


# Chapter 3

## Digital Transformation of Diplomacy: The Way Forward for Small Island States

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter seeks to examine the digital transformation (digitalisation) of diplomacy and how such digital transformations can be used to positively influence and improve a country's foreign services. The chapter further explores how the country's diplomats and their Foreign Service counterparts at Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) can utilize the tools provided by digitalisation to advance the country's interests. Given the critical intelligence data, diplomatic protocols, and confidential information exchanged at the diplomatic level between countries, it is equally important to evaluate and assess the cyber security measures that are being taken to secure the digital network of the diplomatic missions. Scholarly research was initially conducted to position the field of research amongst pertinent literature to ascertain the use of digital tools in diplomacy and present key deliberations that exist.*

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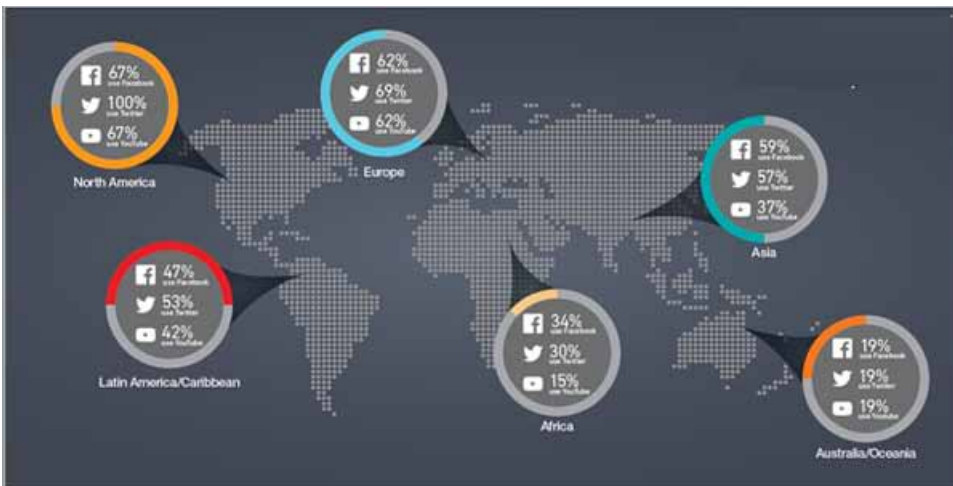
## INTRODUCTION

In this age of information and communication technology, soft power has progressed by the influences of digital technology on the conceptualization, practice and institutions of diplomacy. The social web is key together with instant messaging and online platforms provided by mobile communications where diplomacy of state-to-state relations is encompassing of state to civil society relations.

Norwegian Ambassadors use Skype to engage with university students in public diplomacy, whilst Palestinians use Facebook to engage with Israelis and Kenya uses Twitter for consular aid (Manor, 2017). However, at the same time users of these platforms should be wary that information technology and systems could threaten the privacy of individuals.

In the international fora of state relationships, diplomacy is the art of carrying out negotiations, forging alliances, deliberate on treaties and making agreements based on face-to-face forums. Today, diplomacy is the cornerstone governing foreign policy settings and is taking new shape and substance in the fast evolving age of digitalization. The internet has allowed for the real time communication and exchange of information across global platforms where the conduct of foreign policy meetings can be held in virtual environments like Skype.

*Figure 1. Social Media Fact Sheet of Foreign Ministries. Source: Diplo Foundation (2019)*



