# Social media's impact on International Diplomacy and Foreign Policy

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## Abstract

The rise of social media has brought about a paradigm shift in international diplomacy and foreign policy. This research paper explores how diplomats and foreign policy officials use social media to communicate with one another and the public and the new opportunities and challenges this presents for diplomacy. It examines the impact of social media on public opinion and how it has affected foreign policy decision-making, including whether governments are more responsive to public opinion now that social media has made mobilising and coordinating large-scale protests and movements easier. The paper also explores the weaponisation of social media, including the use of disinformation, division, and undermining of trust by foreign actors to interfere in the domestic policies of other countries, and what steps are being taken to address this issue.

Furthermore, this research paper investigates how international organisations use social media to engage with the public and promote their agendas and the effectiveness of such efforts. It also examines the challenges of using social media to communicate messages and the role of social media in global governance, governance, and accountability, and the impact of non-state actors. Additionally, this paper looks into the challenges of digital diplomacy, the future of digital diplomacy, and ethical considerations surrounding the use of social media in international relations.

Overall, this research paper provides an in-depth analysis of the role of social media in international diplomacy and foreign policy, highlighting the opportunities and challenges that come with this new digital era.

## Introduction

In recent years, the proliferation of social media has dramatically altered the landscape of international relations. Diplomats and policymakers increasingly turn to platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to communicate with foreign governments, engage with global audiences, and shape public perceptions of their countries. This trend has significant implications for international diplomacy and foreign policy formulation. Social media has the potential to both facilitate and complicate efforts, enabling governments to reach new audiences and connect with citizens in new ways but also introducing new challenges and risks that must be carefully navigated. In this paper, we explore the

impacts of social media on international diplomacy and foreign policy, examining how these new technologies are transforming the field and assessing the opportunities and challenges they present. Through analysing case studies and empirical data, we seek to develop a nuanced understanding of social media's role in shaping global governance's future.

## Social media as a tool for diplomacy

Social media has increasingly become a vital tool for diplomacy in the 21st century. It has revolutionised how countries conduct their foreign policy and diplomacy, opening up new opportunities for communication, engagement, and outreach.

Firstly, social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram allow diplomats and foreign policymakers to communicate directly with citizens, opinion leaders, and journalists worldwide. This enables them to quickly share their views and opinions on current events and issues and build bridges with audiences in ways that were impossible before.

Secondly, social media provides a platform for **public diplomacy**, enabling countries to promote their image and values and reach out to audiences more engaging and personal. Social media can break down barriers between countries and create a more open and transparent environment for dialogue and cooperation.

Thirdly, social media allows countries to monitor and respond to global events and crises in real time. By tracking social media conversations and trends, policymakers can better understand public opinion and sentiment and respond quickly to issues that could impact their foreign policy objectives. Social media has become indispensable for diplomacy and foreign policy in the 21st century. It has enabled countries to engage with audiences in new ways, promote their values and interests, and respond to global events and crises more effectively.

1. **How are diplomats and foreign policy officials using social media to communicate with one another and the public?**

Diplomats and foreign policy officials increasingly use social media platforms to communicate with each other and the public. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn provide an opportunity for diplomats to interact with each other and share information in real time. This enables them to engage in a direct dialogue, promote transparency, and build trust between different nations.

One of the primary advantages of social media for diplomacy is that it provides a platform for diplomats to communicate with the public. Diplomats can use social media to provide updates on their work, share news, and express their views on current events. They can also use social media to engage citizens and build relationships with influential individuals and organisations. Using social media, diplomats can reach a broader audience and promote their countries' interests.

In addition, social media allows diplomats to interact with each other on a personal level. Diplomats can use social media to exchange ideas, build relationships, and coordinate their efforts. This helps to promote cooperation and build trust between nations.

Social media can also be used to **monitor international events and gather intelligence**. By monitoring social media platforms, diplomats can gain insights into the perspectives and opinions of people worldwide. This information can be used to inform foreign policy decisions and to develop more effective diplomatic strategies.

2. **What new opportunities or challenges does social media have for diplomacy?**

Social media has presented both new opportunities and challenges for diplomacy. On the one hand, social media has provided diplomats with **new opportunities** to engage with each other and the public, communicate their policies and perspectives and reach out to new audiences. Diplomats can now use social media platforms to interact with other diplomats and officials in real time, facilitating faster and more effective communication. They can also use social media to engage with the public, allowing them to understand better and respond to public opinion on important issues.

