A Theoretical Perspective of an e-Diplomacy Maturity Framework

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ABSTRACT
Diplomacy forms the basis of interaction for countries throughout the globe, while propelling cordial international relations in a wide array of socio-cultural and political. This research outlines an innovative conceptual structure for examining the maturity and feasibility of e-diplomacy. The proposed e-diplomacy maturity framework is a derivative of literary analysis on e-government maturity model, ICT growth of stage theories, coupled with theoretical information and practical features of diplomacy. The e-diplomacy maturity model constitutes variables like the degree of complexity and level of interactivity. Integration of the two variables results in varying phases of the framework. Challenges implicated in the e-diplomacy maturity framework include: sensitivity hence discretionary nature of diplomatic elements, setbacks in organizational structure, and communication impediments on the part of diplomats, as well as, politico-economic concerns and socio-cultural tendencies of various parties.

KEYWORDS
Diplomacy, e-Diplomacy, e-Government Maturity, ICT Maturity

INTRODUCTION
Diplomacy lays the foundation for nations to maintain amiable relations with each other (Jacoby, 2013). This is achieved through fostering negotiations that culminate in consensual decision making and agreements, subsequently facilitating social, political, and economic growth for partisan countries. The author is rightly cognizant of the growing need for prioritization of diplomatic excellence in all nations, which further justifies the need for additional research in the field. Continued exploration of prospective improvements to conventional diplomacy will make it possible to develop practices that befit the rapid advancement of modern political environs. The need for improved diplomatic modalities is arguably the primary motivation for this literature review. Analysis of relevant extant literature paves the way for the development of a framework that can facilitate measurement of the degree of maturity of ICT in diplomatic activities. E-diplomacy, which is considered the use of advanced ICT tools in diplomatic efforts, can be used as a measure of diplomatic excellence as it indicates the advanced nature of diplomacy in any given setting (Shultz, 1997). The use of ICT cannot
be underestimated or foregone, particularly in contemporary political and administrative structures, where communication speed and efficiency are mainstays (Dizard, 2001).

The literature review does not actually construct the projected framework, it provides vital theoretical background, which rationalizes the formation of the framework deliberated upon later in the research. The next section will detail the background information regarding current diplomatic functions, followed by presentation of. Section three will explore key features of the proposed e-diplomacy maturity framework. Elements such as maturity phases, and possible factors that influence execution and assimilation of the e-diplomacy maturity model are explored too. Lastly, the last section will sum up key findings of the analysis, while outlining concluding remarks and recommendations.

LITERATURE OF DIPLOMACY

According to Sun (2008), many countries are progressively recognizing the need for precise and effective diplomatic relations in an attempt to promote and sustain economic competitiveness, political supremacy, and cultural relevance. As a result, such nations are constantly searching for novel ways to capitalize on diplomacy. In support of the preceding assertion, Armitage and Nye (2007) observe that diplomatic distinction is dependent on certain variables, key among them being utilisation of e-diplomacy. Also referred to as digital diplomacy, this modern approach to diplomatic relations involves using advanced information communication technologies (ICTs) such as integrated computer systems and the internet to execute diplomatic functions (Bollier, 2003). The subsequent discussion should provide a detailed analysis of some of the key diplomatic functions documented in literature.

Developing bilateral relation is a key function for any diplomat. Thompson and Verdier (2013) unequivocally stipulates that bilateralism encompasses economic, cultural, and political associations between two autonomous countries. Nations involved in these types of relations recognize each other’s sovereignty and agree to work together guided by defined terms and conditions. Partisan states usually swap agents, such as ambassadors, to represent their respective interests and oversee maintenance of these agreements. (Thompson and Verdier, 2013).

Promoting the home country and building its image globally is yet another key function of diplomatic relations and an indicator of diplomacy excellence. As denoted by Freeman (2007), tags associated with certain nations like terrorism, political instability, debt defaults, and human rights violations, often paint such countries in a negative light, making it virtually impossible for them to create and sustain productive links with others. These include implementation of prudent fiscal policies and practices that seek poverty eradication (Malone, 2005). In addition, they can pass laws that safeguard equity and human rights protection. This can go a long way in repairing a country’s image, increasing willingness by others to associate with it (Yucheng, 2012).

Another key function of diplomats is public engagements. In light of this, public diplomacy differs from traditional diplomacy and is deemed better since it covers a broader range of interactions with both governments and non-governmental institutions (Leonard, 2002). Nonetheless, for greater efficacy, public diplomacy should also institute measures that assure the accountability of diplomats and counter the perception that they are invincible. In accordance with Mathews (2007), ensuring accountability to the public is vital since diplomats act as a country’s representatives and their behavior, positive or negative, reflects back on their respective nations.

In addition, in their examination of internal measures of diplomacy performance, Burt & Robison (2008) emphasise on the diplomatic function of providing consular services. The authors indicate that excellence of consular services translates to diplomacy brilliance. Nicolson (2011) supports this notion by indicating that consular services, which constitute assistance availed by diplomats to a nation’s citizens in a foreign host country, greatly determine diplomats’ diligence and commitment to cordial relations. It is, therefore, vital for any embassy and foreign ministry, in general, to have highly professional staff since the consular services delivered are great determinants of diplomacy (Rana & Kurbalija, 2007).
Towards a Design Rationale for Inclusive eGovernment Services
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