



EFFECT OF DIGITAL DIPLOMACY TO ENHANCE PUBLIC AND DEFENCE DIPLOMACY IN SRI LANKA

*(PENGARUH DIGITAL DIPLOMACY UNTUK MENINGKATKAN DIPLOMASI PUBLIK
DAN PERTAHANAN DI SRI LANKA)*

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Abstract

Sri Lanka has faced negative coverage of its security and human rights situation since 2009. One of the main reasons for the negative security and human rights coverage since 2009 is that the country continues to engage in traditional diplomacy which is ineffective in today's era of rapid and extensive information dissemination through the internet and social media. The aim of this study was to analyze how Sri Lankan has used Digital Diplomacy DD to mitigate security and human rights situations and to analyze how DD could be used to enhance public and defence diplomacy in Sri Lanka. Findings from the study revealed that DD has not been adopted in Sri Lanka to mitigate the negative coverage of the security and human rights situation. Failure to adapt to combat negative coverage of the security and human rights situation in the country can be attributed to several factors. These factors include financial challenges, employee-related, and policy-related issues, and the lack of support from Government leadership for adopting DD. Findings from the study indicate that DD can be used to enhance public and defence diplomacy in Sri Lanka in several ways. These ways include using social media to counter the negative publicity of security and human rights situations by state and non-state actors, dissemination of the actual picture of the security and human rights situation in the country, facilitating low costs and effective two-way communication with all stakeholders, effectively present the Sri Lanka Government position at legislative meetings and other social activities in foreign countries, build effective support for Sri Lanka among member nations at international bodies and forums, and identify and mitigate existential threats to the country.

Key Words: Defence Diplomacy, International Relations, Security, and Human Rights.



Abstrak

Sri Lanka telah menghadapi liputan negatif tentang situasi keamanan dan hak asasi manusianya sejak tahun 2009. Salah satu alasan utama untuk liputan keamanan dan hak asasi manusia yang negatif sejak tahun 2009 adalah bahwa negara tersebut terus terlibat dalam diplomasi tradisional yang tidak efektif di era yang serba cepat dan cepat saat ini. penyebaran informasi yang luas melalui internet dan media sosial. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menganalisis bagaimana Sri Lanka menggunakan Digital Diplomacy DD untuk memitigasi situasi keamanan dan hak asasi manusia dan untuk menganalisis bagaimana DD dapat digunakan untuk meningkatkan diplomasi publik dan pertahanan di Sri Lanka. Temuan dari studi tersebut mengungkapkan bahwa DD belum diadopsi di Sri Lanka untuk mengurangi liputan negatif tentang situasi keamanan dan hak asasi manusia. Kegagalan beradaptasi untuk memerangi liputan negatif tentang situasi keamanan dan hak asasi manusia di negara tersebut dapat dikaitkan dengan beberapa faktor. Faktor-faktor ini termasuk tantangan keuangan, masalah terkait karyawan, dan terkait kebijakan, dan kurangnya dukungan dari kepemimpinan Pemerintah untuk mengadopsi DD. Temuan dari studi tersebut menunjukkan bahwa DD dapat digunakan untuk meningkatkan diplomasi publik dan pertahanan di Sri Lanka dalam beberapa cara. Cara-cara ini termasuk menggunakan media sosial untuk melawan publisitas negatif situasi keamanan dan hak asasi manusia oleh aktor negara dan non-negara, penyebaran gambaran aktual situasi keamanan dan hak asasi manusia di negara tersebut, memfasilitasi biaya rendah dan komunikasi dua arah yang efektif. dengan semua pemangku kepentingan, mempresentasikan posisi Pemerintah Sri Lanka secara efektif pada pertemuan legislatif dan kegiatan sosial lainnya di luar negeri, membangun dukungan yang efektif untuk Sri Lanka di antara negara-negara anggota di badan dan forum internasional, serta mengidentifikasi dan mengurangi ancaman yang ada terhadap negara tersebut.

Kata Kunci: Diplomasi Pertahanan, Hubungan Internasional, Keamanan, dan Hak Asasi Manusia.

1. INTRODUCTION

The year 2009 marked the successful completion of the civil war in Sri Lanka with the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the killing of its leader Velupillai Prabhakaran by the Sri Lankan military forces (Jeyaraj, 2020). Although the Sri Lankan military forces were successful in defeating the LTTE in 2009, this defeat had little impact on the propaganda machine of the LTTE. This limited impact can be attributed to the fact that the propaganda arm of the LTTE was established in Western countries, which have sizeable Tamil immigrant populations.



