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The role of artificial intelligence and social media in digital diplomacy

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Abstract

Digital technology is changing the way diplomacy works in today's world. In the past, diplomacy was slow and private, but now it has become fast and open because of tools like WhatsApp, Zoom, and social media. These platforms allow people to share opinions instantly and help leaders respond quickly. Social media also plays a big role in shaping public opinion and strengthening democracy, as seen in global movements like #MeToo and Howdy Modi. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is helping governments understand public emotions and make better decisions. Countries such as the United States, France, and the United Kingdom are using AI to track public mood and accordingly formulate their foreign policy. AI is also used in military planning, including predicting wars and managing weapons. While digital diplomacy offers many benefits, it also brings challenges like unequal access to technology, privacy concerns, misinformation, and environmental costs. Blockchain is suggested as a secure way to manage treaties, and tools like ChatGPT can assist diplomats in writing reports and analysing complex topics. The paper also highlights how India and the United States can work together in digital areas to improve their relationship. Overall, digital diplomacy is becoming a key part of international relations and global decision-making.

Keywords: Digital diplomacy, artificial intelligence, social media, India-US relations

Introductions

Diplomacy has always been the central mechanism through which states communicate, negotiate, and manage international relations. Traditionally, it was confined to slow, private, and highly formal interactions among state representatives. However, with the advent of digital technologies, diplomacy has undergone a major transformation. Social media platforms such as Twitter (now X), Facebook, and WhatsApp, along with video conferencing tools like Zoom, have enabled leaders, diplomats, and ordinary citizens to participate in real-time conversations that shape global political discourse. This democratization of international communication is what scholars now define as "digital diplomacy" (Bjola & Manor, 2018) +.

At the same time, artificial intelligence (AI) has introduced new dimensions to decision-making in foreign policy. Governments employ AI to analyze public sentiment, forecast geopolitical risks, and even assist in military planning. For instance, AI-driven sentiment analysis was deployed by France to monitor Russian influence operations in Africa, while the United States used similar approaches during negotiations with the Taliban. The United Kingdom applied AI-based opinion mapping during the Brexit referendum.

While these tools offer opportunities for speed, transparency, and inclusivity, they also raise concerns about misinformation, unequal technological access, privacy breaches, and the environmental costs of large-scale computational models. Moreover, developing countries often struggle to keep pace, which creates an uneven distribution of digital power and influence in the global system.

This paper examines the dual role of AI and social media in reshaping diplomacy, with a particular focus on India-United States digital cooperation. It argues that while digital diplomacy enhances engagement and strategic capabilities, it simultaneously generates challenges that demand new governance frameworks. The paper contributes to the literature by integrating technological, political, and governance perspectives, and by highlighting how emerging economies like India can strengthen their digital sovereignty while engaging in global partnerships.

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Research Questions

1. How are AI and social media transforming diplomatic practices in contemporary international relations?
2. What are the main opportunities and risks associated with digital diplomacy?
3. How can India and the United States collaborate in digital diplomacy while addressing issues of dependence and sovereignty?

Literature Review

Digital Diplomacy and Social Media

The rise of social media has transformed diplomacy into a more participatory process. Platforms like Twitter, for example, are now routinely used by foreign ministries to broadcast policy positions and engage with foreign publics (Sevin & Manor, 2019) ^[9]. Research suggests that digital diplomacy not only accelerates communication but also amplifies public engagement by turning local issues into global movements, as seen in campaigns such as #MeToo and climate activism (Chadwick, 2017) ^[12].

Digital diplomacy is also a tool of “soft power.” Joseph Nye’s (2004) ^[6] theory of soft power suggests that states achieve influence not only through coercion but also by shaping preferences and narratives. Social media strengthens this capacity by allowing states to directly project cultural, political, and ideological messages across borders. However, it also exposes states to counter-narratives, disinformation, and hostile digital propaganda.

Artificial Intelligence in Diplomacy

AI applications are increasingly central to diplomatic and military strategies. Sentiment analysis, predictive analytics, and machine learning are now used to anticipate public opinion and forecast conflicts (Scott, Heumann, & Lorenz, 2018) ^[8]. In the military domain, AI assists with autonomous weapons, threat detection, and scenario modeling (UNIDIR, 2020) ^[11]. Scharre (2019) ^[17] cautions that these applications pose risks to international stability if left unregulated.

While developed countries such as the US, UK, and France are at the forefront of AI integration, developing countries face barriers in infrastructure, funding, and expertise (Kapoor & Ray, 2022) ^[4]. This uneven adoption creates a digital divide that exacerbates existing geopolitical inequalities.