However, social media has also presented **new challenges** for diplomacy. Diplomats must navigate the complex and fast-paced world of social media, where information can spread rapidly, and opinions can quickly become polarised. They must also be careful to avoid social media blunders, such as accidentally posting confidential information or making offensive comments that could damage diplomatic relationships. Additionally, social media has created new risks for cybersecurity and disinformation campaigns, which can be used to undermine diplomatic efforts and sow confusion among the public. As such, diplomats and foreign policy officials must carefully balance the opportunities and challenges of social media in their diplomatic strategies.

## Social media and Public Opinion

One of the key ways social media has affected public opinion is by democratising the flow of information. In the past, the media played a central role in shaping public opinion by controlling the narrative and framing issues in a certain way. However, with the rise of social media, individuals have become empowered to share their opinions, perspectives, and experiences with a global audience. Moreover, social media has enabled individuals to connect and engage with like-minded people worldwide. This has allowed for the formation of online communities based on shared values, interests, and beliefs, which can further amplify and shape public opinion.

1. **Social Media: A platform for ordinary citizens to interact with policymakers and express views on International Relations**

Social media has significantly impacted public opinion and has become a significant force in shaping political discourse and decision-making. With its ability to reach millions of people instantly, social media platforms have become powerful tools for political actors to communicate directly with their audiences, mobilise support, and influence public opinion.

In the past, public opinion was shaped largely by traditional media, such as newspapers and television networks, often controlled by a small group of powerful elites. However, social media has democratised the public sphere, voicing various opinions and perspectives.

Today, anyone with an internet connection can share their thoughts and opinions on global issues and engage with others with similar views. This has enabled citizens to participate more actively in foreign policy debates and influence policymakers' decisions.
   - For example, during **the Arab Spring uprisings**, social media was crucial in mobilising citizens to protest against authoritarian regimes and demand greater political freedoms.

Social media has also enabled citizens to **hold their leaders accountable** for their actions on the world stage. In the past, leaders could operate with relative impunity on the global stage without much scrutiny from the public. However, today, social media makes it possible for citizens to monitor their leaders' actions and call attention to any actions that they believe are unjust or unethical. This has put pressure on leaders to act more transparently and to be more responsive to the concerns of their citizens.

2. **How has social media's role in public opinion affected foreign policy decision-making?**

Social media's impact on public opinion has significantly affected foreign policy decision-making. The ability of social media to create and amplify opinions has given policymakers more information about what the public thinks about specific issues. This has led to a shift in focus from traditional forms of diplomacy, primarily focused on communicating with other governments, to a more public-oriented approach.

Social media has enabled policymakers to engage with the public directly, bypassing traditional gatekeepers such as the media. This has given policymakers a more direct and immediate understanding of public opinion, which they can use to shape their decision-making. For instance, policymakers can use social media to conduct online polls and surveys, monitor public sentiment on specific issues, and even track real-time reactions to foreign policy decisions.

However, the influence of social media on foreign policy decision-making is only sometimes positive. Social media can sometimes distort public opinion and create a false consensus on specific issues. In addition, social media can be used by special interest groups to mobilise support for their agendas, which can make it difficult for policymakers to make decisions that are in the best interest of the country as a whole.

3. **Are governments more responsive to public opinion now that social media has made mobilising and coordinating large-scale protests and movements easier?**

Social media has undoubtedly made it easier for people to mobilise and coordinate large-scale protests and movements. As a result, governments may be more responsive to public opinion in some cases. However, this is only sometimes the case, and the impact of social media on government responsiveness to public opinion can vary depending on the context.

**Here are some examples:**

- **Arab Spring:** Social media played a crucial role in the Arab Spring uprisings, which swept across the Middle East and North Africa in 2010 and 2011. Protesters used social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube to organise and coordinate demonstrations, share information, and connect. The protests ultimately overthrew several long-standing autocratic regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya.
- **Black Lives Matter:** The Black Lives Matter movement emerged in the United States in 2013 in response to the shooting of Trayvon Martin and gained momentum in 2014 after the police shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. Social media played a crucial role in organising protests, sharing information and news, and spreading awareness about police brutality and racial inequality. The movement has since spread to other countries, leading to significant changes in policing and criminal justice policies.