The Tamil Diaspora, consisting of pro-LTTE and Tamils with separatist ideology who fled the country and settled in other parts of the world during the height of the separatist war, has continued the propaganda fight against Sri Lanka and its military (Ariyapperuma, 2020). The main tool used by the Tamil diaspora in its propaganda fight against the Sri Lankan military and government (GoSL) is the Internet, specifically the websites (tamil.net), Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and other popular social media platforms (Ariyapperuma, 2020). Information and communication technology has been extensively adopted by non-state actors such as the Tamil Diaspora in the dissemination of false information regarding GoSL and the military in Sri Lanka (Perera, 2016). This disinformation included articles with doctored pictures and so-called eyewitness accounts of alleged atrocities committed against LTTE prisoners of war by security forces and alleging that the Sri Lankan Army deliberate targeting of civilians in the closing stages of the war resulted in the deaths of close to 39,750 civilians (Sri Lanka Ministry of Defense, 2015).

The fake news, effectively published across the internet and social media platforms by the Tamil Diaspora across the globe, was soon picked up by international news outlets and cable news channels (Ariyapperuma, 2020). This in turn resulted in massive negative coverage of the human rights situation immediately after the completion of the war (Perera, 2016). The Tamil Diaspora's interest in undermining the image and reputation of the Sri Lankan government and security forces can be attributed to the objective of establishing a separate Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka. Despite the defeat of the LTTE and other separatist groups in 2009, the Tamil Diaspora harbors strong ambitions of achieving their dream of a separate homeland.

A key strategy in this regard is to win international support and backing by making allegations of continued atrocities against the Tamil community by Sri Lankan security forces and Sinhala extremist groups. These allegations of continued atrocities against the Tamil community are forwarded via Twitter, YouTube, and other social media platforms to



politicians of Tamil Sri Lankan origin in countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and Norway. The message is then amplified by these politicians when they forward these allegations to colleagues in their parties, members of opposition parties, and local and international media outlets. Because of false information, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) passed Resolution A/HRC/25/1. This resolution called for accountability, reconciliation, and human rights to be promoted in Sri Lanka. It also asked the UNHRC to "conduct a comprehensive investigation into alleged serious violations and abuses of human rights and related crimes by both parties in Sri Lanka."

Further, negative publicity regarding the human rights violations after the completion of the war also resulted in some Western countries, including the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA), banning the Army Commander, Senior Officers of the Sri Lanka Army, and Special Forces personnel from entering the countries (Sri Lanka Ministry of Defense, 2015). In addition, negative information pertaining to human rights violations in Sri Lanka after 2009 also resulted in the European Union withdrawing the GSP+ concession provided to Sri Lanka from 2010 to 2017. This in turn resulted in Sri Lanka losing export revenue worth SLR 700 billion during this period (Deloitte, 2022).

A key reason for the extensive negative human rights coverage of Sri Lanka is the failure of the country's public and defense diplomacy channels to effectively address and mitigate this coverage (Ariyapperuma, 2020). The Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry and its embassies across the world use traditional methods and approaches for communication. These traditional methods include the use of email, fax, and telephones for communication between the Foreign Ministry, Foreign Minister, and embassies across the world, and the use of media releases, press conferences, and official letters to communicate with local and international media, foreign ministries, and embassies of other countries (Ariyapperuma, 2020). Further, other reasons for the failure to mitigate this extensive negative coverage are that the responses of public and defense diplomacy channels to this negative coverage are always reactive and consist of contradictory responses by the foreign ministry and



embassies, a failure to provide embassies with the evidence necessary to address accusations of human rights violations and other negative coverage, and a failure to ensure a uniformed response to the negative coverage (Ariyapperuma, 2020).

1.1 Problem Formulation

Sri Lanka has faced negative coverage since 2009 due to various factors ranging from fake information posted by the Tamil Diaspora since the completion of the separatist war, the changes in the political situation since 2009, the Easter Sunday bombings in 2019, and present political and economic situation. Findings from empirical research indicate that one of the main reasons for the negative security and human rights coverage since 2009 is that the country continues to engage in public diplomacy, which is ineffective in today's era of rapid and extensive information dissemination through the internet and social media (Jayathilaka, 2020). The effectiveness of DD over public diplomacy is underscored by evidence from several countries, such as India, Germany, the USA, Ukraine, and Russia, which have effectively adopted DD to mitigate the challenges and issues arising from the rapid and extensive dissemination of information, improve foreign relations, and effectively address crises. Despite findings from empirical research that indicate that DD is more effective than public diplomacy in improving foreign relations and overcoming crises, there is a dearth of research on how Sri Lanka could use DD to mitigate the negative coverage of its security and human rights situation since 2009. The dearth of research in a Sri Lankan context can be attributed to the fact that the adoption of DD is still in its infancy in the country. DD at this very early stage in Sri Lanka is underscored by the absence of an established policy, plan, or strategy for this form of diplomacy. This study aims to address this dearth of research and will be undertaken with the following research questions:

- a. How could DD be used to enhance public and defence diplomacy in Sri Lanka?
- b. How has Sri Lanka used DD to mitigate negative coverage of security and human rights situations after 2009?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section of the study encompasses multiple segments that are applicable to this study in terms of how DD is conceived and different variables that are considered critical to its successful implementation.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

According to Nweke (2010), there is no single concept or theoretical model that can effectively describe the relationship between diplomacy, international relations, and technology. Further, Nweke (2010) further states that the "evolution of digital governance" cannot be linked to any "grand theory" as the circumstances surrounding its embedding by individuals and organizations alike stem from different and wide-ranging perspectives.

