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Digital Diplomacy and Its Effect on International Relations

Bridget S. Verrekia '18, Gettysburg College

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Abstract

Digital technology has undoubtedly shaped the way in which the modern world works, going so far as to create a new form of diplomacy known as digital diplomacy. This paper seeks to explore the evolving nature of digital diplomacy and determine its effect on international relations. Four in-person interviews and 20 academic sources were used in order to assess the advantages and challenges that digital diplomacy presents. Acknowledging the way in which diplomats have been able to utilize social media to further the interests of their nations, this paper argues that digital diplomacy is a positive tool that can be used by governments in modern day statecraft. However, traditional methods of diplomacy still remain relevant.

Keywords

digital diplomacy, international affairs

Disciplines

International and Intercultural Communication | International Relations

Comments

Written as part of the SIT Switzerland: Multilateral Diplomacy and International Relations program.

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Digital Diplomacy and Its Effect on International Relations

By: Bridget Verrekia

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SIT Switzerland: Multilateral Diplomacy and International Relations

Dr. Gyula Csurgai and Dr. Heikki Mattila

Gettysburg College

Political Science and International Affairs

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Abstract

Digital technology has undoubtedly shaped the way in which the modern world works, going so far as to create a new form of diplomacy known as digital diplomacy. This paper seeks to explore the evolving nature of digital diplomacy and determine its effect on international relations. Four in-person interviews and 20 academic sources were used in order to assess the advantages and challenges that digital diplomacy presents. Acknowledging the way in which diplomats have been able to utilize social media to further the interests of their nations, this paper argues that digital diplomacy is a positive tool that can be used by governments in modern day statecraft. However, traditional methods of diplomacy still remain relevant.

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Introduction

The digital age of smart phones and Twitter accounts has threatened to change diplomacy as we know it. With new technology providing access to instant information and interactive online communication, diplomats and government officials have begun to use this to their advantage. This research paper seeks to examine the way in which digital diplomacy is affecting international affairs.

Scholarly research is reviewed at the beginning of the paper in order to situate the topic amongst important literature and present the major debates about digital diplomacy that exist today. The paper then uses the research methodology section to explain how information for analysis was obtained. Concepts such as traditional diplomacy, public diplomacy, and digital diplomacy are then discussed in detail to later answer the research question. The advantages of using digital technologies for diplomacy are explored in the analysis section, as are the potential challenges and threats. Finally, the conclusion seeks to put the findings into a larger context, explaining what digital diplomacy means for the future of international relations

The conclusions reached in this paper are important because they help to put the future of diplomacy in perspective. With traditional methods of diplomacy quickly changing due to innovations in technology, many have been left to question whether or not diplomacy is still valuable. By assessing both the advantages and challenges that digital diplomacy presents, an argument can ultimately be made for the ability of digitalization to enhance diplomacy in the modern world. However, although these digital tools can be strategically used to improve a country's international relations, they will never completely eliminate the need for humans in the field, travelling to foreign countries, analyzing information, and providing foreign policy suggestions.

Literature Review

Since digital diplomacy is such a new concept, there is little existing literature about it. Journal articles such as “Public diplomacy” by J. Melissen and “What is public diplomacy? Past practices, present conduct, possible future” by W. Roberts first explain the transformation from traditional diplomacy to public diplomacy. These sources highlight the way in public diplomacy reshaped foreign policy discussions from occurring only between elites, to now occurring between government officials and foreign publics. However, there is debate amongst scholar as to how new digital technologies are affecting public diplomacy. Literature such as *Diplomacy in the Digital Age* by Brian Hocking and “The digital diplomacy potential” by Kamen Lovez point out two different theories, with some scholars believing digitalization enhances public diplomacy, and others claiming that it completely alters it into something new, known as digital diplomacy.

DiploFoundation, an organization that promotes more inclusive diplomacy, has been the leading source for discussions about digital diplomacy. Blog posts found on the organization’s website have begun to popularize the topic by noting examples of its use. In *Twitter for Diplomats*, Andreas Sandres compiles a collection of tweets made by government officials to provide real-life evidence of digital diplomacy at work. In an attempt to assess the impact digital diplomacy has had on international relations, Twiplomacy, an online website, has conducted several case studies. However, it has ultimately concluded that digital diplomacy is too new to be able to measure any long-lasting effects.

Even though scholars are becoming more interested in digital diplomacy as it continues to evolve, gaps still remain. This paper seeks to determine what effect digital diplomacy is having on international relations by analyzing the advantages and challenges it presents.

Research Methodology

Several different approaches were taken in order to collect data on this topic. With social media being such a new concept in the discussion of diplomacy, it was difficult to know where to begin to look for information. However, both primary and secondary sources were able to provide this paper with information.

Interviews served as the primary source of data for this project. Four in-person interviews were conducted in the spring of 2017, with interviewees being contacted via e-mail. Interviewees were chosen based on their expertise of the subject and location to Geneva. Individuals who had previously worked as diplomats or were currently working for organizations that promoted diplomacy were selected. Ethical considerations were made prior to each interview, with each interviewee giving their consent to be mentioned in the paper.

Academic literature served as the secondary source of data for this paper. Twenty scholarly sources and several other websites provided this paper with a range of information about digital diplomacy. Many of the individuals that served as interviewees were also able to recommend books and journals that are referenced throughout this paper. In addition, the United Nations Library in Geneva and Gettysburg College's remote library resources made it possible to access scholarly sources that would have otherwise needed to be purchased. The qualitative research obtained from these sources was then analyzed in order to determine the effect digital diplomacy is having on international relations.

Traditional Diplomacy

Diplomacy is a concept that has existed for many centuries, even before it was given an official name. Diplomacy refers to negotiations made between actors as they attempt to reach certain objectives. In the context of international affairs, diplomacy is a method by which states manage their relationships with one another and try to achieve their national interests.¹ There are several incentives for states to work with each other within the international system. As described by the realist theory of international relations, states seek security and power within the international system. In order to obtain security and power, states build strategic relationships with one another, constructing alliances to defend their own interests. Therefore, the vulnerability of states, their desire for power, their common interests with other states, and their realization of the benefits of trade, motivate states to partake in diplomacy.²

Although diplomacy is often carried out by states for self-interests, diplomacy has resulted in a lot of good for the world. Diplomacy has commonly been used to prevent war and violence, address global issues, and promote trade. Without diplomacy, states in the international system would be left to try to achieve their interests in less peaceful ways, with a lack of communication and compromise.³

Diplomacy is carried out through multiple channels in the international system, one of the most well-known being through diplomatic missions. Foreign embassies are established around the world in order to address bilateral issues, enhancing the relationship between the country the

¹ Amacker, Christopher. 2011. "The Functions of Diplomacy," *E-International Relations Students*. July 20. <http://www.e-ir.info/2011/07/20/the-functions-of-diplomacy/>

² Rozental, Andres and Alicia Buenrosrto. 2013 "Bilateral Diplomacy," *Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*. 230-235.

