

**Understanding the Scope of Digital Diplomacy in the European Union's Normative
Engagement with Human Rights Context in Third Countries**

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Author's Declaration Form

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Abstract

For decades, many scholars interested in EU foreign policy have focused on the EU's normative power, which is important to conceptualize EU's political identity in the international relations. As significant tools of communication, the emergence of internet and social media has added changes to the traditional way of foreign policy and diplomacy. The purpose of this research is to identify to what extent the EU is exploring digital tools (e.g. internet and social media) to diffuse its norms and values in third countries. More specifically, this research will critically assess the EU's norms diffusion through the digital tools in the human rights context. As a case study, its digital engagement with Bangladesh would be analysed. Despite the fact that international actors such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) increasingly using digital tools – commonly known as digital diplomacy – very few scholars have studied this phenomenon in any great detail. Much recent literature over the EU's normative engagement in human rights in third countries argues that there is a gap between its human rights norms and values and their actual implementation. In this research, I aim to improve on this state of affairs by investigating the EU's digital engagement to promote its normative power. To this end, I engage in a qualitative content analysis of EU's usage of social media in this policy field and reveal the nature of the EU's current digital engagement with third countries human rights. Despite the presence of EU's human rights clauses in the trade and development agreements, the third countries' governments do not always observe these conditions. In these circumstances and based on the empirical data, this research proposes how digital diplomacy can potentially promote the EU's human rights norms and values among the wider public. Since the EU has already recognized the importance of digital diplomacy in its external relations and communication with third countries, this research will examine why it is not essentially being utilized in human rights. Given the importance of normative power in human rights, the recommendations stem from the research findings that digital diplomacy can necessarily promote the EU's normative image in human rights context, which is challenged in many ways and in many parts of the world.

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List of Acronyms

CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EU	European Union
EC	European Commission
EEAS	European External Action Service
EIDHR	The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
GSP	Generalized System of Preferences
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICT	Internet and Communication Technology
IUC	Internet Users by Country
NPE	Normative Power Europe
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

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1. Introduction

In the contemporary global politics, international actors seem to envisage innovation in their bilateral and multilateral relations and public diplomacy. The “new public diplomacy” (Melissen, 2005) is in place through adopting the changes in contemporary world. The transformation happening in the public diplomacy through the uses of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) (i.e. internet, email, video conference) and social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, blogs, official websites, YouTube), is known as “digital diplomacy” (Bjola and Holmes, 2015a) which is under the depiction of “new public diplomacy”. In recent years, international actors considerably manage their day-to-day diplomacy under the remit of digital diplomacy in order to communicate people beyond their region. As a supranational actor with norms-driven external policy, the European Union (EU) is no exception in exploring the digital means in its diplomatic ventures that allow it to engage itself with a wider audience beyond its territory. At the same time, promoting and protecting human rights through the human rights clauses constitute a substantial element of its external foreign policy goals in third countries. In order to link human rights with digital diplomacy, effective communication has been discussed for decades in the human rights debate (Padovani and Pavan, 2009a, p.360). However, this is to argue that to this date, the digital diplomacy remains as a rhetoric in the human rights context with minimum implementation by the EU, which occasionally promotes its traditional diplomatic aims.

The majority of literature agree that the EU’s way of devising its external relations portrays some reasonably distinctive features (Vooren, 2013, Smith, 2011 and Laidi 2008). One of these features is to promote human rights norms in the bilateral foreign policy and diplomatic agreement, more precisely, as the conditionality of trade and development agreements. Thus, norms and value based identity of the EU and its expression of ‘soft power’ in the global politics are famously phrased as ‘Normative Power Europe’ (NPE) (Manners, 2002a). Diplomacy and foreign policy are strongly linked with the ‘soft power’ whereas this soft power has advanced the EU’s legitimacy to diffuse norms and values based on its legal grounding (Nye, 2004a, pp.11-17). For instance, EU Guidelines on the Death Penalty, European Instruments for Human Rights and Democracy (EIDHR) and more specifically the Lisbon Treaty provide very basic legal grounds for wielding soft power in its external relations (EEAS, 2017).

Despite the EU’s value-led normative image, available literature that portray critical insight on the NPE in human rights, argue that there is an incompatibility in its norms diffusion in

the human rights context which is often led by strategic interest (Youngs, 2004, pp. 221-222). Because of being a supranational actor, it is not always possible to prioritize norms and values over the material interest on the part of the EU. Pursuing foreign policy and diplomacy is a rational act and this rationality cannot be separated from any politically significant episode of normative context (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998a, p.888). Furthermore, when the norms are interpreted in the human rights context, manifold challenges emerge both from the recipients' state government and from the norms entrepreneur (the EU in this case). For instance, the states' orthodox sense of "state sovereignty and non-intervention principles" (Forgensen, 2007a, p.55) that always contradicts with the international laws and treaties of human rights, make it challenging for the EU to achieve its human rights objectives in third countries.

Although the human rights clauses constitute a crucial element of the EU's foreign policy goals, based on its political reality and trade interest of the member states, the EU cannot equally diffuse and implement the human rights norms in all geographic areas (Aaronson, 2012, pp.11-15). To explain its wide-ranging normative roles in the international arena, Tocci (2008a) argues that "it pursues the aims of realpolitik imperialist and status quo oriented roles in different times and in different geographic areas" (p.2). Therefore, this inconsistency between the NPE and its implication is undermining the EU's normative image in human rights that makes it incapable of defending rights even in its worst violation.

Based on these facts, I recommend that, in the era of globalization and the internet-connected world, exploring digital diplomacy would potentially contribute to improve the EU's normative power in the human rights context- both internally and externally. Through developing a two-way interactive communication between the diplomats and the stakeholders, digital diplomacy is able to reduce the gap between the NPE rhetoric and its implications in the human rights context (Waters, 2009). While most of the international actors are yet to recognize the connotation of digital diplomacy in their public diplomacy, the EU has recognized its importance in its legal documents to device its External Action Service (EEAS) (EEAS, 2015). What it needs to do is embracing an inclusive communication through the ICTs and social media in order to sustain its normative roles in global politics. Technologies and social media offer a strong avenue for human rights campaign through coordination and communication, which gives access to evidence/ information on human rights abuses (Joyce, 2013, p.235). Engaging itself with the digital means and social media,

the EU needs to develop a two-way communication with a wider public that will improve its eroding normative role in human rights.

Writing from a constructivist insight, this is important to understand that there is a combination of norms and interest in the EU's normative power where it pursues both ideas/norms and material interest in its external relations with third countries¹ (Ruggie, 1998). Through developing the link between this normative image and the digital diplomacy, this research looks into the facts whether these tools are able to better diffuse and implement the human rights norms pursued by the EU in third countries. The conventional way of the EU's traditional diplomacy with third countries is merely unable to defend human rights whereas this research examines how the digital diplomacy can better serve this purpose through engaging more audiences from local to global.

In COM 2011 (886), under the section 'Rethinking of EU communications', it is stated that "engagement with different groups in society through digital diplomacy is a key way to promote EU values, and the EU's work around the world" (COM, 2011). Such documents indicate that the EU has the legitimate ground to integrate digital diplomacy into the practice of foreign policy and public diplomacy. Exploring the ICTs and social media for diplomatic engagement can change the old power structure of diplomacy and engage more audiences from the grassroots in a bottom-up approach. Furthermore, penetrating and shaping norms and values is possible by constructing common interest into the wider public that may defend human rights in the long run if applied properly.

In fact, since the 1970s, "norms and values began distinctly to permeate European foreign policy documents and declarations" (Hill & Smith, 2000). The Treaty of Lisbon has added extra values to EU's already existing normative image through prioritizing the promotion of human rights and democracy in its external relations. Article 21 of the Treaty of Lisbon states that,

"the Union's action on the international scene shall be guided by the principlesand which it seeks to advance in the wider world: democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity.." (2009).

¹ The countries outside the EU are considered as third countries with whom the EU maintains foreign policy and diplomacy.

Developing the EU's relation with the NPE and human rights, my argument will proceed under the assumption that the EU is yet to establish a tangible normative image through exploring the digital diplomacy where the grassroots audiences have minimum information about its norms and principles. Information gathering and sharing are considered as one of the core functions of diplomacy whereas it carries more importance in the realm of human rights because of its contested nature (Murray, 2015, pp. 129-130).

The EU's human rights rhetoric is already recognized in the rights-based context, what is unproven is how it can effectively diffuse and implement this rhetoric in its diplomatic engagement. Since the digital diplomacy is highly recognized in EU's official documents, it is important to study that how much it is explored in the EU's engagement with the third countries.

To investigate these areas, this research will first investigate the EU's existing diplomatic normative engagement through digital means, especially in the human rights context. As stated above, there is a gap in the existing literature that investigated the importance of digital diplomacy in human rights. At the same time, how the internet and social media can advance its promotion of human rights is also unexplored. To fill this gap, this research will focus on the case study of Bangladesh and EU's normative roles in its human rights context in along with exploring the scopes of digital diplomacy. Thus, this research puts an effort to conceptualize the scopes of digital diplomacy to promote the EU's normative roles in the human rights sphere.