2.2 Theories on International Relations

Theories of international relations are broadly segmented into contemporary theories and modern theories. Key contemporary theories pertaining to international relations are realism, liberalism, and constructivism. Realism is based on the belief that the primary objective of a country should be to enhance its power and strength. This theory received significant traction due to results from empirical research that revealed that nations that focus on strengthening their power and strength are more successful than those that fall short in this regard (Karpowics, 2018).

According to the liberalism theory of international relations, an organization can achieve its goals through cooperation rather than conflict with other countries. The main premise of this theory is that the use of direct force to achieve national interest is extremely expensive from an economic, human, and reputational perspective and that national interest could be achieved for a fraction of this cost through international cooperation (Moravcsik, nd).

The constructivism theory of international relations postulates that a country could formulate its foreign policy based on its belief systems (International Affairs Forum, 2020). A key premise of this theory is that non-state actors and international organizations are more central to the development of an effective foreign policy than cooperation with other nations (International Affairs Forum, 2020).



2.3 Actor-Network Theory

Actor-Network Theory (ANT) is a common theory that has been adopted to describe DD (Ziemkendorf, 2007). ANT was conceptualized by Latour in the early 1980s and modified by Callon in 1986 and Law in 1992 (Ziemkendorf, 2007). The importance of ANT in diplomacy is evidenced by its extensive adoption in state and organizational studies and research pertaining to international relations (Huxley, 2014). ANT postulates that a communication set consists of two key parties, i.e., the agent and the actor. The actor in ANT is associated with non-human aspects such as texts and machines (Huxley, 2014). Furthermore, the actor in the communications set is made up of networks that can layer within other mixed networks (Huxley, 2014). Actants in ANT consist of agents, i.e., collective bodies and individuals, who have the ability to establish or terminate relationships with other actors. The main responsibility of actors in ANT is forming and maintaining associations and relationships (Huxley, 2014). ANT theory enabled the researcher to understand how diplomacy works and its main components, i.e., agents and actants. Further, this theory enabled the researcher to understand the primary responsibilities of actants in diplomacy.

2.4 Three Phases of eGovernment

Implementation of e-governance in the state, as well as in private institutions, is facilitated through three phases (Centre for Democracy and Technology, 2002). These stages are, namely, publishing, interacting, and transacting. Publishing is described by the Center for Democracy and Technology (2002) as the need for state or private organizations to publish and disseminate information about themselves to a broad audience. The application of publishing to a DD context necessitates the use of digital channels by foreign ministries and embassies of countries to publish and disseminate information about themselves and their activities to audiences all over the world (Centre for Democracy and Technology, 2002).

Interacting, which is the second stage that is essential for the implementation of e-governance in state and private organizations, is described by the Center for Democracy



and Technology as a two-way communication process that originates with basic functions such as the establishment of email communication for government and private institutions to interact with customers and the general public and the creation of basic electronic forms that enable customers and the general public to provide feeds and proposals to these institutions.

The third and final stage in establishing e-governance, i.e., transacting, is described by the Center for Democracy and Technology (2002) as enabling customers and the public to access products and services of government and private institutions online. Enabling customers and the general public to interact and transact with state and private institutions is extremely important as it reduces communication and transaction costs and time for parties while also enabling state and private institutions to reach and support customers and the general public across a broad geographic area (Centre for Democracy and Technology, 2002).

2.5 Integrated Threat Theory

The integrated threat theory postulated by Stephan and Stephan (1996) identifies four threats that predict and explain prejudicial and negative attitudes of in-groups towards out-groups. Negative stereotypes, intergroup anxiety, symbolic threats, and realistic threats are examples of these threats (Stephan and Stephan, 1996). As per Stephan and Stephan (1996), intergroup anxiety is caused by fears of exploitation, ridicule, and rejection. Further, intergroup anxiety is also caused by a history of antagonism between the in-group and out-group and the absence of prior personal contact between the two groups (Stephen et al. 2000). Negative stereotypes of stereotyping are described by Stephen and Stephen (2000) as common assumptions that individuals in the in-group have about the out-group. Realistic threats are described by Stephen and Stephen (1996) as perceptions that the in-group has about threats posed to their political, economic, material, and physical well-being by the out-group. The symbolic threat in Integrated Threat Theory refers to the perception that the in-group has that its dominant culture could be undermined and



challenged due to differences in values and morals. In-group and out-group attitudes, beliefs, and standards (Stephen and Stephen, 1996).

