

# Social Media as A Challenge to Traditional Indian Diplomacy A Medium of Communication or A Mode of Diplomacy?

Loveleena Sharma\*

## Abstract

*Diplomacy has witnessed several ontological and methodological alterations with the emergence of technological revolution, thus marking the advent of social media. This paper traces the vicissitudes brought in by social media, especially Twitter on the diplomatic plane. It examines these modifications at two levels: structural and individual, using the case of Indian diplomacy. At the structural level, it discusses the transition in the mode of communication; emergence of multiple actors and the transformation of diplomatic approach. At the individual level, it focuses on the shift in the role of political leaders, such as the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, in diplomatic affairs. Furthermore, it addresses the overarching debate of digital diplomacy being a division of diplomacy or social media being a medium of communication of the traditional Indian diplomacy. Against the popular belief, this paper asserts that although social media is an influential communicative tool affecting Indian diplomatic dynamics profoundly, it is not a separate mode of diplomacy altogether.*

## KEY WORDS

Indian Diplomacy, Social Media, Twitter, Digital Diplomacy

## INTRODUCTION

The assertion of man being a political animal has been well established by Aristotle. Existing in a close knit societal structure, man develops not

---

Loveleena Sharma is currently working as a Program Associate at Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). Prior to this, she was a commissioning editor at E-International Relations. She worked as a contributing editor on two books for E-International Relations Publications, namely, International Relations and International Relations Theory: A Practical Introduction. She has widely published works, including blogs, articles and policy briefs focusing on national and international issues. She has done her Masters in International Relations from the South Asian University. She was previously a YFFP-Jindal Foreign Policy Fellow at Jindal School of International Affairs.

*Social Media as a Challenge to Traditional Indian Diplomacy A Medium of Communication or a Mode of* 103  
only political but social and economic relations as well. Even states find themselves in a similar international structure, making interaction with other states at different levels natural and inevitable. Therefore, it becomes a natural instinct of states to be a part of the international dynamics, which are not limited to observe international events, but also to be part of dialogues affecting these events (Watson, 1983). These dialogues are known as diplomacy. Adam Watson defined diplomacy as “negotiation between political entities which acknowledge each other’s independence (Watson, 1983, p.21)”. Echoing Watson, Gilboa (2001) says that, “It refers primarily to international negotiation, to a communication system through which representatives of states and international or global actors defend, express their interests, grievances etc.” Diplomacy has remained an integral part of international relations as it is what makes it about relations between international actors.

However, there has been a cynical view of diplomacy, depicted as a zero-sum game, where it involves depletion of sovereignty, thus endangering the national interest of a state. Consequently, diplomacy ended up being defined as a continuation of power struggle through non-violent methods. Morgenthau claimed that diplomacy has lost its vitality and functions have withered away to a great extent (cited in Leguey-Feilleux, 2009). Kissinger (1994) on the other hand, emphasized the significance of diplomacy. He traced out the prints of pragmatism and paramountcy of national interest in diplomacy against then popular idealist understanding of the same.

The transformation of the world order immensely affected the ideals and objectives of diplomacy. With the ‘constructivist turn’ (Reus-Smit, 1996; Checkel, 1998) in international relations, Morgenthau’s power struggle and Kissinger’s pure economic and military national interests were challenged by soft power and an overarching accentuation of culture, norms and ideas (Jönsson and Hall, 2005). Nuemann insists that diplomacy is a social practice that cannot be abstracted from the social world (Neumann, 2001). This acknowledgment of the intertwined relationship of diplomacy and the social world brought ideas and norms to diplomatic practices, as a result making soft power an integral part of diplomacy. Like any other state, these transitions in diplomatic affairs has changed the face of India diplomacy as well. Indian diplomacy is an epitome of constructivist approach of diplomacy, emphasizing ideas, values and most importantly soft power. It is a soft power by default, owing to its historical values; civilizational power; ‘Bollywood as a quasi-global dream fabric’ and India’s long engagement in multilateral institutions, and high economic growth after 1991 (Thussu, 2013; Wagner, 2010).

Diplomacy witnessed another shift with the technological advances, making media a prominent actor in diplomatic affairs. In the contemporary world, this involvement of media in diplomacy has taken a step further in the form of social media which has opened the gates of traditional diplomacy for actors from all walks of life. It has made diplomacy more accessible and transparent for people, for now states do not strive only to influence other governments but also the public. Indian diplomacy has welcomed technological changes with open arms as several ministries, diplomats and political leaders have embraced social media to practice diplomacy. India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi is one of the most followed people on Twitter. In the contemporary world to become a leader, a state has to be an innovator first (cited Modelski and Thompson in Thompson, 2000). It has to create new trends, impressing upon other states to follow suit. Thus, India is striving to be a trend-setter, where it is carving its path from agenda setter to global leader.