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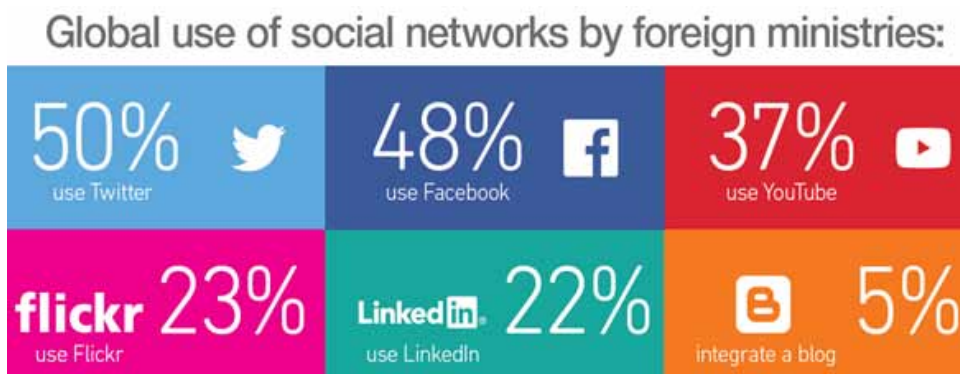
In the process, the internet has typically amplified the array of actors and their interests in making international policy decisions and shifting from states to be inclusive of non-state actors like intergovernmental organizations. Tools of the internet like social media platforms and blogs have exposed foreign policy makers to global viewers and at the same permitted governments to reach their intended audiences instantaneously.

The merging of the internet and mobile technology for example, permits even the least developed countries privy to access business prospects directly across state borders and create much needed economic opportunities.

For the stateless like the Kurds it has created mobilization with a ‘virtual state’ embedded in social media; for the practitioners and academics of climate change the internet has provided a platform to network and debate for a global common good.

This paper examines the way in which the digitalization of diplomacy can be used to positively affect the diplomacy of small island states like Fiji in the global arena. Scholarly research is initially conducted to position the subject amongst pertinent literature to ascertain the use of digital tools in diplomacy and present key deliberations that exist. In-depth interviews with key personnel like Deputy Secretary Policy, Foreign Service Desk officers, and Deputy Secretary of MFA will provide the qualitative analysis on Fiji’s perspective. The advantages of using the digital tools for diplomacy, the impact of internet on international relations will be explored, challenges like violations to the communication protocol examined to provide guidance proposed to manage these platforms.

*Figure 2. Global Use of Social Networks by Foreign Ministries. Source: Diplo Foundation (2019)*



According to the Diplo Foundation (2019), the number of active users on social networks has increased exponentially over the past few years. If we take Facebook

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and Twitter, for instance, the number of monthly users surpasses the one billion mark in 2016. Diplomats have long realised that in public diplomacy, they need to be where the audience is. Five years ago, many of today's top e-diplomacy practitioners were recognising the importance of social media, and started engaging with non-state actors directly on social networks. From experimenting with platforms to integrating e-tools, some foreign ministries today are advanced and active users of social networks with their own fair share of followers. The figures above illustrate the pace at which foreign ministries were quick to jump on social media; integrate into institutions' online presence; which were the most popular platforms over time; and what the level of engagement with citizens was.

The conclusion reached is important as it provides a holistic overview, based on the digitalization of diplomacy that offers an invaluable perspective for the practitioners in MFA and its diplomatic missions abroad. In this way, digital tools can be used by diplomats and staff to reach out to new audiences, diaspora, tackle its geographic isolation and overcome the constraints of traditional diplomacy. Timely cyber security threat assessments needs to be carried out at each of the country's distributed diplomatic missions network abroad and its connectivity to the country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs centralised network system.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Diplomacy altered considerably during the 20<sup>th</sup> century where direct communication with the government of one country and the population of another was banned by the international community and could be regarded as breach of sovereignty. It seems that changes in diplomacy hinges on some form of 'technology' revolution. Traditional diplomacy evolved to public diplomacy with the use of radio in 1917 when both Russia and Germany used radio to broadcast directly to populations of neighboring states advocating revolutionist propaganda. At this point, the monologue became public diplomacy.