Integrated threat theory enabled the researcher to understand how DD could change the Tamil Diaspora group's negative perception of GoSL, the military, and the Sinhala community to a positive perception through frequent communication. This theory also underscores the importance of interacting (which is a key component in the three phases of eGovernment) in creating quality interactions that enhance the positive perception groups or communities have of each other.

2.6 Foreign Affairs Strategy

The Foreign Affairs Strategy Theory postulated by Terry Deibel (2007) is a three-tiered analytical framework based on the fundamental tasks a strategist should perform (Raymond, 2008). These three tiers are evaluation, analysis, and planning. The assessment tier requires the strategist to analyze existing assumptions relating to the domestic and international environments. The analysis tier requires the strategist to match the means with the ends. Planning, which is the final tier in this framework, requires the strategist to create objectives and develop how these objectives will be achieved.

Although Foreign Affairs Strategy Theory at first glance gives the impression that it is simply a checklist for aspiring strategists, it is far more complex as it identifies several important aspects for effective strategy formulation. These aspects are that strategic thinking is interactive, that assessments of the domestic and international environments should be far and wide, that strategies should be formulated taking the long time horizon into consideration, and that multiple scenarios should be assessed in different ways. The Foreign Affairs Strategy enabled the researcher to identify the main factors that are taken into consideration by diplomats and other foreign ministry personnel in the development of traditional, defense, and DD strategies. Key learning from this theory will enable the researcher to develop effective DD strategies to effectively address negative coverage of the security and human rights situation in Sri Lanka since 2009.

2.7 Digital Diplomacy



2.7.1 The concept of Digital Diplomacy

Larson (2004) claims that the revolution within the information space fostered the acceleration of DD, or "e-diplomacy," "cyber diplomacy," or "virtual diplomacy," in other words. Larson also adds that the current trends on economic and technological fronts are likely to significantly accelerate the information revolution to even greater heights. Abbasov (2007) claimed that DD came to fruition when diplomats incorporated communication methods utilizing the latest information and communication technologies into their diplomatic efforts. In 1997, Richard H. Solomon, president of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), posited virtual diplomacy as interactions of an economic, political, and social nature that are conducted through electronics as opposed to traditionally communicating face-to-face. Additionally, the USIP (2006), in its take on DD, viewed its dependence on ICTs as a key differentiator relative to public diplomatic efforts.

Grech (2006) cites Gordon Smith's perception of virtual diplomacy, positing it as "the conduct of what was regarded as classical diplomacy but that is now an activity being practiced in a different way because of changes in technology and because it is practiced by a broader range of people, including those that are not professional diplomats." Thus, DD foregoes professionalism in favor of drawing on ideas from diverse individuals perceived as professionals on certain global concerns and interests. Moreover, Nweke (2011) claims that the states best equipped to engage in DD are those that can send, receive, and process information received digitally. As per IPU (2013), the incorporation of ICT within diplomatic efforts has revolutionized communications internationally, both within foreign states and among diplomats officially stationed overseas.

The first signs of communicating electronically can be traced as far back as 1989 when the World Wide Web came into being. However, other experts on the topic trace DD back to the industrial and communications revolutions in the 1980s (Abbasov, 2007). In terms of diplomacy and international relations, the breakthroughs on the technological front have paved the way for several innovations that have advanced diplomatic efforts from both a theoretical and practical perspective. Lichtenstein (2010) offers his take on DD



within the 21st century, claiming the concept encompasses short message services and posts on Facebook, Google, and YouTube, to name a few of the many options available in terms of utilizing platforms centered around online communications. The concept of DD is like that of a new relationship between giants within Silicon Valley, who are tasked with furthering technology within trade and relations internationally, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

2.8 Adoption of Digital Diplomacy in Sri Lanka

Findings from empirical research indicate that the Sri Lankan government's adoption of DD is extremely limited (Jayathilaka, 2020). The limited use of DD in the country is underscored by the fact that it does not have an established policy, plan, or strategy for this form of diplomacy. The lack of official guidelines on DD has resulted in diplomats and other government officials taking the initiative in this regard. The primary pages or tools used by the Sri Lankan government to engage in DD include the Twitter pages of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The content posted on these pages mainly consists of texts, images, and notices (Jayathilaka, 2020). Findings from research also indicate that Sri Lanka trails neighboring countries such as India in the adoption of DD (Guneratne, 2019). The main reasons for the country's low adoption of DD include a lack of know-how, a lack of training and development in this area, and a lack of knowledge of the significant advantages that could be derived by a small nation such as Sri Lanka through the adoption of DD (Guneratne, 2019). Age and English language proficiency are also key reasons for the low adoption of DD.

