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# DIGITAL DIPLOMACY- WHY DOES IT MATTER?

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commentary

**□DIGITAL** diplomacy is quickly grabbing the space in the public diplomacy arena. As such it is becoming an extremely important segment in conducting international relations in today's world where conventional wars are losing strength and "propaganda war" is becoming much more important. That being said "winning hearts and minds" is the prevailing modus operandi.

Many countries around the world are seizing the moment and actively pursuing their foreign policy objectives and possibilities for positive outlook through the use of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc. The primary use of social media as an online platform makes this part of public diplomacy also easily reachable, meaning that it does not rely that much on resources or national GDP. Whether it is a small country or large super power is something that is slowly losing significance in the digital world. The reason behind this is because most online material is not as expensive as traditional diplomacy and it can reach masses in no time.

Kosovo's bid for membership of UNESCO might not have been successful but can serve as a reminder of the active e-di-

plomacy Europe's newest nation has to offer. In several months of campaigning. Kosovo's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has launched several activities for the purpose of enhancing Kosovo's bid for the highly contested UNESCO membership. Kosovo's leading political figures, diplomats and diaspora actively used social media to showcase the reasons why Kosovo deserves to be part of this UN agency. This was further intensified by the use of powerful images of Kosovo, previously posted on a separate digital diplomacy effort on Instagram called #InstaKosovo as well as separate Twitter account KosovoinUNESCO. Lastly, world famous performer Rita Ora (Kosovo's Honorary Ambassador) was also publically advocating support for this cause.

The public diplomacy efforts of this small country located in South East Europe can be tracked back to the proclamation of Kosovo's independence in 2008. Its Public Diplomacy mastermind Petrit Selimi (serving as a Deputy Foreign Minister) has described the general idea behind the country's digital diplomacy efforts as being to change what you see on Google when searching for Kosovo. This ties really well with Kosovo's nation

building efforts. The best demonstration of such efforts in the digital world was the introduction of DigitalKosovo.org an online platform where everyone can lobby for recognition/listing Kosovo as an independent country by Yahoo, Google, Apple etc. The biggest victory came when Facebook listed Kosovo as an independent country, something which has prompted a number of headlines in major media outlets like BBC, New York Times etc. Many even started questioning the Westphalian concept in an age where digital knows few borders.

Digital diplomacy is not supposed to function independently or replace regular diplomatic efforts but can definitely aid the process. As regular diplomacy, e-diplomacy can also be applied to different state functions including many security issues ranging from light security, such as community policing, to heavy security issues, such as on-going wars. Probably a frontrunner when it comes to the latter is Israel's IDF promotion efforts online. With more than half a million followers on Twitter it is a powerful platform for conveying IDF's side of the story. The IDF social media team is highly engaged with its audiences, using images, info

graphics, animations and other media rich content that can be easily shared across different social media platforms.

There is very thin line between public or digital diplomacy and actual propaganda. Acknowledging that propaganda can be the other (negative) side of the same coin additionally reinforces the need to invest resources and work with innovative ideas on the best way to get the message across and change the narrative. A shining example of digital diplomacy in practice is the use

of social media platforms, such as Twitter by diplomats, usually Ambassadors, who thereby engage with the nationals of the country to which they are accredited with the aim of promoting and fostering their own national foreign policy objectives. What is essential in this digital outreach is the lines of direct communication and access to influencers, journalists, national politicians and at the end of the day regular people. The reason why digital diplomacy can be so attractive is because unlike the tra-

ditional style of conveying a message, through a statement or event, it can also offer a personal view on current issues and a sneak peak at the “secretive” diplomatic world. Lastly, the need for strengthening digital diplomacy efforts is especially important taking into account the lack of resources for the conduct of traditional diplomacy. This is especially relevant when taking into account the need to close down embassies or cut down embassy staff, especially in tough economic times.□



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