The research is based on two following questions-

- 1. Why the EU is not using digital diplomacy more to pursue its normative power in the human rights context?**
- 2. How does the digital diplomacy supplement the EU's traditional diplomacy and normative power in addressing human rights?**

This research is divided into five chapters. In the following section- Chapter two includes the theoretical framework and literature review where it discusses the existing research and basic concepts on the NPE, human rights and digital diplomacy with an effort to link it with this research. Chapter three is on research methods and methodologies. Chapter four is on the empirical data and analysis, and finally Chapter five includes a number of recommendations and concluding remarks.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Two strands of literature are important to conceptualize the author's position in this research - both the NPE and the critique of the NPE approach. The first part in this section discusses the NPE which is connected with soft power and digital diplomacy. The niche of human rights is discussed afterward to conceptualise the roles of the NPE and digital diplomacy based on the existing literature. The overall discussions are carried out through the theoretical framework of constructivism, which is important to conceptualize the strengths and weaknesses of the NPE articulated by Ian Manners (2002b).

2.1 Understanding the NPE, Soft Power and Digital Diplomacy

From a constructivist perspective, Diez (2005a) argues that in order to assert its power on the international scene, the political discourse on normative power is an essential dimension of the EU's strategy. Adopting the constructivist approach, by norms, it is understood here as a "standard of appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity" (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998b, p.891). Norms have the potentiality to create followers if they are interpreted by the right actors and in the right context. Considering the EU as a normative power, it has the ability and legitimacy to create followers in the human rights context by interpreting its norms and values in third countries (Vadura, 2015, p.351). In this research, the EU's normative power is understood through Ian Manners NPE approach, which is the 'power over opinion, and ideological power that can shape and penetrate the will of the norms recipients' (Manners, 2002c, pp. 238-240). However, at the same time, the implication of this normative power is not limited to the NPE since these norms and values are paradoxical in the contested areas of human rights because of its different meanings within different actors (Forgensen, 2007b, p.42).

To continue the discussion and investigate the empirical evidence, the constructivist approach given by Adler (1997) offers an important insight where "constructivism occupies the middle ground between the rationalist approaches and interpretive approaches and creates new areas of theoretical and empirical investigations" (p.319). One could argue that shedding lights on the influence of ideational factors only through the NPE approach can obscure the dynamics of norms and limits the understanding of actions led by the international actors such as the EU. This approach overlooks the influence of material interest, which is a rational and mandatory element of global politics. In this regard, Diez argues that regarding the EU, interests, and norms cannot easily be separated (2005b).

Constructivism is supportive to understand the normative approach of the EU, which is a combination of values, ideas, interests and security concerns in its foreign policy and diplomacy in third countries. Therefore, for being such a hybrid type of international actor, when the EU engages itself with the human rights sphere in third countries, it is challenging to conduct a coherent foreign policy and maintain a balance between its paper-based policies and their implementation. In fact, this ambiguity plays a motivational role for this research to examine the EU's normative engagement through digital diplomacy in promoting human rights values.

The NPE approach given by Manners is not useful for a proper understanding of existing incompatibilities in the EU's foreign policy and diplomacy. More specifically, it does not tell us what conditions are considered to diffuse human rights norms, why their implementations vary and what qualitative changes are brought by these norms in certain human rights contexts. One of the important features considered here is the economic or political significance of the third countries in question that resulted in the inconsistent policies adopted by the EU to avert human rights violations (Smith, 2011a, p.73). Based on different socio-economic circumstances, global political image, and trade interest, the EU's norms vary from country to country. For instance, Crawford (2008) argues that, during the period of 2005-2007, the EU has produced negative Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) statements in the states of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan over the human rights and democracy, whereas, during the same period, Kazakhstan, an economically wealthier state did not receive such statement regardless of its challenged human rights condition (p.177).

As a result, the EU's normative image becomes equivocal and is incapable of dealing with the controversies over the empirical implications of its globally promoted human rights values and principles.

These inconsistencies and policy gaps beg questions about the practicality of norms and ideas. In his critique of the NPE approach, Adrian Hyde-Price (2006) argued that normative agenda remains as a subsidiary concern in the external relations of the EU and its member states compared to their interest in security (pp. 222-223). Hereby, the EU's normative goals are similar to what Wolfers defines as "milieu goals" that "indirectly relates a particular actor's specific interest in international relations" (Tocci, 2008b, p.7).

In the 21st century, attaining these milieu goals are possible through persuasion rather than coercion, which is similar to Joseph Nye's perception of soft power that 'co-opts rather than

coerces people' (Smith, 2011b, p.21). Whereas as a norms based actor, the EU pursues soft power in the contemporary global politics, this is important to examine the ways of this persuasion. Digital diplomacy, which is believed as an important tool of norms persuasion as the "engagement with different groups in society through digital diplomacy is a key element to promote EU values and EU's work around the world" (COM 2011 (866) EUR-Lex, 2011), has the potentiality to fill the gaps in EU's existing normative image-led diplomacy. While coercion, competition and the use of military power have lost their appeals as the elements of public diplomacy in the post-Cold War era, norms based soft power has taken that place with the application of digital means.

According to Bjola (2015), digital diplomacy is a strategy of managing change through digital tools and virtual collaborations (p.3). Digital tools explicitly show how the revolution of the ICTs has changed the landscapes of international relations, foreign policy, and diplomacy. For instance, governments and diplomats have been flooding social media, Facebook pages, Twitter profiles and blogs to increase their reach (Sandre, 2015a, p. xxv).

As stated above, there are inconsistencies in the EU's normative engagement with human rights, this research aims to show how the EU is normatively managing the changes in human rights context through the digital tools. In the discussion of the normative power, the use of digital means is important because the digital diplomacy has implications in four policy areas namely ideas, information, networks, and service delivery (Westcott, 2008, p.16). It is noteworthy that without the amenities of the ICT, exploring any of these four areas is not possible nowadays, whereas normative power is believed to be the power of ideas (Manners, 2009, p.570).

The adoption of digital diplomacy has been associated with changing practices of how diplomats engage in information management, public diplomacy, strategy planning, international negotiation or even crisis management (Bjola and Holmes, 2015b). Public statements or phone calls are not new, but as long as it is on the internet and social media, it is able to reach more diverse audiences than before. While these posts are open, they attract daily citizens to be informed about diplomatic news that may influence their day-to-day lives. It allows them to express their own opinion on the post, which, at the same time, may have important insinuation on the diplomat's engagement with the particular society and leveraging their soft power approach in the long run.

There are ongoing discussions in the relevant, established literature that argue that public diplomacy, digital diplomacy, and soft power are intrinsically connected (Sotiriu, 2015, pp. 33-35). Public diplomacy is defined as “government’s process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation’s ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture as well as its national goals and current policies” (Tuch, 1990, p.3).

Thus, digital diplomacy is not something detached from the public diplomacy and the EU has already recognized its importance in its diplomatic engagement. In 2015, the High Representative of the Union Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini further stated that:

“In the short lifetime of the European External Action Service, social media – or perhaps I should say Digital Diplomacy – have come to play an absolutely crucial part in our communication strategy and hence our day-to-day engagement online” (EEAS, 2015).

It is notable that diplomats do not consider digital means only as a way of communication; instead, they are focused on the political implications of the digital diplomacy in order to improve their policy-making capacity (Melissen, 2017, p.2). At the same time, diplomats need to elevate social media to where it is recognised to play the roles of two-way communication between them and a wider public. Social media is particularly important to improve EU normative roles in third countries where a “two-way flow of information” allow both the EU and the citizens to be engaged in “an ethical communication environment in which people are willing to share information” (Mannor, 2017, p.5).

This is already evident that the foreign ministers in many parts of the world are using digital tools in their day-to-day public diplomacy. Foreign ministers from Israel, Norway, Sweden and the UK are taking this form of digital diplomacy further in their strategic comportment of diplomacy. For instance, the 268 embassies of the UK have their Consulates in 168 countries, where they have approximately 7 million followers from 700 official social media profiles on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Elliott, 2017). Moreover, in terms of pursuing digital diplomacy by the foreign ministers, the UK was ranked top according to the Digital Diplomacy Review (2016).

In 2014, the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs initiated two days long “Stockholm Initiative for Digital Diplomacy” to thrive the culture of digital diplomacy which assembled digital diplomats from around the world (Government Offices of Sweden, 2015). In the Arab world, Israel is taking the digital diplomacy far beyond the expectation. It organized the

Digital Diplomacy Conference in 2016 where the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) recognized the importance of digital diplomacy to create MFA-citizens ties and to implement it during the consular crisis and so on (Israeli MFA, 2016). These examples show that digital diplomacy is neither an alternative nor a completely unique idea in public diplomacy, rather it is but one component of the broader area of public diplomacy. Nowadays, they complement each other and the latter one is incomplete without embracing the first one.

Thus, in the modern age, we see the penetration of ICT and social media in almost every aspect of life including the foreign policy and diplomacy. This digital revolution is transforming and shrinking the world (Nye, 2004b, p.30). Since this rapid development of technology is spreading information more widely than ever before in history, its incorporation is particularly important in welding normative power in human rights due to the contested nature of this context.

2.2 Conceptualizing the NPE and digital diplomacy in the Human Rights Context

The internet and social media can assemble the grievances and compliments of all stakeholders regarding the rights-based issues in a more transparent way than the traditional way of diplomacy. Scholars such as Risse and Sikkink (1999) argue that the “diffusion of international norms in human rights crucially depends on the establishment and the sustainability of networks among domestic and transnational actors” (P.5). It indicates that it is important to establish a bottom-up communication network that is inclusive of diplomats, citizens and CSOs in order to promote human rights norms and values.