2.9 The Benefits, Threats, and Risks of Digital Diplomacy

DD is widely regarded as one of the most significant developments to take place in the field of diplomatic communication in the twenty-first century. It is both a byproduct of globalization and the fruit of the new public diplomacy. Because of the extraordinary advances in information and communications technology (ICT), the internet, and social media, the manner in which diplomacy is practiced and presented has undergone significant transformations and is becoming increasingly disassociated from the



conventional aspects of diplomacy. The significance of utilizing information and communication technologies (ICT), the internet, and social media platforms, which also serve as its foundation, to promote diplomatic ties is the driving force behind the rise of Doha. Because of this, understanding the function and significance of DD is necessary.

It is abundantly obvious for international players that the utilization of DD may be of great assistance in the accomplishment of their objectives in the international arena. However, the process of digitalization cannot be divorced from the threat posed by cyber threats, and the freedom offered by the internet and social media platforms is frequently exploited for a variety of objectives by both state and non-state actors. Although it is accompanied by advantages on the one hand and dangers on the other, the risks of DD are nevertheless covered by benefits, which makes DD an essential component for the execution of diplomatic endeavors.

In addition to this, there are phenomena such as hoaxes, hate speech, terrorism, online fraud, and cybercrime, which are the five most serious hazards posed by the utilization of information technology (Info Komputer, 2021). People who have not been diligent in their use of technology have caused the internet to become a medium for illegal conduct. This has led to the five dangers that have occurred.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Method and Design

The research method adopted in this study is a qualitative research method. This method comprised the collection and analysis of non-numeric data such as text in research articles published in peer-reviewed journals. The research design adopted in this study is grounded research, i.e., "studies in which data are collected and analyzed and then a theory is developed that is grounded in the data" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, cited in Saunders et al. 2018). This grounded research design involved the collection and analysis of non-numeric data to develop theories on how DD could be adopted to enhance public and defense diplomacy in Sri Lanka.



3.2 Research Subject

Sample subjects for the study will be selected using a purposeful sampling method. The sample size will be determined based on the concept of theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation is defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967, cited in Saunders et al., 2018) as "the criterion for judging when to stop sampling the different groups pertinent to a category is the category's theoretical saturation."

Saturation means that no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop the properties of the category. As he sees similar instances repeatedly, the researcher becomes empirically confident that a category is saturated. He goes out of his way to look for groups that stretch the diversity of data as far as possible, just to make certain that saturation is based on the widest possible range of data on the category. "The research object" in the study refers to "a phenomenon or thing that can be measured or observed" (Sugiyono, 2014). The research object in this study is the dearth of research on the adoption of DD in enhancing public and defence diplomacy in Sri Lanka

The selection of the adoption of DD in enhancing public and defence diplomacy and in Sri Lanka as the object of the study was due to the fact that it can be observed from the improvement or deterioration in the coverage of security and human rights situation in the country on the international stage and by the international media. This phenomenon can be measured by using social media analytics to measure likes, forwards, comments, and reactions to content posted by the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry and Defense Ministry to mitigate negative coverage of the country on the international stage and in international media.

3.3 Data Analysis Techniques

Thematic analysis was used to assess qualitative data. Thematic analysis was carried out because it is "a technique to determining what is common to the way a topic is spoken about or written about and making sense of those commonalities" (Braun and Clark, 2012).

Figure 3.1 depicts the processes involved in data thematic analysis. The software package NVivo was used in the thematic analysis of the data.



Figure 1: Data analysis process

Source: Zhang and Wildemuth²¹

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 General Overview of the Research Object

As mentioned previously in this study, the research object is the dearth of research on the adoption of DD in enhancing public and defense diplomacy in Sri Lanka. Although DD is being increasingly adopted by governments and foreign ministries across the globe due to the significant advantages it has over public diplomacy, there is a dearth of research on its adoption by the Sri Lankan government and foreign ministry to enhance public and defense diplomacy and mitigate the negative coverage of the security and human rights situation in the country.

Negative coverage of the security and human rights situation in Sri Lanka since the successful defeat of the LTTE war has significantly damaged the image and reputation of the country and resulted in the UNHRC adopted a resolution calling for a comprehensive investigation of human rights violations during the latter part of the war by both the Sri Lankan security forces and the LTTE. Given that the investigation of the LTTE for violations of human rights is a moot point as it ceased to exist after 2009, LTTE sympathizers, supporters, and nations partial to the Tamil cause in Sri Lanka have looked to exact revenge by embarking on a comprehensive and continuous campaign of



disinformation about the security and human rights situation during the latter and after the completion of the war.

The efforts of the Sri Lankan government and Foreign Ministry to mitigate these allegations have not been successful. This in turn has had a significant impact on the reputation and image of the country. The negative impact on the country's reputation and image has hampered socioeconomic development by affecting tourism arrivals, foreign direct investment, trade concessions granted by the European Union, and the ability to obtain concessionary infrastructure and other development-related loans from western lending agencies such as the World Bank and the IMF. A key reason for this is LTTE supporters and sympathizers effective use of social media and other digital channels to disseminate misinformation and propaganda regarding the security and human rights situation in the country, while the Sri Lankan Government and Foreign Ministry have adopted traditional diplomacy to counter this misinformation and propaganda.

