



Exploring Digital Diplomacy

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The Contradictory Trends of Digital Diaspora Diplomacy

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1. Introduction

In 1976, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin referred to Israeli expats as a “fall-out of weaklings”. Rabin expressed a common Israeli sentiment that viewed immigrants as traitors to the cause of Jewish statehood. Such a view was not limited to Israel. African nations too had expressed open content for immigrants and viewed them as saboteurs, at best, and traitors at worst.ⁱ Consequently, these countries were reluctant to engage in Diaspora diplomacy or enact policies aimed at facilitating ties with Diasporic communities.

The sentiment expressed by Rabin altered dramatically in the following decades. By the 1990s, nations came to regard Diasporic communities as political and financial assets. Diasporas could, for instance, exert political leverage in order to strengthen bi-lateral ties between countries. Additionally, remittances from Diasporic communities could dramatically influence their home countries’ financial prosperity. Thus, the view of Diasporas changed from saboteurs to entrepreneurs.

The digitalization of diplomacy has enabled nations to maintain increasingly close ties with their Diasporas. However, not all Diasporic communities wish to engage with their home country. In fact, immigrants who left their country due to religious or political persecution, or who oppose the policies of their former governments,

can use digital platforms to voice their criticism. As such, digitalization both simplifies and confounds Diaspora diplomacy.

It is the contention of this working paper that the digitalization of diplomacy has resulted in contradictory trends. Moreover, it is my assertion that such contradictions are emblematic of digital Diaspora diplomacy.

The contradictory nature of digitalized diplomacy becomes evident when examining its communicative dimension. For instance, digitalization enables diplomats to engage in two-way conversations with foreign populations thus creating a receptive climate for their nation's foreign policy.ⁱⁱ However, digitalization has also seen the emergence of a volatile, vocal and powerful online public that is asserting itself in unpredictable ways.ⁱⁱⁱ The fear of backlash and criticism from online publics has caused many diplomats to treat digital platforms with suspicion.^{iv}

Similarly, while digital platforms were originally viewed as tools for communicating with foreign populations, Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) now increasingly use them to communicate with their domestic population.^v Such is the case when diplomats attempt to rally domestic support for foreign policy achievements or when MFAs develop digital solutions for the delivery of consular aid, be it through smartphone applications or e-

government services. As such, digitalization has enabled MFAs to develop a domestic constituency.

Social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook also enable the formation of trans-national advocacy networks consisting of NGOs, civil society organizations and connected publics.^{vi} At times, such networks may be utilized by MFAs for the promotion of policy objectives. Such was the case with British FCO's (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) global campaign to #EndSexualViolence in conflicts.^{vii} At other times, advocacy networks may exert influence on diplomatic actors as was the case with an international ban on the use of landmines initiated by a network of 1,000 NGOs in 60 countries.^{viii} Thus, networks simultaneously facilitate and disrupt diplomacy.

As the aforementioned examples demonstrate, digitalization is accompanied by contradicting trends. This is also true of Diaspora diplomacy. While nations can use digital platforms to engage with Diasporic communities, such communities may also self-organize thus marginalizing diplomats. Moreover, while digital tools can increase the cohesion of Diasporic communities, they can also weaken them as immigrants more easily maintain ties with the family and friends they left behind.

Despite the growing importance of Diaspora diplomacy, few studies to date have investigated the practice of

digital Diaspora diplomacy. Therefore, this working paper begins with a review of the existing literature. Next, the paper identifies the contradicting trends brought about by the digitalization of Diasporas. Finally, it offers a series of case studies that demonstrate how diplomats can reap the benefits and avoid the pitfalls of digital Diaspora diplomacy

2. Literature Review

The practice of Diaspora diplomacy is relatively new.^{ix} While diplomacy has traditionally focused on creating relationships, it was not until the late 20th century that nations sought to create, and leverage, relationships with Diasporic communities. The view of Diasporas as political assets is evident in Rana's definition of Diaspora diplomacy as "*engaging a country's overseas community to contribute to building relationships with foreign countries*". Ostergaard-Nielsen defines Diasporas as "*communities of migrants from a homeland living in one or many host countries*".^x Notably, this definition does not include an emotional dimension. But Diasporas are not simply immigrants but rather immigrants who retain an emotional bond with their country of origin. As Rana writes, "*a migrant community becomes a Diaspora if it retains a memory of, and some connection with, its country of origin*". It is this emotional bond that transforms Diasporas into a potential diplomatic asset as they may be willing to aid

their home country achieve its foreign policy goals.