³ Amacker, Christopher. "The Functions of Diplomacy."

embassy is from and the country they are in. By ensuring that the host country approves of the presence of the embassy and that the embassy does not infringe upon the sovereignty of the host country, embassies are able to conduct international affairs diplomatically.⁴ Diplomats execute their missions in three major ways, the first being by representing the interests of the country they are coming from.⁵ By engaging in conversations with the government of the country they are in, diplomats are able to make their foreign interests known. If the government recognizes common interests between the two countries, it may develop policies to benefit the country that the embassy is coming from. The second part of the mission includes taking time to learn about the interests of the country they are in and reporting this information back home.⁶ With this information, ministries try to determine what foreign policies should be initiated in regard to that country. These foreign policy plans are then offered up to political leaders, who make the final decision about what to do.⁷ Finally, embassies use diplomacy to expand the political, economic, and cultural ties between two countries.⁸ Helping set up study abroad opportunities in each other's countries is an example of how diplomatic missions allow two states to strengthen their relationship.⁹ In the same way, consulates in foreign countries help provide visitors with visas and keep them up to date on what is going on inside a country so that people can continue to travel back and forth. Performing these tasks allows diplomats to engage in negotiations with another country that will ultimately enhance their relationship.

⁴ Amacker, Christopher. "The Functions of Diplomacy."

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Imhoof, Rodolphe. Swiss Ambassador. 3 April 2017. Formal Interview. Café Léo, Geneva.

⁸ Amacker, Christopher. "The Functions of Diplomacy."

⁹ Ujvari, Balazs. Research Fellow for Egmont Institute. 6 March 2017. Formal Interview. Egmont Institute, Brussels.

Diplomacy is not just used to manage bilateral relationships. In more recent times, international institutions have been created in order to mediate the interests of multiple states. By sending representatives of their countries to forums where they can meet and take part in discussions with others, states are able to make their stance on global issues known. Although these states continue to seek power and security, in multilateral diplomacy, they are often also seeking to find the best solution to a world problem. Diplomacy allows these states to engage in dialogue in order to make compromises and reach agreements.

The United Nations is probably the first international organization that comes to mind when thinking of examples of multilateral diplomacy.¹⁰ Consisting of 193 member states, the United Nations works to negotiate international treaties to solve global issues such as human rights violations, climate change, and lack of education. The General Assembly of the United Nations holds regular meeting sessions in which representatives from each member state have a chance to discuss the issues. With each state only being granted the power to give one vote, the United Nations highlights how necessary compromise and discussion is in diplomacy.

The World Trade Organization is another example of an international organization that utilizes multilateral diplomacy. In modern times, states have recognized the benefits that come from trade, and have sought to become more powerful within the international system by improving their own economies. This has led some states to conduct trade in ways that others consider unfair or discriminatory. The 164 member states of the WTO have committed themselves to reaching diplomatic solutions to solve this issue, benefitting both themselves and the international system as a whole. Like the United Nations, the member states of the WTO meet to negotiate agreements, ultimately creating trade rules regarding international commerce.

¹⁰ Mahbubani, K. 2013. "Multilateral Diplomacy," *Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy* 249-262.

Members of the WTO help create, practice, and enforce all of these rules.¹¹ It is important to note that WTO members must reach a consensus in order for an agreement to go into effect, again demonstrating the necessity for dialogue in diplomacy.

The way in which diplomacy has been carried out for the last several centuries can be referred to as “traditional diplomacy.” Throughout time, traditional diplomacy has grown to acquire a stereotype for the way in which it operates. For example, when the public thinks of a diplomat, they often imagine a well-dressed man who attends important social functions and has a wealth of knowledge about confidential affairs.¹² Diplomacy is seen as a field that is formal and secretive, taking place within small networks of important contacts rather than extended public circles.¹³

Within traditional diplomacy, diplomats have played a very specific role. Acting as a messenger between their home government and the government of the country they were sent to, diplomats were given one or two topics to focus their mission on.¹⁴ In the past, traveling to a foreign nation and getting set up at a post may have taken a diplomat a long time, during which the situation within the country could have changed. This meant that when diplomats arrived at their post, they needed to know how to adapt and make decisions that were in the interest of their government on their own.¹⁵ Diplomats were given broad frameworks to operate under, not

¹¹ “Understanding the WTO.” 2015. WTO publications.
https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/understanding_e.pdf

¹² Rozental, Andres and Alicia Buenrosrto. “Bilateral Diplomacy”

¹³ Zeepedia. “Diplomacy.”
http://www.zeepedia.com/read.php?diplomacy_how_diplomacy_functions_traditional_versus_modern_diplomacy_international_relations_ir&b=100&c=10

¹⁴ Imhoof, Rodolphe. Formal Interview.

¹⁵ Ibid.

having the ability to obtain direct advice from their home government on a frequent basis.¹⁶ In the eyes of their government, diplomats were a truly valuable resource. Being present in the field by living in this new country for several years allowed diplomats to gain important information about what was going on within the country's borders.¹⁷

Traditional diplomacy relied on person-to-person communication, on both a bilateral and multilateral level. Diplomats travelling to foreign countries were expected to be socially skilled. They needed to know how to aggressively promote the interest of their country while also being able to make smart compromises.¹⁸ In regard to embassies, countries believed that the number of missions they had abroad directly correlated to their international success. They looked to expand the locations where they had diplomats posted, seeing the advantage in these direct lines of communication.¹⁹ International institutions, too, valued this in-person communication. Holding large international conferences in locations such as Vienna and Geneva, international leaders from around the world were able to come together to discuss their interests. However, as globalization and technology began to change the world, traditional diplomacy changed too.

The Digital Age

The development of the internet caused a major change in the world. The internet, along with computer systems, provided the first opportunity for instant access to new information and the ability to send a written message in a matter of seconds. In its early innovation, the internet was a tool used only by the government. It was a state-controlled project that relied on expert

¹⁶ Imhoof, Rodolphe. Formal Interview.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Rozental, Andres and Alicia Buenrosrto. "Bilateral Diplomacy."

¹⁹ Ibid.

coders to know how to operate it.²⁰ Then, as the internet slowly became available to the general public, it became evident that it was going to grow into something larger.

Many believe that the world is currently experiencing a second revolution in internet technology, referring to it as the “Web 2.0.”²¹ The twenty-first century has been marked by its transition to mobile technology, where people no longer have to sit by their computers in order to access the internet. The development of smartphones allows people to bring their phone with them anywhere they go, continuing their instant text communications throughout the day. In addition, the plethora of mobile satellites around the world has now made it possible for people in less developed areas of the world to join in on these conversations.²² With mobile devices and the internet promoting instant, yet perpetual communication, the way individuals live their lives has changed, making it much easier to get into contact with someone.²³

Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Snapchat have only furthered this digital age. 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.²⁴ Another study found that 70% of adults online receive most of their news from links posted through their personal social network on Facebook, and 36% receive news and information via Twitter.²⁵ Sites such as Facebook boast of 845 million monthly active users, while it has been

²⁰ Dentzel, Zaryn. 2017. “How the Internet Has Changed Everyday Life.” *OpenMind*. <https://www.bbvaopenmind.com/en/article/internet-changed-everyday-life/?fullscreen=true>

²¹ Ibid.

²² Dizrad Jr, W. 2001. *Digital Diplomacy U.S. foreign policy in the information age*. London: Praeger

²³ Costigan, Sean S. and Jake Perry. 2012. *Cyberspaces and Global Affairs*. New York: Routledge.

²⁴ Sandre, Andreas. 2013. *Twitter for Diplomats*. Geneva: DiploFoundation.