Promoting human rights through social media, mobile communication, and digital networks is not a new proposition and is already recognized by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in 2011 when a group of human rights activists was doing so in Uganda (OHCHR, 2011a). Countries with disturbed and challenged human rights records over the world also have a monopoly over the internet and media while certain human rights activists try to defend rights through the internet and social media. Azerbaijan, Myanmar, Tunisia, Republic of Korea, Egypt, and Indonesia are some of them (OHCHR, 2011b).

Although the EU “stresses the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights” (Smith, 2011c, p.125), third countries’ governments do not necessarily agree with this always. As a result, the EU needs to integrate inclusive and innovative means to strengthen its norms diffusion capacity that may overcome the state’s authoritative intervention and can directly reach out the citizens and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

One of the EU's core elements to promote and defend human rights through connecting the CSOs and citizens is the EIDHR. Established in 2014, the EIDHR is a comparatively new instrument that is consolidating democracy and supporting human rights in third countries by actively engaging the CSOs (EIDHR, 2017). The key strength of the EIDHR is, as a supranational actor, the EU does not need to look for the host state's consent for supporting human rights while directly cooperating with local partners such as CSOs (EIDHR, 2017). Under the EIDHR mechanism, the EU preserves the legitimacy to defend human rights defenders in a third country through providing them material and financial support (EC-Democracy and Human Rights, 2017a).

This is a unique example of EU's normative power with its implementation mechanism in third countries, although there is a lack of available data on this projects and funding individual human rights defenders. As of writing this paper, only three examples are available on defending the human rights activists around the world. They are, defending lawyer in Congo (2010), protecting freedom of the press in Azerbaijan (2010), and assisting endangered activist in Peru (2011) (EC- Democracy and Human Rights, 2017b).

The EIDHR is a landmark mechanism that allows the EU to promote and to diffuse its norms and values through the internet and social media without considering the state. The internet has the potentiality to defend human rights through “creating change, providing new means of campaigning and challenging abuses of human rights” (Brophy and Halpin, 1999, p.350). However, the unfolding phenomenon of the digital diplomacy in the human rights context is still unexplored around the world, therefore, the potential scopes for its implementation are yet to be revealed in this particular field.

Not only for human rights, the internet and social media are working as a hub of information for the human rights NGOs at the local level since there are certain challenges to get authentic information from the state and state-led security forces. More openness would better serve national security interests as well as the interests of the citizens by detailing the rise of information sharing culture (Bjola and Holmes, 2015c, p.6). Having said that, this is to argue that in the human rights sphere, its grave violations by the states is never preventable if the norms and values remain as a paperwork. For instance, authoritarian state as Myanmar is indiscriminately persecuting its Rohingya Muslim minority regardless of its foreign policy agreement with the EU that enshrines the human rights norms and principles (Sassen, 2017).

This culture of paperwork excludes the citizens from the diplomacy, and at the same time, gives the sole authority of protecting human rights exclusively to the states.

To shed light on the existing examples besides the EU, as a Scandinavian country, Norway already recognized digital diplomacy as one of the thematic priorities of its human rights policies (Norwegian MFA, 2015, p.17). Its foreign ministry stated that the digital means are used as tools to raise awareness on human rights issues from individuals to civil society. These tools are important for human rights defenders who go through certain discriminations, such as deprivation of freedom of expression, intimidation by state and imprisoned or even executed without any legal ground. These tools are important so the human rights defenders can reach the third parties who might support them to defend their rights.

The above-mentioned examples and the literature on the NPE, digital diplomacy and human rights are important to understand the author's analysis in the empirical section in this research. Based on the existing literature, I put emphasize on the scopes of digital diplomacy in EU engagement with the human rights context in third countries. In along with the constructivist insight, the existing literature provide the validation to investigate the scopes of ICTs and social media in diffusing human rights norms on behalf of the EU. Moreover, while inconsistency is already observable in the EU's persuasion of human rights norms in third countries (Sjursen, 2006), this is important to examine whether there is inconsistency in its digital engagement as well, particularly in the context of human rights.

3. Research Methods and Methodologies

3.1 Ontological and Epistemological Considerations for the Research

This research is based on the ontological and epistemological constructivist position in which the world is seen as socially constructed (Marsh and Furlong, 2010a, p. 184). This stance will affect the overall methodology and discussions in along with the areas of knowledge that have been investigated. From the ontological standpoint, this research follows the “constructivism's relativism” which assumes multiple, apprehendable and sometimes conflicting social realities that are the products of human intellects, but may change as a result of the improved information of sophistication of the constructors (Lincoln and Guba, 1994, p.110).

Given the importance of the EU's normative image in world politics, linking it with human rights develops a construction engaging different actors and networks in certain socio-

political realities in the EU and in the third countries. This construction is subject to change based on the human rights condition, EU's diplomacy and norms and values. As a combination of a complex set of actors "constructivism's relativism" is relevant to explain this context.

3.2 Research Method

This is a qualitative research where the human rights and EU's normative engagement is understood by examining the actors/participants in it, which is an "interpretive" method from the epistemological position (Bryman, 2016, p.375). Throughout this research, the interpretative method is applied to 'interpret and to understand the phenomena that include different actors such as the EU, third states and other stakeholders (e.g. citizens, CSOs and human rights organizations), and cannot be understood independently' (Marsh and Furlong, 2010b, p.199). I believe that there are unobservable relationships between the actors and their actions in the contemporary international politics that influence the human rights context and cannot be anticipated beforehand without an in-depth study of the context. Therefore, pursuing interpretive method is compatible with this study, where no predefined hypothesis is leading the research rather interpreting the actual situation (Kaplan and Maxwell, 1994).

At the same time, qualitative analysis of social media content (Facebook pages, Twitter feeds and websites/ blogs belong to the EU in several non-EU countries) is conducted in order to understand the EU's normative engagement with the human rights context and the use of digital diplomacy in it. Although it has Twitter and Facebook accounts in a number of third states, this is important to investigate why the EU is not exploring the digital diplomacy on a large-scale. After exploring its existing digital engagement with a number of third countries, this research will look into the underlying factors that may influence the EU's degree of digital engagement in different regions. To do so, I analysed the contents of the EU's Twitter and Facebook posts that are randomly selected during the period of March 1- April 30, 2017 (9 weeks). In order to answer the first question, this content analysis is important as it gives an insight on its existing norms diffusion through the internet and social media as well as the extent of digital engagement on behalf of the audiences. Contemporary content analysis is important to understand 'how media and technology shape our attention to communication, what the data mean to people and what information they convey' (Krippendorff, 2013, p.2).

This research is not followed by a rigid research design rather it "depends on the principles that pursue new paths of discovery as they emerge" (Vromen, 2010, p.257). The human rights

context is not stable worldwide and largely influenced by the contemporary global politics. At the same time, the domain of human rights per se is a contested phenomenon, which is unlikely to analyse with predetermined ideas without going through the actual context. To answer the research questions, secondary sources are examined such as existing EU policies, EU action plans, Commission's communications, treaties and conventions, newspaper article and LexisNexis database, as well as country-specific human rights reports.

Key features of different EU Resolutions have also been investigated in order to particularly understand its normative engagement through diplomacy and foreign policy. Regarding the EU, documents are retrieved from the website of the Council of the European Union. From focusing on a broader picture of the EU's digital diplomacy in third countries, this research narrows down the study area into a particular case study. The case study helps to answer the second question that asks how embracing the digital diplomacy can advance the EU's normative engagement in the human rights context.

3.3 Case Selection

To attain a detailed understanding of the EU's normative engagement in the human rights context, I had to select a study area that is known to me and helps me to structure the research. "Case studies comprise more detail, richness, completeness, and variance that is depth for the unit of study than does cross-unit analysis" (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p.301). Indeed, there is no unique mean of diplomacy by the EU and more specifically digital diplomacy depends on several circumstances (i.e. internet penetration, actors' willingness, availability of digital means etc.), this research interprets the real situation based on the case study in order to conceptualize EU's engagement as a normative power in human rights context. After going through the wider aspect of EU's digital engagement in third countries, this case study is supportive to investigate the scopes of EU's digital diplomacy in the human rights context. The abovementioned methodology is supportive of exploring the real-life situation that opposes producing an objective statement.

As a case study, Bangladesh has an 'intrinsic interest' for me where the human rights are one of the most challenging areas at this moment, therefore, needs to be addressed in academic research (Stake, 200, p.444). At the same time, the human rights context is not stable and challenged by the authoritative political decisions and political violence on several occasions. The current situation of civil and political rights (e.g. freedom of speech, freedom of religion) are in jeopardy where the state is involved in systemic violations of these rights (Human

Rights Watch, 2017). In this circumstance, the EU and its digital normative engagement are yet to be examined and judged while the EU per se is highly concerned about the human rights violation since 2014 (EU Annual Report, 2014, p.229).

Studying digital diplomacy in Bangladesh would facilitate the future possibilities of embracing digital means in interpreting normative power in a third country by the EU. For the feasibility of the study, this research is based on the literature from 2000-2017. The rationality for this timeframe is to gain a general picture of EU's normative engagement with the human rights context in Bangladesh. The EU finally reaffirmed its bilateral relation through the Cooperation Agreement in 2001 followed by number of resolutions, statements and directives (EEAS, 2001). The significance of this timeframe lies in the 2014 general election that is considered as the beginning of the era to challenge the entire human rights situation due to a widespread political violence (Amnesty International 2015). The massive scale of human rights violation revolves around this election has questioned the democracy and human rights situation in Bangladesh that has drawn the attention of different national and international actors (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

3.4 Interview

Besides secondary sources and case study analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the EU delegates currently working in Bangladesh². As I am interested in unfolding the potentialities of digital diplomacy on EU's normative engagement, semi-structured in-depth interviews were essential to discover the insights of the EEAS officials in Bangladesh. In this regard, the interviewees were encouraged to discuss and present their ideas and perception on innovation in EU's diplomacy. Not surprisingly, some interesting insights came out of this process that was extraordinarily helpful to continue this study.