The digitalization of Diaspora diplomacy is the result of two processes that began in the late 20th century and accelerated in the 21st century. The first was the global proliferation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and the second was an increase in migratory flows.

ICTs have had a dramatic impact on the lives of Diasporas. Israeli immigrants living in America can now watch Israeli television via satellites, communicate daily with their Israeli family on WhatsApp and engage with their Israeli friends through Facebook. The separation of immigrants from their social, cultural and national roots has thus been partially alleviated.

ICTs have also impacted governments who use them to communicate with their Diasporas. Fostering ties with Diasporic communities has become important given the increase in migratory flows. The UNFPA reports that in 2015, 244 million people immigrated from their homelands^{xi}, a 62.2% increase from 2010.^{xii} Coupled with freedom of movement within the EU, the globalization of financial markets and continuous conflicts in the Middle East and Africa, migration flows have reached their highest levels since the First World War.

The geographic dispersal of Diasporas across many countries has further facilitated the employment of ICTs in the practice of Diaspora

diplomacy. Countries such as Israel, Mexico, Georgia, China, Kenya and India now employ a range of digital platforms to strengthen their ties with a globally dispersed Diasporic community.^{xiii}

ICTs have also contributed to the social cohesiveness of Diaspora communities. Hiller and Franz find that immigrants use digital platforms to create relationships with the local Diasporic community^{xiv}. Similarly, Diasporic communities located in different countries can use ICTs to create trans-national networks.^{xv} The dynamics which characterize the digitalization of Diasporas can thus be assimilated into Castells' conception of "*a network of networks*" as networks are at once the communication vehicle and the by-product of digitalized Diasporas^{xvi}. As Rana writes "*Diaspora communities, in forming connections among members in their home and host cultures, create transnational networks and exemplify global connectivity and the functioning of multidimensional networks*".^{xvii}

Brinkerhoff argues that engagement with Diasporas can have both positive and negative outcomes. On the one hand, ICTs enable Diasporas to aid in the development of their home country through transnational advocacy, philanthropic activities and technology transfers.^{xviii} Such is the case with the Chinese Diaspora's use of digital platforms to aid China's self-branding as a "*peaceful and responsible great power*".^{xix} ICTs also

enable frequent and global transfers of funds. Financial transfers from the Moldovan Diaspora, for instance, account for one third of the country's annual GDP (Ref).

ICTs have also empowered Diasporas as they can now actively engage in the political discourse of their home country.^{xx} Such engagement can be of a critical nature as Diaspora may openly criticize their former leaders, governments and their policies. Indeed much of the criticism voiced online during the Tahrir protests in Egypt and the Green Revolution in Iran originated or was disseminated by connected Diasporas.^{xxi} Moreover, Diasporas can leverage digital platforms to organize boycotts and counter the branding efforts of their home country. Thus, for some nations the digitalization of Diasporas is a double edged sword.

The utilization of ICTs by Diasporas may change from one host country to another as the “*conditions in the host or receiving state can shape the contour of what activities are permitted or discouraged*”.^{xxii} Yet as a whole, one may argue that the digitalization of Diasporas presents diplomats with both opportunities and challenges. While ICTs and digital platforms can be used to leverage Diasporas towards political and financial ends, they also empower Diasporas and transform them into independent and influential diplomatic actors.

Likewise, while ICTs enable immigrants to continuously interact

with the friends and family they left behind such interactions may lessen an immigrants reliance on the Diasporic community. Thus, ICTs can increase or decrease the cohesiveness of Diasporic communities.

It is the contention of this working paper that the digitalization of Diasporas is characterized by five contradicting trends. In the following section I outline these contradictions before reflecting on how diplomats can realize the potential of digital Diaspora diplomacy.

3. The Contradictory Trends of Digital Diaspora Diplomacy

Weaker Diasporas versus Larger Diasporas

Traditionally, the decision to immigrate has been regarded as a difficult one as it is accompanied by a separation from all spheres of social life including one's family, friends, community and nation.^{xxiii}

Importantly, immigration is often associated with a decline in social status, alongside the need to acquire new languages and conform to new norms. Thus, studies have repeatedly found that migration is associated with psychological and financial difficulties^{xxiv}.