Social media has transmuted the ontological understanding of diplomacy. It began to be re-defined as 'public diplomacy 2.0' (Glassman, 2008), 'virtual diplomacy' (Brown and Studemeister, 2001), 'cyber diplomacy' (Potter, 2002) or 'digital diplomacy' (Bjola and Holmes, 2015). This paper claims that rather being an altogether new mode of diplomacy, social media is working as a communication tool. It has altered the understanding and practice of diplomacy by widening its scope, without disrupting the old structures altogether. Diplomatic decisions are still taken by a particular sect of society, even though the public opinion has witnessed amplified influential power. Even today, diplomacy takes place behind closed doors, among the representatives of states, thus maintaining the traditional level of secrecy.

This paper primarily traces out this transition in Indian diplomacy brought about by social media. It focuses on the transformation at two levels. First, the structural level where it elucidates the modifications in the medium of communications, emergence of new actors and the transformation of objectives of diplomacy. Second, at the individual level, it fixates on the altered roles of political leaders. I will explore the role of the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Indian diplomacy through social media. This paper is divided into the four main sections. The first section provides a succinct overview of the role of the media in diplomacy. The following section explores the transition in diplomatic practice brought by social media in the context of Indian diplomacy. The third section, discusses the altered power dynamics in virtual diplomatic relations. In particular the altered diplomatic role of leaders, such as PM Modi in the age of social media is examined. Finally, the paper concludes by discussing the overarching debate on the role of social media in diplomacy, whether it is a mode of diplomacy called digital diplomacy, or a communication tool of traditional diplomacy.

## **ROLE OF MEDIA IN DIPLOMACY**

Diplomacy's exposure to media is permanent and irreversible (Gilboa, 2001). Scholars have traced out the relationship between diplomacy and media at various levels. Gilboa (2001) has discussed three types of diplomacy where media has assumed different level of roles as required. First is public diplomacy, where media is used by state and non-state actors to influence public opinion in foreign countries. Second, media diplomacy where the deliberate use of media is made in order to resolve a conflict by promoting favourable images of the counterpart in national media. Third being media-brokered diplomacy where media acquires a dominant role. Here, the media does not remain a tool but an actor in the discourse. In this version of diplomacy, journalists act as diplomats or the third party in the assistance of conflict resolution. On the other hand, Cowan and Arsenault (2008) have presented three layers of public diplomacy with respect to the usage of media as a communicating tool rather than demarcating them into different types of diplomacy. They defined three layers as: monologue, dialogue and collaboration; where monologue implies one way communication; dialogue is flow of information from various sources and; collaborations is based on cooperation and partnership. Monologue signifies the medium used by Gilboa's analysis, namely print and visual media. Dialogue focuses on the new age media that is social media.

The power of media lies in two factors: first, its connectivity and second is its ability to shape public opinion. Media has remained a detrimental factor in facilitating and pushing for several negotiations in history, and still retains the same significance (Davison, 1974). Besides, being a vital factor in negotiations, media also formulates the image of a state abroad, attracting foreign states as well as the public (Anholt, 2007). There are evidences of great political impact of transnational broadcasting by a state through radio for public diplomacy, owing to its massive appeal and reach to the people. For instance, in 1930s, the UK and Germany became the initiators in influencing the opinion of domestic and foreign public through radio (Seib, 2010).

With technological advances, the world witnessed an even more rapid proliferation of media. The radio has now been supplanted by the audio-visual media which exercises immense power in shaping people's outlook towards a state or an issue. Hoffman (2002, p.84) says that "the communication revolution has made diplomacy more public, exposing the once secret work of diplomats to the global fishbowl of life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century." The US utilized visual media to a great extent in its war against

terrorism post 9/11. The USA did not just limit itself to propagation of its ideology but also used media as a source to shape the public opinion in the Muslim world (Hoffman, 2002).

Peter Van Ham (2010, p.117) says,

“Today’s public diplomacy is not only focused on bringing out a target message, it also strives to build relationship with others. It is therefore less about authority telling others what to do, as it is showing others what we consider to be desirable in the hope that it will be emulated. This relationship does not need to be between a government and a foreign audience, but could well be between two audiences, foreign to each other whose communication and interaction a specific government wishes to facilitate.”

In other words, he points out the alteration in the objective of public diplomacy, where the target has not remained the government but the public itself. This alteration has been amplified by the advent of social media, making it the manifest layer of communication in Cowan and Arsenault’s public diplomacy. In visual media, “camera can only see what they are pointed at” but, dynamics have changed in the age of social media (Rai, 2003 p.4).