- **#MeToo:** The #MeToo movement began in 2017 as a way for women to share their stories of sexual harassment and assault and quickly gained momentum on social media platforms. The movement led to high-profile resignations and firings of prominent individuals in politics, media, and entertainment and sparked a global conversation about sexual harassment and assault.
- **CAA-NRC Protests:** Protesters extensively used social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to organise and spread awareness about the protests. The hashtag *#CAA_NRC_Protests* trended on Twitter for several days, and thousands of people used Facebook and WhatsApp groups to share information about protest locations and updates. The government initially responded with a heavy-handed approach, using police force to break up protests and arrest protesters. However, as the protests gained momentum and continued to receive widespread coverage on social media, the government eventually had to address the protesters' concerns. The government formed a committee to review the CAA and held talks with protest leaders in response.
- **Farmers' Protest, 2020:** protests began in late 2020 in response to three new agricultural laws passed by the Indian government. Social media played a crucial role in organising the protests, with farmers using platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp to spread information and mobilise support. The protests gained widespread attention on social media, with celebrities and activists using their platforms to support the farmers and criticise the government. As a result, the government was forced to hold several rounds of talks with farmers' representatives and make some concessions.

These examples show how social media has made it easier for individuals to organise and mobilise large-scale protests and movements and how these movements have led to significant changes in policies and public opinion. As a result, governments are increasingly being forced to be more responsive to public opinion and take action on critical issues for their citizens.

However, social media also presents **several challenges** to public opinion. The speed and reach of social media mean that false or misleading information can spread quickly and significantly impact public opinion before it can be fact-checked or corrected. In addition, social media algorithms that prioritise engagement and attention can lead to the proliferation of extremist views and echo chambers, further polarising public opinion and limiting dialogue and understanding between different groups.

## <u>Weaponisation of Social Media</u>

The weaponisation of social media refers to using social media platforms to spread disinformation, propaganda, and false narratives to achieve political goals. Both state and non-state actors can do this, and it has become an increasingly prevalent tactic in modern political campaigns.

One example of the weaponisation of social media is the **2016 US presidential election**. Russian operatives created fake social media accounts and used them to spread disinformation and sow discord among American voters. The Russian campaign included the spread of false narratives about Hillary Clinton and supporting Donald Trump.

Another example is the ongoing **conflict in Syria**. The Syrian government and opposition groups have used social media to spread propaganda and false information about each other to influence public opinion and gain support for their cause.

The weaponisation of social media is a growing concern for governments worldwide, as it can potentially disrupt democratic processes and destabilise societies. Many countries have implemented measures to regulate the spread of false information and propaganda on social media platforms.

1. **Social media: disinformation, division, and undermining of trust**

   One of the most significant ways social media is being weaponised is through disinformation. **Disinformation** is false or misleading information spread to deceive people or manipulate their beliefs. Social media has made creating and spreading disinformation easier, often through clickbait headlines, doctored images or videos, and fake news articles.

   Another way social media is being weaponised is by **exploiting its algorithms** to promote divisive content and amplify extreme viewpoints. Social media algorithms are designed to prioritise content that generates engagement, such as likes, shares, and comments. This can create a feedback loop where users are shown content that reinforces their existing beliefs and biases and which can further polarise public opinion.

   In addition, social media can be used to **amplify hate speech and incite violence**. Online hate speech, mainly directed towards marginalised communities, has increased in recent years, and social media platforms have been criticised for failing to police this content effectively.

**In India**, social media has been used to spread disinformation and sow division in various instances, resulting in undermining trust in democratic institutions.

One notable example is the use of **social media during the 2019 general elections**. Several instances were reported where false news and propaganda were spread on social media platforms, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter, to influence voter sentiment. One such incident was the spread of a fake news story claiming that the Indian National Congress party had promised free electricity to mosques and churches in its manifesto. The story was widely shared on social media, leading to widespread outrage and communal tensions. Another example is the spread of fake images and videos purporting to show violence against Hindus in West Bengal during the elections, which were used to spread communal tension and mistrust.

In addition to the above, social media has also been used to spread fake news and conspiracy theories about the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in confusion and mistrust among the public. For instance, several false claims were made on social media platforms about the efficacy of specific alternative treatments for COVID-19, leading people to ignore medical advice and endangering public health.

These incidents illustrate how social media can spread disinformation and sow division, which can undermine trust in democratic institutions and erode the social fabric of society. It highlights the need for better regulation and enforcement of social media platforms to prevent the spread of false information and propaganda. The weaponisation of social media has profound implications for democratic societies. Spreading disinformation and promoting divisive content can undermine trust in democratic institutions, erode social cohesion, and create an environment where extremist views can flourish. It also poses a challenge for governments and policymakers, who must balance the need to protect free speech and democratic values with the need to address the harm caused by the weaponisation of social media.

2. **How have foreign actors used social media to interfere in the domestic policies of other countries?**

Foreign actors have used social media in various ways to interfere in the politics of other countries, including

- **Disinformation campaigns:** Foreign actors like Russia and China have used social media platforms to spread false information or propaganda to influence public opinion and political outcomes in other countries. For example, Russian operatives used social media during the 2016 US presidential election to spread false information and sow discord.