Studies have also demonstrated that Diasporic communities can help an immigrant overcome such difficulties as they constitute support networks that enable one to maintain a sense of national identity.^{xxv} Moreover, Diasporic communities can serve as boundary spanners that facilitate an

immigrant's' inclusion into his new society with regard to language, values and norms. Lastly, Diasporic communities can elevate financial difficulties as they aid new immigrants in finding employment opportunities.^{xxvi}

Yet the global proliferation of digital platforms and ICTs is changing the nature of immigration. Digitalization enables immigrants to maintain close ties with all the spheres of social life they left behind.^{xxvii} 21st century immigrants can use Skype to communicate daily with family members, WhatsApp to maintain ties with friends and Facebook to remain socially and politically active in their former communities. Such communication is both relatively affordable and emotionally engaging given its real time, face to face, nature. Notably, the ability to maintain close ties with one's family and community may have alleviated some of the difficulty associated with choosing to immigrate.

The employment of digital platforms for continuous communication with friends and relatives can lead to two contradictory trends. First, by maintaining ties with former communities, immigrants may become less reliant on the local Diaspora. This may weaken the social cohesion of Diasporic communities and, subsequently, diminish their role in bi-lateral diplomacy.

The second and contradictory trend relates to the size of Diasporas. If voluntary immigration is indeed

somewhat easier, then the size of Diasporic communities may continue to grow in coming years. The globalization of marketplaces, the formation of new political entities that allow free movement (i.e., European Union), political unrest and financial stagnation have already resulted in unprecedented levels of immigration resulting in the steady growth of Diasporic communities.^{xxviii} From the perspective of diplomats, the future growth of Diasporic communities may actually prove beneficial as the larger a Diaspora, the more influence it can exert on foreign governments and policy makers.^{xxix}

Migration of Power to the Embassy versus Added Strain on the Embassy

The global spread of communication technologies during the 20th century saw the migration of power from Embassies to MFAs as policy makers could communicate directly with their foreign peers over the phone, as could world leaders. Thus, the Embassy's representative capacity was diminished.

Digitalization has seen the migration of power back to Embassies. Digital tools and social media enable Embassies and diplomats to converse directly with foreign populations and foreign opinion makers thus managing their nation's image, promoting its policies and advancing awareness of its culture and values. As such, nation branding and public diplomacy activities are now devised

at the MFA level but practiced at the Embassy level.^{xxx} Moreover, the adoption of two-way communication models have seen Embassies tasked with listening to foreign publics as a means of gauging public opinion, anticipating political crises and informing policy makers.

This migration of power may be furthered by the growth of Diasporic communities as Embassies will be tasked with recruiting Diasporas to lobby on behalf of national interests. Indeed, countries such as Israel, India, Mexico and China all use digital platforms at both the MFA and Embassy level to leverage the Diaspora toward financial and political ends.^{xxxi}

The growth of Diasporic communities may also prove to be a substantial burden on Embassies who will be required to service an ever growing number of immigrants. Be it in providing consular aid (e.g., registration of births, passport renewals), enabling expats to vote in national elections or providing resources and funding for community events, Embassies may soon find themselves overwhelmed and understaffed. Notably, an Embassy's failure to meet the needs and expectations of Diasporas may cause a rift between diplomats and Diasporic communities.

Diaspora Support Networks versus Diaspora Self-Organization

While digital platforms enable Diasporas to communicate online

with Embassies and diplomats, they also enables Diasporas to self-organize. Such is the case with social media profiles that are used by Diasporic communities to coordinate social and cultural events independently of the Embassy.

Likewise, Diaspora members frequently create web-forums in which immigrants can share experiences, debate political issues, offer advice to new members of the community and find employment opportunities. The Nigerian, Israeli and Irish Diasporas in London have all created networks of websites, social media profiles and web forums that are not associated with their respective Embassies.

Diaspora managed web-forums and social media profiles may have both positive and negative impacts on diplomats. On the one hand, such forums help maintain a Diasporic community's cohesiveness-transforming it from an offline support network to an online one. On the other hand, given that such forums are independent of the Embassy, diplomats may soon find themselves detached from their Diasporic community.

Virtual Communities versus Fragmented Communities

As the previous section suggests, Diasporic communities are now virtual communities brought together through digital platforms. This transition may be more substantial than it first appears.