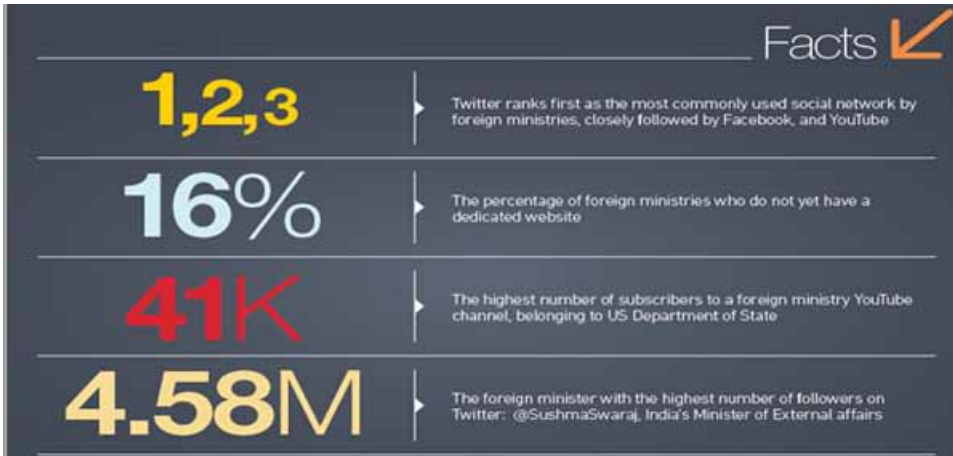
The main tools of public diplomacy became radio, cultural exchange of people and ideas as when the first astronauts landed on the moon it was the Voice of America radio that broadcast to millions on earth the words of Neil Armstrong, (Public Diplomacy, 2019).

The debate among scholars today continue about a new form of public diplomacy. At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, public diplomacy has evolved to encompass the digitalization of diplomacy. The public platform is now a dialogue between state actors and non-state actors with the use of digital tools. How an MFA can successfully utilize these digital tools and benefit as purported by the term 'digitalization of diplomacy' depends on its overarching ability to incorporate the MFA and its missions

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abroad; the diplomats themselves; the audiences of diplomacy and the procedures and guidelines for these institutions in using the digital platforms.

*Figure 3. Facts and Statistics of Social Media Usage by Foreign Ministries. Source: Diplo Foundation (2019)*



This paper supports the view by Manor (2017), who aptly produced a matrix conceptualizing the digitalization of diplomacy the term coined to encompass an evolving digital landscape and to focus on four dimensions of diplomacy mainly:

1. Institutions of diplomacy;
2. Practitioners of diplomacy;
3. The audiences of diplomacy; and
4. the conduct of diplomacy

Pitted in the matrix relative to these dimensions, are four fields of influence mainly:

1. conceptual;
2. behavioral;
3. procedural; and
4. the normative (values, beliefs), (Manor, 2017).

These prescriptive means can be utilized to assess institutional capacity and implement new technologies that lead to normative, behavioral, procedural changes in the MFAs with the outcomes of more effective diplomacy. Within these constructs,

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(four dimensions and four fields) we can bring a logical explanation to the intersection between digital technology and diplomacy.

The matrix offers a systematic classification of domains through which the influence of digitization can be investigated. As Manor, (2017) further states that the processes of digitization is inclusive of diplomats, missions and MFAs which overtime, these processes influences the manner in which diplomats and their audiences behave to achieve their objectives . As such, the impact of digital technology on diplomacy can be identified according to the particular field resulting in the outcome ie the related dimension.

Digital technology has given rise to online opinionated public platforms where individuals want to be heard and share political views, their opinions of local and global events implying a caring society.

Once a diplomat shares his views on social media like President Trump on Twitter, he becomes more transparent in relation to his work with personal self-exposure resulting in professional transparency. Thus, for better or for worse the attention given by online audience to tweets made by Trump illustrates the political power of Twitter (OUPBlog, 2019). According to Duncombe (2019), Twitter perhaps tested the traditional way in which diplomats and political leaders practiced statecraft diplomacy. Twitter was used as the negotiating medium dealing with the nuclear deal between Iran and US and its allies in the nuclear deal.