Risks and Governance Challenges

The promises of digital diplomacy are tempered by serious risks. Misinformation spreads rapidly across social platforms, undermining trust in public institutions (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017) ^[13]. Privacy concerns are heightened by the extensive data collection practices embedded in AI systems. Furthermore, large-scale AI training requires significant computational energy, raising questions about sustainability (Vinueza *et al.*, 2020) ^[12].

Global governance structures remain fragmented. While some states advocate for “digital sovereignty” to secure control over national data, others push for multilateral frameworks that ensure interoperability and fairness (Chertoff & Simon, 2020) ^[3]. Blockchain has been proposed as a tool to manage international agreements securely, offering transparency and tamper-proof record keeping (Tapscott & Tapscott, 2016) ^[10].

India-US Digital Cooperation

India and the United States have increasingly engaged in technology partnerships, particularly in AI, cybersecurity, and digital infrastructure. The US-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET), launched in 2023, highlights the shared ambition to collaborate on secure and open digital ecosystems (White House, 2023). However, scholars caution that overreliance on US-based technology firms may limit India’s autonomy (Kapur, 2022) ^[5]. India must therefore balance collaboration with self-reliance by building domestic AI capacities and ensuring data protection.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, drawing on document analysis, case studies, and comparative methods. The focus is on secondary sources, including government reports and policy documents, scholarly books and journal articles indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, and reports by international organizations such as UNIDIR, Chatham House, CNAS, and Observer Research Foundation.

The paper employs case-oriented analysis to examine how AI and social media are applied in diplomacy by countries such as the United States, France, the United Kingdom, and India. These cases were selected because they represent diverse levels of technological capability and global influence.

A comparative framework is used to assess differences between developed and developing states in digital diplomacy practices. Additionally, a policy review method identifies governance strategies, risks, and cooperative mechanisms. This methodological triangulation enhances validity by incorporating multiple sources of evidence and perspectives.

Results

Transformation of Diplomatic Practices

Findings show that social media has redefined diplomacy by making it faster, more transparent, and participatory. Hashtag activism, such as #MeToo, illustrates how digital tools shape foreign policy agendas. Leaders’ use of platforms like Twitter allows for direct communication with foreign publics, bypassing traditional diplomatic channels.

Role of Artificial Intelligence

AI applications are central to modern diplomacy. France’s use of sentiment analysis to track Russian disinformation, the US reliance on predictive analytics during Taliban negotiations, and the UK’s application of opinion mapping during Brexit exemplify how AI informs decision-making. In the military domain, AI supports conflict forecasting and threat detection.

Challenges

Despite these advantages, three major challenges emerge: (1) Digital Divide-Developing states lack infrastructure and expertise, limiting participation. (2) Misinformation and Privacy-Fake news and surveillance erode trust. (3) Environmental Costs-Large AI models consume vast energy resources, raising sustainability concerns.

India-US Partnership

The India-US partnership highlights opportunities for collaboration in AI and cybersecurity. However, risks of

dependence on foreign technology underscore the importance of building indigenous capabilities. India's digital sovereignty remains critical for long-term resilience.

Discussion

The findings suggest that digital diplomacy is not merely a trend but a structural shift in international relations. Social media enables states to project narratives globally, reinforcing Nye's soft power framework. At the same time, it exposes vulnerabilities to disinformation campaigns, requiring stronger digital governance mechanisms.

AI enhances decision-making by providing predictive insights, yet it also introduces risks of militarization and inequality. As Scharre (2019) ^[17] and UNIDIR (2020) ^[11] warn, unregulated AI in the military sphere could destabilize global security. This underlines the need for international norms on AI use in diplomacy and defense.

The digital divide is particularly concerning. While the Global North advances rapidly, many countries in the Global South risk marginalization. This imbalance threatens to reproduce existing inequalities in international relations. Bridging the divide requires capacity building, technology transfer, and multilateral cooperation.

India-US cooperation offers lessons in balancing opportunities and risks. While collaboration can enhance global leadership, India must safeguard its digital sovereignty. Strategic autonomy requires domestic investment in AI, stronger data protection frameworks, and participation in shaping global digital norms.

Conclusion

This study confirms that AI and social media are reshaping the practice of diplomacy by making it faster, more inclusive, and more data-driven. While these technologies strengthen engagement and decision-making, they also introduce significant challenges related to inequality, misinformation, privacy, and sustainability.

Blockchain and generative AI tools present promising avenues for secure and efficient diplomatic processes, but they must be governed through transparent international frameworks. The India-US digital partnership demonstrates both the opportunities of cooperation and the risks of dependence.

The paper contributes to the field by integrating technological and political perspectives on digital diplomacy, highlighting the importance of balancing innovation with sovereignty and governance. Future research should include empirical studies comparing how different states implement digital diplomacy, with attention to public perception, policy outcomes, and ethical implications.

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