Prior to digitalization, one could have conceptualized Diasporic communities as imagined ones.^{xxxii} This was due to the fact that no single immigrant personally knew all other members of the Diaspora or interacted with them. However, all members of the Diaspora shared a common language, cultural heritage, collective memory and sense of national identity thus constituting an imagined community (Ref).

The transition from an imagined community to a virtual one suggests that the ties which bind a Diasporic community together are now stronger than they once were. Using ICTs and digital platforms, large numbers of immigrants can interact with one another, share experiences and develop a sense of community and belonging. In addition, virtual communities can more easily mobilize their members and exert influence over political processes both in their home country and their host country.^{xxxiii}

However, virtual communities are also fragmented ones. Some immigrants may be active on web-forums; other may prefer Twitter while still others can find their online home on Facebook. As Hayden observes, the digitalization of diplomacy is characterized by a fragmentation of audiences to networks of selective exposure.^{xxxiv}

The fragmentation of Diasporas across several platforms necessitates that diplomats be active on multiple digital platforms and use each

platform to meaningfully engage with members of the Diaspora. Meaningful engagement should be understood as an endeavour to meet the needs and desires of online publics through two-way interactions including responding to online comments, answering questions, listening to criticism and integrating such criticism into the policy formulation process.^{xxxv} However, the question that soon arises is: 'how can diplomats be active on numerous platforms when faced with limited time and resources?'

Remittances versus Political Opposition

For some countries, the importance of their Diaspora lies in their financial support rather than their political influence.^{xxxvi} African countries, for instance, rely on personal remittances from immigrants to strengthen their economies. In Ethiopia, personal remittances account for 1.2% of the national GDP, while in Kenya they account for 2.4% of the GDP.^{xxxvii} Such remittances not only stimulate the economy but also enable the social mobility of immigrants' family members.

As part of the digitalization of Diasporas, some countries have made it easier for immigrants to send remittances to their home country. In Kenya, businesses throughout the country now accept payment in the form of money transfers through smartphone applications (e.g., M-Pesa).^{xxxviii}

However, digital tools also enable Diasporas to voice their opposition to government policy. Thorough social media and messaging applications, Diasporic communities can openly criticize their former governments and make such criticism heard in their home country. In addition, Diasporas can use digital tools to counter the narratives of their former governments and call for political change. Digitalized Diasporas can thus have both a stabilizing and de-stabilizing influence on their home country.^{xxxix}

For instance, during the 2011 Social Justice Protests in Israel, connected Israeli immigrants openly attacked the Netanyahu government's financial policies. These immigrants shared images of their wages on social media thereby attesting to the high cost of living in Israel. Such comparisons soon found their way into the mainstream media and shaped the public discourse surrounding Israel's national priorities.

Similarly, during the 2011 protests in Egypt, the online criticism of the Mubarak regime was often shaped by immigrants living outside these countries.^{xl} Given Diasporas' ability to vocally criticise their former governments, some Embassies take extra caution when communicating online with Diasporic communities.

In summary, the digitalization of Diasporas suggests that Diasporas will become influential diplomatic actors. However, ICTs may also

reduce the cohesiveness of Diasporic communities, enable communities to self-organize and side-line diplomats, raise political opposition to their home country and prove a substantial burden on Embassy resources.

Thus, realizing the potential of digital Diaspora will require that diplomats Embassies and MFAs adopt new practices, tools and working procedures. The following section offers a series of case studies that demonstrate how some diplomatic actors are already labouring to successfully practice digital Diaspora diplomacy.

4. Realizing the Potential of Digital Diaspora Diplomacy

Case Study Number 1: Second Generation Diasporas

As Rana writes, the Indian MEA (Ministry of External Affairs) allocates substantial resources to the practice of Diaspora diplomacy. One of the MEA's most interesting programs, called "Know India", aims to foster relationships with the children of Indian immigrants. As these second generation Diasporas have not lived in India, they may not feel the emotional bond that is so central to being part of a Diaspora.

The "Know India" program consists of both offline and online activities. Offline the program offers second generation Diasporas the opportunity to visit India and become acquainted with its culture, values, traditions and politics. During such visits participants are encouraged to share

their insights and experiences on social media. Moreover, the Indian MEA promotes such visits on its own social media accounts. These “Know India” visits can help participants develop an emotional bond with India while also increasing the likelihood of participants sharing their experiences with their own networks.