The first section of the following chapter would address the first research question through empirically analysing the data considers the puzzle that despite its recognition of digital diplomacy, why the EU is not actively engaged through digital means to promote human rights norms and values in third countries. After analysing the broader picture, the second part will narrow down the analysis through the case study of Bangladesh focusing on how the EU supplements its public diplomacy in addressing human rights to the means of digital diplomacy. To this date, it appears that no scholarly work has examined the implication of

² Questionnaire was sent via email to the EEAS Human Rights officials. Three officials gave their feedback together on a same answer script. Details are in Annex 2

digital diplomacy in the human rights context pursued by the EU. Therefore, the case study will fill this gap and address the second research question.

4. The EU's Digital Normative Engagement in Third Countries Human Rights

Due to its complex institutional structure, the EU lacks coherence and consistency in its articulation of foreign policy and diplomacy (Gebhard, 2011, pp. 102-103). In this section, the EU's Twitter accounts and Facebook pages in different third countries are investigated to understand its digital diplomacy in external relations, whether it maintains consistency or not. Most recently the EU's Twitter account in Israel is drawing academic attention. For instance, through the Twitter page analysis, Ilan Manor (2017a) argues that, the EU is mostly focused on the scientific and cultural issues in Israel through sidestepping the contentious issues such as Israeli settlements, boycotting of settlements and the ongoing occupation of the territories. He concluded that the EU barely replies to the comments on this page, whereas, 'Facebook Q&A with the EU Ambassador to Israel' gained most public attention in Israel that indicates people are eager to digitally engage with the international actors (Manor, 2017b).

4.1 Engagement through Twitter and Facebook Accounts in Third Countries

Through the content analysis of the EU's Twitter and Facebook accounts, this research examines the EU's existing practices of digital diplomacy in third countries. For this purpose, data was compiled from the EU's Twitter and Facebook pages in 70 randomly selected countries³, which are considered as third countries for EU external foreign policy (EC, 2013). This research attempts to find out some correlation between the EU's digital diplomacy and the internet penetration of 70 countries to investigate whether the EU considers the latter to pursue its digital engagement. For instance, countries like Afghanistan and Malawi, the percentage of internet penetration is 6.8% and 6.5% respectively which is comparatively low, however, the EU has both Twitter and Facebook in these two countries with significant number of followers (see Annex 1 for details). On the other hand, in New Zealand and Venezuela, the internet penetration is 89.40% and 57.90% respectively, whereas the EU does not have either Twitter or Facebook (Annex 1).

An independent t-test was performed in order to understand if there is any correlation between the EU's digital diplomacy and the internet penetration in the third countries. The requirement for this t-test emerged from two facts, the first one is the feedback on the initial research where the participants raised a question if low internet penetration is a challenge to

³ See Annex 1

the EU's digital diplomacy. The second fact was during the interview conducted by the author with the EEAS human rights officials in Bangladesh, the interviewees said, "in the least developed countries there is a limitation to the use and efficiency of digital means" (Interview 1, see Annex 2).

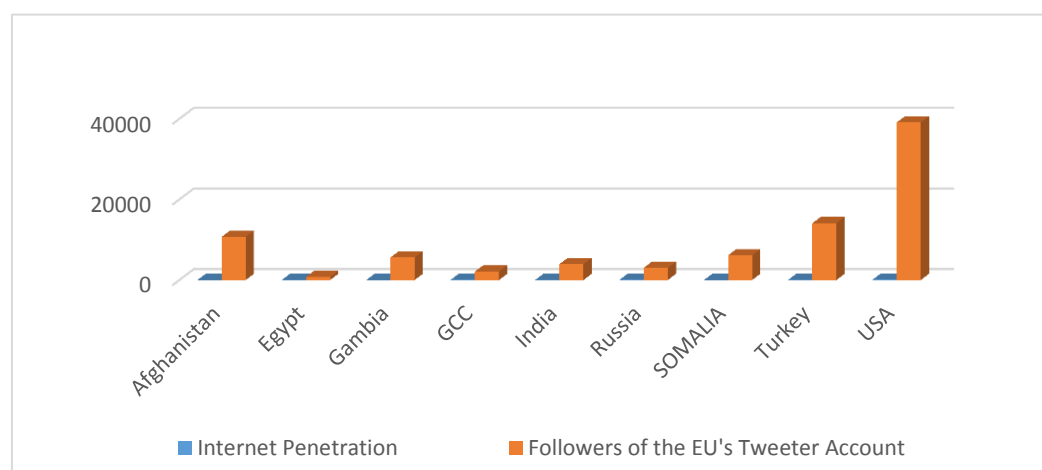
Table-1: Independent T-test

		F	Sig	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Internet penetration (% of total population)	Equal Variances Assumed	.603	.440	1.132	67	.262	.0702611
	Equal Variances not Assumed			1.134	66.838	.261	.0702611

Therefore, the research tries to investigate the hypothesis whether the low internet penetration influences the digital engagement. The output from the independent t-test shows that the significance 'p' = .440 which is bigger than .05 ($p > .05$), indicates that the variances are not significantly different. It means that the internet penetration might not have any influence on digital diplomacy.

Furthermore, the following figure (figure 1) shows that, the internet penetration does not influence the number of followers of the EU's Twitter account.

Figure-1: Internet Penetration Vs. Number of Followers of the EU's Tweeter Accounts in Selected Countries



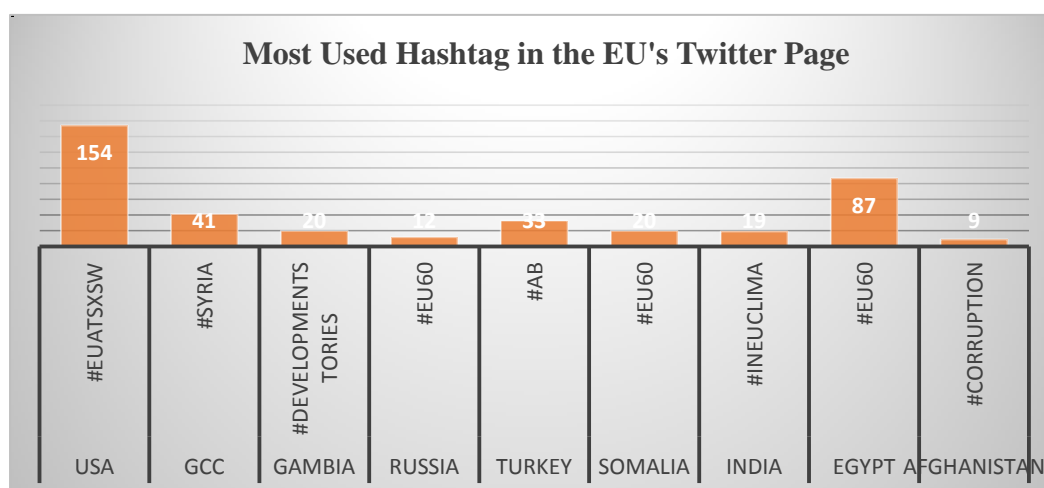
4.2 EU's Engagement with the Human Rights Context in Third Countries

Afterward, I looked into the facts that may influence the EU's engagement with the human rights context. The possible reasons for pursuing Twitter/ Facebook accounts in certain countries are investigated. Considering human rights, ten countries are selected based on the challenged human rights situation. Reports produced by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are considered to figure out the countries with worst human rights records. The countries are- Afghanistan, Egypt, India, Myanmar, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)(Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates)⁴, Gambia, Russia, Somalia, Turkey and Myanmar (Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, 2017).

It is notable that in Myanmar, the EU does not have any Twitter page due to a valid reason that Twitter is not popular in Myanmar (Kham, 2015). It indicates the fact that the citizens inclination towards certain social media also influence the EU's digital engagement. For Myanmar, the EU's Facebook page is analysed in the end of this section.

To investigate the Twitter accounts, the tweets during the period of March 1- April 30, 2017 are analysed (Figure 2) using the Twitter analytic software Tweepchup⁵.

Figure-2: Hashtag Mostly Used in Nine Selected Countries



The analysis (Figure 2) reveals that, in the selected countries, the EU often utilizes digital tools and social media as an auxiliary mechanism of its public diplomacy, *however*, not in the

⁴ In the GCC countries, the EU manages one Twitter page which can be found here <https://twitter.com/EUintheGCC>.

⁵ Tweepchup is a free twitter analytic, however it has certain limitations as it is unable to analyse the tweets for more than two months at a time. Find it here <https://tweepchup.com/>

human rights context. Regardless of the questioned human rights situation in these countries, the EU does not reciprocally promote its human rights norms and values besides the traditional diplomatic issues. For instance, in its page for the GCC countries, which are the EU's fifth largest export market (GCC and the EU, 2017), it does not have any direct tweet on human rights condition. It tweeted forty-one times on #Syria where the tweets expressed its concern about the situation and the updates on its humanitarian support in Syria. However, no tweet was found on the human rights abuse inside the gulf, for instance the Saudi Arabia's airstrike in Yemen that killed dozens in recent time (Osborne, 2017).

