pakistan's inadequate progress in the field of

information technology. It cannot be compared with its regional competitor India when it comes to technological advancement. Lack of adequate economic resources, scarcity of innovation and research culture in educational institutions, inadequate investment of state in the field of science and technology, and higher brain drain are some of the key impediments in the way of technological advancement, consequently, in the way of digital diplomacy in Pakistan.

Non-Compliance of Foreign Policy Elite to the Digitalization Culture

Another fundamental challenge in the way of diplomacy in Pakistan is the non-compliance of stakeholders to the digitalization culture in Pakistan. The majority of officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and associated embassies don't have expertise in using digital means of information and communication. They do not include these digital tools. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan carries a large number of officials who are completely devoid of any technological know-how and thus do not comply with digital means of information and communication. These officials are mostly of higher age and due to lack of adequate technological knowledge, they are reluctant towards digital means of diplomacy. Apart from that, there are numerous ambassadors and diplomatic missions of Pakistan across the world that are only cognizant of basic tools of social media and are not capable of harnessing them for projecting Pakistan's better image. This non-compliance can be indicated by the fact that the number of active users of Facebook and Twitter is much less, and officials with an account on Twitter and Facebook are not yet verified and the quantity and quality of content depicts their inefficiency in the field of digital diplomacy. Thus, this non-compliance of the foreign policy elite to the digitalization culture is another major impediment in the way of digital diplomacy in Pakistan.

Ineffective Digital Reformative Measures at the State Level

Another significant challenge in the way of digital diplomacy in Pakistan is ineffective digital

reformative measures by Pakistani leadership. The lack of seriousness among policymakers vis-a-vis digitalization is impeding Pakistan's progress in the arena of digital diplomacy. Pakistan's digital diplomacy is not up to the mark and is incompatible with neighbouring states and the rest of the world. According to Ittefaq (2019), this style of diplomacy in Pakistan is still devoid of any organized digital media policy to foster communication with global audiences. There are more than one hundred diplomatic missions under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that represent Pakistan all over the world, and statistics reveal that only 30% of foreign missions use social media platforms to project a soft image of Pakistan. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, although holds an account of digital activities, still lacks a centralized e-system unlike other states, that have established their centralized digital system on the foreign affairs front, effectively engaging with the foreign public and consequently, developing a positive and soft image by using this vibrant tool of diplomacy. Furthermore, the existing state of inconsistency in Tweets by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Pakistan still lacks any effective mechanism to update its social account. There is no reform program initiated by successive regimes in Pakistan to uplift the scope of digital diplomacy in Pakistan. In contrast to Pakistan, India, the neighbouring competitor initiated landmark programs, such as "Incredible India" and "Digital India" that are aimed at promoting the soft image of the country by exploring new avenues of tourism and developing technological know-how among the masses and state officials on large scale. However, in Pakistan, higher authorities are still ignorant of digital diplomacy and are not willing to introduce any reform program to integrate digital means into diplomatic affairs.

Privacy Concerns

Another major challenge to digital diplomacy in Pakistan is associated with the privacy of information. Although technological advancement has provided multiple benefits to all walks of life, there are certain risks associated with its integration into diplomatic activities. These risks include leakage of sensitive information, hacking and anonymity of internet users. The best example

that suits here is the information leakage, as a result of Wiki leaks. This Wiki leak in the year 2010, started disseminating secret diplomatic cables shared between Diplomatic officials of the US and its State Department. Developing countries like Pakistan that lack any effective system of information and documentation security are more vulnerable to information leakage. In addition to that, due to the quick dissemination of information, there is always a danger that any slip of the tongue can cause incalculable damage on the foreign policy front. This dimension of risk is quite relevant in the context of Pakistan, where the former Minister of Foreign Affairs in a live discussion at a private channel asked Saudi Arabia for unambiguous support on the Kashmir cause, otherwise Pakistan in collaboration with Turkey and Malaysia will establish a separate block. This statement of the Foreign Minister somehow disrupted relations between both states.