²⁵ Mergel, Ines. 2012. "The social media innovation challenge in the public sector." *Information Polity: The International Journal Of Government & Democracy In The Information Age* 17, 281-292.

recorded that Twitter generates 175 million new tweets a day.²⁶ The popular use of these social media sites has caused the world to feel like a much smaller place, with people all over the globe having similar access to news about politics, pop culture, and more.²⁷

Digital Diplomacy

Although digital diplomacy is becoming an important topic, it still lacks an official definition. Several organizations have attempted to form a concrete definition of the term, yet it continues to be used vaguely. This lack of precision in definition has caused different scholars to research digital diplomacy in different ways, focusing on everything from cyber security to social media to internet governance.²⁸ Another reason for this lack of precision stems from the fact that digital diplomacy is often referred to by different names. Scholars have been using the terms “cyber-diplomacy,” “net-diplomacy,” “e-diplomacy,” and “Twiplomacy” interchangeably.²⁹ Although these terms mean relatively the same thing, each prefix concerns a more specific area of the topic that needs to be used in the right context. For instance, “cyber” is usually used when discussing security issues, “e” for business matters, and “twi” should only be used when referring specifically to Twitter.³⁰ The interchangeable use of these words may seem harmless, but they are partially responsible for the inability of digital diplomacy to be concretely defined. The definition offered by DiploFoundation, an organization that focuses on the nexus between digital technology and diplomacy,³¹ seems to be a relatively good one, stating that digital diplomacy “describes new methods and modes of conducting diplomacy with the help of

²⁶ Sandre, Andreas. *Twitter for Diplomats*.

²⁷ Costigan, Sean S. and Jake Perry. *Cyberspaces and Global Affairs*.

²⁸ Hocking, Brian and Jan Melissen. 2015. *Diplomacy in the Digital Age*. Netherlands: Clingendael.

²⁹ DiploFoundation. “Digital Diplomacy, E-diplomacy, Cyber diplomacy.” <https://www.diplomacy.edu/e-diplomacy>.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Jacobson, Barbara. 2017. Formal Interview. WMO in Geneva.

the internet and ICTs, and describes their impact on contemporary diplomatic practices.”³² In recent times, diplomats and political leaders have begun to recognize the ways in which they can use the popularity of technology in this digital age to enhance their international relations and ultimately further the interests of their country.

Scholars unanimously agree that the origins of digital diplomacy can be traced back to the United States. More specifically, they acknowledge the ways in which former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, was able to shape the foreign policy strategies of the State Department to exploit new technology. During her time as Secretary of State, Clinton made social media an integral part of many of the programs run by the Department of State (DOS), seeking to utilize this popular new trend as a tool for statecraft. In her own words, Clinton wanted to run a 21st Century Statecraft Platform that would “reach beyond traditional government-to-government relations and engage directly with people around the world.”³³ Her dedication to prioritizing digital diplomacy is demonstrated by the fact that the DOS currently has 25 different nodes at its headquarters that focus on digital diplomacy, with over 1,000 employees utilizing it in their work at home and abroad.³⁴ On an everyday basis, the DOS also uses social media to monitor information posted online so that it can modify its messages to respond to public opinion, and monitor Twitter feeds in over 100 languages³⁵.

Since the United States’ adoption of digital diplomacy, countries all over the world have been following suit. 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.

³² DiploFoundation. “Digital Diplomacy, E-diplomacy, Cyber diplomacy.”

³³ Bjola, Corneliu and Marcus Holmes. 2015. *Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*. Routledge.

³⁴ Sandre, Andreas. *Twitter for Diplomats*.

³⁵ Zhang, Juyan. 2013. “A Strategic Issue Management (SIM) Approach to Social Media Use in Public Diplomacy,” *American Behavior Scientist* 57 (9).

As far as individual countries go, the United Kingdom has since established an official Office of Digital Diplomacy within its government and countries such as Sweden, France, and Poland have been noted for their attempts to incorporate digital tools into their statecraft. In regions such as Asia, India seems to be leading the way, with its Ministry of External Affairs posting its first tweet in 2010. Some regions, like Africa, have yet to show much progress towards moving in this direction.³⁶

It is difficult to talk about digital diplomacy without mentioning a popular debate about it that has risen among scholars. This debate questions whether or not digital diplomacy uses new technology to conduct public diplomacy in a more modern way, or if it completely alters the way in which public diplomacy operates, changing the conversation from a monologue to a dialogue.³⁷ In order to weigh in on this discussion, it is important to understand what public diplomacy is. Public diplomacy pertains to the way in which countries communicate with foreign publics in an attempt to achieve their international interests.³⁸ Public diplomacy emerged in the early twentieth century, with the invention and popularity of the radio enhancing means of communication.³⁹ Political groups such as the Nazis and the Bolsheviks used the radio as a tool to spread their political propaganda to citizens of other countries. For the first time, these groups were able to directly communicate with foreign publics without having to engage with their governments.⁴⁰ These interactions with the public became important for international policy success.⁴¹ While meetings between government officials are important, public opinion can also

³⁶ Bjola, Corneliu and Marcus Holmes. *Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*.

³⁷ Manor, Ilan. "What is Digital Diplomacy?" *Digital Diplomacy Blog*.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Melissen, J. 2013. "Public diplomacy," *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*. 436–452.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Roberts, W. R. 2007. "What is public diplomacy? Past practices, present conduct, possible future." *Mediterranean Quarterly*.

be essential in shaping international policy.⁴² Public diplomacy has continued on today, as diplomats try to reach out to the public of the country they are posted in, rather than just the elites.⁴³

Although it can be a useful diplomatic tool, public diplomacy can be difficult to actually carry out in the field. Despite trying to engage with their foreign publics, diplomats often find themselves separated from the public, not able to engage with them. This is largely because embassies, especially American ones, are set up like compounds, surrounded by big fences which people are unlikely to enter. Without meaning to, diplomats have built up communication barriers between themselves and the public, when in reality they are trying to tear them down.⁴⁴ This is why many have found a positive link between digitalization and public diplomacy, with new technology allowing diplomats to use the internet and social media to directly reach out to citizens in a way even the radio could not. This is why some argue that digital diplomacy is different from public diplomacy, changing interactions from a monologue to a dialogue.⁴⁵ Foreign policy can benefit when there is a two way exchange of information between the public and the government.⁴⁶ As public diplomacy moved from the radio, which usually sent out one message to everyone, to the internet, where people are exposed to many different points of view, people could tune in to the message that matched their interest.⁴⁷

Advantages of Digital Diplomacy

⁴² Nye, J. 2004. *Soft power*. New York: Public Affairs.

⁴³ Ujvari, Balazs. Formal Interview.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Manor, Ilan. "What is Digital Diplomacy?"

⁴⁶ Grunig, J.E. and T. Hunt 1984. *Managing Public Relations*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

⁴⁷ Cull, N. 2011. "WikiLeaks, public diplomacy 2.0 and the state of digital public diplomacy," *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 7(1):1-8.

