Digital Diplomacy: Rewards and Challenges

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Abstract :   The term "digitalization of diplomacy" has brought immutable changes to the four realms of diplomacy: the institutions of diplomacy, the practitioners of diplomacy, the audiences of diplomacy and the conduct of diplomacy. This study tried to trace the inception of digital diplomacy, its practices and the changes that it has brought to the conduct of traditional diplomacy. The focal point of this study was to analyse whether digital diplomacy is different from traditional diplomacy or complements it?

Keywords : Digital diplomacy, traditional diplomacy, twidiplomacy, secret diplomacy, technological revolution, digitalization

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Introduction :

Digital Diplomacy or e-Diplomacy is the utilization of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and the social media platforms like twitter, facebook, instagram, flickr and so on by a country to achieve its foreign policy objectives. The United States of America's State Department was the first foreign ministry to use e-Diplomacy for the conduct of its foreign affairs. India made a debut, in the arena of digital diplomacy, when its Twitter account was established in 2010. The digitalization of diplomacy has irrevocably changed the conduct of foreign policy throughout the world. However, in order to understand the impact of digital diplomacy on foreign policy one needs to understand the relationship between digital diplomacy and traditional diplomacy to find out not only the

difference between the two but also the efficacy of these two as a tool of foreign policy.

The basic difference between traditional diplomacy and digital diplomacy is that traditional diplomacy is defined in terms of sender (diplomat) and receiver (public), whereas digital diplomacy is defined in terms of the medium (digital channels). A diplomat, using a digital medium, can reach millions at a given point of time, whereas a diplomat using traditional means, can only be reaching one or a few. The traditional diplomatic methods are quite expensive. For example, a significant amount is spent by a country to maintain its missions abroad but digital diplomacy is extremely cheap and it requires minimal cost to practise it. Considering all these facts in mind, a pertinent question which arises is, will digital diplomacy replace traditional diplomacy in future. There is substantial literature available on diplomacy and this study made an attempt to review the literature available on diplomacy with the intention of finding the gaps existing in the available literature.

Review of Literature :

Karagulle (2015) in his book '*Digital Diplomacy 101'* took 700 people from 82 countries as sample. Surveys were sent through email and posted on various facebook pages while Arapov (2017) in his study '*The Use of Digital Diplomacy as a Tool for Symbolic Violence: Framing Analysis of Russian Turkish Relation on Twitter*' took 262 tweets published by Russian and Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs as sample. In both, the results showed that digital media is an important element to conduct a better public diplomacy. It also showed that more scholarly work is needed in this field. Digital diplomacy and digital public diplomacy are two different things. Digital diplomacy structure should be included in Ministries of Foreign Affairs.

In two other interesting works by Adesina (2017) and Verrekia (2017) the research showed that digital diplomacy has changed the way of delivery of diplomacy through adoption of various tools like social media. The study further found that digital diplomacy has increased the rate of interaction of government with people. Social media helps in providing information and submitting complaints. Similar work by Manor (2016) found that digital diplomacy studies have failed to understand why ministry of foreign affairs have yet not realised the potential of social networking sites.

However, one finds that in all the above cited works focus has been on digital diplomacy at embassy or ministry of foreign affairs level. But the study fails to understand that every nation's political system is different, and therefore, same methodology will not work everywhere.

Similarly, Westcott (2008) in *'Digital Diplomacy; The Impact of the Internet on International Relations', and* Melissen (2015) in '*Diplomacy in the Digital Age*' have dealt with digitalization of diplomacy and its use and significance as a tool of foreign policy.

Bjola and Holmes (2015) and Deruda (2015) too in their respective books '*Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice* and *the Digital Diplomacy Handbook: How to use social media to engage with global audiences'*; have portrayed digital diplomacy as a form of "change management" in international politics. They have defined the term "digital diplomacy" and have illuminated upon its practices by different countries of the world. They have also suggested as to how the foreign ministries can utilize the digital mediums for diplomacy to their maximum advantage.

A number of articles too have been written on the topic like those by Halvard's (2016) '*A Conceptual History of Diplomacy'*, Richard's (2011) '*From Ancient Greek Diplomacy to Modern Summitry*', Tethloach's (2017) '*The History of Diplomacy and the Ancient Greek, Italian, Roman and French Diplomatic Traditions' etc.* These articles have basically dealt with the evolution of diplomacy and the changes witnessed in it because of technological revolutions.

