

E-Diplomacy: a Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Digital diplomacy (also popularly known as e-Diplomacy), is generally defined as the use of information and communication technology for purposes of attaining foreign policy goals. Many experts have particularly defined digital diplomacy as an electronic component of public diplomacy. Although digital diplomacy is an emerging new field with a wide range of important applications in international relations, only a few previous studies have been conducted in this area. This has contributed to a significant research gap. The primary aim of this paper is to provide an analysis of the current e-diplomacy studies based on a systematic literature review research methodology. The results have highlighted two key findings. Firstly, most of the previous studies have been primarily conducted in North America and Europe. Secondly, the majority of studies adopted qualitative methods to gather new empirical evidence to support existing literature and develop new propositions on e-Diplomacy. Finally, based on the findings, the paper highlights a few areas in which further research may be needed in order to help develop the emerging concept of e-Diplomacy.

CCS Concepts

- Applied computing~E-government

1. INTRODUCTION

E-Diplomacy is an emerging internet based resource that combines different applications to help in the advancement diplomatic goals of different countries [1]. In the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office [2] digital diplomacy is currently being considered as an important tool in the management of foreign policy issues via the internet. The current scope and definition of e-diplomacy is however limited as it does not cover internal electronic collaboration processes, mobile applications or related technologies. The US State Department applies the concept of 21st Century Statecraft to encompass the elements and applications of digital diplomacy where the focus is on three primary information networks of international relations and trade, personal communications and mass media.

A review of relevant literature revealed a significant lack of adequate studies, which had been previously examined in E-diplomacy. Batora [3] particularly argues that a majority of current diplomatist literature are largely concerned with various

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ICEGOV2016, March 1–3, 2016, Montevideo, Uruguay.
Copyright 2016 ACM 1-58113-000-0/00/0010...\$15.00.
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/12345.67890>

aspects of diplomacy, negotiation process, diplomatic function, culture, habits, and history with little focus to the potential use of information and technology in the area. As a result, we posit that the concept of e-diplomacy is still embryonic and further studies are needed to examine and synthesis existing work in the area. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to provide a comprehensive summary of the current literature relevant to e-diplomacy. This was particularly achieved by using a systematic literature review technique whereby all a number of existing studies were comprehensively reviewed and classified basing on relevancy to the research area, methodology adopted and country where the study is conducted.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

A systematic literature review was used as the method for this study [4][5][6]. The approach primarily aimed at providing a comprehensive summary of current literature that is relevant to the research topic, e-diplomacy, or digital diplomacy in this case. In general, the first phase of a systematic review involves searching for the literature for relevant papers in all relevant academic databases such as Web of Science and Scopus or general search engines such as Google/Google Scholar. In addition, given the embryonic state of a research field such as e-diplomacy, manual searches for individual papers, article, reports, websites and books is important to ensure that no key works are missed in the study.

The methodology adopted in this paper is illustrated in the diagram below:

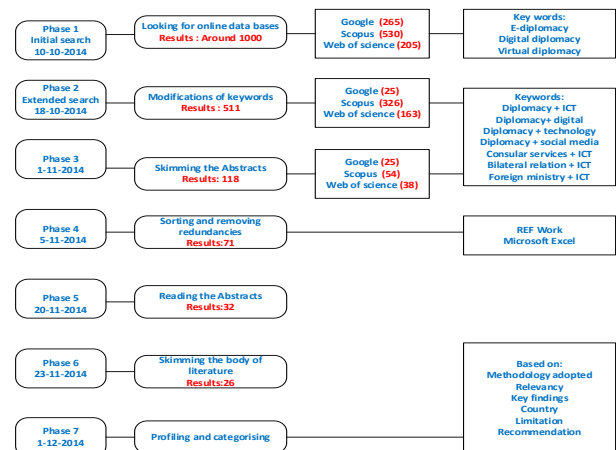


Fig.1. Research Methodology

Taking into account the data in Fig. 1, the research methodology, which is based on a systematic literature review, can be explained as follows:

Phase 1 (Initial search): around 1000 results were found by using three key words that are “e-diplomacy”, “virtual diplomacy” and “digital diplomacy.”

Phase 2 (Modification of the key words): After initial screening, it was found that 51.1% percent of papers found from phase 1 were not relevant due to being out of scope or context. A further more focused search was performed using specific keyword combinations as shown in figure 1 above.

Phase 3 (skimming the abstracts): The 511 results were reduced to 118 by analysing the abstracts of the documents. Only relevant studies were considered.

Phase 4 (Sorting and removing redundancies): REFWORKS and Microsoft Excel were used. REFWORKS is a software package for managing references, which are web-based. The results from this phase amounted to 71.

Phase 5 (Reading the abstracts): After this exercise, only 32 sources were found to be relevant for the study.

Phase 6 (Skimming the body): In this phase, the main text in the 32 sources was read and only 26 of them were found to be relevant to the research topic.

Phase 7 (Profiling table): Finally, a profiling table was created for the 25 sources.