The growing popularity of digital diplomacy is enough to suggest that there must be advantages to its use, so it is important to analyze what some of these benefits are. One of the most appealing aspects of digital diplomacy is its ability to foster two-way communication. The Netherlands Ambassador to the United States, Rudolf Bekink, notes that “the digital arena opens new possibilities from one-on-one conversations to dialogues with communities.”⁴⁸ As mentioned previously, methods of traditional diplomacy relied strictly on interactions between government officials. Although the adoption of public diplomacy sought to change this, government officials still only interacted with the public on a general level, usually addressing them through one-sided radio broadcasts. The development of social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook have created open conversation spaces where government officials can directly communicate with certain audiences and individuals. These lines of two-way communication allow individuals to influence their government in ways that were not previously possible.⁴⁹ Governments, and ultimately their foreign policies, benefit from these conversations with the public, because they are able to gain a better grasp of public opinions on certain issues.⁵⁰

One of the best examples of this was displayed by UK Foreign Secretary, William Hague, who used his Twitter account to launch an initiative called “Meet the Foreign Secretary.” This initiative asked his followers to tweet him with their ideas of what issues they thought the Foreign Office’s priorities should be in the upcoming years, with the promise of rewarding several participants with the ability to meet him.⁵¹ Hundreds of people joined in to tweet Hague with their opinions, showcasing how social media can provide a platform for the public to be included in conversations about foreign policy. Other foreign officials have become well-known

⁴⁸ Hocking, Brian and Jan Melissen. *Diplomacy in the Digital Age*.

⁴⁹ Ross, Alec. 2011 “Digital Diplomacy and US Foreign Policy.” *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* (6): 451-455

⁵⁰ Bjola, Corneliu and Marcus Holmes. *Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*.

⁵¹ Sandre, Andreas. *Twitter for Diplomats*.

for their online interactions as well. For example, the Twitter account for the Dutch government devotes every weekday from 8 in the morning until 8 at night to answering questions posed by its followers, and reportedly 81% of Rwandan President, Paul Kagame's tweets are replies to other users.⁵² New social media features such as Facebook live video chat and Twitter polls have made these interactions even easier.⁵³

In the same way, social media has allowed diplomats and world leaders to easily extend their diplomatic networks and build strategic relationships. Because digitalization has caused so much to be easily accessible online, diplomats no longer exercise a monopoly on information.⁵⁴ This loss of power has left room for other non-state actors to become more valuable than before, creating new incentives for diplomats to break free from their confined network of elites.⁵⁵ Social media has made it easy for government officials to do so. Although government officials have used these sites to interact with each other, they much more often use them to connect with others.⁵⁶ Michael Oren, Israeli Ambassador to the United States notes that many diplomats use social media in order to be able to connect with the younger generation, acknowledging how often they use it.⁵⁷ Further examples of this are exhibited by the Digital Outreach Team of the DOS, which has made profiles on popular Arabic, Urdu, and Persian language internet forums in order to make connections with citizens living in the Middle East.⁵⁸

⁵² Twiplomacy. "Twiplomacy Study 2016." <http://twiplomacy.com/blog/twiplomacy-study-2016/>

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Lovez, Kamen and Art Murray. 2013. "The digital diplomacy potential." *KMWorld* 22(6).

⁵⁵ Hocking, Brian and Jan Melissen. *Diplomacy in the Digital Age*.

⁵⁶ Twiplomacy. "Twiplomacy Study 2016."

⁵⁷ Sandre, Andreas. *Twitter for Diplomats*.

⁵⁸ Bjola, Corneliu and Marcus Holmes. *Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*.

Digitalization has even brought about a new, unique type of networking known as “Twiplomacy.”⁵⁹ Twiplomacy refers to the way in which individuals in the modern world form relationships simply by “following” each other on Twitter.⁶⁰ Researchers have begun to look into the effects these connections can actually have on international relations. A fascinating example can be found in how the United States regained its relationship with Cuba after several years of issuing an embargo. On May 26, 2015 the DOS decided to “follow” the State Department of Cuba on Twitter. Later that day, the same gesture was returned by Cuba. What is important to note is that this online connection occurred 2 months before the two countries officially welcomed each other back into their networks.⁶¹ Although talks about renewing an alliance had been happening before this event, this example highlights the way social media allows relationships to develop. Other countries have sought to make similar connections through the simple click of a button. Researchers studying Twiplomacy have recorded the way in which smaller countries have gone out of their way to try to form relationships with the rest of the world. Peru, for example, follows 509 world leaders on Twitter.⁶²

Another important advantage of digital diplomacy is that it leads to an increased sense of transparency. In the modern world, people put everything online. Individuals broadcast their lives to the public by updating their Facebook statuses and posting pictures on Twitter. This trend, along with a natural desire to want to know what one’s government is up to, has led to a public demand for transparency⁶³. With diplomacy being a profession that is notorious for its

⁵⁹ Twiplomacy. “Twiplomacy Study 2016.”

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Finaud, Marc. Formal Interview.

confidentiality, it has been difficult for some diplomats to find a balance between the two.⁶⁴ Yet, it is important for diplomats to utilize this new technology to its full potential. By making personalized posts about the activities they are carrying out, diplomats and political leaders are able to make the public feel as though they are included in important conversations.⁶⁵ For example, United States President Donald Trump posts daily tweets to let his followers know who he is meeting with that day and what they will be discussing. Research has shown that personalized messages such as these have positive effects, causing audiences to pay higher levels of attention to the information they read by creating visual images in their mind.⁶⁶ Research has also shown that emotionally-charged tweets receive the most attention online.⁶⁷ Many tweets by President Trump are often retweeted, sent to others, ultimately spreading his message. This personalization is good for diplomats and political leaders who want to engage with the public and appear as though they are being transparent.

The use of digital diplomacy also leads to a decrease in financial and environmental costs. With the advancement of technology, foreign representatives no longer need to get on a plane and travel to a distant country in order to hold a meeting. Telecommunication technologies such as Skype and Facetime allow people to communicate remotely, being able to discuss issues as if they were in the same room.⁶⁸ This means that foreign offices no longer need to spend as much on transportation costs and can instead use that money to invest in other areas. But telecommunication does not only provide diplomats with a financial benefit, it also provides an

⁶⁴ Hocking, Brian and Jan Melissen. *Diplomacy in the Digital Age*.

⁶⁵ Bjola, Corneliu and Marcus Holmes. *Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*.

⁶⁶ Strauß, Nadine, Sanne Kruikemeier, Heleen van der Meulen, and Guda van Noort. 2015. "Digital diplomacy in GCC countries: Strategic communication of Western embassies on Twitter," *Government Information Quarterly* 32, 369-379.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ujvari, Balazs. Formal Interview.

environmental one.⁶⁹ Digital technology in general has a great potential to reduce effects on our environment. For example, digitalization has led to newspapers and books being printed online, reducing paper and printing production. Telecommunication is another way that the environment benefits. The ministry of Japan conducted studies within their country and determined that the use of digital technology can reduce their CO2 emissions by up to 7%. By decreasing the need for physical travel, digital diplomacy causes financial and environmental costs to decline.⁷⁰

Challenges of Digital Diplomacy

Although this new technology comes with many benefits, it also introduces a set of challenges. One of these challenges is that some of the aforementioned benefits are not actually being achieved in practice. For example, although social media sites provide government officials with the ability to extend their influence by being interactive, personal, and transparent, not all leaders seem to be taking advantage of this opportunity.⁷¹ A study examining the communication strategies used by Western countries on social media provides disappointing results, revealing that most diplomats are not connecting with diplomats outside of their country. It also reveals that the non-government institutions they choose to follow are not very diverse, following mostly businesses.⁷² This information suggests that states and their representatives are still failing to exploit social media to its full potential.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Loerincik, Yves. 2006. "Environmental Impacts and Benefits of Information and Communication Technology Infrastructure and Services, Using Process and Input-Output Life Cycle Assessment." Thesis for the École Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne.