In a way digital technology has enabled the adoption of new norms, values and beliefs (Duncombe, 2019), where diplomats and political leaders use twitter through social media platforms to conduct important diplomatic communication with their counterparts. The adoption of these new norms, values and beliefs gives way to behavioral change and the impact occurs in the practice of diplomacy. The shift from traditional face-to-face diplomacy to social media negotiations has resulted in the conceptual change that is transformational diplomacy.

Further, the use of Twitter communication as a share and care online platform by Iran and US diplomats from 2013, given the severing of diplomatic ties since 1980, has seen threatening encounters between the two nations kept at bay. For example in January 2016, two US Navy patrol boats wandered into Iranian territorial waters threatening its sovereignty, was detained by Iranian authorities. However, within 24 hours the patrol boats were released.

Diplo Foundation (2019), reports on how instrumental was the sustained use of Twitter and its role in affecting diplomacy. Ongoing studies from Diplo Foundation found that 50% of foreign ministries globally use twitter, 48% Facebook and 37% YouTube. Prevalent is the use of social media platforms in North and Latin America, Europe and Asia. This has made the diplomats and state leaders more transparent in the way they conduct their international relationships and project their states' interests abroad. Tweets' by Trump hours before the Hanoi Meet with Kim Jong Un

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projected his message to entice North Korea to denuclearize and thrive with new economic possibilities (Lahiri, 2019). What could not be said face to face was said on this platform to set the mood of the meet and prepare Kim of what to expect.

The Internet has a profound effect on diplomacy according to Kurbalija, (2017). The effects are on the two cornerstones of diplomacy: information and communication. Diplomats deal with, collect, and manage information. Diplomats communicate in person, via diplomatic notes, and at international conferences. It remains to be seen how profound these changes will be in the short- and long-term perspective. The Internet has changed and continues to change the environment in which diplomats operate (sovereignty, interdependence, geo-strategy). The Internet also brings new topics to diplomatic agendas (Internet governance, cybersecurity) and it changes the practice of diplomacy by introducing new tools (Wikipedia, social media, tele-conferencing).

Diplomats have to adjust to these changes. A century ago, they were mainly negotiating peace agreements and borders. Today, and increasingly in the future, they will have to negotiate – for example – how the interests of their citizens will be protected in cyberspace. They will also have to learn how to interact via social media spaces. Diplomatic cables and notes verbal are no longer sufficient for effectively performing diplomatic tasks (Kurbalija, 2017).

According to (Holmes, 2013), e-Diplomacy as a form of public diplomacy has generated significant attention and criticism, with views ranging from technology allowing “people around the world to obtain ever more information through horizontal peer-to-peer networks rather than through the old vertical process by which information flowed down from the traditional sources of media authority” to claiming that efforts in public diplomacy often are understood as little more than top down dissemination of (counter)-propaganda. From a public diplomacy perspective then the goal of utilizing ICTs, or e-Diplomacy strategies, is the production, dissemination, and maintenance of knowledge that helps to further state interests. The advent of these technologies has fundamentally changed the ways state can both engage and inform foreign audiences. One need not look far for examples of this type of information penetration. In 2009, President Obama released a YouTube video message to Persian-speaking peoples of the world to mark the occasion of the Nowruz holiday. While the Iranian government did not necessarily appreciate the gesture, everyday Iranians did; according to Politico, the video had more views in Tehran than San Francisco (Holmes, 2013).

The Internet revolution has affected all aspects of life, including International relations. Diplomacy as a tool of foreign policy has also been transformed by this revolution. A paper by (Adesina, 2017) examines the concept of digital diplomacy, focusing on the use of digital media in the field of diplomacy and how countries are utilizing these tools in the pursuit of their foreign policies. It examines the

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opportunities and challenges these media offer for diplomatic activities, and argues that countries cannot afford to be left behind in this era of digital diplomacy as they can greatly benefit from these emerging diplomatic trends. Digital diplomacy and Internet activities as a whole can greatly assist in projecting a state's foreign policy positions to domestic and foreign audiences.