Apart from that, another major challenge in the way of digital diplomacy in Pakistan vis-à-vis privacy of sensitive information is hacking. As a result of this technological disingenuity, official documents of states are always susceptible. In Pakistan, such incidents have often been reported. For instance, in the year 2019, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website was almost hacked, as a result, it became inaccessible to people living in the European and Gulf region. In addition to that, the Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts of the Pakistani embassy located in Serbia were also hacked in 2021. Another potent hacking incident took place in March 2022, when the Twitter account of the Pakistani embassy in Nigeria was hacked. Anti-state machinery and propaganda groups that operate outside of the country's territory often resort to this tactic to extract information of a sensitive nature.

One of the most common issues that a state faces while conducting its diplomatic activities via digital platforms is a "culture of anonymity". Anyone with a false identity can pretend to be someone else and can adopt a fake address to attack someone or the state.

Technological mischief is more prominent in the field of digital diplomacy, as these pseudo-accounts can disseminate extremely controversial information. For instance, on

the occasion of an event at the World Economic Forum in 2012, in Davos, the foreign minister of Britain shared an awkward tweet from his account, which received a lot of condemnation from world leaders (Ittefaq, 2019).

Another very potent challenge in the way of digital diplomacy in Pakistan is the pressure imposed by the public on foreign affairs officials who might in return, instead of making rational decisions succumb before the public will. Rapid communication with foreign publics cannot always provide comprehensive solutions to the matter under critical discussion. The oversimplification of matters might create new problems on the diplomatic front. Public pressure during times of crisis also increases many folds when it comes to making a diplomatic decision regarding its management. Thus, in countries like Pakistan where the state is not that powerful, decision-making is often done to release public pressure, instead of making a proper cost-benefit analysis.

Challenges to Digital Diplomacy on the Geopolitical and Geo-Economic Front

In this modern age of information technology, countries are highly dependent on the smooth flow of data, and any disruption in its flow can inculcate a lot of damage. The Geopolitics of the world primarily relies on internet cables that maintain a smooth flow of data across the globe. At present, approximately 90% of the internet traffic is being carried out by submarine cables that follow the same trajectory as telegraphs followed in the nineteenth century for diplomatic exchange. These submarine cables of the internet are tangible elements of data-driven global geopolitics. The damage of any frequency can cut off the communication of the entire world within minutes, as a result, it can have profound geo-political implications for the entire world. For example, in the year 2008, the world witnessed damage to submarine cables of the internet near the Alexandria region of Egypt, consequently almost entire states of the region faced internet cut-off and disruption of politico-economic activities. There are some areas of profound strategic imminence, like the Suez Canal of Syria and Melaka that are responsible for the maintenance of

internet traffic between Asia and Europe. Thus, any damage to these cables can cut off internet supply to multiple states instantly. Pakistan is also vulnerable to this challenge, as it often faces slow internet speeds due to disruptions in submarine cables. Thus, in light of the above discussion, it can be ascertained that emerging digital diplomatic activities are subject to a continuous supply of the Internet, and any issue can pose incalculable damage.

Recommendations

Digital Diplomacy in Pakistan is in the evolving phase and it seeks the utmost attention for its effective utility in pursuing the social, economic, security, and other goals ascribed in the foreign policy agendas. Indeed it has become a compulsion rather than a choice. For reasons the due to the pandemic crisis, the global world witnessed a resounding shift toward digital diplomacy and it has now become a new global norm. The majority of countries in the world give preferential treatment to the course of digital diplomacy as it proves more productive with fewer constraints and arrangements. For Pakistan, this evolving trend also necessitates aligning foreign policy with globally recognized diplomatic practices. The efforts for incorporation of digital diplomacy orient from certain aspects. According to Alvi & Zaheer (2021), COVID-19 and global conflicts have made digital tools more important than ever before. Second, the realm of geopolitics is drastically dependent on technology and to an extent, it cannot be overturned by any means. Third, for Pakistan, the conflicts and hostilities also required adoption of the digital means for the conduct of diplomacy. Fourth, technological innovation has pulled all the diplomatic affairs toward self. Following are the recommendations to achieve the prospects and mitigate the challenges to uplift digital diplomacy in Pakistan.