⁷¹ Strauß, Nadine. "Digital diplomacy in GCC countries: Strategic communication of Western embassies on Twitter."

⁷² Ibid.

Further studies about social media show that many actors are just generally misled when it comes to Twitter and how to use it. For instance, Ambassador Djalal of Indonesia has done a great job of acquiring a large following-base on his Twitter account; yet rankings indicate that he is much less influential than ambassadors with fewer followers. This means that although he has a large audience, Ambassador Djalal is not tweeting in a way that leads to increased interactions or an extended influence.⁷³ He is not alone; many governmental officials have started to use Twitter without really knowing what they are doing.⁷⁴ For example, Swedish foreign minister, Carl Bildt, is reported to have made a media mistake when he posted a tweet reading: “Leaving Stockholm and heading for Davos. Looking forward to World Food Program dinner tonight. Global hunger is an urgent issue!” With his followers finding a problem with the wording of his statement, Bildt ended up hurting his image instead of bolstering it.⁷⁵ Another example is seen in how the French Ambassador to the United States tweeted about the world coming to an end when Donald Trump was elected president, shaming those in the United States who had voted for him. Being stationed in the United States, this tweet was seen as highly controversial and largely frowned upon, so he eventually took it down.⁷⁶ This is problematic, as the whole point of digital diplomacy is to use social media as an easier way to communicate a state’s interest and develop important relationships.

Social media training seems to offer a solution to this challenge.⁷⁷ Some government officials have begun hiring communication professionals to run their social media accounts for them, leaving it up to these experts to know how to spread their policy ideas in the best way. For

⁷³ Sandre, Andreas. *Twitter for Diplomats*.

⁷⁴ Strauß, Nadine. "Digital diplomacy in GCC countries: Strategic communication of Western embassies on Twitter."

⁷⁵ Adesina1, Olubukola S. 2017. "Foreign policy in an era of digital diplomacy," *Cogent Social Sciences*.

⁷⁶ Finaud, Marc. French Diplomat. Formal Interview.

⁷⁷ Ujvari, Balazs. Formal Interview.

others, it seems that courses on social media may be in the works to be available to help those who want to run their accounts on their own. Handbooks such as *Twitter for Diplomats* provide basic tips for how to use social media, such as encouraging the use of slang and noting that deleting tweets is frowned upon.⁷⁸ Although digital diplomacy is challenging because there is no specific protocol on how to use social media successfully, if government officials make an effort to use this tool to its full potential, they will see rewards.

Another difficult challenge that digital diplomacy presents is cybersecurity. Although the rapid spread of information is often an advantage for digital diplomacy, it can also turn out to be a great disadvantage.⁷⁹ The dangerous ability for information to be leaked and accounts to be hacked has caused many online users to be wary of attack.⁸⁰ The most well-known example of information leakage is found in the recent United States scandal known as WikiLeaks.⁸¹ When WikiLeaks publically released private foreign policy files that had been shared between US embassies and the DOS, the whole world gained access to frank assessments that had been made by US diplomats about other world leaders and their host countries.⁸² With the United States feeling as though they had been directly attacked through WikiLeaks, and many other diplomats recognizing the potential for their private foreign policy information to be exposed online, people became hesitant about the idea of digital diplomacy.⁸³ This information puts targets on the backs

⁷⁸ Sandre, Andreas. *Twitter for Diplomats*.

⁷⁹ Jacobson, Barbara. Formal Interview.

⁸⁰ Adesina1, Olubukola S. 2017. "Foreign policy in an era of digital diplomacy."

⁸¹ Jacobson, Barbara. Formal Interview.

⁸² Manor, Ilan. 2015. "WikiLeaks Revisited." *Digital Diplomacy Blog*. <https://digdipblog.com/2015/11/09/wikileaks-revisited/>

⁸³ Bjola, Corneliu and Marcus Holmes. *Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*.

of individuals, putting their lives in physical danger.⁸⁴ Cyber-weapons that can interfere with government transmissions and disrupt the system have furthered these doubts.⁸⁵

Falling under the same theme of cybersecurity is the threat posed by anonymity online.⁸⁶ Social media and the internet limit the need for face-to-face communication, leaving people to interact online only through the words they type and the photos they choose to share. Because of this, it is very easy for users to hide behind a computer screen and pretend to be someone they are not.⁸⁷ This could lead to trouble, especially if the public relies on social media accounts as their main source for information from their government officials. If they are accidentally following an account that is run by an imposter, they may be receiving false or fake information. In addition, the ability to be anonymous has also been seen to encourage negative behavior. For instance, if a person knows they can verbally attack someone online without being caught or experiencing repercussions, they are more likely to cause mischief.⁸⁸ Because identity can be so easily concealed online, cyber-attacks are likely to happen.⁸⁹ This is worrisome in an environment that is supposed to be able to promote diplomacy.

Threats to cybersecurity have caused diplomats to worry that digital diplomacy is not possible. With diplomacy being a field known for its confidentiality, in the months following the WikiLeaks incident, many diplomats struggled to carry out their jobs as information-gatherers knowing that there was a constant threat of exposure. However, as time passes, it seems that

⁸⁴ Finaud, Marc. Formal Interview.

⁸⁵ Kurbalija, Jovan. 2017. *An Introduction to Internet Governance*. Geneva: DiploFoundation.

⁸⁶ Adesina, Olubukola S. "Foreign policy in an era of digital diplomacy."

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Costigan, Sean S. and Jake Perry. *Cyberspaces and Global Affairs*.

governments are learning how to take the precautions necessary to prevent information leakage to still gain the benefits of digitalization.⁹⁰ Social media training courses are currently being created in order to educate diplomats on how to use this tool in the safest and most influential way.

Possibly the greatest challenge for diplomats pursuing digital diplomacy is the fact that their role as diplomats is changing. Prior to digitalization, the main responsibilities of diplomats were to represent their governments while they were abroad and report information to their governments when they returned.⁹¹ Because diplomats were mostly unable to communicate with their governments while they were away, the information they provided when they returned was regarded as being new and valuable. However, this is not the case anymore.⁹² With social media sites now allowing any person to be both a producer and a consumer of information,⁹³ diplomats have lost their monopoly on being able to report about what is happening in other countries.⁹⁴ Diplomats are now competing with journalists and ordinary citizens who can easily pick up their phones and tell the world about what they have seen, a competition that diplomats will not win.⁹⁵

Due to this shift in information technology, governments are no longer left in the dark when diplomats are away at foreign embassies. Officials at headquarters have instantaneous access to international media, and are able to adjust the goals of their foreign policy missions

⁹⁰ Manor, Ilan. "WikiLeaks Revisted."

⁹¹ Rozental, Andres and Alicia Buenrosrto. "Bilateral Diplomacy."

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Finaud, Marc. French Diplomat. 28 April 2017. Formal Interview. Geneva Center for Security Policy, Geneva.

⁹⁴ Manor, Ilan. "WikiLeaks Revisted."

⁹⁵ Imhoof, Rodolphe. Formal Interview.

accordingly.⁹⁶ Because of this, diplomats in the modern world are less free within their given frameworks to develop the relationship between the country they come from and the country they are in.⁹⁷ Foreign ministries themselves have been given much more power, having access to reports that diplomats used to be responsible for generating.