- **Covert operations:** Foreign actors have also used social media to conduct covert operations, such as creating fake social media accounts or hacking into political party databases to influence political outcomes. For example, in 2017, the French presidential campaign was targeted by a hacking group believed to be linked to the Russian government.

- **Targeted advertising:** Foreign actors have used targeted advertising on social media platforms to influence political outcomes. For example, during the Brexit referendum campaign, the Leave campaign was accused of using targeted advertising on Facebook to reach specific demographics with misleading information.

- **Influencing public opinion:** Foreign actors have also used social media to influence public opinion in other countries. For example, Chinese state media outlets have used social media to promote their government's views on issues such as the Hong Kong protests and Taiwan.

There have been several instances of foreign actors using social media to **interfere in the politics of India.** One example is the 2019 general elections, where there were reports of foreign entities trying to influence the outcome by spreading disinformation and propaganda on social media platforms.

According to a report by the Oxford Internet Institute, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC) were the two main targets of social media manipulation during the elections. The report found evidence of foreign-based actors and organisations spreading misinformation and polarising content on social media, including Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp.

Another example is the ongoing farmers' protests in India, where there have been reports of foreign-based actors using social media to spread false narratives and inflame tensions. In

particular, there have been accusations of Chinese and Pakistani involvement in spreading propaganda on social media to undermine the Indian government's response to the protests.

3. **What steps are being taken to address this issue?**

Several steps are being taken internationally to address the threat of the weaponisation of social media. These steps include

1. **International Cooperation:** Countries cooperate to share intelligence and coordinate their efforts to combat disinformation and foreign interference on social media platforms. For example, the European Union has established the <u>European External Action Service's East Stratcom Task Force</u> to monitor and expose disinformation campaigns.

2. **Increased Regulation:** Many countries are considering increased regulation of social media platforms to combat the spread of disinformation and propaganda. For example, the European Union has passed the <u>General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)</u> to protect citizens' data. In contrast, the Senate Intelligence Committee has called for increased transparency and accountability from social media companies in the United States.

3. **Education and Awareness:** Governments and organisations are working to educate the public about the dangers of disinformation and propaganda on social media. For example, the United Kingdom has launched the <u>Don't Feed the Beast campaign</u> to educate young people about disinformation.

4. **Tech Solutions:** Social media companies are developing new technologies to identify and remove fake accounts, bots, and other malicious actors from their platforms. For example, Facebook has developed machine learning algorithms to detect and remove fake accounts and disinformation.

5. **International Norms:** Efforts are underway to establish international norms and standards for behaviour on social media platforms. For example, the <u>Paris Call for Trust</u>

and Security in Cyberspace, launched in 2018, calls for developing international norms and rules for cyberspace to promote peace and stability.

**In India,** the government has taken several steps to address the threat of the weaponisation of social media. Some key initiatives implemented include

- **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021:** The government introduced these rules in February 2021 and requires social media intermediaries to follow a code of ethics regarding content moderation and data privacy. The rules also require intermediaries to appoint grievance, nodal, and chief compliance officers to address user complaints.
- **Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000:** This section allows the government to block public access to any information it deems to threaten national security or public order. The government has used the section to block social media and website access.
- **Section 505 of the Indian Penal Code** deals with spreading rumours or false information that could incite violence or cause public alarm. The government has used the section to prosecute individuals using social media to spread disinformation or incite violence.
- **Cyber Crime Cells:** Several states in India have set up cyber crime cells to investigate and prosecute individuals who use social media to spread hate speech or incite violence.
- **Social Media Monitoring:** The government has also set up monitoring cells to monitor and track the use of social media platforms by individuals and groups that may threaten national security or public order.

## Social Media and International Institutions

Social media has become essential for international organisations to communicate with their stakeholders and the public. Many international organisations, such as the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and the International Monetary Fund, have established a presence on social media platforms to disseminate information about their activities, promote their values and goals, and engage with their audiences. International organisations also use social media to connect with their member states and to collaborate with other organisations, civil society groups, and private sector partners. Social media platforms provide a space for virtual meetings, consultations, and discussions, allowing for greater participation and input from diverse voices.

1. **Are International organisations using social media to engage with the public and promote their agendas?**

    Many international organisations increasingly use social media to engage with the public and promote their agendas. Social media has become an effective tool for these organisations to connect with a broader audience, raise awareness, and promote their mission and objectives.

