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Digital Diplomacy: A Case Study of Foreign Relations of Mongolian and India in Social Media by Big Data Analysis and Computation †

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Abstract: We explored digital diplomacy, an evolving field, focusing on the digital engagement strategies of India and Mongolia from 2012 to 2022 through a quantitative analysis of secondary data sourced from social media platforms. We investigated how these countries utilized digital tools to shape their international relations, highlighting the impact of digital diplomacy on traditional diplomatic practices and the potential for enhancing public diplomacy. By examining parameters such as post frequency and engagement rates, significant differences were determined to suggest strategic improvements for Mongolia. The findings offer the basis for the adoption of digital diplomacy, emphasizing its role in reshaping global interactions in the digital era.

Keywords: information and technology; international relations; public diplomacy; soft power; digital diplomacy

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1. Introduction

The rapid evolution of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has significantly transformed diplomatic practices, enhancing the efficiency and innovation of global interactions [1]. This technological progression has strengthened both bilateral and multilateral relations, providing diplomats with advanced tools that facilitate active participation in international negotiations. This engagement helps them understand diverse perspectives and complex policies profoundly. The development of digital diplomacy strategies has revolutionized how nations engage, utilize social media and various digital platforms, and connect with global stakeholders and advocate their values and priorities effectively [2]. Recent exponential growth in the ICT sector highlights the increasing importance of digital tools in diplomacy. Diplomats are now required to master these technologies to stay competitive [3]. Many countries are investing heavily in digital diplomacy, recognizing its potential to transform traditional practices and significantly contribute to achieving foreign policy goals. The effective use of digital tools can enhance a nation's image, promote positive changes, and foster successful international cooperation [4].

Previous research has examined digital diplomacy's role across different nations. Researchers [5] explored digital tools and applications of Western Balkans' Foreign Ministries, explaining their strategic use. Antwi-Boateng [6] noted the challenges faced by the UAE, such as media regulations that balance the empowerment provided by digital tools against potential security risks. Listyowati [7] emphasized Indonesia's engagement with digital advancements to strengthen its regional influence and international collaborations.

Consequently, we scrutinized case studies of successful practitioners of digital diplomacy in India and Mongolia, focusing on these digital nations within the Asian continent.

The study result bridges the gap by using a quantitative methodology by analyzing secondary data retrieved from social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter and evaluating the activities and interactions of both nations over a decade from 2012 to 2022. By integrating Constructivist Theory and Actor-Network Theory, we explained digital diplomacy to understand digital diplomatic practices and offered practical implications for policymakers and diplomats to enhance their countries' diplomatic efforts on digital platforms. The results can be used to guide strategies for countries to improve their digital diplomacy practices, aiding in their engagement, public relations, and soft power efforts on the global stage.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Constructivist Theory

Constructivist Theory, advocated by Alexander [8], emphasizes the role of prevailing ideas and identities in shaping state actions, focusing on social constructs over purely rational considerations. Martha [9], Peter [10], and Nicholas [11] expanded this theory, applying it to various facets of international relations, including norms and identities within the global political arena. Constructivist Theory is relevant to digital diplomacy. For instance, Yousef [12] showed how non-state actors such as new media significantly alter international behaviors, pushing the evolution of public diplomacy strategies and emphasizing the role of shared norms. Rus Shafinas [13] explored how communication processes and behavioral modeling influence digital diplomacy and international relations. This theory helps to understand how the platforms develop shared meanings and new diplomatic norms, influencing the creation of perceptions and the formation of diplomatic relationships in our digital age.

2.2. Actor-Network Theory

Originating from Science and Technology Studies, Actor-Network Theory (ANT) treats technological objects as equal to human agents, a perspective that gained traction in international relations due to its emphasis on materiality and the dynamic nature of technological and human interactions. Christian [14] discussed how ANT underscores the need for diplomatic representation tools and the inclusion of both professional and private actors in diplomacy. Huxley [15] revealed how digital transformation is shaped by cultural and political contexts, influencing global diplomatic practices in Finland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs using ANT. Almuftah [16] reviewed the necessity to explore e-diplomacy's various facets through theories like ANT. This theory provides a unique way to examine the intricate relationships and power dynamics among technological tools, government bodies, and public entities to enhance the understanding of how digital diplomacy is practiced between India and Mongolia.