Diplomats can overcome this challenge if they adapt their role to fit this new communication system. If diplomats no longer just report on the information they gather, but instead are able to analyze it, they will be able to play a valuable role in international affairs.⁹⁸ Scholars note that the WikiLeaks incident actually helped to highlight the quality of analysis that can be provided by diplomats, with the released files revealing the in-depth accounts of political and cultural transitions occurring around the world.⁹⁹ This incident reminded the world that diplomats carrying out missions in foreign countries truly are foreign policy experts, with access to unique knowledge about the places they are stationed. With so much information being posted online, diplomats are needed to be able to decipher what is true and what is false.¹⁰⁰ If diplomats in the modern world can transition from merely reporting information to being able to create hypothesis and facilitate discussions, they will be able to have a stronger influence on foreign policy decisions than ever before.¹⁰¹

Conclusion

⁹⁶ Rozental, Andres and Alicia Buenrosrto. "Bilateral Diplomacy."

⁹⁷ Imhoof, Rodolphe. Formal Interview.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Manor, Ilan. "WikiLeaks Revisted."

¹⁰⁰ Finaud, Marc. Formal Interview.

¹⁰¹ Imhoof, Rodolphe. Formal Interview.

Upon receiving the first telegraph message in 1860, British Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston, is reported to have exclaimed, “My God, this is the end of diplomacy!”¹⁰² Although it is true that internet technologies have reshaped traditional methods of diplomacy, the overall purpose of diplomacy remains the same. Diplomacy continues to be an essential part of a government’s ability to gain power within the international system.

Innovations in the digital age have made the execution of diplomacy easier. Social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook have expanded communication from being a monologue to a dialogue, allowing government officials to be able to engage in two-way conversations with public individuals. These sites have also made it easier for officials to expand their networks, making connections by the click of a button. Another advantage is that Twitter and Facebook have allowed diplomats to appear more personal and transparent to the public, developing a sense of public trust and ultimately extending their influence.

However, although technology is an asset that can greatly benefit those who use it in the right way, it is not a requirement and should not replace all parts of diplomacy. Poorer countries that are unable to keep up with the latest technologies should not fear that they will fall behind in the international system because traditional methods of diplomacy are still important. When it comes to international affairs, technology will never replace the expertise that can be gained from sending diplomats to foreign countries to observe these places first-hand. There is no certainty in where digital diplomacy will lead the world in the next few years, but there is certainty that diplomacy will remain an important part of international affairs.

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Jacobson, Barbara. Research and Project Associate for DiploFoundation. 12 April 2017. Formal Interview. World Meteorological Organization, Geneva.

Ujvari, Balazs. Research Fellow for Egmont Institute. 6 March 2017. Formal Interview. Egmont Institute, Brussels.

ISP Work Journal

Date: 2 February 2017

Upon arriving in Geneva, I do not have a specific ISP topic in mind. I plan to listen to the lectures of our guest speakers and attend international conferences in order to get an idea of what I want to write about. I hope to choose a topic that will be relevant to my future career path.

Date: 17 February 2017

With our first ISP proposal being due next week, I decided to meet with Aline for some guidance on how I should go about choosing a topic. I hold her that I am interested in a wide variety of topics and am unsure of how to narrow my choices down. She suggested that I come up with 3 topics that I am the most interested in, and then meet with either Dr. Csurgai or Dr. Mattila for their input.

3 broad topic areas of interest:

The effect of social media on international issues

Outsourcing and human rights violations

Diplomacy and terrorism

Date: 17 February 2017

Dr. Mattila was very open to listening to my topic ideas. He helped provide more specific ideas inside of the general themes I provided him. He suggested that I spend more time thinking about what interests me and doing some more research.

Date: 22 February 2017

I just submitted my first ISP proposal, proposing 2 different topics instead of just 1 with the permission of Aline.

Proposal #1:

Digital Diplomacy: What is it and what does it mean for the future of international relations?

(I came across this topic while trying to combine my interests in social media and diplomacy)

Proposal #2:

The Impending Refugee Crisis as a Result of Climate Change: What the international community can do about it

(I came across this topic when we attended the International Humanitarian Conference)

Date: 27 February 2017

I had my ISP advising meeting with Dr. Csurgai to discuss the 2 proposals I submitted. Although he said that he liked both topics, he thought it would be best for me to write about digital diplomacy. He suggested that I reach out to someone working at the Egmont Institute in Brussels for a potential interview, being a think tank focused on international affairs and diplomacy. He also suggested several other places I should look to for information, the first

being DiploFoundation and the second being a publication titled *Diplomacy in the Digital Age* by Brian Hocking.

Date: 1 March 2017

After visiting the website of the Egmont Institute in Brussels, I decided to e-mail 2 people to try to set up interviews. I e-mailed Marc Franco (Senior Associate Fellow who specializes in EU diplomacy) and Balazs Ujvari (Research Fellow who specializes in global governance and multilateral diplomacy.)

Date: 1 March 2017

Balazs Ujvari responded to my e-mail saying that he would be able to meet when I visited Brussels on our trip. We scheduled an interview for 2:15 on Monday, March 6th at the Egmont Institute.

Date: 1 March 2017

Marc Franco responded to my e-mail saying that he would be away from the Institute when we would be visiting Brussels, but he said that he would be available to do a phone interview later during the ISP period. I responded saying I would be in touch.

Date: 6 March 2017

I had my interview with Balazs Ujvari. He helped me learn about what public diplomacy is and how it relates to my topic. A summary of the interview is attached at the end.

Date: 21 March 2017

Today I e-mailed Ambassador Imhoof who came to speak to our class several times. I am hoping he can provide me with some important information, since he is a bit older and experienced this technology shift and also has spent his life conducting diplomacy.

Date: 28 March 2017

Ambassador Imhoof responded to my e-mail and we set up a meeting for Wednesday, April 5th at a location to be determined.

Date: 30 March 2017

Ambassador Imhoof emailed saying he could no longer make that date, so we rescheduled for an earlier time. We are now going to meet for a coffee at Café Leo at 9:30 on Monday April 3rd.

Date: 3 April 2017

Today I had interview with Ambassador Imhoof. He provided me with incredible information, really helping to shape the direction of my paper. He talked a lot about the evolving role of diplomats. A summary of the interview is attached at the end.

Date: 4 April 2017

Gloriana reached out to me on Facebook to see if we would want to do an interview together, as recommended by Dr. Csurgai. I responded saying yes, but then did not hear back from her.

Date: 8 April 2017

I reached out to Gloriana to see if she had thought about where we should do an interview, and she told me she was in the process of setting up an interview at DiploFoundation and would ask if I could come along.

Date: 10 April 2017

Gloriana confirmed the interview at DiploFoundation with Barbara Jacobson for the following Wednesday at 11 am.

Date: 12 April 2017

Today we had the interview with Barbara Jacobson. She talked mostly about the work DiploFoundation does. However, she did talk a little bit about the challenges of digital diplomacy, giving me more to expand upon in my paper. A summary of the interview is attached at the end.

Date: 19 April 2017

Sent Aline updated information on my ISP paper. I included the many new academic sources that are now in my bibliography. I was able to access most of these sources on the online catalog at the United Nations Library in Geneva.