Personal computers and the speed of fibre optic cables in the transfer of information have marked the modern revolution and almost removed limitations of time and space (Friedman, 2005). The digital medium has redefined communications, providing ‘techno-geographical milieu of connected minds’ where the circulation of information shapes the consciousness of people bypassing physical boundaries (Grincheva, 2013). Sassen (2002, p.366) defines three properties of digital networks as decentralized access, simultaneity and interconnectivity.

But, focusing on social media, as merely digital advancement would be looking at the world with only one eye open, thus blindsiding the ‘social’ factor embedded in digital mediums. Sassen says that, (2002, p.368) “digital space is embedded in larger societal, cultural, subjective, economic, imaginary structuration of lived experienced and the systems within which it exists and operates.” There has been a proliferation of non-commercial users, using social media for larger social goals such as transmuting social media as a platform for social activism (Sassen, 2002).

Social media has changed the texture of the fabric of diplomacy, bringing in a new dimension and source of power, thus making decision making more complex. The changes brought in by social media will be discussed in detail in the next section.

## **TRANSFORMING THE UNDERSTANDING OF DIPLOMACY**

Social media has instigated three major vicissitudes in diplomacy, namely the medium of communication, actors in dialogue and objective of communication. This section will elaborate on the changes brought in Indian diplomacy with the advent of social media especially Twitter.

### **MEDIUM OF COMMUNICATION**

Communication lies at the root of any interaction. Even Joseph Nye (2004) has placed strategic communication as one of the major pillars of diplomacy. These communication are facilitated through the medium of media. In the changing world dynamics, the role of media has changed; now it is not merely a communicating tool, but has transformed into a platform for interaction. The convergence of telecommunication has made the world a global community in the virtual sense (Wriston, 1997). Political communication is no longer required to be mass communication or one to one communication, it can be targeted at individuals as well as groups. Thus, social media is changing the pattern of diplomatic communication from one to one to many to many (Papathanassopoulos, 2011, p. 44).

Social media has made diplomacy more accessible to the public. Earlier the role of public remained as receptors but now through social media, they have become prominent actors. Diplomacy to public or public diplomacy puts human interaction at the front and centre as compared to the traditional diplomacy. Nancy Snow underlines the centrality of human interaction, asserting that in diplomacy “the target audience is more like a prosumer (proactive consumer) consuming messages from the sender that ranges from a public affairs officer to the head of a nongovernmental organization, but also proactively responding and persuading back in a two-way exchange of ideas (Snow,2012).” Even Navdeep Suri (2011) defines public diplomacy as a practice not just about communicating, but also about listening. In resonance with this understanding of public diplomacy, India opened up avenues to implement the two-way communication. PDD (public diplomacy division), a special division created under Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), India in 2006 (later in 2014 merged with external publicity division) stresses on a two-way communication with its tagline ‘advancing India’s conversation with the world’ by focusing equally on listening as much as projective narratives (Natarajan, 2014). PDD joined Twitter in 2010 providing significant updates regarding Indian diplomatic activities. Later, several political leaders and diplomats followed the same route to Twitter.

India has been focusing on technological advancement as it does not want to be left behind in the race for soft power using mediums of social media (Hall, 2012). Indian diplomacy is focusing on the true sense of communication, rather than one-way oration it has opened the gates for several actors. India's Foreign Minister, Sushma Swaraj has made this conceptual two-way communication through social media a living reality. She has been addressing various issues brought up by Indian diaspora on Twitter and implementing viable solutions to the issues. Thus, social media has made diplomatic activities more transparent and accessible for the public. Further, it has not only provided the public with the information required about foreign dialogues but also has made them a proactive actor. Therefore, with the advent of social media, communication has become multileveled, involving numerous participants in comparison to non-interactive political mass communication.

## **ACTORS IN DIALOGUE**

Social media has made it difficult for classical gatekeepers (like the state) to control information and easier for the social actors to influence the discourse (Ham, 2010, p.1). "Earlier states were primary actors in managing communications with foreign nations, but with the proliferation of social media technologies and advance information access online, the credibility of a national government as the primary player in the eyes of foreign public has dramatically declined (Grincheva, 2013, p.17)." Now with the cumulative usage of social media, there has been an emergence of multiple actors on the forefront of diplomatic affairs.

Social media has brought people from the receiving end to the contributing end. The Public, especially younger media users, prefers social media over any other medium, as an online interactive environment where they are not merely consumers, but co-producers of messages (Papathanassopoulos, 2011). It has provided a common platform for constant interaction among state, non-state actors, affected people etc. These interactions over social media are playing a pivotal role in shaping public opinion, where an individual's opinionated tweet takes the form of trends within no time (The Times of India, 2014). Sometimes display of strong public opinion against injustice through social media has been witnessed in India. In the revolution to destroy the old norms and establish new ones, technological change has always been a catalyst (Wriston, 1997). Social media has acted as a catalyst in several instance of social activism, be it against corruption or rape incidents in India, where digital literates forced the government to take action (Barn, 2013; Chadha and Harlow, 2015).