Contemporary diplomacy is subject to the same pressures of globalization as many other communication industries. However, insights from different areas of Media and Communication Studies have only been partly explored in the context of diplomacy. An article by (Pamment, 2016) aims to investigate the ways in which contemporary diplomatic advocacy campaigns cope with fundamental problems such as media repertoires, co-created content, collective intelligence, digital convergence and stakeholder management. The article contends that co-creation and co-option of shared values through transmedia engagement techniques perform a disciplining role.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Although digitalization of diplomacy has given substance to MFAs where they can maximize their potential role in projecting public diplomacy, reaching out to their diaspora or crisis communication; this paper ascertains that traditional diplomacy of foreign affairs will always remain the basis of face-to-face state relationships in reaching deliberations on state-to-state interests. In recent days, Trump has floated the idea of a third North Korea meeting. Given all the digital tools available, the biggest superpower still feels the need to seek face-to-face state diplomacy (Landler, 2019).

Further, it will look at how digital technology is fast shaping international relations between states and non-state actors. Digital diplomacy through social media platforms and rapid increase in mobile connectivity has allowed nontraditional engagement between citizens and government, which in turn can influence decision making for governments. Similarly, world leaders use social media tools to engage directly with audience they wish to influence.

Digital technology is being used by states globally to advance foreign policy. What is the impact of the internet on international developments? How effective is the use of ICT in digital diplomacy such as promoting global economic growth? Are practitioners and diplomats satisfied with the use of the digital tools including social media platforms?



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### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The primary source of data was taken from four person interviews that spoke on the four dimensions as stated by the Manor's (2017) Matrix. In this way, the authors was able to give perspective to what would be an otherwise muddled study of how digitalization could impact small island states. The interviews discussed their perspectives around the four dimensions of diplomacy and how they influenced each other in the context of the country's MFA.

These individuals have served as diplomats, are major policy writers for the country's engagements globally and have travelled to United Nations meetings; and engaged on advisory panels to the state leader and various government Ministers on issues such as the Cotonou Agreement with the European Union and Climate Change including the lead up to COP 23 and COP 24.

Academic literature provided the secondary source. Notably this paper will base its findings on research and analysis previously conducted in terms of the matrix provided by Manor (2017), with the findings of previous researchers.

During the presearch phase, key words and databases were selected based on a combination of (a) strategies used in prior literature reviews and (b) test searches with candidate key words, filters, and databases. Some of the prior literature reviews focused on specific e-Diplomacy, Digital Diplomacy and Digital Transformation of Diplomacy, whereas others investigated certain aspects of digital diplomacy usage or content regardless of the social media platform. The present study integrates a combination of both social media platform-specific and general search phrases to explore an array of studies involving single or multiple types of social media and other web-based platforms. The key words used were e-Diplomacy, Digital Diplomacy and Digital Transformation of Diplomacy. Each of these search phrases has been used in at least one prior literature review. Many of the prior digital diplomacy literature reviews and published papers were grounded in a particular field of study and in our case, digital diplomacy.

### **Findings/Analysis**

The analysis of the findings are aligned according to (Manor 2017) as referenced in Table 1 below based on the in-depth interviews with local diplomats and MFA staff.