Date: 22 April 2017

Still needing a final interview, I sent several e-mails to different offices working at the International Telecommunication Union in Geneva. Dr. Mattila had suggested I interview someone working here. However, I am not confident that I will get a response, as I could not find the direct contact information for any people. Their website only lists the e-mail addresses for their offices.

Date: 25 April 2017

I met with Dr. Mattila today to have a mid-ISP period advising session. He told me that he liked the way my paper was structured, taking time to explain diplomacy first. I told him that I was having trouble getting into contact with ITU, so he gave me the contact information for Marianne Lathuille who had previously served worked with SIT's Global Health program.

Date: 25 April 2017

E-mailed Marianne as instructed by Dr. Mattila, however I did not hear a response all day.

Date: 26 April 2017

I decided to e-mail Mr. Marc Finaud about a possible interview. I have spoken to him several times, with him having given my group a tour of the GCSP for the RME exercise. Hopefully I will be able to set up a time to meet with him.

Date: 27 April 2017

Mr. Finaud responded saying he would love to meet. We set up an interview for the following day at the GCSP at 11:30 am. Marianna Lathuille from ITU also responded saying that she could try to set up an interview for me with someone next week, but that they would be very

busy. I responded to her telling her that my paper would be due before then and that I had found another interview, so she did not have to worry.

Date: 28 April 2017

Had my interview with Mr. Finaud. Knowing that this was my final interview and I already had most of my paper written, he let me read through the outline for my paper. He then picked sections that he could expand on and gave me information there. It was super helpful. A summary of the interview is attached at the end.

Date: 28 April 2017

I finished my ISP!! Just need to print it out and purchase a binder.

When I worked on my ISP paper, I was always worked at the United Nations Library in Geneva or the Library in Uni Mail. I used the UN Library when I needed to access academic sources and obtain information, and I used Uni Mail when I was actually writing and piecing my paper together.

Summary of Interviews:

Ujvari, Balazs. Research Fellow for Egmont Institute. 6 March 2017. Formal Interview. Egmont Institute, Brussels.

Me: “Can you tell me a little bit about Egmont Institute in general? And what you do here?”

BU: “Egmont is a very special institute. We are part of the Belgium Foreign Ministry as a state-owned think tank. Every country in Europe has a national think tank specifically for international relations, and we are the Belgian one. We operate in two main buildings, the one we are speaking in being the less important one, and the main one being just across the road. Everyone who works here is Belgian, except for me. I’m not Belgian, I’m Hungarian but I’m trained as a global citizen, having studied at the College of Europe in order to work specifically for the EU. At Egmont, I do a lot of writing and event-planning, as I am still only 26 and on the younger side.”

Me: “You mentioned in your e-mail that you took a course about E-tools for diplomacy when you were getting your degree. Can you explain to me what you learned in that class?”

BU: “It wasn’t a major course, it was more of an optional workshop that I did. Actually, the guy who taught it is based in Geneva, so I can put you in touch with him. The course was about the importance of Twitter if you’re a diplomat. For example, the outcome of the Nuclear Deal with Iran was announced on Twitter earlier than in any official press communication. It shows just how important online tools are becoming with the rise of Twitter. In class we thought a lot about how diplomats go about writing a crafted tweet that can get the message out.”

Me: “Did your professor seem to think that Twitter will become a necessity for diplomacy? Will all diplomats have to get a Twitter?”

BU: “I definitely think so. If you do not have an appropriate online presence, you are missing out. I think that as a foreign ministry you’ve got to have a Twitter account nowadays. It’s really moving in that direction. And some member states are better and more adaptable than others. For example North-West Europe, such as the Netherlands and Denmark are really good at adapting to the evolving technology, but in the South, and in the East and Central Europe they are less likely to adapt quickly to the change. I think that’s interesting for you to analyze as well. And it’s not only Twitter, it’s Facebook as well. Having a profile is important.”

Me: “When I was reading about digital diplomacy, many articles mentioned its link to public diplomacy. Can you expand upon what public diplomacy is and how it ties into the new age of digital diplomacy?”

BU: “Yes, actually, I can put you in touch with another guy because I took a course in diplomacy with Brian Hocking and he is very keen on public diplomacy. Public diplomacy is basically about promoting your country in the eyes of the public of another country. For example, if you’re an American diplomat and you are posted to China, you will deal with Chinas leaders, from one elite to another elite. But public diplomacy is about going beyond that and dealing with the Chinese public as a whole. It is about showing them the opportunities they can have in the United States, such as studying in the United States, it is about promoting American culture

in China, by promoting American cuisine and introducing American films. Public diplomacy entails showcasing what a country has, targeting not the leadership of another country, but the public. However, this can be pretty hard to carry out in practice. If you look at what American diplomatic missions look like, I don't know if you've had the chance to see the one in Brussels, but it's like a compound. It's actually surrounded by a big fence. We are building walls between diplomats and the people when actually we should be doing the opposite. Great ambassadors are the ones who roll up their sleeves and go out and interact with the people."

Me: "How do you find the balance between what is too much to put online for the public to see and what is the right amount? For example, I think about how Trump has the ability to go on Twitter and tweet to the President of Mexico telling him that we are going to build a wall. Doing so allows the public to see their full interaction and it almost takes away the need for Trump to actually have to meet with the Mexican president in person."

BU: "I think it definitely depends on the leader in question and the extent to which he or she uses Twitter. I think Trump is a very radical example. Usually the president isn't the one tweeting, rather someone else is delegated to be in charge of that. But I think Trump is actually the one tweeting from his account, which is really very dangerous because he is not a trained social media person. He's not a communications man, he's a politician. He's not even a politician, he's a businessman.

Me: "That leads right into my next question which is whether or not you think there needs to be some sort of education for those who are going to utilize this tool."

BU: "I definitely think that. I think you need a particular training to make the most of that tool and I think it's very dangerous that he's the one actually managing that. Usually it's outsourced to communication officials."

There was a break before we got back onto the topic

BU: "Consular services are also an important aspect of digital diplomacy. For example, when you are in another country, you should be able to go to the website of the local American embassy and find the ways in which they can help you if you are in trouble. Foreign ministries are there to provide services, and these services have to be appropriately presented on their website. Having an up-to-date website is very important. If you work in an embassy you need to have a website that provides the latest information on the country in question so people can know whether or not it is safe to travel there and what documentation is needed. However, website upkeep is also a question of capacities and resources. It is not a priority for every country and every country does not have the resources to do so."

Me: "From what you're saying I can see how public diplomacy and digital diplomacy can interact. A lot of it seems to be to help get messages out to the public, but will this be a problem for countries that have limited access to social media?"

BU: "That's actually a very good question. Diplomats can't use Facebook to reach the Chinese public."

Me: "So would China fall behind and not be able to participate in this new age of digital diplomacy?"

BU: “In China they have Twitter, so if you’re an American diplomat you can operate through that, but the tweets are limited to a certain amount of characters. If the American embassy has a website in China, that should work, but social media definitely would not be the main tool. In dictatorial regimes I guess diplomats have to go through more traditional means, such as reaching out in-person and using posters as advertisements. In these cases, it would be very important to have good relations with locals. It’s actually a really good point that you bring up, that digital diplomacy is more important in certain countries than others.