Further increasing the power of social media is the shift from representational democracy to direct democracy at a virtual platform, where political actors are required to act and react within a limited time period (Martin and Jagla, 2013). Noam Chomsky unveiled an existing alternative practice of democracy where public must be barred from managing their own affairs and the means of information must be kept narrowly and rigidly controlled (Chomsky, 2002, p.10). The existence of such practice becomes impossible in the age of social media, where people have acquired the calibre to challenge the status quo. Although a boon, it's a bane as well. At one point, social media provides a space for the concerned public to involve in the decision making for their future, which was earlier out of their reach. On the other hand, it has opened the window of access for the spoilers, who hinder long term decision making (Martin and Jagla, 2013). Thus, it has increased the number of stakeholders in decision making. It has turned decision making more transparent and democratic, but at the same time more complex.

## **OBJECTIVE OF COMMUNICATION**

Besides the transition in the nature of communication and the increased number of actors involved, social media has transformed the objective of diplomacy. Earlier it was about relationships between the representatives of states, or other international actors; whereas now diplomacy targets the general public of foreign societies and specific non-official groups, organizations and individuals (Melissen, 2005, p.5). With social media, state and people come into direct contact leaving no time for slow reactions. Thus, it has brought a drastic change in the diplomatic approach from calculated strategic responses to spontaneous responses. It has prompted India to keep up its pace with the digital world, ensuring not only the presence of state representatives such as diplomats, leaders, ministries etc. but also their availability to address any issue in the least time possible.

Secondly, it has increased the significance of soft power by an enormous amount. In contemporary world politics, soft power has assumed a vital position and social media has made its position even stronger. "International relations are shaped not just by the power states have but the ideas the states hold about how that power should be used (Natarajan, 2014, p.91)." Earlier there were few sources of information flow, media being one of the core providers. Now with the technological progress, the world has witnessed several versions and sources of information (Silverman, 2012). Thus, it has become crucial to analyse how these ideas are communicated and become mainstream, and those who master this understanding of



construction of narrative and their right communication to mainstream, holds the key to power in the contemporary era (Natarajan, 2014).

India, too acknowledged these deviations from its traditional approach towards the endeavour of constructing a new one. As Ian Hall (2012, p. 1090) said,

“To a degree, India’s new public diplomacy builds upon this tradition but also departs from India’s past practice in three key ways. First, India’s new public diplomacy is actually seeking new audience within India (notably politically engaged young people at home), in the west (Indian diaspora communities abroad), and in the developing world. Second, Indian officials are attempting to render India’s foreign policy process more open and democratic by engaging in dialogue with communities outside the New Delhi Political and diplomatic elite. Third, the efforts seek to utilize new media rather than traditional methods to reach its various target audiences.”

India has not had any overarching goal after NAM, but with the arrival of a new era, it is focusing on new goals thus forming a new strategy with a rationalistic approach. Kanti Bajpai claims that India’s grand strategic thinking has been influenced by three major schools, which he defines as Nehruvism, Neo-liberalism and Hyperrealism (Bajpai, 2014, p.114). India’s foreign policy under PM Modi has been formulated using the major elements of traditional diplomacy. It still maintains India’s non-aligned position, but it is no longer guided by Nehruvian socialism embedded in idealistic ideology, as seen during the initial years of independence. India has become an aspiring, pragmatic state, moving forward to its goal of establishing itself as a major global power (Poudel Sharma, 2015). Though India is still focusing on the Nehruvian legacy, but now the maintenance of relationship with all states is based on pragmatism rather than ideology (Poudel Sharma, 2015).

As Sharp (2009, p.41) points out, “today international relations are more rationalistic and reasonable than yesterday”. Indian diplomacy has followed the rationalistic approach, contributing in making a more civilised space through meaningful and peaceful interactions (Sharp, 2009). And, social media has acted as a catalyst to further these interactions, not just with other states but the peoples as well. Given India’s young demography social media has proved to be a powerful platform for making their voices heard. At large, social media has changed the approach, making the actors more responsive and diplomacy more soft power driven.

With the advancement in technology, there comes a change in world order, changing the role and status of actors. Social media has brought the public from the periphery to the core of diplomatic discourses, but whether it

*Social Media as a Challenge to Traditional Indian Diplomacy A Medium of Communication or a Mode of* 111  
has hindered the power of the primary actors shall be answered in the next section.