Online the “Know India” program also includes a web-based platform that offers Indian parents a host of games, activities, and quizzes that can acquaint their children with Indian history, tradition and culture. The web platform also includes educational resources on India’s history and national institutions.

The Indian MEA’s decision to focus its activities on second generation Diasporas demonstrates a networked approach to Diaspora diplomacy. Children of Indian immigrants are members of a myriad of intersecting networks including their family, friends, acquaintances and interest groups. If incorporated into the Diaspora network, Indian youngsters could serve as boundary spanners disseminating information and insight about India among their networks. For example, a French teenager who visited India may share his experiences and views on India’s rich history and culture with other French teens that serving as a boundary spanner. Importantly, social media users are more likely to be receptive to information shared by their Friends than that shared by

governments. As such, second generation Diasporas may prove an invaluable tool for diplomats.

It should be mentioned that India is not the only country to dedicate resources towards engaging with second generation Diasporas. The Georgian Diaspora Ministry uses Skype to offer Georgian language lessons to children of immigrants around the world. Given that language is a fundamental component of imagined and virtual communities, the Diaspora ministry may be investing in the future cohesiveness of Gregorian Diasporas.

Case Study Number 2: Tailored Diaspora Diplomacy

Like India, Israel has also traditionally sought to maintain close ties with second generation Diasporas. In 1999, Israel began to partially fund the Birthright program which offers all Jewish youngsters the opportunity to visit Israel. During such visits, participants are exposed to the Israeli way of life, ranging from its culinary achievements to security concerns. As is the case with the “Know India” program, Birthright maintains an extensive social media presence and it too encourages participants to serve as online boundary spanners by sharing insights and experiences with their online and offline networks.

However, it is Birthright’s extensive use of Instagram that is significant to the practice of digital Diaspora diplomacy. As argued earlier, digitalization has seen the emergence

of networks of selective exposure as different audiences use different platforms. This necessitates that diplomats use specific platforms to converse with specific audiences or, in other words, that they tailor their online activities to the characteristics of the audiences they are attempting to engage with. Birthright uses Instagram as this is the preferred digital medium of young people in a host of Western countries. Moreover, the content shared on Instagram by Birthright might appeal to a young audience. This includes humoristic and satirical videos, images from extreme sports such as white water rafting, parties at exotic locations such as the Dead Sea and Israel's Gay Pride Parade. At the moment, Birthright has some 44,000 followers on Instagram.

Essentially, Birthright seems to have tailored its online messaging to the habits, values, norms and social media preferences of its target audience - digitally engaged Jewish youngsters. The logic of tailoring is one that should underpin all digital Diaspora activities. According to this logic, the diplomatic goal determines the audience while the audience determines the platform to be used. This necessitates that MFAs, Embassies and diplomats identify which platform is used by their intended audience. For instance, while Facebook is extremely popular in Israel, Twitter is not. Foreign Embassies hoping to engage with Israelis on Twitter are thus waiting valuable time and resources. Next,

one must adapt content to the identified platform. While Instagram is purely visual, Facebook is also textual. Moreover, while Instagram offers limited engagement opportunities, Facebook is a medium for relationship building.

Another relevant case study of tailored digital Diaspora diplomacy is the Ethiopian MFA's "A week in the Horn" magazine and website. This weekly magazine, shared on the MFA's Facebook page, offers readers a review of events and news from the Horn of Africa. Importantly, this magazine is also shared globally by Ethiopian Embassies on their respective Facebook profiles. The magazine focuses primarily on political and financial issues while exhibiting Ethiopia's stability the stability of the region. As such, "A Week in the Horn" offers Diasporas the opportunity to keep abreast of events in their country of origin thereby maintaining an emotional bond with Ethiopia.

Equally important in the Ethiopian context, the magazine can help facilitate remittances to Ethiopia and facilitate investment in Ethiopian businesses or national infrastructure projects. Given that the Ethiopian MFA is targeting adult Diaspora members, it has chosen to be active on Facebook. Moreover, as it is targeting adult Diasporas it is delivering information in the form of a magazine. The goal of remittances and direct investments has thus

determined the audience, the platform and the message.