In Figure 2, it is also remarkable here that in the USA the mostly used hashtag is #EUatSXSW, which stands for "the EU is an open, innovative and dynamic player in both the digital and cultural spheres", indicates its promotion of self-image as an innovative actor in the cultural sphere. The other tweets promote its traditional diplomatic purposes such as trade and development related (#DEVELOPMENTSTORIES), climate diplomacy in India (#INEUCLIMA), sixty years of the Rome Treaty (#EU60) and its position against widespread corruption in Afghanistan (#CORRUPTION).

However, the available data (Annex 1) shows that the level of audience engagement with the pages is quite high regardless of the subject of the Tweets or the internet penetration. Egypt had the highest number of retweets (63,455) with a 33% internet penetration of total population.

At the same time, the following box (Box 1) shows how many times the rights-based issues were tweeted in these countries. During the two months period, no tweet was found on civil and political rights in its India page while there is a widespread violation of human rights in the India administered Kashmir during March-April (Aljazeera, 2017).

Box 1: Rights based hashtags in EU Twitter accounts

USA-#HumanRights: 0
GCC-#HumanRights: 0
Gambia- -#HumanRights: 4
Russia- #HumanRights: 0
Turkey-#EU4Children: 24
Somalia-#HumanRights: 0
India-#HumanRights: 0
Egypt-# HumanRights: 0
Afghanistan- #EU4WomenRights: 1

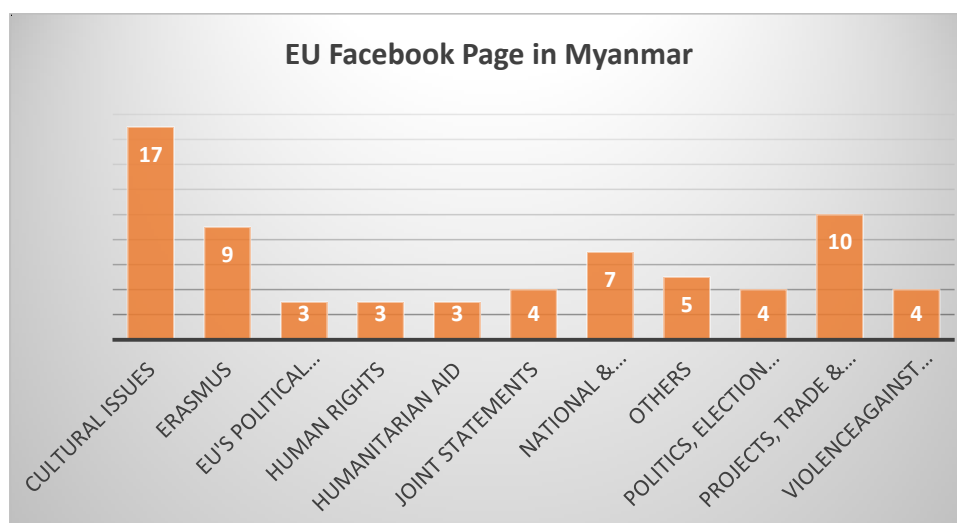
In Turkey, #CHILDRENRIGHTS was tweeted the highest time (24) and in Afghanistan #Eu4Womenrights was tweeted once. No tweets on rights based approach (i.e. civil and political rights, children rights, women rights and human rights) were found in Egypt, India, Russia, Somalia, GCC countries and in the USA.

The findings indicate that the EU maintains a critical distance from digitally engaging itself in the rights based issues. Countries where the governments have strict surveillance over the internet and have record to block social media, the EU hardly promote human rights norms and values through digital means. For instance, in the case of Kashmir, it is important to note that amid the extensive violence, 22 social media sites were blocked from April 27th, 2017 (Najar, 2017). It may constitute one of the reasons why the EU did not have any tweet on rights based approach in India as it is concerned about the citizen's safety and security.

Furthermore, the empirical data shows that there was no consistency and coherence from the side of the diplomats on these pages that may be considered as a sign of establishing communications with the audiences, especially to collect information and to clarify its position against the human rights violation.

The chart below represents the data through the content analysis of EU Facebook page in Myanmar. The data was manually analysed from the EU's posts during March 1-April 30, 2017.

Figure-3: Key Issue Areas of the EU's Facebook Page in Myanmar



From the human rights context, the situation in Myanmar is alarming because of its recent state-led 'crime against humanity' against the ethnic minority Rohingya people (Cockburn, 2017). Particularly, despite imposing trade and economic sanctions by the EU, which is a diplomatic tool to improve human rights condition, the situation has not changed so far. This sanction was lifted in 2013 and the EU has started full-fledged trade and development projects in Myanmar since then (BBC News, 2013).

The above chart shows that during the period, this page has 17 posts on cultural issues and 10 posts on trade, development and funds. Nevertheless, only 3 posts covered human rights issues, where none of them directly addressed the Myanmar government's atrocity against the Rohingya people and the position of the EU in that.

It is understood that the EU's Facebook page in Myanmar barely represents its normative engagement with human rights where it does not comment on the contentious issues of human rights violation. Myanmar is considered as a potential sector for EU foreign investment because of its labour-intensive industries (EC, 2017). The constant persuasion of trade and economic interest beg the question whether its paper-based human rights values work in the cases where there is likelihoods of compromising trade and economic interest.

4.3 Discussion based on the Key Findings:

To summarize the empirical evidence found through the content analysis of the EU's Twitter and Facebook accounts that address the first research question, it can be stated that,

Although the EU is not very active to pursue digital diplomacy, it has embraced digital tools in its diplomatic engagement to some extent to uphold its public diplomacy interest. Since the EU's Twitter and Facebook is capable of engaging a large number of citizens, which is proved through the number of followers and their regular tweets (see Annex 1), one could argue that why the EU does not actively promote its human rights norms through the same platform;

Promoting its cultural values and economic interest is one of its highest priorities for digital engagement (in the USA and Myanmar);

Trade and economic interests play important roles for the EU to abstain itself from digitally engaging with human rights (in GCC, Myanmar);

One of the reasons of not pursuing digital diplomacy in human rights context is to avoid the risks of putting human rights activists lives into the risk of being arrested by the state as it happened in India (Indian Express, 2016);

Another reason may include state's strong surveillance over the internet and social media in certain states (in Kashmir);

At the same time, the citizens' inclination towards particular social media such as Twitter and Facebook also influence its engagement (in Myanmar).

Moreover, the data shows that there is no consistent policy to pursue its digital diplomacy likewise its public diplomacy. In some cases, the responsible delegates seem to be skilled and ordered on social media, while in other cases, there is no regular communication from diplomats. The findings suggest that similar to the EU's paper documents, the human rights norms and values remain as rhetoric on the digital sphere.

However, since the EU is not found as an active actor on digital sphere, it cannot be concluded from the above findings that how internet and social media can advance the public diplomacy in order to promote human rights norms and values. Therefore, the following section examines to what extent is the EU using digital tools in its public diplomacy in Bangladesh, specifically to address the human rights issues. Based on the empirical data, this section will address the second research question.

4.4 Case Study-Bangladesh: Does Digital Diplomacy Advance Normative Engagement with Human Rights?

“Human rights transcends borders and cannot be left to the sole appreciation and benevolence of national governments protected by the respect of sovereignty” (Balme, 2008, p.152).

The EU’s external relations with Bangladesh officially started in 1989 through the opening of the Delegation in this region, however, trade and economic development potentially started in 2001 through the EC- Bangladesh Cooperation Agreement (Delegation of the EU to Bangladesh, 2016). In this section, this research looks into the human rights context of Bangladesh and the EU’s diplomatic documents during the period of 2000-2017. The reason is to understand its traditional diplomatic engagement before looking into its digital engagement in human rights. The significance of this timeframe is that the EU promptly started engaging with Bangladesh trade and development since the year of 2001 whereas the documents are available online from this year as well. Furthermore, the national parliamentary election in Bangladesh was held in 2014 that drastically changed the human rights landscape through the systemic violation of human rights (Human Rights Watch, 2014a). Therefore, this is important to look into EU engagement with Bangladesh during this period, through both of traditional and digital diplomacy.

During the period of 2000-2017, because of the contentious human rights situation, the EU has produced a number of resolutions in order to raise its concern over the human rights violation in Bangladesh. According to the latest report in 2014⁶, the EU supports civil society and human rights defenders under the projects of EIDHR (The EU Delegation in Bangladesh, 2014).

Going back to digital diplomacy, the EU has no Twitter account in Bangladesh. Until 2015, this social media did not gain popularity in this country while Facebook is the most used social media (Mridha, 2015). Therefore, the EU has its Facebook page where its certain presence is visible through different posts.

Considering Bangladesh as an EU norms recipient, besides an active civil society, a large number of bloggers and human rights activists are active online and on social media to

⁶ No further document of EIDHR in Bangladesh was found online since 2014. The contentious human rights condition since 2014 might be a reason for such circumstance.

express their opinions against odd or discrimination, regardless of the warning to be murdered (Aljazeera, 2016).

According to the Bangladesh Telecommunication and Regulatory Commission (BTRC), the number of total internet subscribers in Bangladesh is 61.288 million of 120 million people (BTRC, 2016). This is notable that, despite the low internet penetration, the capital Dhaka in Bangladesh ranked second among top cities with active Facebook users (The Daily Star, 2017). It means a potential number of audiences are active on this platform who may be the recipients of the EU's norms and values and capable of disseminating them among others who may not have the internet access.