## **POWER DYNAMICS: ALTERED ROLE OF POLITICAL LEADERS**

Social media has created a digital panoptic for the political authorities, keeping them under public scrutiny (Grincheva, 2013). But, in the digital era, power dynamics have transformed but have not reversed. Where on one hand, the public has got an increased say in the discourse and leverage to create pressure on leaders, on the other hand, the power of leaders in diplomatic affairs has remained intact. Diplomacy is still a state affair more than being a public affair. Political leaders still reside at the core diplomatic affairs, but the system has become more inclusive and progressive with respect to people.

“Political leaders’ battles for overseas hearts and minds are therefore anything but a recent invention” (Melissen, 2005, p.4), but the methods for gaining influence have changed. In the age of social media, the role of political leaders has become demanding. A leader is not just a connector and a representative of a country on social media but assumes several other roles in this larger context (Newton and Deiser, 2013). First, he is a producer, who is assigned with the task to produce favourable content online to increase country’s soft power and maintains relationships with other states. Second, he is a distributor who, with the help of concerned ministries, distributes the information to maximum number of people, and ensures constant flow of such information. Third, a leader is a recipient, who is assigned with the task of managing an overflow of information and responding to the flow of harmful information. Fourth, a leader is an architect of the virtual organizational structure, ensuring the power hierarchy. And, finally a leader is an analyst, who analyses current trends and keeps a tab on recent events to formulate appropriate responses to them <sup>1</sup>(Newton and Deiser, 2013).

PM Modi at the outset realised the worth of social media. “I am a firm believer in the power of technology and social media to communicate with people across the world”, he said in his inaugural message on twitter (Twiplomacy.com, 2015). His famous tweet: “India has won! The conquest of India. Good days are ahead” was retweeted more than 20,000 times (Twiplomacy.com, 2015). Mr. Modi is the most followed Indian politician, and the second most followed politician in the world after Barack Obama.

---

1 Applied the role of corporate leader in the context of politics

Modi's number of followers crossed the 15 million mark on September 22, 2015. Since the time he was sworn into office on May 26, 2014, he has gained over 11.9 million followers. According to Twitter, PM Modi has also set new records as the largest increase in the number of followers in a 12-month period for an Indian account (8.8 million followers from Sep 17, 2014 to Sep 17, 2015) (Twiplomacy.com, 2015). India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi made history when he posted a selfie at an election booth on 30 April 2014, (Twiplomacy.com, 2015) marking a beginning of a new trend which went viral all over Twitter. Through usage of social media as a tool, the PM has projected himself as accessible for fruitful interaction, making his initiatives public through his tweets.

“Mr. Modi's focus on the grand chessboard of geopolitics to underpin national interests suggests a strategic bent of mind (Chellaney, 2014).” His foreign policy is imbued in ideas rather than ideologies. PM Modi has demonstrated a skilful approach to galvanise public opinion through social media platform (Chellaney, 2014). He is endeavouring to make India a trend setter, especially in the contemporary digital age by establishing itself as a power that takes responsibility in deconstruction and maintenance of global order (Raja Mohan, 2015).

Mr. Modi with great emphasis on India's legacy of soft power has enhanced the points of strength of India's power by focusing on three dimensional objectives: economic, political and especially cultural. With respect to the economic aspect, Mr. Modi has focused on strengthening economic independence of India, not just at the ideological front but also on the policy oriented front. He has explored bilateral relations with countries that were either not a part of India's international relations plans or ones where relations were too strained to move ahead. He has focused on the Act East policy for the exploration of unexploited economic avenues. Mr. Modi has rebranded India's “Look East” policy as “Act East”, with special emphasis on strengthening economic and security ties with Asian neighbours like Japan, Vietnam, South Korea, Australia and Mongolia (Raja Mohan, 2015). He is targeting to improve India's internal ties with key actors (especially East Asian), to increase India's global standing and influence (Hall, 2015). He went a step further by tweeting to the people and leaders of these countries in their official languages, making clear his intentions of forming relationships not just with leaders but also with the people.

Ian Hall (2015) has rightly observed PM Modi's emphasis has been on economics to connect with India's skilled innovators and capital rich diaspora in countries like Australia and the USA. This connection has been carried out through Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) and promotion

of the 'Make in India' concept. Using the medium of Twitter he has emphasized on reviving the old bilateral relationship with the US and the fact that India-US ties in the digital economy will benefit the entire world. It would be erroneous to say that PM Modi is the first leader keeping economic development through FDI and diaspora contribution as his primary objective. Although the engagement with the diaspora had begun to gain some traction since the Vajpayee years, Mr. Modi has elevated it to a new level (Raja Mohan, 2015). He tweeted, "A message for Diaspora – India awaits you!", therefore, opening and reviving the economic and cultural avenues possible through interaction with the Indian diaspora abroad. His trips and tweets focused on the Indian diaspora abroad, from Punjabis in Canada to Malayalis in the UAE, making his objective of diaspora inclusion in foreign policy quite visible.

