

MEA's Digital Diplomacy Footprint

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has pioneered the use of digital technologies and social media platforms to engage with the public and with consistent efforts it has also garnered a place amongst the top government organizations to efficiently incorporate new technologies in its working. These technologies and platforms have proved to be of immense help in shaping up the narrative, communicating with the interlocutors, connecting with Indian diaspora and extending support in crisis situations.

2. MEA's journey on social media dates back to 2010 when the @IndianDiplomacy Twitter account was set up. In 2011, it was followed by the creation of @MEAIndia's Official Account. Both accounts serve different purposes. @MEAIndia is the official Twitter handle of the Spokesperson of the Ministry and currently the second most followed Foreign Ministry handle in the world. It disseminates information about bilateral/multilateral official engagements, visits and meetings of President, Vice President, Prime Minister, External Affairs Minister and Minister(s) of State and senior Foreign Service officials in real time, supported with photos, videos, graphics and creatives.

3. On the other hand, @IndianDiplomacy handle is focused on creating a positive cultural narrative for Brand India. It follows an eclectic mix of content comprising of press statements, speeches, joint statements, appointments of new ambassadors, soft stories on Indian arts and culture, achievements by Indians across the world, bilateral and international relations, strides by India across various platforms as well as plethora of human-interest stories that captures the interests of its visitors and followers.

4. The MEA India Facebook page, which was created in 2012, is today the most liked and followed Foreign Ministry page in the world. While it usually reflects the information posted on the Twitter accounts to maintain uniformity of content, the posts are usually longer and more detailed. Facebook also offers the Ministry the option to broadcast live its press conferences and media briefings through the use of its live feature tool, taking public outreach to new heights altogether.

5. More impressive is the fact that the MEA has successfully brought almost all of its Missions and Posts on Facebook and Twitter. 174 of India's Foreign Missions & Posts have twitter accounts, which are not only verified but also standardized. 172 Missions and Posts have Facebook pages, which are all verified and bear a standardized name. All Regional Passport Offices (RPOs) too are on Twitter and effectively utilizing it to address passport and visa related queries and grievances.

6. The External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj, is the most followed Foreign Minister in the world with more than 10 million followers, and often makes use of her Twitter handle to respond to calls of distress by Indian citizens from any part of the world instantaneously. Instant and personal replies to SoS tweets have become the EAM's unique quality and earned her widespread appreciation and following in the universe of social media.

7. Apart from this, as proof of the MEA's assiduous commitment to constantly expanding and consolidating its social media base, it also maintains two Youtube channels (MEA India and Indian Diplomacy), and accounts on various platforms like Instagram, Soundcloud and Flickr. MEA India also maintains a Google+ channel with 8,68,054 followers. The MEA also created a profile on LinkedIn in July 2017 with the aim of intensifying engagements in the social space, this time with a focus on an audience of professionals.

8. #AsktheSpokesperson – The Ministry launched a this unique initiative on Twitter wherein it invites questions on India's foreign policy from public on social media and the selected questions are responded to by the Official Spokesperson live on Twitter. The objective is to bring better awareness and understanding of foreign policy issues to general public.

9. The Ministry had launched the mobile application "MEA App" in line with the approach to expand its digital media base as well as providing efficient services to general public. The mobile application launched in June, 2013 was the first ever Mobile application by any Ministry in the Government of India.

10. The Ministry, through its own handles and those of its Missions and Posts, is using its presence on social media for a number of

purposes. They range from escalating its cultural diplomacy push, creating a shining narrative for Brand India and promoting Indian culture, and even using an indigenously created online portal called MADAD (meaning 'help' or 'aid' in Hindi) to effectively and address consular grievances in a hands-on manner.

11. It is evident that MEA India has enthusiastically embraced the social media sphere and persistently perseveres to enlarge its footprint in the new realm of diplomacy.