



Digital Diplomacy: Transformation of International Communication in the Digitalization Era

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Abstract

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The era of digitalization has made massive changes in various aspects of life. The digital era has also made all activities change uncharacteristically. One of them is diplomacy, now diplomacy has shifted to digital diplomacy or better known as digital diplomacy. This article aims to analyze how transformations in communication and diplomacy between nations occur along with the advancement of digital technology. Through an analysis of books and journals, this article illustrates the role of digital diplomacy in improving the efficiency, accessibility, and impact of diplomacy in international relations. This article will identify the influence of social media, digital platforms, and other communication technologies in shaping the dynamics of modern diplomacy. This article also discusses the challenges and opportunities faced in digital diplomacy.

Keywords: *Digital Diplomacy, Social Media, Technology, Communication*

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INTRODUCTION

In the era of increasingly advanced digitalization, the development of digital technology has fundamentally changed the way we communicate and interact with each other. In the midst of this shift, the world of diplomacy has also undergone a significant transformation. Diplomacy, as the art and practice of building relations between countries, is no longer limited to formal diplomatic meetings in international conference rooms. In the face of a new era driven by technology, digital diplomacy is emerging as a new concept involving the use of social media, digital platforms, and other communication technologies in facilitating communication between nations, promoting public diplomacy, and influencing the dynamics of international relations as a whole (Bjola & Holmes, 2015). This paradigm shift fundamentally alters how states manage global communication networks and pursue their foreign policy objectives through digital agendas.

The role of digital diplomacy in international relations is increasingly important along with the development of information and communication technology that continues to increase. In an era where information can be easily transmitted and accessed instantly, digital diplomacy has the potential to change the paradigm of communication between nations and open up new opportunities in building more effective international relations. Through the use of social media, diplomats can communicate directly with the general public, creating a more open

dialogue and strengthening mutual understanding. This evolution shifts traditional public diplomacy from a one-way propaganda mechanism into an inclusive, two-way dialogue with global audiences (Melissen, 2005). Digital diplomacy also provides a platform for broader public diplomacy, where countries can introduce their cultures, policies, and values to international audiences directly through globally disseminated digital content.

Digital diplomacy has also contributed to conflict resolution. In some cases, online platforms are used as a forum for dialogue, mediation, and building mutual understanding between parties involved in conflicts. The fast and efficient communication offered by digital technology allows stakeholders to interact directly, overcome misunderstandings, and seek mutually beneficial solutions. This "real-time diplomacy" serves as a crucial crisis management instrument, enabling foreign ministries to deploy immediate narratives to defuse misinformation during escalating geopolitical tensions (Manor, 2019).

Not only in the political and security context, digital diplomacy also plays a significant role in the economic context. Economic digitalization has opened the door to more intensive international trade, investment, and economic exchange cooperation. Countries are using digital technologies to facilitate business relationships, expand trade networks, and promote economic growth through sophisticated economic diplomacy.

However, along with the opportunities presented by digital diplomacy, there are also challenges that need to be overcome. Cybersecurity, data privacy, and the dissemination of inaccurate or manipulative information are some of the critical issues that come with the adoption of digital diplomacy (Bjola & Holmes, 2015). Furthermore, the strategic environment is increasingly complicated by algorithmic biases and echo chambers that restrict public receptivity to foreign narratives, alongside structural cyber-propaganda deployed by both state and non-state actors (Manor, 2019). Therefore, a deep understanding of the technical, ethical, and legal implications of digital diplomacy is essential for diplomats and policymakers.

METHODS

This research uses qualitative data analysis with data collection techniques through books, journals, the internet, and others. While the data analysis technique used is a descriptive qualitative methodology to explain how social media, digital platforms, and other communication technologies have transformed countries interacting and conducting diplomacy.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

History and Development of the Digital Age

In international relations, diplomacy has long been recognized as one of the main instruments used by states to achieve their national interests. Diplomacy involves negotiation, dialogue, and interaction between countries with the aim of promoting peace, resolving conflicts, building cooperation, and fighting for national interests. Along with the times and technological advancements, including the digital revolution, the ways of diplomacy have undergone a significant evolution. The internet and social media platforms have changed the

way countries interact and conduct diplomacy (Bjola & Holmes, 2015). In examining this structural shift, qualitative approaches such as those outlined by Creswell (1994, 2013) provide a robust framework for interpreting text, talk, and interactive media to understand how digital spaces redefine state behavior. This method allows researchers to parse the complex interaction between traditional diplomatic practices and new digital structures (Silverman, 2001).