As a social media site, Facebook is already considered as a significant tool for public diplomacy (Park and Lim, 2014, p.84-86). Because of its inclusive features of the medium, it is also considered as an important toolkit for diplomats. On its Facebook account in Bangladesh, the EU seems consistent in interpreting its human rights norms, besides promoting its public diplomacy and foreign policy. It regularly posts on different rights-based issues on this page, for instance, its resolutions on the human rights conditions can be found on this page.

To give a brief background on Bangladesh's status of digitisation, in recent years, the government has made a considerable number of reforms in the public sector through introducing ICT and digital tools in its public service delivery. Emphasizing its political manifesto for 'Vision 2021-Digital Bangladesh', this digitisation of governance is merely visible (Perspective Plan of Bangladesh, 2012). The culture of digitisation of public service can be found in a number of policies and their implementation ranging from primary education to land registration (Rahman, 2016). Being one of the most vulnerable states for climate change, the government has also developed an SMS-based disaster warning system which is considered as an important tool for policy makers (Sandre, 2015b, p. xxvii).

Surprisingly, while on the one hand the government is embracing digitization of public service, on the other hand, it is shrinking the digital spaces for public opinion and occasionally blocking social media. Although it is stressing the digitisation of its administration, on a contrary it is limiting the use of internet and social media for the public who attempt to be critical of the subject areas such as religion, government, etc. For instance, through amending the ICT Act, the government allows the law enforcers to arrest people under Section 57, who will post something false or obscene on internet and social media (The

daily Star, 2015). Regarding the EU's digital engagement in Bangladesh, it is interesting to analyse whether the EU's normative power can overcome these challenges stemming from third countries. At the same time, there are challenges from the EU's internal facts as well that may undermine its normative image in the human rights context beyond its region.

For instance, Arfan Ashik, one human rights official from the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in Bangladesh said during his interview that, "human rights norms can be diffused among the wider public in Bangladesh through social media. However, as an international actor the EU is yet to defend human rights inside its border, for instance the recent refugee crisis, therefore it needs to be careful about its norms diffusion in third countries" (Interview 2, see Annex 3).

An overview of the human rights situation in Bangladesh during the period of 2000-2017 is given below to understand why the human rights situation needs attention from the international actors. However, this research is not concerned with an in-depth critical analysis of the human rights violations over this period; rather the focus is placed on the EU's engagement with the human rights sphere.

4.5 Human Rights Context in Bangladesh and the EU's Engagement with it

The Bangladesh government's engagement in multilateral institutions and ratification of multiple international human rights laws and treaties did not produce significant changes at the domestic level. For instance, during the post and pre-election in 2014, sporadic political violence interrupts human rights, either led by opposite political parties or by the democratically elected political government. (Human Rights Watch, 2014b).

Based on the reports produced by Amnesty International, Odhikar⁷, Human Rights Watch and Front Line Defenders, I identified the major characteristics of the human rights violations and compiled the data during the period of 2000-2017.

Extrajudicial arrests and killings: since 2004, about 2503 people have been killed by the state security forces in the name 'of cross-fire'. Furthermore, evidence shows torture and ill-treatment: conducted by the police and other state-led security forces (e.g.-Rapid Action Battalions (RAB) and Army (Odhikar, 2004-2017).

⁷ Odhikar is one of the leading human rights organizations in Bangladesh which is producing Annual human rights reports since 2004. There are few other human rights organizations in Bangladesh, however, they do not produce reports on a regular basis. The Odhikar reports can be found here: <http://odhikar.org/>

Arbitrary arrest and detention: in 2016 alone, the security forces have reportedly arrested over 11,000 in connection with murder of secular bloggers and LGBT rights activists, however without any credible evidence (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

Targeted attacks on human rights defenders: between February 2013 and June 2016, about 14 human rights defenders were murdered in Bangladesh (Front Line Defenders, 2017).

Enforced disappearance: from 2004-2017, about 452 people were disappeared by the security forces and their traces were never found (Odhikar, 2004-2017).

Electoral and political violence: during the pre and post-election in 2014, about 300 civilians have died due to the countrywide political violence (Odhikar, 2014).

Increased challenge on freedom of expression: ‘freedom of expression is caught between fear and repression in Bangladesh’ whereas the state systemically limiting this right with its laws and policies (Amnesty International, 2017).

Violence against women and children: between 2004-2017, approximately 8000 women and children were raped in Bangladesh (Odhikar, 2004-2017).

Increased impunity for the security forces and power political party: the increasing level of impunity enjoyed by the political members of the power political parties and the security forces is nourishing social injustice around the country (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

Violence against religious and ethnic minorities: minority groups are occasionally being abused and attacked by political party members in along with Islamic fundamental group (Odhikar 2014-2017).

The EU has produced number of resolutions regarding the human rights violation on several occasions that are given below-

Table-2: List of EU motions and resolution in Bangladesh during 2000-2017

Resolution	Issue	Is the Resolution Posted on the Facebook Page ⁸ ?
Child Marriage, 2017	Following the government's recent adoption of the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017 (EP Resolution, 2017).	Yes
Islamic terrorist attack in 2016	Following the ISIS claimed dreadful attack (EP Resolution, 2016).	Yes
Freedom of expression in 2015	Addressed violence against journalists and bloggers. (EP Resolution, 2015).	Yes
National election in Bangladesh, 2014	Following the most violent general election (EP Resolution, 2014).	Yes
Fundamental freedoms, human rights, democracy in general, 2013	Following the outbreak of countrywide violence (EP Resolution, 2013).	Yes
Labour conditions and health and safety standards in Bangladesh, 2013	Following the collapse of the garment factory Rana Plaza, this resolution warned the government about suspending the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) facility (EP Resolution, 2013).	Yes
Joint Motion for a Resolution on 6 September 2007	Addressed the state of emergency and the aftermath suspension of civil and political rights (EP Resolution, 2007).	No
Resolution on 21 st November, 2002 in Bangladesh	Expressed grave concern over the extrajudicial killings under the government led joint security force operation (EP Resolution, 2002).	No
Resolution on 18 th	First resolution after the EC-Bangladesh	No

⁸ Assessed by the author through the analysis of EU Facebook page in Bangladesh

January, 2001 in Bangladesh	Cooperation Agreement in 2001 that gave priority to the promotion of human rights and democracy as trade conditionality (EP Resolution, 2001).	
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From a human rights perspective, one could argue that despite the EU's persuasion of soft power in the human rights context through resolutions and trade conditionality (from Table 2), the human rights are still challenged in many ways. It indicates that the traditional way of normative engagement is not successful to defend human rights. It needs more comprehensiveness, more openness and more transparency to disseminate information and to engage a wider public in interactive dialogue.

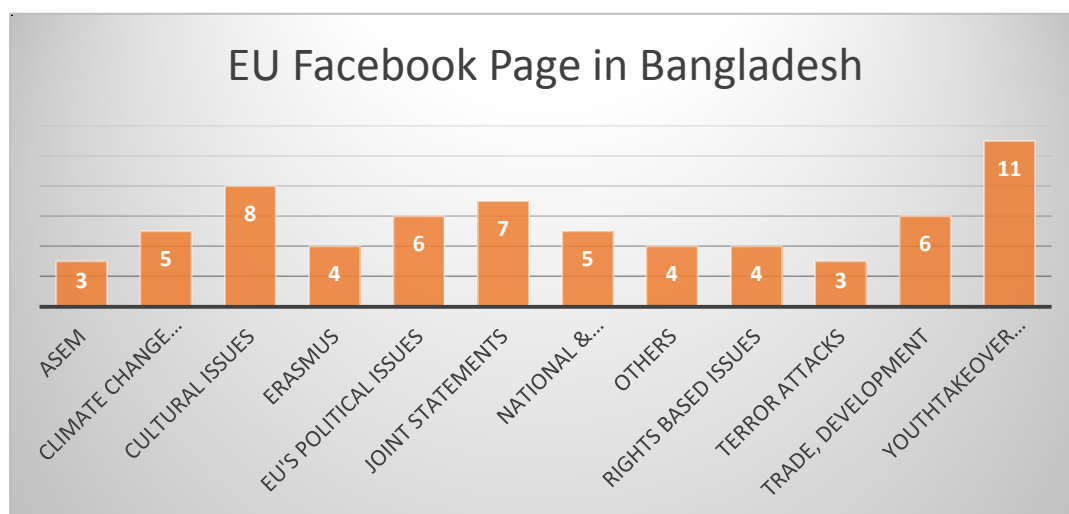
Apart from that, the above table also shows that since 2013, the EU started to inform the citizens about its concern over human rights violation through the social media which might be considered as a positive attitude towards the digital diplomacy in Bangladesh.

Similar to the earlier time frame for content analysis, this research analysed the Facebook posts during the period of March 1- April 30, 2017 on the EU's Facebook page in Bangladesh. This page has 26,097 followers in total.

Through the manual content analysis, it is found that the EU is consistent over its digital engagement in Bangladesh while equally promoting its material issues (e.g. economic interest, trade and business interest) and norms based issues (e.g. culture and human rights norms). In the following page, figure 4 shows how many times the EU has posted different issues on its Facebook page in Bangladesh.

The content analysis reveals that it has posted eleven times on YouthTakeover, which stands for promoting children rights, eight times on cultural issues, seven times on its joint statement on several issues in Bangladesh that address its concern over the human rights situations and so on. What is unique in this finding is its constant posts on promoting children rights through #YouthTakeover.

