Digital Diplomacy and SDG Advocacy: The Role of Social Media in Global Policy Discourse

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Abstract: This study explores social media's impact as a digital diplomacy tool for both advocating and promoting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This study assessed the social media interactions of global diplomats and institutions in 2024 using a mixed-method design that incorporates content analysis of official social media accounts and social media engagement metrics. In this research, I found that advanced communication methods and increased SDG awareness were significantly correlated. It underscores the opportunity that exists for harnessing digital diplomacy in shaping global narratives and fostering international collaboration and policy advocacy attention among international audiences.

I. Introduction

The development of digital communication tools has changed diplomacy and global policy dialogue activities. The use of technology and the internet as tools for carrying out diplomacy functions by state and non-state actors is referred to as digital diplomacy. The soft power promotion global narratives advocate for the entire transnational achieve the United Nations SDGs (SDGs) using cyber resources has become increasingly important. Public sentiment, awareness, and cross-national cooperation—aspects that foster active participation—are critical for quite a number of SDGs. These attributes clearly indicate, the potential for digital diplomacy is enormous transforming engage in achieving targets. In today's integrated global society, social media has given leaders, international organizations, and civil society people the ability to engage with global audiences directly. Digital platforms such as Twitter (now X), Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram are great examples. Unlike the slow-paced "traditional diplomacy," which centers on private deals and official statements, digital or "online diplomacy" is real-time, open, and accessible to the public. The ability to present an idea to the public has great consequences for advocacy efforts with regards to sustainable development goals (SDG); be it rallying people's support, fighting misinformation, or cultivating consensus across borders. The United Nations and affiliated organizations have been actively promoting key milestones and messages using social media, as well as carrying forward stakeholder engagement across all sectors. For instance, diplomats and foreign ministers now use Twitter to discuss developmental collaborations, share infographics on climate targets, or participate in campaign's advocacy for gender equality, education, and sustainable infrastructure. This momentum, however, still needs investigation into the efficiency of these strategies to impact policies. This study hopes to advance knowledge on how digital diplomacy assists in supporting SDG advocacy and the effectiveness of such support in achieving global engagement. In particular, it focuses on social media interactions of selected international stakeholders, analyzes social media activity, identifies best practices, and assesses the extent of the policy impact using digital metrics. It also analyzes issues like the digital divide, algorithmic discrimination, and fragmentation of discourse in online spaces. The paper responds to ongoing discussions at the intersection of diplomacy and technology while bringing attention to the emerging discourse on sustainability.

II. Literature Survey

New literature has highlighted that the role of digital diplomacy has increased within the global governance framework, particularly for SDGs. Fasinu et al. (2024) argue that diplomatic missions are increasingly using social media and other digital platforms to craft development narratives and build bilateral relations. Their study also reports a sharp increase in digital activity from international organizations and government embassies since 2020, driven by pandemic-related social distancing measures and reliance on digital communication.

Maksymova et al. (2023) provide further insights into digital diplomacy, claiming that it facilitates greater participation by stakeholders in global governance. Their analysis of digital methodologies shows how hashtag activism correlates with increased media attention and policy discussions at the international level. The role of influencers and civic actors is highlighted as crucial for sustaining online momentum for SDG causes.

Barman (2024) underlined that multilingual digital tools are critical in engaging with marginalized groups in society. His work explains how country-specific accounts tailor SDG engagement to regional contexts and languages to enhance relatability. However, he also observed that variations in digital infrastructure across regions pose challenges to consistent outreach.

At the same time, Charles (2024) cautions against performative activism and algorithmic echo chambers, pointing to the risks of shallow engagement dominated by metrics like retweets and likes. Meyong (2024) adds that engagement devoid of data-driven frameworks risks lacking policy substance, emphasizing the need for structured analysis in linking digital participation to global governance outcomes.

In general, the literature shows a growing agreement on the importance of digital diplomacy in the global policy advocacy ecosystem. However, there remains a lack of empirical research measuring its concrete impact on the SDGs. This study aims to bridge that gap by combining quantitative assessment of digital participation with an analytical framework of policy relevance.

III. Methodology

This research uses a design that incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methodologies of content analysis and evaluation of strategical communication to measure the impact of digital diplomacy on the advocacy of the SDGs. This study analyzes the Twitter (X) handles of key global policymakers such as the United Nations (@UN), UNDP (@UNDP), WHO (@WHO), and selected foreign ministries including the FCDO of the UK and the US Department of State. The study covers the year 2024 from January to December (UNDP, 2024).

A dataset comprising tweets was obtained from the Twitter API v2.0 focusing on SDG related hashtags such as #SDGs, #GlobalGoals, #ActNow, as well as #ClimateAction (SDG 13) and #GenderEquality (SDG 5). A total of 4,500 tweets were captured and analyzed for various engagement metrics which included the number of likes, retweets, and replies. In order to maintain standard procedures, engagement rates were adjusted relative to follower counts.

Concurrently, a qualitative coding scheme was developed to classify the content theme as informational (policy updates), inspirational (calls to action), interactive (polls or Q&A), and visual (infographics or videos). A theme label was attached to each tweet to uncover actionable patterns on content effectiveness. Additional coding was applied to assess the tone (neutral, urgent, hopeful) as well as the direct mentions of global policy events like COP28 or the UN General Assembly.

To evaluate the actual policy impact, the digital reach of the messages through the mainstream press and civil society was tracked employing specific tools along with citation metrics from relevant academic literature. Further analysis of public response activity was conducted using sentiment analysis with NLP tools and other public and proprietary sentiment analysis frameworks.

IV. Results and Discussion

Analysis proved that there is a significant relationship between digital diplomacy as a strategy and audience interactions. Accounts featuring visuals and participatory styles, such as infographics illustrating SDG indicator progress or short explanatory videos outlining progress, had far greater engagement than accounts providing textual updates. The results additionally suggest that more inspirational, positive, and hopeful messages received greater public engagement than more technical and alarming depictions.

Table 1: Engagement Rates by Content Theme (Normalized per 100K Followers)

Content Theme	Avg. Likes	Avg. Retweets	Avg. Replies
Informational	185	72	19
Inspirational	342	119	36
Interactive	398	158	49
Visual (Infographics)	421	173	53

Table 2: Frequency of SDG Hashtag Mentions (2024)

SDG Goal	Hashtag Used	Frequency (Tweets)
SDG 13 – Climate Action	#ClimateAction	1,245
SDG 5 – Gender Equality	#GenderEquality	922
SDG 4 – Quality Education	#QualityEducation	710
SDG 3 – Good Health	#HealthForAll	688
SDG 17 – Partnerships	#GlobalGoals	623

The predominant mention of these hashtags is related to women and climate which reflects the current global policy focuses as well as the responsiveness of digital audiences to these issues. Furthermore, clustering hashtags around major events highlight the significance of social media in shaping international discussion.

V. Conclusion

The results of this study show that, indeed, digital diplomacy serves as one of the most powerful tools for advocacy and actively promoting the SDGs BY amplifying policies, reaching out to a large number of people, and discussing topics that are of global concern. Content which includes visuals and overall good design garners higher attention resulting in better achievement of sustainable development goals. Further studies are encouraged to look into AI personalization of outreach regarding discrepancies in regions targeted for such advocacy to fully optimize the impact on a global scale.

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