2.3. Digital Diplomacy and Public Administration

Digital diplomacy has emerged as a crucial strategy in modern international relations to promote a country's interests and values globally without coercion. Implemented alongside traditional diplomatic channels, this strategy demands digital tools to foster dialog, cultural exchange, and economic cooperation, enhancing international relationships and shifting the power dynamics between states and citizens [3]. It involves various online platforms to engage international audiences, counter misinformation, and advance national agendas [17]. However, the impact of digital diplomacy can be elusive and often gauged by social media metrics such as followers and engagement levels [18]. The widespread adoption of digital platforms in diplomatic circles underscores the growing importance of digital engagement in maintaining global relationships [19,20].

3. Research Methods

We employed a comparative and big data analytical approach to assess the digital diplomacy strategies of India and Mongolia, focusing on their social media usage over the past decade. By analyzing data from platforms, including Facebook and Twitter, we explored the effectiveness of each nation's digital diplomacy efforts. For the analysis, a range of diplomatic activities and metrics such as post frequency, content types, and engagement levels were analyzed to provide a view of their strategies and impact. This study adhered to high ethical standards, ensuring all data used are handled responsibly, reflecting the scholarly intent of this investigation.

4. Analysis Results

4.1. Digital Revolution of India

India has significantly advanced its digital diplomacy efforts by utilizing online platforms to amplify diplomatic operations amid resource constraints [20]. Initiated in 2010 by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, this foray into digital diplomacy was adopted by Former Foreign Minister S.M. Krishna who began using Twitter in 2011 to address the concerns of Indians abroad. India's digital strategy includes using mobile apps, video conferencing, and high-speed internet to connect with both domestic and international audiences effectively [21]. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been a pivotal figure in these efforts, advocating for a proactive digital diplomacy approach. As the Asian leader with the most Twitter followers, Modi uses these platforms to enhance India's global image as an environmentally conscious and development-oriented nation. His social media prowess was notably demonstrated during his 2014 election campaign, and he continues to engage with a global audience. Modi's Twitter account, established in 2009, has amassed 92.9 million followers, and his Facebook page, also started in 2009, boasts 48 million followers [22]. His posts typically receive widespread interaction, exemplifying the significant impact of his digital engagement [23]. The extent of his influence is illustrated in Figure 1, which charts the growth of his Twitter and Facebook followers.

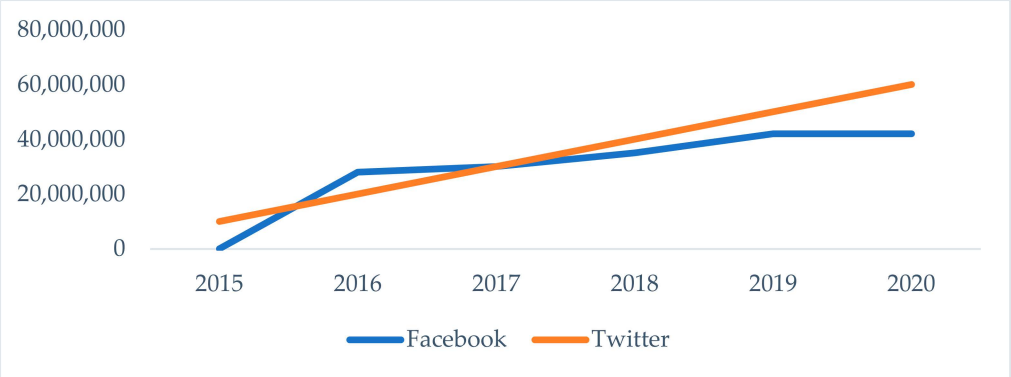


Figure 1. Growth of Narendra Modi's social media pages.

4.2. Embassy of India in Mongolia

Recognized globally for its effective use of social media, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs ranks among the top social media users. With substantial followings on digital platforms, the ministry engages with millions, setting a benchmark in digital diplomacy relations [20]. The embassy in Mongolia reflects this strategy by actively maintaining strong ties with the Indian government and its people and by managing a significant online presence. This proactive engagement on social media helps foster and sustain diplomatic relationships far beyond the Indian subcontinent [21].

4.3. Impact of President of Mongolia on Digital Diplomacy

Mongolia's adoption of digital diplomacy under President Khurelsukh Ukhanaa illustrates the potential of ICT in enhancing international relations, even among smaller nations [18,24]. Since joining social media in 2012, Ukhanaa has used these platforms sporadically, with notable increases in activity during certain years. His engagement has highlighted Mongolia's stance on international issues, as evidenced by his congratulatory tweet to Prime Minister Modi on India's vaccination milestone, which garnered significant attention. However, the engagement level of his accounts suggests room for increased consistency and broader strategic use of digital platforms. This is detailed in Figure 2, which shows the use of Facebook and Twitter by President Ukhanaa.