    Here are some examples of international organisations using social media:

    - **United Nations (UN)** - The UN has a strong presence on social media, with active accounts on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube. The organisation uses social media to share updates on its work, promote its campaigns and initiatives, and engage with the public on global issues such as climate change, human rights, and sustainable development.

    - **World Health Organization (WHO)** - The WHO has been using social media to disseminate information and guidance on the COVID-19 pandemic. The organisation has been using its Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram accounts to share updates on the latest COVID-19 developments, debunk myths and misinformation, and provide public health advice.

    - **International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)** - The ICRC has a solid social media presence, using its Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram accounts to raise awareness of its work in conflict-affected areas worldwide. The organisation uses social media to share updates on its operations, promote its humanitarian activities, and engage with the public on issues related to international humanitarian law.

- **World Wildlife Fund (WWF)** - The WWF is a leading conservation organisation using social media to raise awareness of environmental issues and promote conservation efforts. The organisation uses its social media accounts to share updates on its conservation projects, promote its campaigns, and engage with the public on climate change, biodiversity loss, and sustainable development.

2. **How effective is it?**

The effectiveness of international organisations' social media strategies in engaging the public and promoting their agendas can take time to measure accurately. It depends on various factors, such as the organisation's objectives, target audience, content strategy, and metrics used to evaluate success.

However, some indications suggest that social media has effectively allowed international organisations to engage with the public and promote their agendas. For example:

- **Increased reach and engagement** - Social media platforms allow organisations to reach a wider audience and engage with them directly through comments, likes, shares, and retweets. This can help organisations to promote their messages and campaigns to a broader audience and encourage public engagement and action.

- **Improved transparency and accountability** - Social media provides organisations with a platform to share updates on their work, progress, and achievements. This can help increase transparency and accountability and build trust with the public.

- **More significant impact on public opinion and policy** - Social media can help organisations shape public opinion and influence policy decisions by highlighting important issues, promoting research and evidence, and mobilising public support for their causes.

3. **Challenges faced in using social media to communicate messages**

While social media has provided international organisations with a platform to engage with the public and promote their agendas, there have also been challenges in using these platforms to communicate their messages effectively. Here are some challenges that international organisations face:

- **Managing online reputation:** Social media can be an unpredictable platform, and negative comments, feedback, and reviews can quickly spread and harm an organisation's reputation. International organisations must proactively manage their online reputation, respond promptly to feedback, and handle online criticism professionally.

- **Dealing with misinformation:** Social media can be a breeding ground for rumours, conspiracy theories, and misinformation. International organisations must be vigilant in monitoring and correcting misinformation to avoid causing confusion or harm to their reputation.

- **Ensuring accessibility:** While social media has enabled international organisations to reach a wider audience, it is essential to ensure their content is accessible to all users, including those with disabilities or limited internet access.

- **Maintaining consistency:** International organisations often have multiple social media accounts across different platforms, making maintaining a consistent voice and messaging challenging. Ensuring consistency in messaging can help build trust and credibility with the public.

- **Balancing transparency with confidentiality:** International organisations often deal with sensitive information and confidential data, making it challenging to balance transparency and confidentiality. International organisations must ensure they do not compromise their confidential information while being transparent with the public.

- **Language barriers:** International organisations often work in countries and regions with diverse linguistic backgrounds. This makes it challenging to ensure their messaging is clear and understandable across different languages and cultures.

Overall, social media can be a powerful tool for international organisations to communicate their messages effectively. Still, it requires careful planning, execution, and monitoring to maximise effectiveness and overcome challenges.

## Social Media and Global Governance

Social media has democratised public discourse and provided a platform for marginalised voices to be heard. It has also enabled international collaboration and promoted transparency and accountability in global governance. However, the use of social media in global governance also presents challenges, such as the spread of misinformation and the need to balance transparency with confidentiality.

In this context, it is essential for governments and international organisations to carefully plan and execute their social media strategies to maximise their benefits and minimise their risks. This includes developing guidelines for social media use, promoting transparency and accountability, and engaging with citizens and stakeholders meaningfully and inclusively. Overall, social media is changing how we think about global governance and accountability, and its influence will likely continue to grow in the future.