The endeavours towards diaspora economic engagement have been made by previous leaders as well. PM Modi has tried to revive a vital aspect of diaspora engagement that is the cultural influence of India in the world of soft power. He has endeavoured to rebrand India as a source of immense cultural power in the world where cultural tools hold the greatest power. One of his significant steps includes the acknowledgment of yoga being a gift to the world from the roots of the Indian civilization. He proposed the celebration of International Yoga Day throughout the world, spreading the Indian culture to every street of the world. This in turn made India's presence in world affairs stronger than it was before. Besides the promotion of the Indian identity through culture, PM Modi rightly touched upon the cultural ties between countries to formulate stronger relations, focusing on culture as a binding factor. His objective of strengthening relationship with China through a Buddhist path could be inferred from his tweet - "Buddhism is a very strong bond between China and India". He deliberately chose cultural linkage to reach out to people and transform the competitive political-economic relations into a benevolent cultural relation. Through his tweets PM Modi has sought to underline the civilizational roots of religious and cultural heritage. Secondly, he focused on the use of language in his tweets as he realised that it is not the state that he had to influence but it is people he had to convince. He used different languages in his speech and tweets to move closer towards the people of foreign lands. For instance, he joined Sina Weibo, a Chinese alternative to Twitter and posted tweets in Mandarin.

On the political front, Modi's approach has remained to utilize India's image as the largest democracy in the world. Mr. Modi is not the first one to identify democracy as central to India's international identity. It has been there right from independence, during NAM years forming the initial

identity of India in the international affairs. PM Modi with his presence on social media as one of the most active users has re-emphasized India's belief in democracy.

Thus, two questions raised through this analysis of PM Modi's use of social media for diplomacy in the digital era are: first, how social media is contributing to his diplomatic practice and second, how far it has changed the role of political leaders. Social media, especially Twitter has somehow provided a platform to execute PM Modi's aims and objective by providing him outreach to an audience and contemporary approach. First, with respect to India's demography and PM Modi's investment goals: younger generation (at home) and Diaspora (abroad) remained his primary audience. Hence, social media turned out to be the perfect platform to access both of them at the same time for interaction, accessibility and shaping their opinion. Second, in the digital era, when a huge number of people are on social media, it has helped to increase the global reach of India and at the same time, made its presence in world affairs stronger. Third, social media has become a platform where public opinion gets shaped and discourses are formed. Thus, by having a social media presence, PM Modi got a chance for contributing to the discourse and responding on the basis of the magnitude of public's action and reaction over social media. Though leaders cannot control the discourse over social media, they can certainly resolve issues with their rightful presence and responses, in accordance with the magnitude of such issues.

In comparison to previous leaders, Modi's role has become multi-faceted in a social media centric world. First, the public has an access to communicate with the leader through social media which was not the case earlier. Second, social media has increased the significance of public opinion and public pressure. It has brought people from the periphery of decision making to the core, affecting the hierarchical structure of the core. This has changed the power dynamics for contemporary leaders to an extent. They have to be more responsive, vigilant, and cautious about public opinion. Third, social media has decreased the response time for a leader to respond to an issue. If a case occurs in India or the world, it demands an immediate response in the form of a statement or a tweet from PM Modi. He cannot afford to ignore any major happenings in the world, and thus has to remain aware about the developments around the world. And, finally social media has affected the approach of leaders, especially PM Modi who needs to focus on promotion of Indian soft power now more than any other leader before.

Though Indian diplomacy has been progressing with social media, widening its scope and reach, but it has been argued that the reach of

*Social Media as a Challenge to Traditional Indian Diplomacy A Medium of Communication or a Mode of* 115  
internet in many countries, including India is not adequate. "India is often celebrated as a contradiction in terms so it may not be surprising to that even though the country has about 10% internet penetration" (Edling, n.d., p.96). But the target audience for diplomatic activities on Twitter is the youth and the diaspora, who have a healthy online presence. Further, to increase the scope of digital connectivity, PM Modi is proposing a plan towards enhancing internet accessibility throughout India. Second, though social media has given space to the voices of people, but sometimes these voices lack substantive arguments and are embedded in stereotypes and prejudices. Thus, with an abundance of information available in public domain, governments have become increasingly subject to pressures of public opinion, which at times makes the going difficult for the political leaders (Martin and Jagla, 2013). Third, it must be realised that just as "the real world of contemporary diplomacy is not captured in the dichotomous categories of state and non-state actors locked in the zero sum game" (Brian and Jan, 2015, p.12), so is the virtual world not divided into analogue and digital. The real challenge in diplomacy and for political leaders is to maintain an apt balance of both traditional and new age diplomacy.