Figure-4: Key Issue Areas of the EU's Facebook Page in Bangladesh



#YouthTakeover is a social media based platform for engaging youths initiated by the EU and Plan International (EU Guidelines, 2017). Based on the EU engagement through this digital campaign, this research emphasizes this finding to address the second question how embracing the digital diplomacy can advance EU's normative engagement in the human rights context.

4.6 #YouthTakeover: A Potential Digital Model to Promote the EU's Normative Image in Human Rights

Based on its revised Guidelines for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child (2017), the EU has initiated this global social media platform #YouthTakeover. In Bangladesh, it is working with the PLAN International to implement this social media platform where they give the platform to young people to share their thoughts, ideas on rights-based issues (PLAN International, 2017).

From the Figure 4, it is visible that 11 posts were delivered on #YouthTakeover. On the Facebook page, the EU started this campaign on April 10 and continued to post every day until April 20. In order to participate in promoting children rights in Bangladesh, this page has organized live Q&A session on Facebook where selected youths are seen to disseminate the EU's human rights principles and information on existing projects in an interactive way.

Young representatives were live twice on this page during ten days (April 10- April 20) period. During these days, the responses from the wider public on these posts and videos were particularly significant. For instance, the first video was viewed 1100 times and was

shared 22 times, whereas the second one was viewed 1000 times and was shared 16 times (EU Facebook page in Bangladesh⁹).

Screenshot 1- Live Facebook Chat by the Youths on EU Facebook Account in Bangladesh



Key areas of children rights were raised in the comment section, such as the evidence of early marriage in some localities and violence against children (EU Facebook page in Bangladesh). In such cases, the participants are seen to engage in an inclusive manner and providing the audiences with useful information on how the EU may support defending children rights, which organizations are working with the children rights and so on. This is an ideal example of digital diplomacy in defending rights-based issues. Based on this, this research puts forward the argument that this example needs to be followed by the EU to be engaged with the human rights context in third countries. This empirical evidence has shown how two-way communications can necessarily promote rights-based norms among the wider public.

Bangladesh is a case study where the internet penetration is not high, human rights are challenged and the government is systemically violating human rights. In this circumstance, the EU has taken the initiative to defend child rights by constructively engaging itself with citizens through the social media. The empirical evidence shows that during a short time span its achievement is noteworthy.

⁹ EU Facebook page in Bangladesh, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/European-Union-in-Bangladesh-271319608846/>

4.7 Discussions Based on Key Findings

Overall, the EU's engagement through its Facebook page in Bangladesh portrays a balanced and *regular* communication;

While there is an ongoing tension on shrinking the freedom of speech over the internet and social media by the government, the EU carefully *sidesteps the conflicting issues* on human rights violations. However, it expresses its concern over the situation through posting the specific resolution on human rights violation on this page;

Unlike the previous examples, the EU seems to have tendencies of equally promoting its material interest (e.g. trade, development, funding for new projects and overall statement on different issues and EU's political issues) and human rights norms through this page;

Finally, and most importantly, what is unique about the #YouthTakeover is that it proves that the internet and social media can potentially serve the purpose of promoting human rights as it is doing in the case of children rights.

This content analysis of the EU Facebook page in Bangladesh, it is distinguished that- although the EU skips critical human rights issues, it tries to maintain consistency to promote human rights norms and values occasionally. The example from Bangladesh implies that even though the EU is not ready yet to pursue a two-way dialogue on contentious human rights issues (e.g. civil and political rights) using social media, it is trying to do so in the context of children rights. This is a positive sign of promoting normative power and a potential step towards reaching the level of a 'coherent actor' (Zeilonka, 2011) which is important for its normative image in human rights.

5. Recommendations and Concluding Remarks

In the 21st century, this is axiomatic that the EU's norms based diplomacy has the power to promote human rights worldwide. This research aims to explore that why the EU is not taking the advantage of digital diplomacy in diffusing its human rights norms and principles in third countries where it has already recognized the importance of digital diplomacy. Some causes came forward such as the EU's business and trade interest in certain countries in along with the third countries contentious human rights context.

Furthermore, facts like the third countries authoritarian governments' predisposition to keep human rights as domestic issues may influence the engagement of the international actors. . Throughout the research, it is observable that in the implementation of the human rights

norms, the EU is still following a top-down approach, not the bottom-up, which excludes a large number of stakeholders from its norms diffusion.

Internet and social media offer a platform that is free from state intervention, needs to be utilized to inform the wider public about their rights and the EU's existing norms to defend those rights. Although the authoritarian government can intervene by blocking the internet and social media, blocking these for longer period is particularly problematic for a long-live state (Shirky, 2011, p.7). Promoting human rights through the suspension of trade concession or imposing sanctions on third countries may affect the stakeholders around it. However, this method does not inform the stakeholders from grassroots to top about the norms and principles. Internet and social media can potentially play the role of disseminating information. To defend human rights, it is vital to communicate and to engage the wider public about the human rights norms since certain states have shown systemic failure to comply with the universal norms.

In this research to understand the normative power and its implication in human rights, the theory of constructivism is applied. Even though the EU follows the principles of soft power in manoeuvring its normative roles, the ambiguity and inconsistencies over these roles undermine the possibility to conceptualize its implications. Constructivism allows to understand how different actors act in global politics through the assimilation of their norms and interest. This research examined the combination of norms and interest in the EU's normative power as "interest and norms of normative power are two sides of the same coin" (Manners, 2011, p.242).

From the analysis of empirical data in the first part of chapter 4, the findings show that the EU is pursuing digital diplomacy to some extent in order to promote its traditional diplomatic purposes, however, not actively and consistently despite having legitimate ground of exploring digital diplomacy. As a political actor, the tendency of pursuing material interest through digital platform is rational, however, in the case of the EU it raises questions how the rhetoric of normative power is translated to defend human rights.

Therefore, this research looked into the case study of Bangladesh where the empirical data shows consistency in pursuing digital diplomacy with balanced tendency of promoting human rights norms and traditional diplomatic interests. In Bangladesh, the EU per se showed the example of pursuing and promoting children rights on social media that this might be the model to promote the human rights principles as well. Since human rights are

systemically violated worldwide, the EU needs to engage more promptly because of its acknowledged legitimate image to promote human rights which is grounded on its laws, treaties and agreements.

This research indicates that, the EU's normative engagement in the human rights context is still questionable, needs more clarification and consistencies that can jointly raise and validate its norms, values and principles in third countries. The possible ways to achieve these objectives are shown throughout the research by proposing digital diplomacy as an effective tool to improve its normative power in human rights.

The aim of this research is not proposing the EU to follow a 'one size fits all' normative approach, rather to identify the different social contexts to pursue its unique norms and values. Digital engagement serves the purposes of this identification as well as to interpret norms. Diplomacy should not be considered as divorced from social context. Human rights norms are more worshipped than obliged worldwide, whereas international actors such as the EU needs to innovate ways to promote and to defend human rights. ICTs and social media offers a two-way communication between the EU and the wider audiences that allows the EU to get in-depth knowledge on the challenged human rights situation in along with providing it the opportunities to illuminate its position regarding the rights-based approach.

It cannot be concluded that digital engagement through the ICTs and social media will definitely reduce the gap between the EU's human rights rhetoric and its implementations. Nevertheless, if managed constructively, it may produce a positive interaction between diplomats and stakeholders. This interaction is necessary for the actors in it to transform their identities and interests and to conceptualize human rights issues that makes sense to a broader audience (Padovani and Pavan, 2009b p.361).

Based on the empirical findings and given the importance of EU's normative power in the human rights context, a number of recommendations can be made-

Firstly, in order to sustain its normative image, the EU should accept the digital diplomacy as an imperative element of its public diplomacy through constructive and regular interactions with the global audience. As the EU already has a set of globally recognized values, it should be diffused and promoted in transparent, consistent and accountable manner. At present, it remains as paper work that needs to be transformed into a bottom-up approach through engaging all stakeholders (citizens, CSOs human rights organizations, etc.). In order to

defend human rights in third countries, the EU needs to develop a two-way communication over the social media to reach the wider citizens beyond its border.

Secondly, the EU should adopt a coherent and consistent framework to pursue its digital engagement while providing diplomats with digital skill development training. Around the world, diplomats who put efforts into changing the conventional pattern of diplomacy by embracing the digital means became more popular not less.

Thirdly, amidst the systemic violation of human rights worldwide, the world needs more actors to be engaged in defending human rights whereas the EU has this objective in its value based diplomacy. There needs to be a balance between the norms and interest of the NPE in the EU's engagement with human rights. Since the digital sphere offers a platform to interpret its norms, this tool should be utilized to implement its human rights principles.

Limitations

It is understood that the EU is clearly a normative power in global politics to conduct its foreign policy and diplomacy that distinguishes it from the other international actors. However, there are several limitations of this study that should be considered. One of the basic limitations is the lack of interview since recruitment of participants proved to be challenging and beyond the scope of this project. Only three human rights officials at the EEAS and one NHRC official in Bangladesh agreed to send their feedback. Although, their feedback provided important insights, this research would be benefitted from more interviews with EEAS officials.

Another aspect is that the empirical data from the EU's Twitter and Facebook pages was compiled from two months period (March 1- April 31), 2017. The previous Tweets and posts may include more human rights concern that cannot be revealed due to the limitation of the software.

