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INDIA'S GLOBAL IMPRESSION- INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL DIPLOMACY

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Abstract:

The substantial online population renders social media a critical platform for digital diplomacy, facilitating the announcement of new foreign policy measures and initiatives, as well as the monitoring of public opinion to enhance the understanding of international relations. Social media platforms enable policymakers to communicate directly with governments across the globe. India's digital diplomacy has garnered significant attention and acclaim in recent years. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) holds the distinction of being the most followed politician on X (formerly Twitter), and he is the sole global leader to surpass 20 million subscribers on YouTube. This Paper Focuses on investigation of digital modes and social media as effective means of diplomacy for India across the globe.

Key Words: India's Global role, Digital diplomacy

Introduction:

Recently, social media has emerged as a vital tool for diplomats to engage with global audiences, foster citizen interest, and cultivate a more informed public opinion. As of October 2023, there are 5.3 billion internet users globally, representing 65.7% of the total population. Of this total, 4.95 billion individuals, representing 61.4% of the global population, were users of social media.¹ India has 1.2 billion internet users and 0.5 billion social media users². As of January 2023, India has 27.25 million users on X (formerly Twitter), ranking third after the United States and Japan³. The substantial online population renders social media a critical platform for digital diplomacy, facilitating the announcement of new foreign policy measures and initiatives, as well as the monitoring of public opinion to enhance the understanding of international relations. Social media platforms enable policymakers to communicate directly with governments across the globe. India's digital diplomacy has garnered significant attention and acclaim in recent years. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) holds the distinction of being the most followed

politician on X (formerly Twitter), and he is the sole global leader to surpass 20 million⁴ subscribers on YouTube. MEA India (@MEAIndia) ranks among the most followed Twitter (now X)⁵ accounts of foreign ministries worldwide. The Ministry of External Affairs of India on Twitter (now X) provides updates regarding foreign dignitaries visiting India and offers briefings on the discussions that take place. Alongside the social media presence of MEA India, the Indian Diplomacy (@IndianDiplomacy) account serves to enlighten the public by disseminating Press Releases, Joint Statements, speeches, and announcements regarding the appointments of new Ambassadors, among other pertinent information.

Some Facts about sri Narendra Modi- 2 Cr subscriber on Youtube, 8.5 Cr followers on Instagram, 9.5 Cr followers on X, 4.5 cr. Followers on Face book, 1.26 Cr on WhatsApp . Most Followed leader in the world on Insta, Most followed government official on X, Most popular leader in the world on Facebook, First leader to reach 2cr subscribers⁶.

Digital Diplomacy - Mapping its Impact
In 2011, during the Arab Spring, the influence of social media was recognised by global leaders and scholars on a significant scale. The Covid-19 Pandemic necessitated that countries rely on digital communication as one of the few effective means to maintain global connectivity and facilitate international relations. Video conferencing tools facilitated communication among world leaders regarding international relations and diplomatic ties during conferences, summits, and Track II dialogues. Digital Diplomacy - Influencing Public Perceptions Instantly

Social media has transformed the practice of diplomacy. Historically, diplomacy was regarded as exceedingly opaque. Decisions were primarily made in private meetings, with individuals receiving information via news channels or print media. Diplomats and embassies are now actively engaged on social media. Citizens can obtain information directly from policymakers and hear firsthand accounts of decisions and their consequences. Both domestic citizens and expatriates can ascertain the immediate effects of new laws and immigration policies, facilitating informed decision-making in real time. Presented below are several prominent digital diplomacy tools from 2023.

- Videos & Podcasts - YouTubers are now addressing significant issues such as the Ukraine crisis, the Israel-Hamas conflict, and other global topics, with viewers expressing their opinions in the comments section. Podcasts featuring diplomats, foreign policy researchers, professors, and academics facilitate comprehension of international issues, enabling individuals to develop more informed opinions.
- Timely Official Updates - Prior to the completion of official documents by foreign ministries, participants in any Summit or Dialogue are informed about pertinent discussions and issues via social media posts from the official accounts of attending dignitaries, as evidenced multiple times in 2023, including during the G20 Summit under India's

Presidency.

- Significant Global Awareness - It is a fact that we are influenced by circumstances that affect our brain visually. Social media has evolved into a platform that amplifies impact. Individuals are increasingly earnest in their pursuit of understanding global issues, including climate change, as evidenced by the recent COP28 in the UAE, as well as economic growth, gender equality, health, and conflict situations. COP28 emerged as a prominent subject of discussion and debate on social media from late November to mid-December 2023. With specific hashtags trending, social media platforms ensure that various facets of the issue are emphasised by different interested participants.

