

Book Launch
Digital Strategy Framework
A Practical Guide for Business Incumbents
By Amit Prabhu

Remarks by Ambassador
Tanmaya Lal

Mr. Prabhu,
Friends,

I would like to thank Mr. Prabhu for inviting me to this book launch.

Good to join all of you this evening. Experts in digital technologies and strategies.

The premise of the Book is quite interesting. So, I look forward to learning from the discussions today.

Our lives and economies are being transformed by Digital age.

New products and services are being developed every day. Also bringing much greater efficiency and transparency to governance.

India is being transformed by the Digital Public Infrastructure or the iStack created by the Government as an open-source public good, free to use by private developers.

DPI is maximising financial inclusion through direct benefit transfers, facilitating e-commerce and expanding access to loans. Farmers, Students and patients all benefit from digital services.

As I browsed through the Introduction of the Book, my thoughts also drifted towards my own area of work – diplomacy.

If I just look at the evolution of digital tools of relevance to our work.

My first foreign posting was in early 1990s in Bonn, Germany, when India launched major economic reforms. I remember working on setting up an Electronic Bulletin Board. To disseminate Information on business opportunities and new regulations. It aimed at facilitating Transparency and Ease of doing business.

But within less than two years, technology had moved on and the EBB platform was suddenly obsolete as internet came on to the scene.

We immediately started designing a website. Since then, we have worked on creating useful content and design for websites for various Missions.

Also in 1990s I served as **Regional Passport Officer** in Delhi when we started to digitise records and deploy digital & communication tools to streamline public interface.

As **social media** came online, we started engaging very actively on these platforms.

India's **Ministry of External Affairs** went on Twitter nearly 15 years ago in 2010.

Ten years ago in 2014 Sweden hosted the first international gathering of diplomats and experts under the **Stockholm Initiative for Digital Diplomacy**.

And in 2017 **Denmark** became the first to appoint a Tech Ambassador who was stationed in the Silicon Valley.

In our work, I can think of **three main ways** in which digital technologies have impacted diplomacy significantly.

One is, of course, using digital platforms for Communication and Outreach, which are very important aspects of diplomacy. The **second** is utilising these tools to improve internal work processes. The **third** relates to understanding and negotiating Digital Governance and policy issues.

A major aim of communication and outreach relates to Public diplomacy. To disseminate various kinds of information to target audiences both in India and outside. Also to streamline consular information and services. Developing smartphone apps and web portals that increase efficiency, transparency and trust.

In this respect, Digital tools have had a major impact since they allow **content** creation by an institution or an individual and break the monopoly of traditional mainstream media channels. The social media communications are more **active** in nature vis-a-vis websites and the outreach is **multiplied** manifold. This way communication is often round-the-clock.

It has proven especially useful in **crisis** situations like evacuation of nationals from conflict zones or other situations.

In 2020 during strict Covid lockdowns in **Mauritius** I used video messages on social media to reach out to Indian students and diaspora to keep them informed of Government's efforts to help them and facilitate evacuation.

In **New York** where we work with more than 190 other delegations at the United Nations, our digital outreach content has to be carefully crafted to achieve desired balance.

Another aspect which has changed communication is the **informal, direct and instantaneous** nature of messages exchanged between leaders and dignitaries.

Foreign Minister Tobias **Billström** during his recent visit to Delhi and Bengaluru posted extensively on social media. These posts related to his travel on a Metro, shopping for books and eating fast food. These became instant hits and popular with viewers.

The second aspect is improving internal work processes - through digitisation of records, moving towards more paper-less systems, better coordination and real-time monitoring and grievance redressal for applicants through portals etc.

Covid pandemic led to an explosion in **virtual and hybrid** meetings, also in diplomacy. Including at **Summit** level. In 2021 the India EU Summit was held in a virtual format. These have become much more common now, often saving time and travel.

Yet another aspect is understanding Digital Governance issues. To be better prepared for discussions and negotiations where cross border implications are there. For instance, a Global Digital Compact is being debated at the United Nations, where Sweden is one of the two co-facilitators; or when Data and Digital domains are part of FTA or Investment or Technology negotiations.

Like in any business, all these require a clear **understanding of the nature and capabilities** of the digital tools. And their implications. And a strategy to deploy these. This requires **leadership**, building digital **skills** and allocation of adequate **resources**.

Our Ministry has had good success in adopting digital tools. And this has been driven both from top **leadership** who have led by example and careful implementation of strategy.

There are, of course, associated **pitfalls** in the growing use of digital tools. Misinformation, cyber attacks or AI generated content can create serious challenges.

Coming back to India Sweden context, Digital transformation is a leading area of our collaboration.

Digital technologies are transforming all sectors from mining to manufacturing to space & geospatial. They are helping develop cleaner technologies and sustainable solutions at scale.

Indian companies are active in not only digital services field but in speciality steel, biorefinery, forging to power transmission. All of these sectors are being transformed because of digital disruption and AI.

An area where we are focusing is collaboration opportunities in Space & Geospatial sectors where Data and insights enabled by digital tools are helping create new solutions and products that are accessible and affordable.

Both India and Sweden have strengths in digital technologies. There are complementarities in several areas where innovation and clean technologies can be scaled up.

Most of the companies concerned also have global presence.

In this context, it is interesting to see this book authored by Mr. Prabhu. Look forward to hearing from him.

Thank you.