1. **Social Media: Governance and Accountability**

    Social media are transforming how we think about governance and accountability by providing new opportunities for engagement, transparency, and collaboration. Here are some examples of how social media is changing the way we think about governance and accountability:

    - **Transparency in government:** Social media has made it easier for governments to share information about their policies, decisions, and actions with the public. For example, the United States government has a social media presence on platforms like Twitter and Facebook, sharing updates and progress reports with citizens. This increased transparency helps build trust and credibility with citizens and promotes accountability in governance.
    - **Citizen participation in decision-making:** Social media has enabled citizens to participate in decision-making processes by providing new channels for public feedback and consultation. For example, in Estonia, citizens can use an online platform called "e-Rahvaalgatus" to propose and discuss new laws and policies. This platform has helped increase public participation in decision-making processes and promote accountability in governance. Another example is the Indian government's launch of an online portal called "MyGov", where citizens can give suggestions and feedback on various government policies and programs. This platform has helped increase public participation in decision-making processes and promote accountability in governance.
    - **Promoting transparency in corporate governance:** Social media has also been used to promote transparency and accountability. For example, companies like Nike and Coca-Cola have used social media to update their sustainability initiatives and engage

with customers and stakeholders on human rights and environmental sustainability issues.

- **Holding governments accountable:** Social media has become a powerful tool for holding governments accountable for their actions in India. For example, during the **2011 anti-corruption movement led by Anna Hazare**, social media played a crucial role in mobilising citizens and holding the government accountable for its actions. Social media platforms such as Twitter were used to organise protests, share information, and document corruption in government.
- **Information dissemination during disasters:** Social media has played a critical role in disseminating information during disasters in India. For example, during the **2018 Kerala floods**, social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook were used to share real-time updates and coordinate rescue and relief efforts. This helped improve the response time and effectiveness of disaster management and promote accountability in governance.

2. **Social Media: a new opportunity for citizens to participate in governance?**

Social media and other digital technologies have created new opportunities for citizen engagement and participation in global governance. Here are some examples:

- **Online platforms:** Various online platforms have been developed that enable citizens to participate in global governance, such as the World Economic Forum's Global Shapers Community and the United Nations My World 2030 platform. These platforms allow citizens to share their ideas and perspectives on global issues, connect with like-minded individuals and experts, and influence policy decisions.
- **Social media:** Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have become powerful tools for citizens to engage with global governance issues. Social media allows citizens to share their opinions, organise campaigns and protests, and connect with other individuals and groups across borders to advance common goals.
- **Digital petitions and campaigns:** Online petitions and campaigns have become popular tools for citizens to express their opinions and influence global governance decisions. Platforms such as Change.org, Avaaz, and Care2 allow citizens to start and sign petitions on various issues, from climate change to human rights.
- **Digital consultations:** Digital consultations enable citizens to participate in policy-making processes, even if they are not physically present. Platforms such as the

World Bank's Open Forum and the United Nations E-Discussion enable citizens to participate in consultations and provide feedback on policy proposals and initiatives.

These new digital technologies have made it easier for citizens to participate in global governance and make their voices heard. However, it is essential to note that there are still many barriers to citizen engagement and participation, such as unequal access to digital technologies and limited representation of marginalised groups. Therefore, efforts must be made to ensure that these digital tools are accessible to all citizens and that their voices are heard in global governance processes.

## Social Media: Non-State Actors

The use of social media by non-state actors has significantly impacted international relations in recent years. Here are some examples of how non-state actors have used social media to influence and shape global affairs:

- **Terrorist organisations:** Groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda have used social media platforms to spread their propaganda and recruit new members. They have also used social media to plan and coordinate attacks, as well as to communicate with supporters and sympathisers around the world. For example, ISIS used social media to promote its ideology, showcase its military capabilities, and recruit new fighters worldwide.
  - One example is the terrorist organisation **Indian Mujahideen (IM)**, which has used social media platforms to recruit new members, spread propaganda, and communicate with its followers. In 2012, the group claimed responsibility for a series of bombings in Pune and used social media to promote its message and celebrate the attacks. The Indian government has since cracked down on the use of social media by terrorist groups, including blocking websites and social media accounts affiliated with such groups.
- **Activist groups:** Social media has become an essential tool for activist groups seeking to promote their causes and mobilise supporters. For example, the #MeToo movement used social media to raise awareness about sexual harassment and assault, while the Black Lives Matter movement used social media to highlight police brutality and racial injustice. These movements were able to spread their message globally and mobilise supporters across borders through social media.

- **Hacktivist groups:** Hacktivist groups like <u>Anonymous</u> have used social media to launch cyber attacks on governments and corporations and promote their political causes. For example, Anonymous launched a series of attacks on the websites of government agencies and corporations in support of the Occupy Wall Street movement.
- **Cybercriminals:** With the increasing digitisation of India, cybercriminals have also been using social media to carry out their activities. They use platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp to spread malware and phishing links, steal personal information, and carry out financial fraud.