Determining how DD could be adopted to mitigate negative coverage of the security and human rights situation is critical as findings from the literature review show that this form of diplomacy is an effective strategy adopted by governments across the globe to effectively and efficiently disseminate information to all types of stakeholders. Findings from the literature review show that DD facilitates effective two-way communication with people from all over the world easier, and enables governments to quickly find and address misinformation and propaganda posted on social media channels.

4.2 Data Interpretation

Findings from the data analysis indicate the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry has adopted several strategies to enhance the security and safety of the country. These strategies range from legal strategies to operational strategies, including coordination and information sharing with other ministries and agencies in foreign countries, improving networking and sharing of national security and safety information received from other countries and agencies amongst security, military, and other agencies and ministries, and



informing and ensuring that Sri Lankan Government Ministers are aware of matters pertaining to international security and counterterrorism. The interpretation of the data indicates that whilst the current public diplomatic strategies to mitigate the security and human rights challenges are a significant improvement over the strategies implemented prior to the Easter Sunday attacks in 2019, these strategies need to be modified further to enhance their effectiveness in mitigating the security threats and other challenges to the country.

The interpretation of the findings from the data analysis indicates that negative coverage of the security and human rights situation since 2009 is primarily centered on human rights violations. These human rights violations include allegations of torture, detention, arrests ect. of political opponents, members of Tamil and other minority communities, and media personnel by police and security personnel. Negative coverage of the security and human rights situation in the country has resulted in several adverse consequences. These adverse consequences range from socioeconomic consequences to international relationship consequences and consequences for military personnel. Socioeconomic consequences include the loss of the GSP+ trading preference granted by the European Union, difficulties in obtaining loans from western-backed donor organizations, a decline in direct foreign investment in the country, and obtaining loans at higher interest rates from new sources such as the Import-Export Bank of China (China EXIM Bank).

International relationship consequences include the deterioration of bilateral relationships with India and western countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as a decline in international relationships with international organizations such as the UNHRC. To mitigate the deterioration in relationships with donor international organizations, India, and Western countries such as the USA and UK, the Sri Lankan government has focused on developing robust relationships with traditional rivals of Western countries such as China and Russia, and international bodies that are backed by these countries such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and China EXIM Bank. Consequences for military personnel include the UN decision not to select Sri Lankan



military personnel for peacekeeping missions, difficulties in military personnel obtaining visits and other types of visas to Western countries such as Australia, Canada, the UK, and the USA, and certain military personnel facing the threat of being charged by the International Criminal Court for human rights violations.

The interpretation of the results from the data analysis indicates that current strategies adopted by the Sri Lanka Foreign Ministry and the Defense Ministry to mitigate negative coverage of the security and human rights situation are limited to finger-pointing and realigning policy. Finger-pointing consists of arguing that the USA, UK, and other western nations have also committed human rights violations and have justified these violations under the umbrella of ensuring global and country security and safety. For example, the US military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Realignment of foreign policy consists of building closer relationships with traditional foes of Western nations such as China and Russia at the expense of warm relations with India, the USA, and the UK. Results from the data analysis indicate that these strategies have not been effective in mitigating the negative coverage of the security and human rights situation in the country. The low effectiveness of these strategies is underscored by the failure to stop or address the consequences associated with the continued posting of false information and propaganda regarding the security and human rights situation in the country after 2009, The consequences include the failure to prevent the adoption of human rights violation resolutions against the country at the UNHRC, and the failure to counter anti-Sri Lankan debates in legislative bodies of influential countries such as the UK.

Findings from the data analysis indicate limited use of DD in the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry and Defence Ministry. DD used by the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry and Ministry of Defense to counter negative coverage of the security and human rights situation in the country since 2009 consists of posting notices, text, and images to counter negative publications by state and non-state actors on traditional social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube. Although DD use in the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry and other ministries is limited, social media is used by ministers and ministries to promote self-



interest. The use of DD in this context includes the spreading of online conspiracies about rival politicians and acting as a propaganda tool for the government. The limited use of DD has resulted in its limited effectiveness in countering the negative coverage of the security and human rights situation in the country. The limited effectiveness of DD in this context is underscored by the fact that, whilst DD has been successful in countering travel advisories issued against the country by various western nations from time to time, it has failed to prevent or remove the UNHRC resolutions against Sri Lanka and effectively address the false misinformation and propaganda on the security and human rights situation in the country posted by non-state actors on various social media channels. The limited success of DD is also underscored by the low numbers of followers and engagement levels on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube of the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry and Ministry of Defense.