## **DIGITAL DIPLOMACY OR SOCIAL MEDIA AS COMMUNICATION TOOL**

Diplomatic studies have welcomed social media, owing to the remarkable changes it has brought to the understanding and practice of diplomacy. But, scholars differ in their take on the ontological space of social media in diplomacy. There have been two major views, where one defines the role of social media as a tool of communication in public diplomacy, the other claims diplomacy to be an altogether.

"Digital Diplomacy is the growing use of ICTs and social media platforms by a country in order to achieve its foreign policy goals and practice Public Diplomacy" (Exploring Digital Diplomacy, 2014). The definition points out a phenomenon of increasing usage of social media in diplomacy, but the increase in usage of a tool does not make it a different stream of diplomacy. This paper is not questioning the power of social media, but it is disagreeing with the classification of diplomacy in social media as a type of diplomacy called digital diplomacy.

In this paper the objective was to put forth social media as a tool of communication, rather than a different branch of diplomacy; though it has brought some changes at the level of practice and the role of leaders. With respect to diplomatic practice, the paper focused on three primary changes. First, social media has broadened the scope and mode of

communication. Second, it has discussed the increased number of actors involved, strengthening the role of public in the diplomatic discourse. Third, it has increased the inclination of countries such as India towards using its soft power through the medium of social media. Further, the paper has analysed the changed power dynamics, bringing the public from the periphery to the core of diplomacy. But it also points out to an important status quo with regard to the position of political leaders and diplomats. Thus, social media has transformed the understanding and practice of diplomacy, but it definitely cannot replace the traditional form of diplomacy.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anholt, S. (2007). *Competitive identity*. Basingstoke [England]: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bajpai, K. (2014). Indian Grand Strategy Six Schools of Thought. In: K. Bajpai, S. Basit and V. Krishnappa, ed., *India's grand strategy: History, theory, cases*, 1st ed. New Delhi: Routledge, pp.113-150.
- Barn, R. (2013). Social Media and Protest - The Indian Spring? *Huffington Post*. [online] Available at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/professor-ravinder-barn/india-social-media-and-protest\\_b\\_2430194.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/professor-ravinder-barn/india-social-media-and-protest_b_2430194.html) [Accessed 15 Nov. 2015].
- Bjola, C. and Holmes, M. (2015). *Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*. Routledge.
- Brian, H. and Jan, M. (2015). *Diplomacy in Digital Age*. Clingendael: Netherland Institute of International Relations.
- Brown, S. and Studemeister, M. (2001). Virtual Diplomacy: Rethinking Foreign Policy Practice in the Information Age. *ISIJ*, 7, pp.28-44.
- Chadha, M. and Harlow, S. (2015). The Writing on the Wall, or is it? Exploring Indian Activists' Belief about Online Social Media's Potential for Social Change. *International Journal of Communication*, (9), pp.672-693.
- Checkel, J.T. (1998). The constructive turn in international relations theory. *World politics*, 50(02), pp.324-348.
- Chellaney, B. (2014). Deconstructing the Modi foreign policy. *The Hindu*. [online] Available at: <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/deconstructing-the-modi-foreign-policy/article6658904.ece> [Accessed 10 Dec. 2015].
- Chomsky, N. (2002). *Media control*. New York: Seven Stories Press.
- Cowan, G. and Arsenault, A. (2008). Moving from Monologue to Dialogue to Collaboration: The Three Layers of Public Diplomacy. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616(1), pp.10-30.
- Davison, W. (1974). News Media and International Negotiation. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 38(2), p.174.
- Edling, J. (n.d.). India and the Internet: An Ambiguous Relationship. *Rising Soft Powers: India*, pp.96-98.
- Exploring Digital Diplomacy, (2014). *What is Digital Diplomacy?*. [online] Available at: <http://digdipblog.com/countries-on-Twitter-and-facebook/> [Accessed 30 Dec. 2015].