- International Branding - International dialogues and discussions are increasingly perceived in a concert-like format. This incites global curiosity regarding every action, both visually and otherwise. Individuals experience exclusion when they are unaware of current trends and unable to engage in discussions. The branding of foreign policy enhances citizen awareness and curiosity.

- Humanitarian Impact - Social media diplomacy enables diplomats globally to conduct surveys, map crises by analysing social media post trajectories, and utilise this information to formulate more effective responses to both natural and anthropogenic disasters. Embassies can even create custom-made apps to serve the greater good of their citizens living abroad. Social media can now effectively foster the authentic essence of democracy by engaging vast populations and enabling them to articulate their views on foreign policy development and the establishment of international relations. Crisis Communication Strategies on Twitter (now X) Recent Global Developments The Indian Ministry of External Affairs' Twitter (now X) account ranks among the most followed global government handles on social media, highlighting the significance of Social Media Diplomacy as a crucial instrument of contemporary diplomacy. During crises or

conflicts, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the Ukraine crisis, or the Israel-Hamas conflict, Indians residing abroad were repatriated through effective communication strategies on social media. The Digital Diplomacy Initiatives of MEA India include - MEA India's Madad Portal - MEA India's Madad (@meaMadad) is highly active on X and Facebook, promptly addressing the concerns of Indians residing overseas. Previous requests for assistance, which traditionally required several days to reach the relevant authorities across borders, now arrive at their embassies instantaneously via Twitter (now X) and Facebook. Previously, individuals submitted offline applications to the relevant embassies, and the communication channels were challenging to monitor. Currently, citizens overseas are utilising Twitter to obtain prompt assistance.

- India's G20 Presidency - During India's G20 Presidency, the dedicated G20India Twitter (now X) account focused on disseminating comprehensive details to the public, resulting in significant attention and acclaim for India's leadership. The G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration has garnered over 2.9 million views and 11,000 retweets from the Twitter (now X) account of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi (@narendramodi).

- Rescue Operations in Crisis - Conduct rescue missions amid the turmoil in Sudan or Israel, as MEA initiated various operations utilising trending hashtags. This facilitated prompt and efficient assistance. The likelihood of inclusivity is significantly greater online, as social media hashtags serve as a more potent medium for identifying and connecting with a broader audience than physical interactions. Below are the trending assistance hashtags from MEA India. 2023 - #OperationKaveri In the 2023 Sudan conflict, approximately 2,500 Indians were successfully rescued by India through this operation.⁷

#OperationAjay - The Ministry of External Affairs initiated this operation amid the Israel-Hamas

conflict. It was trending on Twitter (now X), and over 1,300 individuals were rescued⁸.

India's digital diplomacy efforts are exemplified by Kenyan President William Samoei Ruto's recent visit, during which he announced the dispatch of Kenya's ICT Minister to India to study digital identification and the digitization of government services. In addition, India has signed Memoranda of Understanding with Finland, Vietnam, Africa, and several other countries in the field of Information and Communication Technology to enhance digital infrastructure and communication while strengthening diplomatic relations. India is actively collaborating with Global South nations to share its expertise in Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), including Aadhaar, UPI, Digilocker, Co-Win, JAM (Jan Dhan Yojana, Aadhaar, and Mobile Number), and e-KYC. The DPI initiatives have enabled the Indian Government to deliver prompt, direct, and traceable benefits to citizens.



Image

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Addressing Challenges of Disinformation

The emergence of rapid and efficient communication channels presents the challenge of monitoring news and identifying misinformation and online threats. Effective monitoring channels and digital tools must be implemented to detect false propaganda and misinformation. PIB India, MIB, and MyGov are official channels that assist in identifying

misleading trends on social media, providing the public with accurate information and official facts. At the virtual G20 Summit held in November 2023, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi articulated concerns regarding the proliferation of fraudulent AI technologies. The Prime Minister stated, "A challenge is emerging due to Artificial Intelligence and deepfakes. A significant portion of our population lacks alternative verification options, leading individuals to often believe in deepfakes, which poses a substantial challenge." I recently viewed a video featuring my performance of Garba songs. I was impressed by the quality of the video. Numerous similar videos are available online. The Prime Minister proposed that Global AI Leaders implement advisory labels and announced India's commitment to advancing global AI regulations.⁹

In conclusion

Social media has facilitated communication among diverse stakeholders and enhanced the transparency of foreign policy dissemination for the benefit of the public. Real-time opinions, polls, and surveys, both direct and indirect, are now instrumental in shaping policies and initiatives. In the current era of digital diplomacy, public engagement and involvement in foreign policy initiatives are being enhanced, as demonstrated by the JanBhagidari (People's Participation) approach during India's G-20 Presidency. Social media enables policymakers to remain attuned to public sentiment and serves as an essential instrument for contemporary governance.

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