**Importance of Strategic Communications in Diplomacy**

[Hassan Khan](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/hassan-khan/)

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For diplomacy to be successful, it requires diplomats to have three essential qualities, which include taking calculated risks and having utmost credibility and critical thinking. Of course, these are essential in other fields as well but international relations in the modern world are full of complex challenges that were previously unheard of just a few decades ago.

Navigating foreign policy for a country like Pakistan is a major challenge on its own given a largely hostile neighbourhood, tenuous ties with some key Western allies and internal security and economic dynamics that upend the hard work achieved by sections of the diplomatic apparatus.

Nonetheless, today’s piece isn’t about any complaints, but for highlighting the immense potential of the country’s public and cultural diplomacy with the role digital diplomacy plays simultaneously. Strictly speaking, Pakistan’s soft power is one of the handfuls of factors that keep the state’s external prominence sustainable to an extent. Music, arts, fashion, tourism and cuisine are among the key drivers in this regard.

If Western pop culture is duly considered, Hollywood and the West’s music industry are globally unbeatable to a large extent. Call me biased but the West’s musical peak remained in the 1980s when a diverse set of music thanks to synth-pop, soft rock and power ballads became household names. As for Hollywood, it continues to dominate the global film industry thanks to brand names such as Marvel Cinematic Universe, DC Universe and LucasFilm. Hence, the pop culture factor remains pivotal in driving a state or regional bloc’s foreign policy goals.

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When it comes to Pakistan, Coke Studio is one such brand that has collaborated with the Foreign Office last summer for a cultural diplomacy initiative. This is something to celebrate given how diplomacy and music were merged to showcase to the world. Such events should become a regular occurrence not only at home but abroad as well via collaborative measures. Not long ago, Sachal Jazz and Rahat Fateh Ali Khan were featured at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) under former envoy Maleeha Lodhi’s supervision. Again, only diplomats with a long-term vision can do such wonders whether they are from FSP cadre or contractual appointees.

As for digital diplomacy, Twitter is the primary driver in today’s world which has uprooted traditional media to a greater degree. If an entity or individual has good command over the language and can present their views with clarity, people would tend to notice more and take things seriously. For this purpose, the Foreign Office’s Strategic Communications Division (SCD) has brought the diplomatic apparatus to the limelight at a pace that was previously unheard of. There’s only one reason why this was possible: millennial and zoomer generation diplomats making it all a reality. These diplomats belong to an era, which has technological prowess at its peak and are the most tech-savvy generations.

Just recently, the SCD launched a new Twitter account called “Public Diplomacy Pakistan,” solely meant to highlight the country’s soft power potential whether through the eyes of diplomats or prominent celebrities from different walks of life. A couple of years ago, I wrote a piece, which pointed out how twiplomacy is important for the FSP cadre. It has, indeed, come a long way in this regard as more and more diplomats are joining Twitter for this purpose, especially the younger lot. A clear messaging is of utmost importance and this is exactly what these diplomats are striving to achieve despite the odds.

Since the SCD’s formation by former prime minister Imran Khan, it has focused on other aspects as well such as training diplomats and press officers for using social media effectively, promoting intra and inter-departmental cohesion, and focusing on using e-conferencing platforms such as Zoom that remained useful in cutting logistic costs. Twitter Spaces has also been useful to reach out to the public in some cases. In key countries where the diasporas are strong enough, additional measures to realign soft power goals have become crucial in these testing times. Student societies and young professionals need to be engaged more than ever and the SCD can potentially assist diplomatic missions.

Thus, global outreach measures for Pakistani diplomats could be amplified if the limitations in hard power and negotiations are removed effectively. Political uncertainty, a weak economy and diplomatic scandals of personal or professional nature don’t bode well yet the positive aspects are very much achievable thanks to those who have the best interests in their heart.

*The writer is Associate Editor (Diplomatic Affairs), Daily Times. He tweets @mhassankhan06*