3. FINDINGS

As mentioned in the previous section, only 26 studies were found to be useful and relevant to the topic of e-diplomacy. These studies are classified into groups of relevancy, countries where the study was conducted and methodology adopted. Categories of Publication (focus-region-methodology). Out of 26 resources there are 12 studies focused on E-diplomacy. A total of ten publications have focused on social media as a tool for public diplomacy. The last four studies did not have a direct focus on e-diplomacy. Countries or Regions where the studies were conducted. Nine studies were conducted in Europe, eight in North America, three in the Far East two in each Australia and the GCC (gulf corporation council) only one each in India, and Caucasian region. None of the studies found in our systematic search used surveying or any other kind of quantitative method. Seventeen publications used case studies to support their theoretical contents. Five studies involved interviewing people. Two studies were based on collecting data using observations. Finally, eleven studies reflected solely on literature. The profiling table below offers a synopsis of the main findings of each paper.

Table 4. Profiling table

<i>Key finding and usefulness to researchers</i>
[7] The aim of this dissertation is to illustrate the effect of ICT on diplomacy and to show some methods used in diplomacy, which substituted the old ones. The author discussed that three major areas of diplomacy in which ICT has been used which have resulted in significant effects. These areas are diplomatic missions, negotiations, and learning. The author also performed a SWOT analysis on virtual diplomacy.
[8] This very useful dissertation shows the theory of contemporary diplomacy, areas of diplomacy, which ICT can improve, risks, and among others.
[9] The paper discussed several common areas where digital diplomacy is particularly effective: as foreign ministry resources that are public diplomacy, information management, and consular activities. Moreover, it shows the major risks of digital diplomacy. Finally, the paper outlines some digital diplomacy

tools and resources.
[3] Batora discussed two main questions regarding the effects of ICT at an organizational level in the context of diplomacy. First, the author examines the magnitude of change (i.e. are the changes as radical and as extensive as claimed by the proponents of diplomacy. Second, what is the direction of the change? He also discusses the influence of hierarchy, secrecy and one way communication on transforming foreign affairs using ICT
[1] Hanson’s paper discusses the use and importance of ICT and new technologies to the Australian department of foreign affairs and trade, DFAT. The author examines the potential of ICT to increase efficiency and improve both internal and external communication.
[10] The paper shows a great example of how the US department of state (DoS) is applying the tools of e-diplomacy. Diploopia, the state diplomacy Wiki, which is a current system for knowledge sharing at the DoS, is examined.
[11] A theoretical framework is reviewed which includes analysis and linkage of ATN to international relations. Because ATN can be used to show the interrelatedness in access and feedback associated in foreign relation, researchers could use this paper to relate or link ANT as a social theory to e-diplomacy
[12] The study outlined three areas that have been transformed by ICT revolution which are the practice of diplomacy, the management of the foreign ministries and the nature of foreign services. Finally the author sheds light on some obstacles and constrains
[13] The author of this article is completely against the idea of IT replacing the functions of diplomats and he discusses nine important functions of diplomats that cannot be replaced by information technology. A researcher might use this article to look at the negative side of e-diplomacy, compare it with the advantages, and then create a compromised framework or an ideal model for e-diplomacy or digital strategy.
[14] The main question in this paper is that “how does a Caucasian diplomats work with using IT?” The Question is answered in three steps that are receiving, processing, and delivering information.
[15] The paper discussed the effect of social media on the Ministry of foreign affairs (MFA) of Finland. The author was researching how actors within the MFA of Finland see the organizational changes both inside and outside the MFA. Actor network theory (ANT) was used to explain the mediatisation. Interviews were conducted to derive to empirical data.
[16] This study shows the functions of diplomats in the context of new IT environments. It also explains how these functions are affected, either directly or adversely, by IT.
[17] The article illustrates how social media and ICT can be beneficial to Qatari diplomats. This is the only article that was found which examines the context of the Middle East.
[18] The paper discussed the effect (major challenges and benefits) of ICT on international affairs. The conclusion is that although ICT can help states run their communication in fast and cost effective ways, it could be vulnerable to cyber-attack. Moreover, it examines the US experience using different programs such as the e-diplomats program (adoption). Finally, the paper discusses the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and trade DFAT digital diplomacy strategy and it showed that it declined in lately.
[19] An online article that outlines a country-to-country analysis statistics of digital diplomacy uses through social media. It could be very beneficial and useful for researchers who are seeking