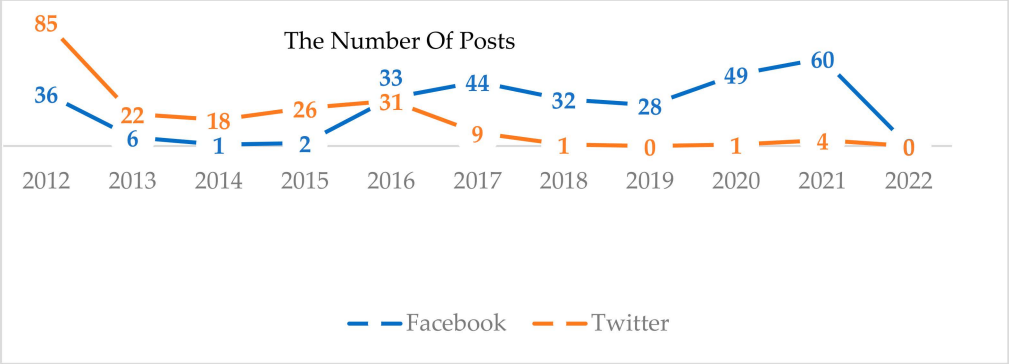


Figure 2. Use of Facebook and Twitter by U. Khurelsukh.

4.4. Embassy of Mongolia in India

Since its establishment on Facebook in 2012, the Embassy of Mongolia in India has used the platform to enhance bilateral relations and promote Mongolia's cultural and diplomatic initiatives. Despite a notable decrease in posting frequency and engagement from 2018 to 2021, the embassy's digital presence remains crucial for its diplomatic strategy. The absence of a Twitter account represents an opportunity for expansion to reach wider audiences and enhance digital engagement. This is reflected in Figure 3, which shows the embassy's Facebook usage and trends in engagement and post frequency over the years.

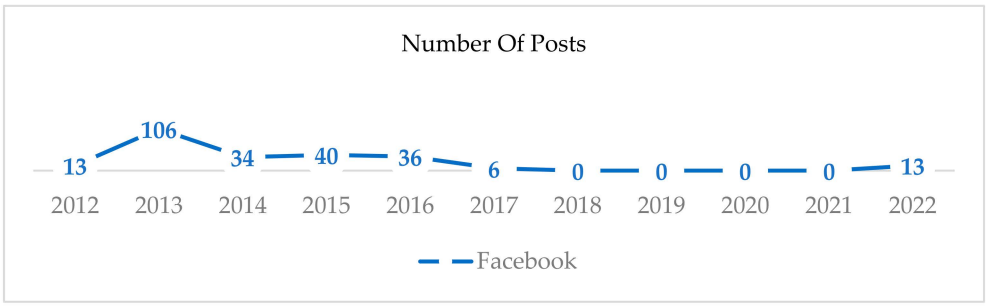


Figure 3. Facebook usage of Embassy of Mongolia in India.

Overall, both India and Mongolia demonstrate robust digital diplomacy efforts with varying degrees of emphasis and success. By leveraging social media effectively, these nations further enhance their international presence and diplomatic reach.

5. Conclusions

In modern diplomacy, digital diplomacy is a crucial tool for leveraging technology to enhance communication and collaboration rapidly and effectively. Digital diplomats play a key role in managing these interactions, ensuring that technology and information are used efficiently across policy development, government administration, and international relations. In this study, India as a leader in digital diplomacy, with Prime Minister

Narendra Modi driving the country was highlighted for a prominent global status. Over the past 14 years, India has skillfully used digital diplomacy to engage its citizens and a broad international audience, successfully promoting its cultural and developmental achievements.

However, the adoption of digital diplomacy varies significantly worldwide among wealthy and developing countries. Mongolia, for example, despite having a high number of internet users, shows limited implementation of digital diplomacy by its government officials. President Khurelsukh Ukhnaa has been relatively slow to adopt this modern approach. Nevertheless, the substantial populations of Indians in Mongolia and Mongolians in India—approximately 200 and 900, respectively—demonstrate significant potential for expanding digital diplomacy efforts between these two nations.

The result of this study emphasizes the ongoing need for effective digital diplomacy. It highlights the importance of the Constructivist Theory and the Actor-Network Theory, which provide frameworks for understanding the dynamic and transformative landscape of digital diplomacy. These theories reshape the conceptual framework of international relations in the digital era. By underscoring the critical role of technological advancements, the importance of digital diplomacy is reaffirmed in enhancing diplomatic practices and fostering stronger, more productive international relationships.

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