1. **Impact**

The impact of social media usage by non-state actors for propaganda on foreign policy can have both short-term and long-term implications for states. Here are some examples of how non-state actors have used social media for propaganda and its potential impact on foreign policy:

- **ISIS and the Syrian Civil War:** A non-state actor effectively used social media platforms to spread its ideology and recruit new members during the Syrian Civil War. Their propaganda videos and online campaigns were designed to attract foreign fighters to their cause, ultimately impacting foreign policy decisions. Many countries were forced to respond to the threat posed by ISIS, resulting in military intervention in the conflict.
- **Kashmir Conflict:** Non-state actors in Pakistan have been accused of using social media to spread propaganda and incite violence in the ongoing Kashmir conflict. Their online campaigns have fueled tensions between India and Pakistan, making both countries take a hardline stance.
- **China and the South China Sea Dispute:** China has been accused of using social media to promote its claims in the South China Sea dispute. It uses propaganda to assert its territorial claims and challenge the international norms and laws that govern the region. This has significantly impacted foreign policy, with many countries taking a more assertive stance towards China's actions in the region.
- **Iran and the Middle East:** Iran has used social media to promote its agenda and spread propaganda in the Middle East, focusing on destabilising US allies. This has significantly impacted foreign policy decisions, with the US and its allies taking a more aggressive stance towards Iran's activities in the region.
- **Pulwama attack:** In February 2019, a terrorist attack in Pulwama, India, killed 40 Indian paramilitary personnel. The Pakistan-based militant group Jaish-e-Mohammed

claimed responsibility for the attack, and their propaganda videos celebrating the attack went viral on social media. This propaganda fueled public anger in India and led to a significant escalation of tensions between India and Pakistan, with both countries carrying out airstrikes against each other.

- **Khalistan movement:** The Khalistan movement is a separatist movement that seeks to create a separate Sikh homeland in Punjab. Some Khalistani groups have used social media to spread propaganda and radicalise Sikh youth. This propaganda can strain India's relationship with Canada and other countries with a large Sikh population.

## Challenges of Digital Diplomacy

Digital diplomacy refers to using digital technologies and communication channels by diplomats and government officials to conduct diplomacy and promote foreign policy objectives. However, using digital technologies in diplomacy presents several challenges that diplomats and government officials must address.

- One of the significant challenges of digital diplomacy is **cybersecurity**. Diplomats and government officials must be aware of the risks of cyber-attacks and data breaches in digital diplomacy efforts. They must secure online communication channels and data storage to prevent unauthorised access and breaches. However, they must also balance cybersecurity with Open communication and transparency, which are essential for effective diplomacy. For example, In 2022, a major **cyber attack on India's AIIMS** attributed to a state-sponsored Chinese hacking group. This incident highlighted the vulnerability of diplomatic communication channels to cyber attacks and the need for more robust cybersecurity measures in digital diplomacy efforts.

- Another challenge of digital diplomacy is **cultural and linguistic barriers**. Diplomats and government officials must communicate in online diplomacy efforts across different cultures and languages. They must be culturally competent to avoid misunderstandings and miscommunication in online communication. The Indian government has responded to this challenge by launching the **Indian Foreign Service Institute's online Hindi learning program**, which helps diplomats learn the Hindi language to better communicate with Indian citizens.

- **Legal and regulatory challenges** are also significant challenges in digital diplomacy. Diplomats and government officials must navigate the different legal and regulatory

frameworks governing online communication in different countries. Conflicting laws and regulations can hinder digital diplomacy efforts, and there is a need for international agreements and cooperation on digital diplomacy regulations.

- **Technological limitations** are also a challenge in digital diplomacy. The limitations of existing digital technologies can hinder practical diplomacy efforts. Diplomats and government officials must adapt to rapid technological changes and stay updated with new developments.

- **Transparency and accountability** are also a challenge in digital diplomacy. Diplomats and government officials must promote transparency and accountability in digital diplomacy efforts. Online communication can be easily manipulated or distorted for propaganda or disinformation purposes, highlighting the need for clear standards and guidelines for online communication and engagement in diplomacy. For example, there have been instances where **Indian diplomats have been accused of using social media for propaganda purposes**. This highlights the need for clear standards and guidelines for online communication and engagement in diplomacy and greater transparency in how digital diplomacy efforts are conducted.

- Finally, engaging with the public and promoting foreign policy objectives through digital channels is a challenge in digital diplomacy. Diplomats and government officials must be aware of the potential for adverse public opinion or backlash hindering digital diplomacy efforts. The role of social media in amplifying public opinion and influencing policy decisions is also a challenge that needs to be addressed.

Addressing these challenges requires careful planning and strategic thinking when using digital technologies in diplomacy efforts. It requires a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach that involves diplomats, technologists, policymakers, and other stakeholders.