1. The contours of diplomacy notably soft diplomacy, exceedingly depend on the imperatives of digital technology such as various social applications/tools, innovative websites, and social media. Indeed driven by technology the social web has taken center stage in disseminating and highlighting the preferences of foreign

policy and various objectives at inter and intra-state levels. Nevertheless, Pakistan predominately operates on conventional methods of diplomatic engagement. There is a dire need to transform this strategy at the earliest to ensure an effective mechanism of diplomacy. On account of this, the government should introduce a Digital Diplomacy policy to uplift the process of diplomatic deliberations. The digital diplomacy policy must be documented in collaboration with the Ministry of Information Technology and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Habibullah & Xiguang 2022). Digital policy through and holistic approach can advocate state Policies digitally, and safeguard national interests at home and abroad. The formulation of digital policy to enhance and extend the role of policymakers attributed to the tasks of international policymaking for the preservation of all endeavours. Likewise, the incorporation of digital means to further free allows the dissemination of information, irrespective of the agendas both overt/ covert about any diplomatic issue or event. One of the better advantages that Pakistan can seek is the rapid transformation of diplomatic services to be conveyed more swiftly (Alvi & Zaheer, 2021). With conventional diplomatic means, Pakistan's foreign policy remains circumscribed. Thus, stakeholders must devise inclusive mechanisms to promote Digital diplomacy through endorsing across various virtual platforms including various types of official blogs, trending social media pages, and other digital tools/websites, that will further diversify the options of policy and endeavours sharing.

2. To overcome the constraints efforts should be carried out to keep the impulsiveness of digital/social media in an organization where communications are not unstructured – in such cases the diplomatic deliberations must be prudently crafted, discussed, analyzed, and cleared – to avert the plausible chances that digital media dictates. Amidst the pandemic crisis, the use

of technology in diplomatic deliberations of day-to-day affairs has further increased and it has potentially necessitated a greater role, ultimately the contemporary world depends on technology and digital tools to seek objectives (Shabbar, 2021). It is evident that during the extreme COVID-19 crisis, all diplomatic engagements were shifted virtually. The usage of Skype, Zoom, Twitter Space, Google Meet, and other related platforms became important platforms for global decision-making gatherings, diplomatic meetings, and conferences as travel became impossible or infeasible.

3. There is no doubt that the digitization of the system of networking could bring massive advantages for the use in consular services, for instance, by decreasing workload around investigation, proclamation, and document processing can be shifted virtually (Feijóo et al., 2020). Although other Skills related to conversations, reporting, and cultural appointment will largely remain relevant, they can also prove adeptness for digital prospects. In Pakistan's context the unique perspective of digital diplomacy residues mainly untouched, however, to have better assessment and appraisal it is important to cognize the efficacy and efficiency of digital diplomacy and its limitations and bottlenecks need to be extensively reviewed. There should be clear demarcation about the usage and limitations of digital diplomacy. The key objective of MFA so far thus far the public-facing "front-end" of digital diplomacy, and it also remains limited. There is also a need to further broaden this entire system by fostering an active role in launching the "back-end" design supportive of MFAs' digital policies and processes. Through this twofold approach, the grey patch between digital diplomacy and foreign policy affairs can be minimized with the strategic use of digital diplomacy (Ittefaq, 2019).
4. The shift to digital connectivity is important for Pakistan because it allows for covering the existing domestic fault lines of the

country. For instance, given the daunting challenges of security and terrorism in Pakistan, the commencement of any international summit poses greater security challenges. Virtual engagement allows for overcoming security risks and it also allows for minimizing the economic expenses of the country that is teetering and wobbling in an economic soft path over the past few years. The twofold advantage of digital connectivity allows for pursuing foreign policy objectives in a much better way. To further extend diplomatic engagement worldwide, the government under MOFA should establish a “Centre for Strategic Communications” with advanced virtual step-up by prompting soft diplomacy among the global blogosphere (Betz & Phillips, 2017). There should professional team that can develop the proper content for the various social media platforms and also the appointment of dedicated social media officers to be made in each region.