Critical gaps found through the review of

literature

The study found that none of these scholars pondered over the question as to whether digital diplomacy will ever replace traditional diplomacy? They did not highlight the disadvantages of digital diplomacy considering the fact that it is in a way too informal and even a petty mistake by a diplomat can have a major impact on international politics because it provides a very small room for the correction of mistakes. Thus the study found that there was a need to study this aspect of digital diplomacy where it will try to assess the relationship between digital and traditional diplomacy to find out the advantages and disadvantages of the two and answer the question as to whether digital diplomacy is a reward or a challenge to foreign policy.

Statement of the problem

Digital Diplomacy has been introduced in India but how much awareness people have about it, has not been researched upon. Whether people consider digital diplomacy as an innovative strategy of conducting foreign policy or not also needs verification. Thus, one needs to find out an answer to the question as to whether people have information about digital diplomacy, whether they consider it as only a new way of conducting foreign policy, whether digital diplomacy only aids traditional diplomacy? In order to find answer to these questions this research undertook to verify the above stated problem. All this was done keeping in mind the following objectives that were:

Objectives :

- To study the impact of social media and internet on diplomacy.

- To draw comparison between digital diplomacy and traditional diplomacy.

The study was undertaken to test the hypothesis and related research questions which were:

Hypothesis :

Digital diplomacy aids traditional diplomacy.

Related research questions

1. Digital diplomacy complements traditional diplomacy.

2. Digital diplomacy is synonymous with public policy.

Methodology :

The methodology adopted for testing the hypothesis and the related research questions was comparative, deductive and qualitative in nature. The technique of Scheduled Interview was used for the purpose of collecting primary data for the work. The method of sampling used was Incidental Purposive Sampling, and the Number of Respondents (N) was 57. Primary data was collected by interviewing 7 experienced diplomats having diverse experiences in the realm of international relations and 50 common people including the teachers of Patna Women's College. For interview, a sample of relevant questions with the scope of open ended responses were prepared.

The annual reports from the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India and the Annual Reports from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Government of Australia were also used as primary data.

The secondary data was collected with the help of books, newspapers, magazines and the websites.
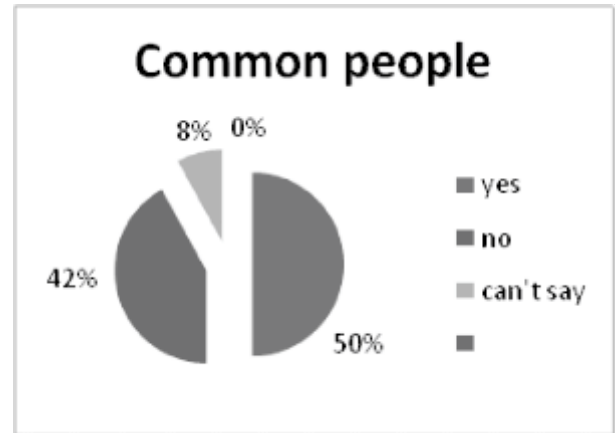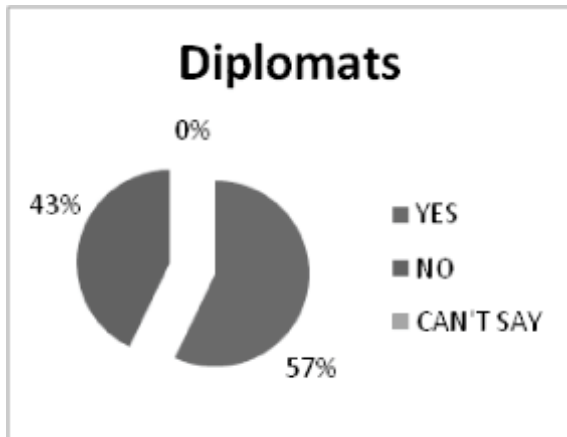
The findings were analysed with the help of Pie Charts.