The low adoption of DD in the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry and Defence Ministry can be attributed to several factors. These factors include financial, i.e., lack of funds to implement DD across the Foreign Ministry and Defence Ministry network; employee-related challenges such as organizational culture; lack of expertise on social media; and limited English language skills; policy-related issues, i.e., absence of a standardized policy on DD; and lack of support from government leadership in adopting DD. These roadblocks to the adoption of DD can be overcome through the adoption of several strategies. These strategies include rolling out DD in stages across the Foreign Ministry and Defence Ministry network to mitigate financial constraints, implementing a change management program to overcome employee resistance to the adoption of DD, and providing employees training, particularly technical and language skills training necessary to use DD effectively; implement a standardized DD policy in the Foreign Ministry; and conduct awareness campaigns to educate senior political leaders on the advantages and disadvantages of DD.

Findings from the study also indicate that Sri Lanka does not have to invest significant capital and time in developing an effective DD strategy, as it can borrow from the DD strategies adopted in other countries such as India. Findings from the study



indicate that for DD to be effectively implemented in Sri Lanka, the following components are essential:

- a. The main social media channels in DD should be Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.
- b. The main languages used in DD should be Sinhala, Tamil, and English.
- c. The DD audience should consist of state actors such as diplomats and ministers of foreign governments and non-state actors such as the UNHRC and other international organizations, international media, and anti-Sri Lankan organizations such as Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora organizations in various countries.
- d. Content posted on social media platforms should provide detailed coverage of the security and human rights situation in the country.
- e. A centralized DD unit should be established to monitor and address all negative coverage pertaining to Sri Lanka, particularly coverage pertaining to the security and human rights situation in the country.
- f. The DD strategy should encourage and promote engagement with stakeholders across the globe.
- g. Social media postings should be open and transparent.
- h. Under the DD, senior officials in the Foreign Ministry and Defence Ministry should engage extensively with foreign ministries in other countries, international organizations such as the UNHRC, foreign ambassadors stationed in Sri Lanka, and key global leaders such as the Presidents of the United States and China, as well as the UN Secretary-General through Twitter, instergram, Facebook and other social media channels.
- i. Postings on social media must be proactive and not reactive.
- j. Social media analytics must be used to monitor the effectiveness of DD strategies.

4.3 Discussion



Findings from this study revealed that Sri Lanka's use of DD is low and that it does not have a DD strategy, plan, or policy consistent with the findings from empirical research conducted by Jayathilaka (2020). Furthermore, the findings of this study which revealed that low adoption of digital development in Sri Lanka is due to a lack of know-how, training, and government leadership's ignorance of the significant benefits associated with DD confirms Guneratne's (2019) empirical research, which yielded similar results. Further, this study, similar to Guneratne's (2019) study, also found that language skills, specifically English language skills, are one of the main factors for the low use of DD in Sri Lankan ministries.

The limited effectiveness of DD used by the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry and Defence Ministry, underscored by the limited number of times content is posted on its social media channels, is consistent with research conducted by Sevin and Ingehoff (2018), which state that the number of times social media posts are forwarded and tweeted underscores the breadth and expansion of the collaboration generated by social media. Further, the low engagement generated by the DD efforts of the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry and Defence Ministry identified in this study collaborates with the research of Rachmawathi et al. (nd), which concluded that the effectiveness of DD in generating engagement can be measured by the comments and reactions to the content posted on social media platforms. High comments and reactions indicate a high level of engagement, whereas low comments and feedback indicate the opposite (Rachmawathiet al., nd). Given that comments and feedback generated by social media posts by the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry are low, it can be concluded that its DD efforts are not very effective.

The limited use of DD in Sri Lanka contrasts with findings from empirical research, which show that this form of diplomacy is used extensively in other countries. For example, Twiplomacy (2016) in their research found that other small emerging nations are using DD to overcome economic difficulties and establish diplomatic relations with countries across the globe. In addition, whilst the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry only adopts DD for one-way communication such as posting notices, text, and images to counter negative publications



by state and non-state actors, diplomats and foreign ministries in other countries are using this form of diplomacy to foster two-way communication with the general public, understand public concerns and issues, and gauge public perception of strategies and policies introduced to address these issues and concerns (Lovez and Murray, 2013).

5. CONCLUSION

This study was undertaken with the aim of analyzing how Sri Lanka has used DD to mitigate the negative coverage of the security and human rights situation in Sri Lanka since 2009 and to analyze how DD could be used to enhance the effectiveness of public and defense diplomacy in Sri Lanka.

a. Findings from the study revealed that Sri Lanka has used DD in a very limited way to mitigate the negative coverage of the security and human rights situation in the country since 2009. DD used by the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry and Ministry of Defense to counter negative coverage of the security and human rights situation in the country since 2009 has consisted of the posting of notices, text, and images on traditional social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube to counter negative publications by state and non-state actors. Findings from the study indicate that these posts have failed to generate a large follower base or engagement with existing audiences. The use of DD in this manner has resulted in the failure of this form of diplomacy to mitigate this negative coverage. This is clear from the fact that the UNHRC passed a human rights resolution against Sri Lanka.