The lack of available resources on the role of digital diplomacy in human rights is a limitation as well. More research in this field is necessary to understand how human rights could be promoted and protected through digital tools.

Finally, this research is an exploratory study to understand the EU's normative engagement in the human rights context through digital diplomacy albeit some strategic limitations. The normative image of the EU has already shaped its identity in global politics. Question remains how the EU is going to sustain and promote this identity. My point of argument is

that, as a normative power the EU needs to embrace digital diplomacy in order to promote human rights norms worldwide. Digital diplomacy should not be kept as rhetoric and human rights norms should not be conflicting with material foreign policy interest.

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Appendices

Annex 1

Country	Facebook URL	Followers on Facebook	Twitter URL	Tweet	Following	Followers on Tweeter	Likes	Year of launching the page	Internet Penetration (% of total population)
Afghanistan	https://www.facebook.com/EUinAfghanistan/	40226	https://twitter.com/EUinAfghanistan	2130	498	10700	224	2012	0.068
Albania			https://twitter.com/EU_Albania	3003	542	5158	149	2013	0.628
Algeria									0.197
Andorra									0.965
Angola									0.23
Aemenia	https://www.facebook.com/eu.delegationforarmenia/	25336	https://twitter.com/EU_Armenia	4895	301	4138	209	2012	0.499
Aruba									0.878

Australia	https://www.facebook.com/page/EUAustralia/likes/?ref=page_internal	4256	https://twitter.com/EUinAus	11600	5004	3441	22.3k	2015	0.851
Azerbaijan									0.611
Bahamas									0.848
Bangladesh	https://www.facebook.com/European-Union-in-Bangladesh-271319608846/	26097	N/A						0.132
Belarus									0.61
Bolivia	N/A		https://twitter.com/UEenBolivia	98	336	216	3	2014	0.411
Bosnia AND Herzegovina	N/A		https://twitter.com/eubih	1400	559	7154	82	2011	0.616
Brazil									0.664
Canada	https://www.facebook.com/E	3998	https://twitter.com/EUin	2442	347	1623	518	2015	0.855

	UinCanada/		Canada						
Cape Verde									0.425
Cayman									0.741
Chad									0.0327
Chile									0.778
China									0.522
Columbia									0.569
Comoros									0.073
Cook Island									
Costa Rica									0.564
Cuba									0.324
Dijibuti									0.117
Ecuador									0.431
Egypt	https://www.facebook.com/EuDelegationEgypt/	52168	https://twitter.com/EUinEgy	3815	44	780	1886	2015	0.33

EU in the GCC Delegation of the European Union to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the Cooperation Council for the Arab Countries of the Gulf	N/A		https://twitter.com/EUintheGCC	3213	130	2105	12	2013	0.82
Gambia			https://twitter.com/EUinTheGambia	425	309	5600	146	2015	0.169
Ghana			https://twitter.com/EuropeInGhana	301	41	721	31	2016	0.284
India	https://www.facebook.com/EUinIndia/	15547	https://twitter.com/EU_in_India	3250	565	3934	189	2013	0.348
Indonesia	https://www.facebook.com/uni.eropa/	96898	https://twitter.com/uni_eropa	9530	554	11100	417	2011	0.204

Iraq	N/A		https://twitter.com/IraqDel	1	16	22	1	2014	0.13
Israel	https://www.facebook.com/page/Europe.in.Israel/likes/?ref=page_internal	12310	https://twitter.com/EUinIsrael	1932	392	338	960	2014	0.725
Jamaica	https://www.facebook.com/page/euinjamaica/likes/?ref=page_internal	808	https://twitter.com/EU_Jamaica	4251	436	1478	512	2014	0.434
Jordan	https://www.facebook.com/EUinJordan/	51782	https://twitter.com/EUinJordan	92	348	480	161	2015	0.457
Kazakhstan	https://www.facebook.com/EUinKZ/	1358	https://twitter.com/EUinKazakhstan	60	52	159	15	2016	0.558
Kenya	https://www.facebook.com/euinkenya/	2354	https://twitter.com/EUinKenya	1955	271	5947	267	2013	0.45

Kosovo	https://www.facebook.com/EuropeanUnionInKosovo/	25019	https://twitter.com/EUKosovo	1125	79	6100	174	2013	0.7
Lebanon	https://www.facebook.com/EUDelegationLebanon/	17608	https://twitter.com/EUinLebanon	4321	1760	3682	3798	2013	0.759
Macedonia									0.692
Malawi	https://www.facebook.com/eu.dtomalawi/	1226	https://twitter.com/EUinMalawi	474	279	1472	696	2015	0.065
Malaysia	https://www.facebook.com/EUinMalaysia/	3062	https://twitter.com/EUinMalaysia	483	177	904	398	2014	0.686
Morocco	0	0	0						0.576
Myanmar									0.025
Namibia	https://www.facebook.com/EUinNamibia/	3589	https://twitter.com/EU2Namibia	233	147	526	13	2013	0.156
NEPAL	https://www.facebook.com/EUinNepal/	67770	https://twitter.com/EUinNepal	489	457	5352	332	2015	0.172

New Zealand									0.894
Nigeria			https://twitter.com/EUinNigeria	229	153	631	304	2016	0.461
Paraguay									0.468
philippines									0.435
Russia	https://www.facebook.com/EUinRussia/	10613	https://twitter.com/EUinRussia	2537	264	3026	534	2014	0.713
Singapore	https://www.facebook.com/EUinSingapore/	955	https://twitter.com/EUinSingapore	1045	255	498	388	2016	0.825
Somalia	https://www.facebook.com/pg/EUSomalia/likes/?ref=page_internal	1295	https://twitter.com/EU_in_Somalia	1529	629	6134	145	2015	0.017
South Africa	N/A		https://twitter.com/EUinSA	1807	810	1082	834	2016	0.52
Sri Lanka	https://www.facebook.com/EUdel.Srilanka.	67770	https://twitter.com/EU_in_Sri_Lanka	600	161	788	97	2015	0.293

	Maldives/		a						
Sudan	N/A		https://twitter.com/EU_SUDAN	235	253	1450	3	2014	0.171
Syria	https://www.facebook.com/EUinSyria/?hc_ref=SEARCH	2776	https://twitter.com/EUinSyria	1478	282	732	1426	2016	0.296
Thailand									0.427
Tunisia									0.481
Turkey	N/A		https://twitter.com/EUDelegationTur	7274	258	14100	1822	2012	0.58
Uganda	https://www.facebook.com/eudeluganda/	18316	https://twitter.com/EUinUG	2445	506	3694	991	2014	0.19
USA	https://www.facebook.com/EUintheUS/	67352	https://twitter.com/EUintheUS	24600	1989	39100	1735	2010	0.885
Uzbekistan	https://www.facebook.com/eudeluzb/?hc_ref	15467							0.51

	=SEARCH&fref=nf								
Venezuela									0.579
Vietnam									0.52
Yemen			https://twitter.com/EUYemen	0		2		2013	0.247
Zimbabwe	https://www.facebook.com/EUDelegationtoZimbabwe/?hcref=SEARCH&fref=nf	4931	https://twitter.com/euinzim	2905	344	4002	1851	2015	0.21

Annex 2

Interview 1 (Interviewees – Helene Gonnord, Palaghiciuc Dorin and Pavel Svitil – EEAS Human Rights Division)

1. Do you think that the European Union believes in innovation in its diplomacy and foreign policy or it wants to pursue the traditional form of diplomacy particularly in Bangladesh?

The **Sustainability Compact** is an example of how the EU uses diplomacy, technical and development assistance.

In general, the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon gave greater **coherence** and **visibility** to the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy. The High Representative Federica Mogherini presented the EU global strategy "Shared vision, common action: a stronger Europe" in June 2016. The strategy is intended to guide EU foreign and security policy in the years to come.

https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/7337/high-representative-mogherini-presents-eu-global-strategy-foreign-and-security-policy_en

2. Do you think embracing digital means (e.g. facebook, twitter, blogs, website, etc.) in diplomacy can engage more audiences from the grassroots to top and can easily diffuse norms without physically reaching the audience?

In general, digital means can engage more audiences and diffuse norms.

Most of our delegations are active in social media and have Facebook accounts.

<https://www.facebook.com/European-Union-in-Bangladesh-271319608846/>

In relation to Bangladesh, I can give the following specific example -

To mark the adoption of the EU Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child, the European External Action Service and selected EU Delegations are partnering with **Plan International** to organise a global social media #YouthTakeover, so young people's opinions can be heard. Bangladesh is one of the participating delegations and the YouthTakeover should take place in April 2017.

- **#YouthTakeover campaign:** <https://plan-international.org/eu/leave-no-child-behind-eu-guidelines>

Nevertheless, Bangladesh belongs to the group of Least Developed countries and it poses a natural limit to the use and efficiency of digital means.

Annex 3

Interview 2 (Kazi Arfan Ashik, Deputy Director, National Human Rights Commission, Bangladesh)

1. **Do you think that as an international actor the EU can promote the human rights norms and values through the digital means in a country like Bangladesh?**

Gradually a large number of people in Bangladesh have internet access. Bangladesh government has arranged internet in the union digital center where people can access internet though it needs time to be fully operational. Besides, there are a number of NGOs and CSOs who can disseminate the norms at the grassroots level. Human rights norms can be diffused among the wider public in Bangladesh through social media. However, as an international actor the EU itself is not successful to defend human rights inside its border, for instance the recent refugee crisis, therefore it needs to be careful about its norms diffusion in third countries.