5. For digital diplomacy effectiveness, there is a dire need for a centralized mechanism that can bring the entire structure of diplomacy to the trending contours (Cull, 2010). The government and state policy institutions must be apt to a model that can better pursue the policy objectives. Concrete steps should be taken; the Digital School Foundation can be the cornerstone of this new policy drive. Pakistan must review and access the best practices of digital diplomacy across the world in terms of technical and normative prospects. Likewise, it should also be regulated as a pre-requisite for all the diplomats/ government officials and bureaucrats to learn and adopt all the emerging niches that enable better global outreach with ideal gains vis-à-vis foreign policy objectives.
6. Pakistan’s foreign policy academic discourse lacks the study of digital diplomacy (Ismail, 2020). No academic institution or university offers any kind of such academic courses or full-time degrees. That creates one of the biggest bottlenecks as the majority of our younger generation is

hardly familiar with the concept of digital diplomacy in academia. Herein it requires special attention to promote digital diplomacy as an academic discourse. This step would allow us to groom our generations on the pathways of the globally driven practices regarding foreign policy and it will also accomplish goals by bringing resounding diplomatic successes at foreign policy fronts.

7. As Pakistan's digital diplomacy structure is in its nascent phase, it poses countless vulnerabilities pertaining to cybersecurity, data thefts and communication errors. It is often witnessed that various official accounts of diplomatic missions, embassies, and personal social media accounts of key stakeholders are hacked and misused. This vulnerability is a matter of great concern for Pakistan as it directly hits the core interest's derail. Hence special efforts need to be carried out at the operational and tactical level to address such challenges that have a massive impact on the diplomacy and other related affairs of the state (Iftekhar& Bokhari, 2022). Security breaches and data thefts must be avoided by the utility of advanced technology and AI, OSINT can also be used to secure and protect the data and other related accounts used for diplomatic communication and engagement (Manor & Pamment, 2019).
8. Apart from the state diplomatic machinery other wheels of diplomacy such as inter-state associations and forums, communities, and organizations also need strong digital connectivity as it is considered a major source of the diplomatic relations of Pakistan with the rest of the world. Such bodies/ consortiums should promote digital presence along with the cause and mission for better and more accurate information to the connecting people (Shabbar, 2021). Indeed, Pakistan seeks digital diplomacy connectivity at all the tires such as track II, P2P, B2B, shuttle diplomacy, and other emerging means, merely relying on Track I does not provide the desired outcomes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Pakistan's opportunities and difficulties in the field of digital diplomacy create a complicated environment that calls for strategic insight and adaptation. On the one hand, Pakistan has a lot of potential to improve its diplomatic efforts thanks to the expanding technological developments and the extensive use of digital platforms. The nation may efficiently promote its national interests, project its soft power, and reach a worldwide audience by utilizing social media, online forums, and digital communication channels. Additionally, digital diplomacy can promote increased participation with the international community, encourage interpersonal relationships, and forge alliances with other countries to improve understanding and collaboration. The quick development of e-diplomacy may also result in diplomatic initiatives that are more effective and economical, creating new opportunities for global cooperation and alliances (Pipchenko, [2020](#)).

To ensure the success of its digital diplomacy activities, Pakistan must overcome a number of obstacles despite these encouraging prospects. It must first address the problem of internet accessibility and digital literacy within its own borders. Rural areas may still lack adequate connectivity even though big urban centres may have robust digital infrastructure, which makes it difficult for the nation to successfully engage its whole population and provide a cohesive national story. Pakistan also has to deal with the dangers of disinformation and cyberwarfare. The propagation of false narratives and misinformation could jeopardize the nation's diplomatic efforts and credibility in the international arena as the digital

space grows more competitive. It is crucial to invest in cybersecurity and create systems to successfully combat internet propaganda and unfriendly activity. Concerns about data security and privacy must also be addressed. Sensitive data gathering and storage may come under international scrutiny, and any alleged data misuse may lead to diplomatic disagreements or strained ties with other countries.

In the modern age of digital diplomacy, there is a need for Pakistan to develop and institutionalize mechanisms for digital diplomacy adaptation. At the primary level, the stakeholders must work for the development of digital diplomacy authority regulated by the MOFA and other higher-ups including the armed forces, and LAEs respectively. Apart from technical expertise, digital diplomacy promotion seeks massive financial budgets. Herein the government must allocate special funds for digital diplomacy promotion. There is a dire need to harness the digital culture for the adaption of digital diplomacy as the new normal in Pakistan's foreign policy. Additionally, comprehensive training programs for diplomats and government officials on digital diplomacy best practices and cyber hygiene will be instrumental in fostering a capable and responsible digital diplomatic corps. In conclusion, the future of Pakistan's digital diplomacy holds immense potential for strengthening its international standing and achieving its diplomatic objectives. By effectively addressing challenges and seizing opportunities, Pakistan can emerge as a digitally savvy nation that effectively engages the global community and shapes its narrative in the increasingly interconnected world.