And one more thing to add is that in the modern world, we have had to shut down many embassies due to crisis situations. Because of this, we have had to establish new concepts, such as sometimes replacing resident ambassadors with ones that only go to the country when they absolutely need to. This causes the ambassador to have to keep in touch with the people on the ground through digital means. The UK has no ambassador based in Singapore, but the ambassador keeps in contact with the locals online, which is very important.”

Me: “Is digital diplomacy going to replace the need for diplomats to physically travel to different places and meet in person?”

BU: “Yes, definitely. Multilateral diplomacy is losing out due to digitalization. There is no need to go to a particular country and meet there, you can just connect the people via teleconferences. I think it is good because it reduces the cost and the environmental footprint. It can spare money and allow groups who could not ordinarily meet in person to connect. In this way, digitalization can be a tool used for public diplomacy, but it can also replace traditional diplomacy and replace real multilateral meetings, allowing people to have discussions from their couch.”

Imhoof, Rodolphe. Swiss Ambassador. 3 April 2017. Formal Interview. Café Léo, Geneva.

What was diplomacy like in the past?

Diplomats would meet with their government and then go to their post. Diplomats had 1 mission focusing on 1 or 2 topics. Diplomats knew what they had to do and would adapt themselves to achieve this. Diplomats would then report back to their government.

In the past, traveling took a long time. In the time it took for a diplomat to get somewhere, a situation could change. Diplomats had to know to adapt and make decisions on their own, keeping government interests in mind.

Diplomats were given broad frameworks to operate under

A diplomat was an organ of execution of a decision made by the government. A messenger

What is diplomacy like in current times?

Situation is very different. Diplomats are less free within a given framework to develop the relations between 2 countries.

Diplomats can be in touch with their governments during travel and be kept up to date on what the situation is and how they should handle it

Diplomats have less independence because of this new communication system, but if diplomats can learn to adapt and use this system, then they can have a much broader picture. If these diplomats know how to analyze, not just report, they will be able to have a stronger influence on government decisions than before.

What is the difference between a diplomat and a journalist nowadays?

He believes there is still a very important difference. The job of journalists is to report facts.

Young diplomats have been trying to compete with journalists by reporting facts back to their governments. However, this is bad/has a low impact and does not add value to the work of diplomats. Diplomats will never win a competition against journalists, and they should not be trying to

Diplomats need to analyze, not just report. Create hypotheses. Use knowledge of the region they are in. "Because I am posted in Syria, I know..." Need to help facilitate the discussion and decision of the government. Less report, more analysis

2 qualities needed from diplomats nowadays: Capacity of Synthesis "see too many trees, not the whole forest" and Analysis

Is traditional diplomacy useless now?

Technology has not completely diminished the need for diplomats to be sent to posts. Being in the field provides diplomats with much more insight than the government can obtain alone. Having an embassy in even in dangerous places is still important for the information that can be gathered.

With this information, diplomats are able to offer advice to the government sending instructions on how to act. They are able to have an influence on decisions.

Example: The US did not have an embassy in Tehran or Cuba, so it had to rely on the Swiss for communication. Switzerland represented foreign interests. This scenario proves the importance of and benefit of direct contact (even if through an ally)

Technology will never replace real contact, due to the need of an opinion from a human being. Technology as an asset instead of a necessity. Technology changes so much in a lifetime, it is impossible to predict what will come next. Using technology is an asset for countries and diplomats who can use it in the right way. However, poorer countries who do not develop in this way do not necessarily need to worry. A lack of technology can be made up for by having a brain and the ability to conduct traditional methods of diplomacy.

Jacobson, Barbara. Research and Project Associate for DiploFoundation. 12 April 2017. Formal Interview. World Meteorological Organization, Geneva.

Can you tell me a little bit about DiploFoundation?

DiploFoundation carries out a broad range of activities

Mission: to make diplomacy more inclusive for all countries and to bring to light policy issues that need diplomacy, focusing on issues such as climate change and now internet governance

They focus on the nexus between digital technology and diplomacy

They teach courses through e-learning because the internet allows remote countries to be involved in international relations and have access to knowledge that places such as Western countries already have access to. This demonstrates how they want to be inclusive.

DiploFoundation also looks at new ways diplomats can use digital technologies. Social media is the most common way, but think there are others. For example, in consular services, websites can now keep people updated on emergencies occurring in a country and provide online visa application forms.

What is your position here at DiploFoundation?

Works as a Research and Project Associate at DiploFoundation in Geneva

She has held various positions within the company over the course of the past few years, but she is now doing research on Big Data and content policy. She is focusing on what can and can't appear online. She tries to determine what information is freedom of expression and what information goes too far.

Do you think social media training is an important part of digital diplomacy?

Social media training already exists, with the ministries of ambassadors keeping them in check. Barbara believes that diplomats on social media should not be too regulated, though, noting that an important advantage of this digital technology is personalization. If the accounts of these diplomats aren't very personal, how are they any different than the websites of these organizations that already exist?

What are some challenges of digital diplomacy?

How do countries like Honduras and Ghana gain prominence in a space that is so flooded by other, more entertaining information? How do these smaller countries reach out of their filtered bubble to a new audience? It is very hard to go viral, and keeps digital diplomacy as a hierarchical tool. While the US State Department is willing to put lots of resources into social media, other countries may not have these same funds, or being willing to make a cultural shift to this digitalization.

Another challenge is that 50% of the world still doesn't have access to the internet and some countries do not have the same technology.

Cybersecurity (WikiLeaks), Different National Privacy Rules, Transparency (the public could be against some of the stuff they read and keep their ambassador from interacting with others)

Finaud, Marc. French Diplomat. 28 April 2017. Formal Interview. Geneva Center for Security Policy, Geneva.

Can you tell me a little bit about your experience serving as a French diplomat? How did digital diplomacy come to affect you in the field?

Started working in diplomacy about 40 years ago. Was Spokesperson and Head of Public Affairs for French Ministry. Established the first website for France's foreign service, when there was only 1 other ministry with a website

Back then, they had to train themselves how to use this new technology. His generation did not grow up knowing how to use it

Digital technology was revolutionary because diplomats no longer needed to rely on others to send messages for them, they could do it on their own

How has digital diplomacy changed the way diplomats carry out their responsibilities?

Everyone is a consumer and producer of information nowadays. Anyone can become a journalist.

So much information available online that can be used by diplomats to better understand situations

French embassy in Tunisia during the Arab Spring had young junior diplomats working in the office that had a better idea of what was going on in the country than the diplomats did because they were on social media. What the president and official reports at the time were saying inside Tunisia was completely different from what was actually going on, and social media helped people realize this.

Also this unofficial information is good, it can also lead to the question of what information is true and what information is false. Need for diplomats to analyze this.

What challenges does digital diplomacy present?

Cyber security threats endanger the lives of people, showing the need to still have some confidentiality. There are still classified files that cannot be released.

Also, with not all government officials being trained in social media, mishaps happen. Example: French Ambassador to the US tweeted that the world was coming to an end after Trump was elected. This was seen as controversial and largely frowned upon since he was stationed inside the United States, so he took the tweet down. Need for social media training to keep diplomats safe from security threats and their own mishaps.

What advantages does digital diplomacy present?

Government can use media to advertise what they are doing and influence others

Public believes they have a right to information in this age, so it is important for officials to give it to them

What do you think about the future of diplomacy?

Although social media is a great tool, it will never replace the need for human contact.