## **The future of Digital Diplomacy**

Digital Diplomacy has emerged as a critical tool for modern diplomats and policymakers to engage with foreign audiences, promote national interests, and build international partnerships. With the rapid advancement of digital technologies and the increasing importance of digital communication in global affairs, the future of digital diplomacy is poised for significant growth and evolution. This growth presents opportunities and challenges for diplomats and policymakers as they navigate new

technological landscapes, address cybersecurity threats, and adapt to changing global communication trends. In this context, it is essential to examine the future of digital diplomacy and explore its potential to shape foreign policy in the coming years.

Here are some potential examples of the future of digital diplomacy:

- **Increased use of virtual and augmented reality:** Virtual reality and augmented reality technologies could be used to create immersive experiences that allow diplomats and foreign policymakers to visit other countries and interact with local communities virtually. This could help overcome the physical limitations of travel and increase cross-cultural understanding.
- **Use of artificial intelligence:** Artificial intelligence (AI) could help diplomats and policymakers analyse large amounts of data and make more informed decisions. AI could also create chatbots that can provide instant translation services and assist with communication between officials from different countries.
- **Expansion of digital public diplomacy:** Public diplomacy uses communication and outreach to promote a country's foreign policy objectives. With the increasing importance of digital communication, countries are likely to expand their efforts to engage with international audiences online through social media, online events, and other digital channels.
- **Greater emphasis on cybersecurity:** With the increasing reliance on digital technologies, cybersecurity will likely become a more significant concern for diplomats and foreign policymakers. Countries will likely invest in new cybersecurity technologies and strategies to protect against cyber-attacks and data breaches.
- **More collaboration and cooperation on digital diplomacy:** As digital technologies continue to transform diplomacy, countries will likely work together more closely to develop shared standards and guidelines for digital diplomacy. This could include agreements on cybersecurity, data privacy, and online communication protocols.
- **Digital cultural diplomacy:** India has been using digital technologies to promote its rich cultural heritage worldwide. For example, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations has launched a digital platform called "India Culture" to showcase Indian art, music, dance, and literature.
- **Robotics and automation:** Robotics and automation technologies can significantly affect international relations. For example, autonomous drones and other unmanned vehicles can be used for surveillance and military operations, while automated systems can be used for logistics and supply chain management.

- **Blockchain:** Blockchain technology can help increase transparency and accountability in digital diplomacy efforts. Blockchain can be used for secure and tamper-proof record keeping and verification of transactions.

1. **Ethical Considerations**

As emerging technologies continue to shape international relations, potential risks and ethical considerations must be considered. Here are some key concerns:

- **Privacy Concerns:** Using emerging technologies can raise privacy concerns, mainly when collecting and using personal data. As governments and corporations gather more data on individuals, there is a risk that this information could be misused or abused.
- **Bias and Discrimination:** Emerging technologies can also perpetuate bias and discrimination, mainly if developed without considering ethical and social implications. For example, facial recognition technology has been criticised for being biased against certain ethnic groups.
- **Ethical Implications of Autonomous Systems:** As autonomous systems become more prevalent in international relations, there are ethical implications to consider. For example, autonomous weapons raise concerns about accountability and the ability to make ethical decisions in complex situations.
- **Digital Divide:** Adopting emerging technologies can exacerbate the digital divide between nations and within societies. Certain nations and populations may be left behind without sufficient access and infrastructure, which could further perpetuate inequalities.
- **Sovereignty and Governance:** Using emerging technologies in international relations can challenge traditional notions of sovereignty and governance. For example, blockchain technology can create decentralised systems that bypass traditional governance structures.

Policymakers and practitioners must consider these potential risks and ethical considerations when incorporating emerging technologies into international relations. This includes engaging with stakeholders to ensure that emerging technologies are developed and used responsibly and ethically.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, social media has become a powerful tool in international diplomacy and foreign policy. It has transformed how nations interact and has enabled more excellent communication and information sharing among nations. Diplomats and policymakers increasingly use social media platforms to engage with citizens, disseminate information, and shape public opinion on foreign policy issues. While social media has opened up new avenues for diplomacy and foreign policy, it also poses challenges and risks, such as the potential for miscommunication, disinformation, and the spreading of harmful content. Therefore, policymakers and diplomats must be aware of social media's benefits and limitations and use it strategically to advance their diplomatic and foreign policy objectives. Social media will undoubtedly shape the future of diplomacy and foreign policy, and policymakers must stay abreast of these changes and adapt to new technologies and platforms as they emerge.

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