Case Study Number 3: Mapping Influencers

If Embassies and diplomats are to digitally strengthen ties with Diasporas, they must identify online influencers. Online influencers serve as information hubs within networks. Such hubs are usually those that share the most information in the network, and that disseminate information from the network core to its periphery, and vice versa. By identifying online influencers, and gaining their assistance in information dissemination, Embassies may be able to dramatically increase the reach of their content and engage with ever growing numbers of Diaspora members. Moreover, by facilitating close ties with influencers, Embassies may be able to remain an important part of the Diasporic community even if the community uses its own digital platform to self-organize. Identifying online influencers is possible in the digital age as online networks can be mapped and analysed.

Another important aspect of digital Diaspora diplomacy is network building - both offline and online. Embassies and diplomats should strive to create networks that can be leveraged to obtain specific goals. For instance, the Diaspora officer at an Embassy may create a dedicated Facebook group where he can interact with online influencers, update them on upcoming

community events and ask their help in promoting Embassy events online. A tourism representative may create his own social media groups with Diaspora members who are influential among the financial elite. Finally, the consular officer may create a messaging group with leaders of the local Diasporic community so that the community may be mobilized during times of crises.

A relevant case study is the Russian Embassy's use of a messaging application to coordinate aid following the 2015 Paris terror attacks. In the immediate aftermath of the attack, dozens of Russian tourists found themselves stranded in Paris unable to reach a hotel or to make their way to the airport. The Embassy quickly used a messaging group to contact the leaders of the local Diaspora and arrange shelter for Russian tourists. Throughout the night, the Embassy directed Russian tourists to the homes of Russian Diaspora members thus offering much needed aid. In this case study, the Embassy utilized digital platforms to mobilize the Diasporic community into offline action. This could not have been achieved without mapping Diaspora influencers and leaders and building a network that could spring into action.^{xli}

The benefits of messaging applications as a crisis management tool has recently been explored by Corneliu Bjola who added: "As good practice, a WhatsApp crisis cell

including the ambassador, the embassy's digital communication officer, and a senior MFA official would be useful to establish with the dual purpose of enhancing MFA-embassy coordination and reducing decision-making time". The same holds true for embassy-Diaspora coordination.

Case Study Number 4: Offering Valuable Information

Finally, it is important to note that Embassies seeking to foster ties with their Diasporic community must be able to offer the community an added value. Within the digital realm, this could take the form of expert opinion and analysis. Diasporas, by definition, have an emotional bond with their country of origin. As such, they are likely to be interested in analysis of events shaping the country of origin, its region and bi-lateral ties between their country of origin and their adoptive country. Who better to offers such analysis than diplomats who are, by trade, foreign policy experts?

One notable example is the British FCO's (Foreign and Commonwealth) blogosphere in which high ranking diplomats and Ambassadors offer analyses of local, regional and global events. A review of recent blog posts demonstrates that many of these deal with bi-lateral ties and as such may be of relevance to the Diaspora. Such is the case with a blog about UK-Romanian defence cooperation, UK Malaysia science cooperation and

increased collaborations between the UK and Macedonia.

While the FCO's blogosphere is both extensive and informative, it is not targeted specifically at the Diaspora, nor tailored to their needs and habits. Yet this model could serve as an inspiration to Embassies and diplomats. Ambassadors can write blog posts for popular Diaspora web-forums, Diaspora officers can offer insight into the activities of other Diasporic communities around the world while the trade delegate can offer a weekly bulletin of financial news on Facebook. Importantly, the Embassy can also invite Diaspora members to write blog posts that will be shared on the Embassy's website. By providing valuable information to the virtual Diasporic community, an Embassy can become an integral part of such vibrant communities and strengthen their cohesion.

5. Avoiding the Pitfalls of Digital Diaspora Diplomacy

As argued earlier, ICTs and digital tools may be used to maintain and enhance relations between Embassies and Diasporic communities. However, digital Diaspora diplomacy is not without perils. This section outlines three possible perils and how to avoid them.

The first limitation of digital Diaspora diplomacy lies in the fact that Diasporas may not wish to engage with diplomats given their critical view of their home country and its government. This may lead Diasporas to vocally express their criticism on

Embassy social media accounts. However, digital tools may also be used to bridge differences and facilitate dialogue between Diasporas and their home country. It thus falls on diplomats to carefully engage with social media critics and differentiate between trolls who are uninterested in dialogue and Diaspora members who are open to opinion exchange. The latter should be engaged with on a regular basis, the former should be left to their own devices as trolls tend to breed trolls.