secondary data and information about different social media platform used in many countries.
[2] This strategy conducted by the FCO, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, covers the implication of digital systems for both the UK's diplomatic work as well as the digital services to the British public abroad.
[20] The study begins with a general literature on soft power, smart power and public diplomacy as well as the way China incorporates these tools into its governance. The attention is focused on the Chinese citizens' online participation, which created state-society relations. To support the theory a case study named "anti-Carrefour incident" is examined to show how the Chinese people are using online tools and smart power to influence the state strategy.
[21] How social media affected the public diplomacy of India. The paper discusses how the rise of China is one of the main reasons for India to rush to work on its soft power.
[22] The aim of the study is to examine how US diplomats are engaged with the public and what tools they use.
[29] An online communication research that shows the utilization of twitter as a tool for digital diplomacy by some selected embassies from the in the GCC region . The results show that theses embassies are not fully utilizing Twitter.
[23] The article discusses the use of twitter as a major tool for social diplomacy.
[24] The paper discussed the objectives of the UK digital diplomacy strategy in the political context. It also argues that there are a set of frames that helped the UK to identify its diplomatic goals with the international priorities of cultural developments and hence gave the UK a positive image.
[25] The author argues that the US is not fully utilizing online technologies as mechanisms of public diplomacy. The essay is reviewing the early work of the US information agency and then the US department of state that took part public diplomacy initiatives using ICT. Finally, the essay outlined the new state department approach to overcoming the institutional limitations of utilizing public diplomacy.
[26] The paper examines the public diplomacy practice of the US embassy in China by applying two techniques. The first method is a case study involving analyzing the embassy's blog and the other one is an interview with the public diplomacy officer. The main aim of the study is to answer two main questions, a) which are what the key features of the US embassy's social media strategies and b) what are the core messages of e-diplomacy.
[27] The paper examines the role of the internet, new ICT and media technologies in transforming US public diplomacy. It also argues that social media and the internet is becoming a key lever of US power and influence.
[28] The aim of this study is to assess the US DOT (US digital outreach team) in which they are responsible for engaging directly with citizens in the middle east by posting messages about US foreign policies. Also, the paper focuses on examining the strategic challenges that are faced by public diplomacy 2.0

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present literature review has revealed that diplomacy has changed significantly in the past few decades. These changes can be attributed mostly to the expansion of the digital network and electronic capability, which has now made the connectivity of parties faster and easier.

In order to achieve the results of this study a systematic literature review methodology was adopted. Twenty-five publications were analysed and classified into groups of relevancy, countries where the study was conducted and methodology adopted in these studies. In addition, a profiling table was created for the sake of the abovementioned reasons.

The findings showed that most of the studies on e-diplomacy were conducted in North America and Europe. Very few studies have been conducted in the Far East, Asia, and the Middle East. The methodology adopted by most of the studies were based on qualitative methods in which case studies, interviews and literature reviews were used in most of the studies. None of the studies found used quantitative methods such as surveys, which concluded that researchers in the field of e-diplomacy prefer applying qualitative methods.

The profiling table illustrated many results. It exhibited a short brief about each study, usefulness of the study, and areas of limitations and recommendations for future investigations. Some of the studies were based on a case study, which is very limited to a small population. Many of the studies were also based on literature review, which lacked some empirical evidence that can support the theory.

Based on the findings, recommendations for future studies can be grouped into four main categories. These groups are , the need to support the study of e-diplomacy with empirical evidence, considering more than one case study to achieve generalizable results, discussing as many areas of e-diplomacy as possible in the study (i.e. ICT tools, social media, risks etc) and supporting the studies with some theories such as actor network theory.

For instance, with regards to the need for empirical evidence, [17] and [8] can be expanded by supporting the theory with evidence such as interviewing diplomats, surveying diplomats and considering some case studies. In addition, in [9], Hanson [21] and [14], there are rich discussions and suggestions that can be applied to different cases (i.e. different countries) and validated with empirical data from interviews and/or surveys. Moreover, although [20] offers a very rich study, this study could be enhanced by interviewing Chinese officials and maybe surveying the citizens to find out more about their adoption of ICT tools.

[3] has discussed in his research the effects of IT on the organizational level of diplomacy and he supported his argument with three case studies. There is however, no theory or study showing the key factors that may influence diplomats' adoption of e-diplomacy, or the key factors influencing e-diplomacy implementation in different countries. Moreover, the same methods could be applied to different regions of the world as Batora only considered two European countries and one North American country. As mentioned previously, some studies [12],[16],[25],[17],[26],[27],[27], and [28] were conducted on a single case study thus; the results might not be generalized. Therefore, these studies could be enhanced by considering other cases and/or countries. Both [11] and [15] used ANT-Actor network theory, to show the interrelatedness in access and feedback associated in foreign relation.

5. RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION

This study aimed at providing e-diplomacy researchers with a comprehensive summary about current research in the field as researchers have conducted very few studies in this area thereby contributing to a significant research gap. Therefore, it is the first study to contribute a systematic review in the area of e-diplomacy such as visiting its definition, areas of focus, tools used, risks and

challenges, empirical cases and many others. This review could assist researchers who are seeking knowledge and references in the area by providing them with useful resources for further investigation and studies. The profiling table presented in the paper can be considered as a starting point for any new researcher in this field. Finally, this paper shall contribute to a literature review chapter of a PhD research in which an E-diplomacy maturity model will be developed to evaluate countries' usages of ICT tools in the field of diplomacy.

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