References

- Aftab, N. (2020b). Pakistani bureaucracy: crisis of governance, prospects and recommended reforms. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Delivery.cfm/SSRN_ID3549924_code3990137.pdf?abstr actid=3549924&mirid=1&type=2
- Ahmed, I., & Rafique, A. (2017). *Pakistan's Democratic Transition: Change and persistence (1st Ed.)*. Routledge.
- Alvi, A. S., & Zaheer, F. (2021). New Trend of Digital Diplomacy in Pakistan: Amelioration or Deterioration. *ASLAN Journal of International Peace & Security (AJIPS)*, 5(2), 98–108. <http://www.ajips.org/index.php/ajips/article/view/2021-vol-5-new-trend-of-digital-diplomacy-in-pakistan>
- Baissultanova, K. Ch., & Baktybekova, B. B. (2020, January 1). On the issue of digital diplomacy in the context of public diplomacy in modern international relations.. <https://dspace.enu.kz/bitstream/handle/data/17650/on-the-issue-of-digital-diplomacy-in-the-context-of-public-diplomacy-in-modern-international-relatio .pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Betz, D., & Phillips, V. T. J. (2018). Putting the Strategy back into Strategic Communications. *Defence Strategic Communications*. <https://doi.org/10.30966/2018.riga.3.2>
- Bjola, C. (2016). Digital diplomacy – the state of the art. *Global Affairs*, 2(3), 297–299. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23340460.2016.1239372>
- Cull, N. J. (2010). Public diplomacy: Seven lessons for its future from its past. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 6(1), 11–17. <https://doi.org/10.1057/pb.2010.4>
- Feijóo, C., Kwon, Y., Bauer, J. M., Bohlin, E., Howell, B., Jain, R., Potgieter, P. H., Vu, K., Whalley, J., & Xia, J. (2020). Harnessing artificial intelligence (AI) to increase wellbeing for all: The case for a new technology diplomacy. *Telecommunications Policy*, 44(6), 101988. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.telpol.2020.101988>
- Habibullah, M., & Li, X. (2022). Exploring the extent of digitalisation and digital diplomacy in Pakistan embassies. *The Journal of International Communication*, 28(2), 206–227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13216597.2022.2073255>
- Harris, B. (2013). Diplomacy 2.0: The Future of Social Media in Nation Branding. Exchange: *The Journal of Public Diplomacy*, 4(1), 17–32. <https://surface.syr.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1032&context=exchange>
- Iftekhar, B., & Bokhari, H. (2022). Channelising Digitalisation Amidst COVID-19 Outbreak: Case of Multichannel ICTs in Pakistan. In *Lecture notes in networks and systems* (pp. 369–377). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-5655-2_35
- Ismail, N. (2020). Diplomacy in the Age of the Internet: Challenges and Prospects. Academia.edu. https://www.academia.edu/47753287/Diplomacy_in_the_Age_of_the_Internet_Challenges_and_Prospects
- Ittefaq, M. (2019). Digital Diplomacy via Social Networks: A Cross-National Analysis of Governmental usage of Facebook and Twitter for digital engagement. *Journal of Contemporary Eastern Asia*, 18(1), 49–69. <https://doi.org/10.17477/jcea.2019.18.1.042>
- Pamment, J., & Manor, I. (2019). Towards prestige mobility? Diplomatic prestige and digital diplomacy. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 32(2), 93–131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2019.1577801>
- Pipchenko, N. (2020). Digital Diplomacy: How International Actors Transform Their Foreign Policy Activity. *Ukraine Analytica*, 20(2), 19–25. <https://doi.org/https://ukraine-analytica.org/digital-diplomacy-how-international-actors-transform-their-foreign-policy-activity/>
- Shabbar, S. (2021). Innovation Deficiency in Pakistan. *Express Tribune*, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2335751/innovation-deficiency-in-pakistan>