**Digital Transformation of Diplomacy***Table 1. Digitalization of Diplomacy. Note. This table has been reproduced from (Manor, 2017)*

<b>Dimension of Diplomacy</b>	<b>Normative (norms, values, beliefs)</b>	<b>Behavioral</b>	<b>Procedural</b>	<b>Conceptual</b>
<b>Audiences of Diplomacy</b>	Connected publics are volatile and unpredictable (Haynal, 2011)	Digital publics constitute networks of selective exposure (Hayden, 2012)	Peer to peer diplomacy (Attias, 2012)	Diplomacy as engaging with connected publics (Melissen, 2005)
<b>Institutes of diplomacy</b>	Digital Diplomacy as managing organizational culture of MFA's (Bjola, 2017)	Networked diplomacy (Slaughter, 2009) Digital Diplomacy and Digital Containment (Bjola, Pamment, 2016)	Selfie diplomacy (Manor, 2017; Segev, 2016)	MFA's as service providers (Manor, 2017)
<b>Practitioners of Diplomacy</b>	Diplomats must conceptualize and imagine digital diplomacy before it can be practiced (Manor, 2017)	Twiplomacy study (Manor, 2017)	Digital diplomacy as transmedia engagement (Pamment, 2016)	From club mentality to network mentality (Heine, 2013)
<b>Practice of Diplomacy</b>	Lack of online engagement with social media users	Digital diplomacy as crisis communication	Digital diaspora diplomacy (Rana, 2013)	Digital diplomacy as change management (Bjola; Holmes 2015)

Previous research have ascertained that ***online audiences can be unpredictable in their reactions*** for example to online Tweets from state leaders and diplomats and rather incredulous of the information Twitted. Public connected via social media to foreign diplomatic missions and its services are often volatile and unpredictable (Haynal, 2011). The advent of new web technologies included in the “Web 2.0,” such as Facebook, Twitter, and so forth, have spurred much attention in how states are able to disseminate information of their choosing to particular constituencies and groups abroad. Thus the e-Diplomacy professionals, referenced above, working in state departments and foreign ministries are ultimately engaged in the practice of politics through engagement with foreign others, understood as a form of “public diplomacy.”

According to (Baba, 2019), Fiji diplomats should be trained to use social media tools like Twitter and avoid unnecessary ridicule from their audiences, where the diplomat could waste enormous time in counter tweets. She felt that as the MFAs in the Oceania region and in particular, the country of study is only about 19% engaged with Twitter, Facebook or YouTube; the time is appropriate to provide guidance

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to use digital platforms. e-Diplomacy as a form of public diplomacy has generated significant attention and criticism, with views ranging from technology allowing “people around the world to obtain ever more information through horizontal peer-to-peer networks rather than through the old vertical process by which information flowed down from the traditional sources of media authority” to claiming that efforts in public diplomacy often are understood as little more than top down dissemination of (counter)-propaganda

As such, MFA headquarters (HQ) would be able to collate data and provide the target audience for a particular social media platform. For example in the United Kingdom, the diaspora communicate widely through Facebook. MFA should now develop necessary policies to be in place for use of digital platforms and at the same time allow missions to collaborate with their counterparts and international organizations to find best practices in reaching out to their audiences and maximize their diplomatic roles.

For **institutions of diplomacy**, similar sentiments were echoed by Emberson (2019), who could not envisage his busy Director’s role as head of the Multilateral Bureau without being connected, as argued by (Slaughter, 2009). Emberson (2019) felt that traditional diplomacy could only get better with constant networking in order to be heard and remain relevant in the enormous global fora.

However, the success of digitalization in a MFA could bring about counter trends. For example, diplomatic engagement that depend on minimal shared considerations and reciprocal candidness to work could be destroyed. Nevertheless, when emotions dominate the discourse opinions formed online can be taken out of context when facts are sidelined. As such, the MFA could miss the intended diplomatic audience and would waste time regurgitating its emotive stance with its sympathizers. For example, Trump had an agenda to use Twitter to provoke the masses with situations that would incite anger and then would punctuate it with ‘Sad’ (Popper, 2017).

Importantly as researched by (Bjola, 2017) and (Pemmant, 2016), regarding behavior and the need to be aware of preemptive measures to combat disinformation and as purported by (Emberson, 2019) the need to curb threats of cyberattacks. With the country, being the hub of the Pacific and a key regional partner in security and defense partner of New Zealand and Australia an attack on the country could escalate to these nations.