Universe : The areas of study were Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi, New Patliputra Colony and Patna Women's College.
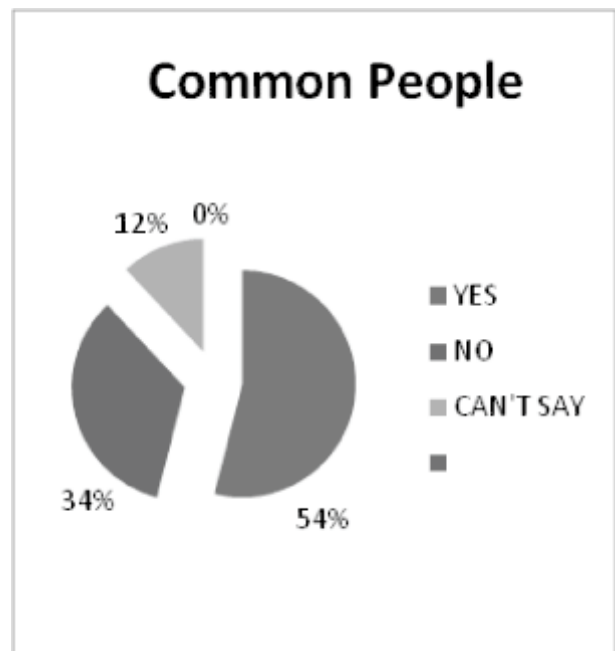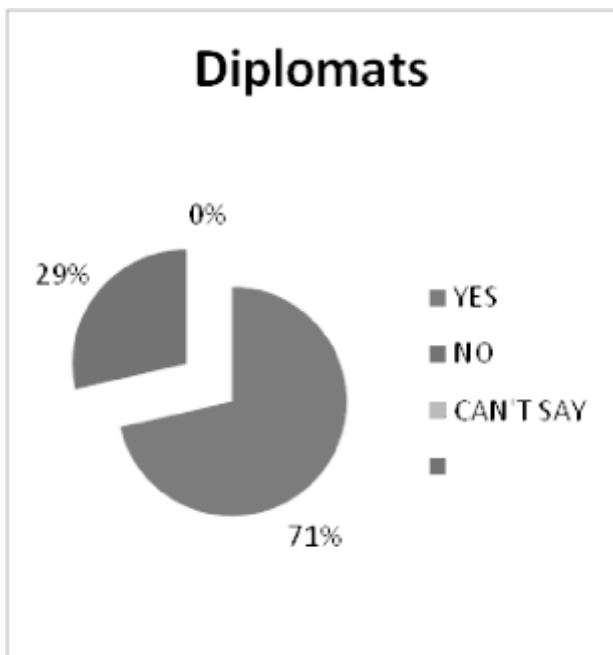
Findings :

The following were the findings of the study (after each finding there is a pie chart depicting the results of the findings as derived from the empirical research):
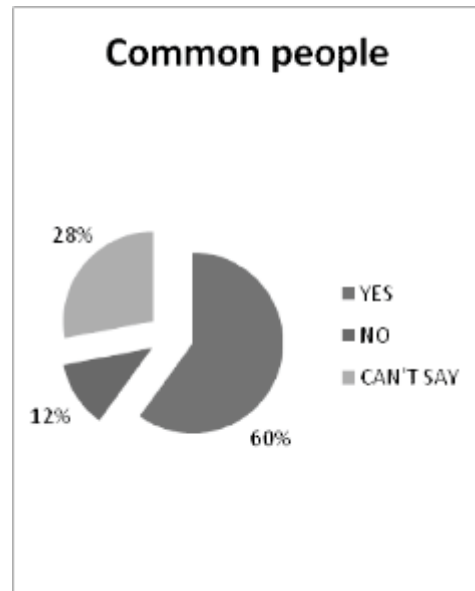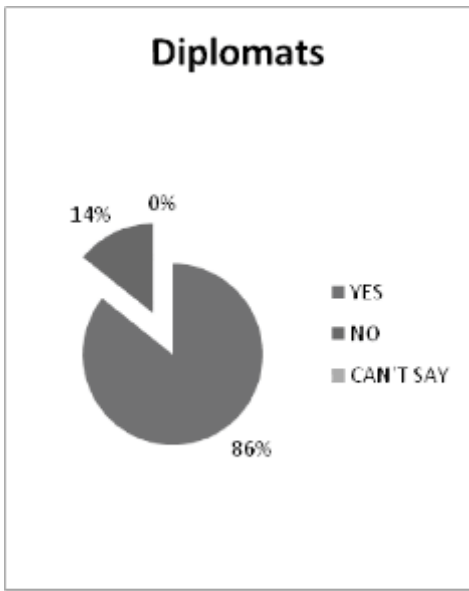
- **Digital diplomacy complements traditional diplomacy:** The research proved the hypothesis of the research that digital diplomacy aids traditional diplomacy in affirmative. Majority of respondents said that digital diplomacy is just a repackaging of traditional diplomacy. This inference was further substantiated by the response of majority of the people where they said that digital diplomacy has brought diplomacy closer to people and made it people friendly. Thus, the means of conducting foreign policy now also includes the views of the people. However, the overall conduct of foreign policy is the same as it was under traditional diplomacy.
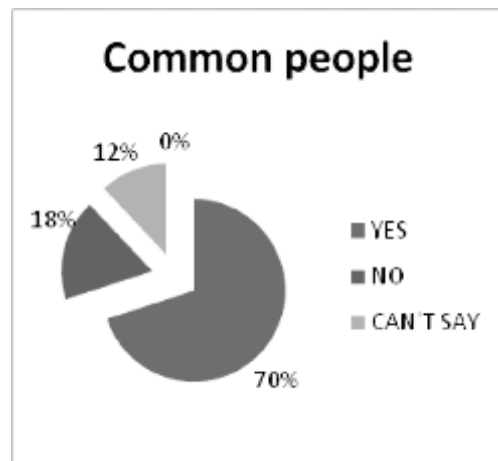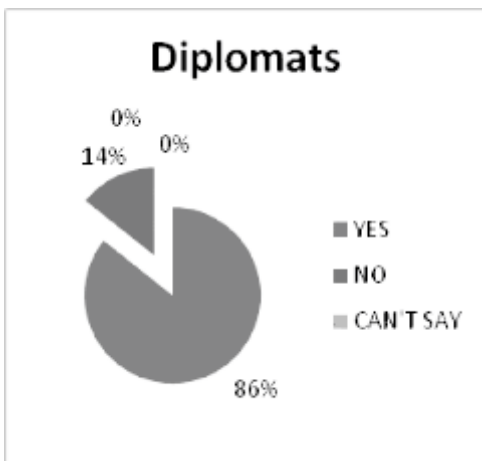