Second, some Embassies have allegedly taken to monitoring Diaspora web forums. Last year, a thread published on a Nigerian Diaspora web forum stated that diplomats were monitoring conversations on behalf of the Nigerian government. Such stalking may further erode trust between Diasporas and their home country. Even if a Diaspora is not critical of its home country, it may be rattled to learn that diplomats are taking part in discussions without identifying themselves first. Thus, diplomats should always seek the Diaspora's permission to join web forums, contribute to social media pages or take part in online discussions. Transparency between diplomats and Diasporas is sure to facilitate trust between parties and strengthen ties between Embassies and Diasporic communities.

The third and last relates to foreign ministries, rather than Embassies. The expected growth of Diasporic

communities will soon translate into an added burden on understaffed Embassies. If Embassy's will fail to meet the needs of Diasporic communities, be it in consular services or organizing community events, relations with Diasporas may deteriorate. Thus, MFAs should begin to formulate innovative digital solutions to this challenge. One solution may be to digitalize Embassy services such as passport renewals or birth registration. Another solution could be to utilize Chat Bots and Artificial Intelligence to handle consular requests while yet another may include using messaging applications to coordinate all Diaspora-Embassy activities. MFAs who will fail to employ digital technologies in Diaspora diplomacy will also fail to foster close ties with Diasporic communities and leverage such ties when necessary.

6. Conclusion

The rapid proliferation of ICTs has led to the digitalization of Diplomacy.^{xliii} This process has influenced the institutions of diplomacy, the practitioners of diplomacy and the audiences of diplomacy. This working paper focused on the digitalization of Diasporas. The paper postulates that the adoption of ICTs, and digital tools, by Diasporas will lead to five contradictory trends. In addition, the paper analysed four case studies that demonstrate how MFAs, Embassies and diplomats can best practice digital Diaspora diplomacy.

The first contradictory trend is that ICTs may lead to larger yet ultimately weaker or less cohesive Diasporic communities. In order to strengthen ties with large Diasporic communities Embassies should attempt to map, and collaborate with, influencers. Offline collaborations with influencers can help mobilize the Diasporic community while online collaborations can help the Embassy disseminate information and engage with the Diasporic community at large. Russia's use of messaging applications to build and mobilize Diasporic networks is a relevant case study for such activities. Notably, collaborations with influencers necessitates the active creation of online and offline networks by Embassy staff.

The second trend relates to the expected growth of Diasporic communities which will empower the Embassy but also prove a burden on Embassy resources. Tailored approaches to Diaspora diplomacy can help Embassies increase their ROI (return on investment) on digital activities. By tailoring digital activities to target audiences' norms, values and social media usage, Embassies can strategically communicate with specific groups within the large Diasporic community. Such is the case with the Israeli Birthright's use of Instagram. However, MFAs should also invest in the digitalization of Embassy services. For instance, Chat Bots may soon replace consular staff.

The third trend relates to Diasporas ability to self-organize via web-forums and social media profiles. Such self-organization requires that Embassies reach out to their Diasporas and offer these communities an added value. The British FCO's blogosphere is one example of how diplomats can offer value in the form of foreign policy analysis. Importantly, diplomats must ask permission from Diasporic communities before joining their forums lest they be seen as government stalkers.

The fourth trend relates to Diasporas transition to virtual, yet fragmented, communities. The fragmentation of Diasporas necessitates that Embassies adopt two principles. The first is a tailored approach to Diaspora diplomacy in which the diplomatic goal defines the target audience and the platform to be used. In addition, diplomats must adopt a networked approach to Diaspora diplomacy that views Diaspora members as nodes in a myriad of intersecting networks. The MEA's decision to focus on second generation Diasporas represents a tailored and networked approach to Diaspora diplomacy in which second generation Diasporas are viewed as boundary spanners.

In conclusion, digital Diaspora diplomacy requires more than adopting ICTs. The ability to reap the benefit, and avoid the pitfalls of digital Diaspora diplomacy will require a conceptual and practical

shift among diplomats towards tailored and networked diplomacy.

ⁱ Morris, K. A. (2012). Diasporic Politics, Transnational Media Circulation, and the Multifocality of Côte d'Ivoire. *City & Society*, 24(2), 240-259.

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