Traditional diplomacy involves direct meetings between diplomats of the countries involved. These meetings are usually held in embassies, consulates, or in international forums such as the United Nations (UN). Diplomats meet to discuss issues, negotiate, and reach agreements. In multilateral diplomacy, countries work together in international forums to address complex global issues. Examples are the United Nations, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the European Union (EU). Through multilateral diplomacy, countries can coordinate and seek common solutions to global challenges such as climate change, arms control, and nuclear proliferation, which are increasingly categorized as complex global issues that interconnect domestic politics with international survival (Snarr & Snarr, 2008).

Public diplomacy or diplomacy through public opinion is an approach that involves direct communication with civil society in another country. Through mass media, conferences, cultural exchanges, and educational programs, countries try to build understanding and cooperation with the civil society of partner countries. Digital diplomacy is a form of diplomacy that emerged along with advances in information and communication technology. The internet and social media platforms have opened new doors for interacting and communicating between actors in international relations. Countries use digital diplomacy to promote national interests, influence public opinion, and build relationships with other countries (Melissen, 2005).

In digital diplomacy, countries use social media, websites, blogs, and other communication platforms to spread messages, influence public opinion, and communicate directly with civil society in other countries (Manor, 2019). This shift has given rise to *Netpolitik*, a phenomenon where the internet radically alters the dynamics of international politics, making information power decentralized and shifting control away from absolute state monopolies (Bollier, 2003). Digital diplomacy also involves the use of technology to monitor and gather information regarding the policies and activities of other countries.

Digital Diplomacy

In achieving national goals and interests, digital diplomacy plays an important role. Diplomacy itself is the implementation of relations between countries and other entities in the political world, represented by official representatives, and carried out peacefully. Diplomacy is a negotiation process that respects the sovereignty of the parties involved. In its development, diplomacy has adapted to changes in the global order, especially with the emergence of information and communication technology. No longer only focusing on formal relations between countries, diplomacy today also involves non-state actors and utilizes various aspects, such as economy, culture, food, and information technology. In the economic realm, the integration of digital networks helps optimize regional trade, capital flows, and shared growth, mirroring early

foundations of economic integration theory where structural coordination creates mutual interdependence (Balassa, 1961).

One concept that emerged in response to these changes is public diplomacy. Public diplomacy is a diplomatic effort aimed at spreading the culture, values, and attitudes of the country to build good relations with the community (Melissen, 2005). In this context, non-state actors, namely the public, are also involved in diplomatic efforts undertaken by the state. Digital diplomacy is an instrument that develops within the framework of public diplomacy. While there is no definitive definition of digital diplomacy, most definitions emphasize the role of communication technologies, such as the internet and social media, in conducting diplomacy (Bjola & Holmes, 2015). This paradigm signals that foreign policy can no longer be executed in isolation; rather, in an era of digital diplomacy, the domestic and foreign policy spheres blur as social media forces instantaneous accountability and engagement (Adesina, 2016).

Digital diplomacy makes use of social media, websites, blogs, and other communication platforms to spread messages, influence public opinion, and communicate directly with people in other countries. Through digital diplomacy, countries can promote national interests, build relationships, and influence global agendas in faster, broader, and more direct ways. Modern international communication relies heavily on these networks to bypass territorial boundaries (Manor, 2019).

However, as with digital diplomacy, there are challenges that need to be addressed. For example, information that is widely disseminated through the Internet can be easily altered, leaked, or manipulated, thus disrupting the continuity of honest and transparent diplomatic efforts. This vulnerability is starkly visible in the rise of mass transparency platforms, where corporate tech-monopolies and state surveillance intersect, occasionally exposing confidential communications and forcing states to redefine state secrets. In addition, the threat of cyber conflicts and cyberattacks can also affect relations between countries and complicate diplomatic efforts (Assange, 2014).