- Social Media as a Challenge to Traditional Indian Diplomacy A Medium of Communication or a Mode of* 117
- Friedman, T. (2005). *The world is flat*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Gilboa, E. (2001). Diplomacy in the media age: Three models of uses and effects. *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 12(2), pp.1-28.
- Glassman, J. (2008). *Public Diplomacy 2.0*, speech delivered at the New American Foundation. [video] Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X3NU4d81Ps4> [Accessed 19 Nov. 2015].
- Grincheva, N. (2011). The 'Starfish' of Cultural Diplomacy: Social Media in the Toolbox of Museums. Language of Art and Music International Symposium Proceedings.
- Grincheva, N. (2013). 'Psychopower' of Cultural diplomacy in the information age. Los Angeles: Figueroa Press.
- Hall, I. (2012). India's New Public Diplomacy. *Asian Survey*, 52(6), pp.1089-1110.
- Hall, I. (2015). Is a 'Modi doctrine' emerging in Indian foreign policy?. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 69(3), pp.247-252.
- Ham, P. (2010). *Social power in international politics*. New York: Routledge.
- Hoffman, D. (2002). Beyond Public Diplomacy. *Foreign Affairs*, 81(2), p.83.
- Jönsson, C. and Hall, M. (2005). *Essence of diplomacy*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kissinger, H. (1994). *Diplomacy*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Leguey-Feilleux, J. (2009). *The dynamics of diplomacy*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Martin, C. and Jagla, L. (2013). *Integrating Diplomacy and Social Media*. Washington D.C.: Aspen Institute.
- Melissen, J. (2005). *The new public diplomacy*. Basingstoke [UK]: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Natarajan, K. (2014). Digital Public Diplomacy and a Strategic Narrative for India. *Strategic Analysis*, 38(1), pp.91-106.
- Neumann, I. (2001). 'Grab a Phaser, Ambassador': Diplomacy in Star Trek. *Millennium - Journal of International Studies*, 30(3), pp.603-624.
- Newton, S. and Deiser, R. (2013). Six social-media skills every leader needs. *Mckinsey Quarterly*. [online] Available at: [http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/high\\_tech\\_telecoms\\_internet/six\\_social-media\\_skills\\_every\\_leader\\_needs?cid=other-eml-ttn-mip-mck-oth-1312](http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/high_tech_telecoms_internet/six_social-media_skills_every_leader_needs?cid=other-eml-ttn-mip-mck-oth-1312) [Accessed 10 Nov. 2015].
- Nye, J. (2004). *Soft power*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Papathanassopoulos, S. (2011). *Media perspectives for the 21st century*. London: Routledge.
- Potter, E. (2002). *Cyber-diplomacy*. Montreal, Que.: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Poudel Sharma, S. (2015). *Modi's Foreign Policy: Nuanced Non-Alignment*. Singapore: RSIS Commentaries.
- Rai, A. (2003). Diplomacy and the news media: A comment on the Indian experience. *Strategic Analysis*, 27(1), pp.21-40.
- Raja Mohan, C. (2015). A new manual for diplomats. *The Indian Express*. [online] Available at: <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/narendra-modi-government-one-year-after-a-new-manual-for-diplomats/> [Accessed 23 Dec. 2015].
- Reus-Smit, C. (1996). The constructivist turn: Critical theory after the Cold War. Department of International Relations, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University.
- Sassen, S. (2002). Towards a Sociology of Information Technology. *Current Sociology*, 50(3), pp.365-388.
- Seib, P. (2010). Transnational Journalism, Public Diplomacy, and Virtual States. *Journalism Studies*, 11(5), pp.734-744.
- Sharp, P. (2009). *Diplomatic theory of international relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



- Silverman, C. (2012). A New Age for Truth. *Truth in the Age of Social Media, Nieman Reports*, 66(2).
- Snow, N. (2012). Public Diplomacy and Propaganda: Rethinking Diplomacy in the Age of Persuasion. *E-International Relations*. [online] Available at: <http://www.e-ir.info/2012/12/04/public-diplomacy-and-propaganda-rethinking-diplomacy-in-the-age-of-persuasion/>. [Accessed 23 Dec. 2015]
- Suri, N. (2011). Public Diplomacy in India's Foreign Policy. *Strategic Analysis*, 35(2), pp.297-303.
- Szondi, G. (2008). Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding: Conceptual Similarities and Differences. Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'.
- The Times of India, (2014). How Twitter shapes public opinion. [online] Available at: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/tech/social/How-Twitter-shapes-public-opinion/article-show/31882728.cms> [Accessed 6 Nov. 2015].
- Thompson, W. (2000). *The emergence of the global political economy*. London: Routledge.
- Thussu, D. (2013). *Communicating India's soft power*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Twiplomacy.com, (2015). *Twiplomacy Study 2015 | Twiplomacy*. [online] Available at: <http://twiplomacy.com/blog/twiplomacy-study-2015/> [Accessed 13 Nov. 2015].
- Twitter.com. (n.d.). *Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) | Twitter*. [online] Available at: <https://twitter.com/narendramodi?lang=en> [Accessed 20 Dec. 2015].
- Wagner, C. (2010). India's Soft Power: Prospects and Limitations. *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs*, 66(4), pp.333-342.
- Watson, A. (1983). *Diplomacy*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co.
- Wriston, W. (1997). Bits, Bytes, and Diplomacy. *Foreign Affairs*, 76(5), p.172.