- **Digital diplomacy has greater security implications than traditional diplomacy:** Majority of the diplomats said that they need prior permission for expressing their personal opinion on social media and they have to maintain separate personal and official accounts. The reason for this was that diplomats too are human beings, so they can be swayed by emotions and write or say things that may adversely affect the bilateral ties between and among nations. As things once said can't be taken back, so it may lead to conflicts.
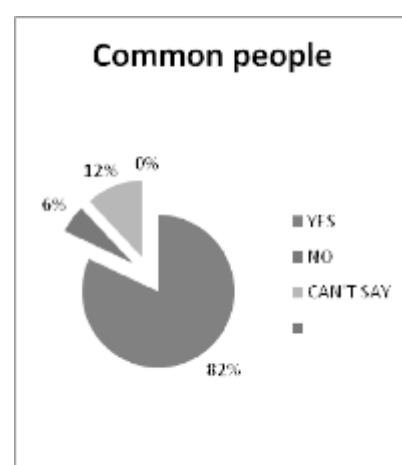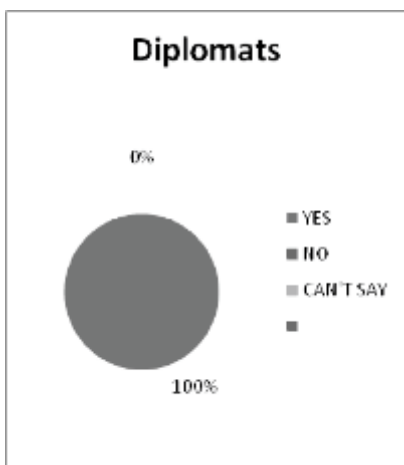

- **Digital diplomacy has made consular aid and emergency services easier**: With the use of faster means of communication and information technology, Digital Diplomacy has made it easier to reach out to people in times of crisis. Digitalization of diplomacy has brought in an era of public diplomacy where the views and opinions of people are given higher weightage in policy formulation.

- **Digitalization of diplomacy requires special training for the diplomats**: The diplomats need special training for the conduct of Digital Diplomacy. In traditional diplomacy, there was no place for internet and technology like the digital diplomacy. So, training should be given to them to handle the technology and social media properly.

- With the use of faster means of communication and information technology, **Digital Diplomacy has made the promotion of one's culture in the world easier.**

Suggestions :

Based on the findings, the following suggestions were given to improve the way Digital Diplomacy is conducted and remove its hindrances.

- There should be proper system of checks and balance on the posts made by the diplomats. Controversial tweets must be checked earlier. There must be a feedback mechanism and increased awareness of the campaigns among people and nations.

- Some of the diplomats don't know how to utilize the social media to its fullest. Many of the political leaders don't know the technicalities of using Internet and social media. So, there should be proper training, for both diplomats as well as for the political leaders.

- The diplomats should keep business and other non- diplomatic activities apart and focus only on the diplomatic activities.

- Diplomats should focus on advancing foreign policy goals.

- There should be a high level security system so that the government's sites are not hacked easily and important information does not leak.

- Diplomacy is not merely confined to 'behind the door Diplomacy' today. So, the diplomats should have good knowledge and awareness of other's customs and languages.

- Diplomats should be aware of the contemporary global issues.

- The act of diplomacy has become people-friendly, so the diplomats should try to establish a good official relation with the masses too.

- While dealing with the masses, the diplomats must choose their words carefully.

- Diplomats should generate new ideas and be flexible enough to adopt changes according to the need of the situation.

Thus, this topic proved to be an aid in understanding the concept of 'Digital Diplomacy' and its rewards and the challenges which it offers.

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