b. The second objective of this study was to analyze how DD could be adopted to enhance the effectiveness of public and defense diplomacy in Sri Lanka. Findings from the study indicate that the adoption of DD to enhance the effectiveness of public and defense diplomacy necessitates the development and implementation of an effective DD strategy. The development of an effective DD strategy requires the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry to take into consideration several factors. These factors are namely the target audience for DD, the social media platforms that will be used in the DD strategy, the content that will be posted on social media channels, an



effective DD policy, and the management of risk associated with DD, and the tools used to measure the effectiveness of the DD strategy.

c. The development of an effective DD strategy will enable the Sri Lankan foreign ministry to counter negative publicity of the country's security and human rights situation by state and non-state actors, such as the UK and US governments, as well as human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International; effectively and affordably disseminate the actual picture of the country's security and human rights situation through social media channels; and to identify and mitigate existential threats to the country through coordination with foreign ministries, security institutions, etc., of other nations across the globe.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Sri Lanka should implement a DD strategy to mitigate negative coverage of the security and human rights situation in the country and enhance its public and defense diplomacy efforts. This DD strategy should be a long-term strategy and should not be subject to change each time a new regime comes into power. In addition, DD will also enable the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry and Defence Ministry to continue maintaining a robust presence across the globe despite the closure of several embassies and missions due to the current economic crisis in the country.

a. The Foreign Ministry and Defence Ministry should address the Sri Lankan political leadership's lack of support for the adoption of DD by emphasizing the significant benefits, particularly the ability to mitigate the negative coverage of the security and human rights situation that could be achieved through the adoption of DD.

b. In the development of a DD strategy, Sri Lanka should look to copy aspects of the DD strategies of countries such as India, which have been extremely effective in using DD.

c. To support the country's DD strategy, a comprehensive and robust policy framework, including a DD policy and code of conduct, should be developed. Like



the strategy, the policy framework introduced should be long-term and should not be subject to change each time a new political regime takes over the reins of the country.

d. Given the country's current economic crisis, the country's DD strategy should be implemented in stages. The staggered implementation of DD will also allow for the identification and resolution of problems and issues that may arise when implementing this new form of diplomacy. The selection of which countries to prioritize in the staggered rollout of DD should be based on the negative coverage of the security and human rights situation in Sri Lanka generated in these countries. For example, DD should be initially rolled out in countries such as the UK, USA, France, Germany, Australia, Canada, and India and at international bodies such as the UNDP and UNHCR, as a high percentage of the negative coverage of the security and human rights situation in these countries is generated by these countries and bodies.

e. The effectiveness of a DD strategy to enhance public and defense diplomacy in Sri Lanka will depend significantly on selecting the right audience. In this regard, the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry should focus on state and non-state actors who have a significant interest in the security and human rights situation in Sri Lanka and the power to significantly influence this image. For example, the US ambassador in Sri Lanka, the Indian embassy, the UNHRC, and Tamil Diaspora groups in various countries

f. A change management plan should be implemented by the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry to overcome likely employee resistance to the implementation of this new form of diplomacy, address employee concerns and issues pertaining to their jobs and positions in the foreign ministry as a result of this initiative, and identify and provide the training and development required by employees to implement this form of diplomacy.



g. A DD department should be established within the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry. The main objective of this department should be to ensure consistency and accuracy of all social media posts across the Foreign Ministry network and postings of other Sri Lankan ministries that have implications for the country's image, reputation, security, and human rights situations. Further, other key objectives of this department must include continuous monitoring and addressing negative coverage of the security and human rights situation across all social media channels, direct engagement with all local and foreign stakeholders on social media, and promoting the image and reputation of the country on social media. In addition, this department should also be responsible for ensuring that all digital diplomatic activities are according to the established DD policy and code of conduct and for providing training and development pertaining to DD and social media across the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry Network. This department should also monitor potential risks that could arise from the social media postings of authorized individuals and departments within the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry.

h. Social media analytics should be used to evaluate the effectiveness and awareness of the DD strategy of the country, particularly its effectiveness and awareness in addressing negative coverage of the security and human rights situation in the country. Changes should be implemented if social media analytics indicate that the DD initiatives have failed to achieve the desired outcomes, particularly those pertaining to negative coverage of the security and human rights situation in the country. The DD department should be entrusted with the responsibility of analyzing the effectiveness of the DD strategy.

i. While the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry's DD strategy should include all social media platforms, it should prioritize platforms with large global followings, such as Facebook and Twitter. All content posted on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms should be accurate and should not be used to promote the propaganda objectives of political parties or politicians.



j. The Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry should establish groups on various social media platforms, e.g., WhatsApp groups, to facilitate and speed communication of security and defense-related matters with foreign ministries, defense establishments, and security establishments in countries in the SAARC region as well as key global countries such as the USA, China, and the UK.

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