MFAs are now conceptualized as service providers. The growing use of MFAs as service providers with consular aide like online visa applications; trade and economic business application portals amongst others as seen in the current Fiji MFA website. Similarly, embassy websites the world over contain pertinent information such as ‘advice for travelers’, which can receive over million visits per month; country branding including culture and languages; and trade and investments portals.

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Adesina (2017) released a public interest statement indicating, “Digital diplomacy is usually conceptualized as a form of public diplomacy. It involves the use of digital technologies and social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Weibo by states to enter into communication with foreign publics usually in a non-costly manner. In her paper, Adesina (2017) examines the concept of digital diplomacy, focusing on the use of digital media in the field of diplomacy and how countries are utilizing these tools in the pursuit of their foreign policies. It examines the opportunities and challenges these media offer for diplomatic activities, and argues that countries cannot afford to be left behind in this era of digital diplomacy as they can greatly benefit from these emerging diplomatic trends.

One major factor that has affected diplomacy in this modern age is the revolution in ICTs. Digital diplomacy does not actually replace the traditional face-to-face diplomacy. Traditional and digital diplomacy co-exist and complement, rather than compete with, each other. Digital diplomacy and Internet activities as a whole can greatly assist in projecting a state’s foreign policy positions to domestic and foreign audiences (Adesina, 2017).

For **practitioners of diplomacy**, Nayasi (2019) emphasized the need to move away from the traditional exclusive club of diplomats to be inclusive of non-state actors. A case in example, in climate change discussions; recent Cotonou trade discussions happened between the country’s MFA and the civil society. The objective is to generate awareness and at the same time collaborate to put an inclusive agenda to the EU on the Cotonou Agreement, which will impact trade providers in the country and its sugar industry. Nayasi (2019) feels in order for diplomats to make right decisions together with state leaders; civil society should be included relative to the negotiations.

The **practice of diplomacy**, according to Cokanasiga (2019), was about the importance of missions to engage with their diaspora using the right medium like Facebook in UK to provide necessary real time information like any terrorist attacks in the vicinity; communicate on natural disasters amongst others. However, at the same time the MFA and its missions should be mindful of guidelines and procedures to follow when issuing emergency notifications. On the other hand, Cokanasiga (2019) felt that digital platforms could only be used to enhance traditional face-to-face diplomacy and that human interaction and warmth or otherwise can never be replaced by bots or social media platforms to make decisions on the global fora.

Early initiatives on data diplomacy have started developing. For example, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office plans to establish a Data Director and to strengthen the use of data mining, as announced in its recently published report, Future FCO. Other diplomatic services are exploring data diplomacy from a multidisciplinary approach, taking into considering the skills that diplomats need to harness the benefits of data. As part of this research, a first roundtable, held in

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Geneva, brought together diplomats and practitioners from international organisations to address (big) data in diplomatic reporting, humanitarian affairs, public diplomacy, development, and the sustainable development goals (Kurbalija, 2019).

## **CONCLUSION**

On receiving the first telegraph note in 1860, British Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston was reported to exclaim, “My God, this is the end to diplomacy!” (Diplo Foundation, 2018). Internet and digital technology has advance the way diplomats and state leaders interact on the international platform, where economic benefits and trade agreements can be formalized. However, traditional face-to-face diplomacy remains the cornerstone of foreign policy settings where information and communication are cornerstones to diplomacy and its state relations.

At this time, smart collaborative efforts with other MFAs from developing countries for in-house training on digital use and digital essentials like Twitter and Facebook will ensure that the target audience is reached and message contents understood. Other tools like Viber have come in handy in UN corridors and are crucial in keeping various groups informed when attending various meeting platforms on timings, urgent updates to the representative speaker who is about to speak and cannot be interrupted otherwise.

The country of this research can be proactive with policies and guidelines in encouraging their diplomats to be abreast with the rest of the world and be relevant on the digital wave.

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