Overall, digital diplomacy is an evolution of traditional diplomacy and is an important instrument in achieving national goals and interests. For developing states like Indonesia, utilizing digital diplomacy is a deliberate foreign policy choice championed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Kemenlu) to strengthen the nation's international leverage and ensure active political visibility on the global stage (Antara, 2017). In the context of public diplomacy, digital diplomacy allows states to interact with people in other countries directly and involve non-state actors in diplomatic efforts undertaken by states. In the context of digital diplomacy, there are two main levels related to a country's diplomacy, namely the Ministry of Foreign Affairs level and the embassy representative level. Digital diplomacy is considered capable of supporting countries in achieving their interests, such as efforts to build an image or nation branding. In addition, digital diplomacy is also considered an effective tool in maintaining a country's reputation (image management) because it is able to facilitate two-way communication between its users (Manor, 2019).

At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs level, digital diplomacy can be used as an instrument to design and implement a country's diplomatic strategy. The

Ministry of Foreign Affairs can use social media, official websites, and other online platforms to spread messages, promote national interests, and build a positive image for the country. For example, through content disseminated on social media, countries can present culture, tourism, economy, and other achievements to the international community. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs can also use digital diplomacy to expand the reach of public diplomacy, interact with the international community, and respond to rapidly evolving issues in the digital world. This framework requires robust infrastructure; thus, the implementation of an open government framework through comprehensive E-Government networks is mandatory for building domestic transparency, which acts as the bedrock for outward digital diplomacy (Humas Kemensetneg, 2015).

Digital diplomacy is also applied at the embassy representative level. Embassy representatives can use social media, embassy websites, blogs, and other online communication channels to build relationships with foreign nationals, local communities, and other stakeholders in the country where they serve. Through digital diplomacy, embassy representatives can interact with local communities in person, disseminate information about their home countries, host events and meetings virtually, as well as answer questions and address misperceptions that may exist related to their countries. This applies even to unique diplomatic entities like the Holy See, where embassies utilize digital platforms and social networks to amplify messages of peace, human rights, and global solidarity directly to a global audience, bypassing classic bureaucratic constraints. Digital diplomacy at the embassy representative level can also help facilitate bilateral cooperation, cultural exchanges, and expand diplomatic networks (British Embassy Holy See, 2014).

In the context of digital diplomacy, the use of social media, the internet, and digital technology has become very important. Therefore, digital diplomacy is often associated with the use of the internet and social media in diplomatic efforts. Other terms often used for digital diplomacy are e-diplomacy, cyber diplomacy, and Insta-diplomacy.

Instagram diplomacy refers to the use of Instagram as a visual-heavy social media platform in digital diplomacy efforts. Instagram is widely used by Foreign Ministries and embassies around the world because it is highly effective in visual storytelling, nation branding, and interacting with the younger public through photos, reels, and stories (Manor, 2019). Instagram has the advantage of allowing aesthetics-driven framing that shapes emotional connections and projects a country's soft power. Within this framework, the strategic utilization of Instagram represents a core shift toward "new public diplomacy" (*diplomasi publik baru*), which decentralizes international communication by fostering active public participation and genuine two-way dialogues (Chudory & Novendari, 2022).

According to Media Richness Theory, Instagram functions as a highly "rich" virtual communication channel because its interactive features—such as likes, comments, and direct messages—provide instantaneous, unmediated feedback loops between state actors and global audiences. Empirically, this capacity to sustain real-time global communication is backed by its massive user base, which reached 1.96 billion active users globally by the first quarter of 2022, making the platform more than capable of effectively representing and reaching

the global community. With such a vast number of active global users, including state leaders, government officials, and influential figures, Instagram serves as a highly efficient visual communication tool to achieve modern public diplomacy goals (Chudory & Novendari, 2022).

Through Instagram diplomacy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs can disseminate curated diplomatic messages, strengthen the country's tourism and cultural image, establish emotional communication with the international community, and showcase bilateral activities in real-time. By using Instagram, digital diplomacy can bypass traditional news gatekeepers, providing direct visual access to the public and building closer, more interactive engagement between state institutions and global citizens. The active use of Instagram in digital diplomacy demonstrates the important role of visual-digital technology in shaping more open, transparent, and inclusive diplomatic communications. By leveraging the visual advantages of this platform, digital diplomacy can reach broad millennial and Gen-Z audiences and interact directly with them, thereby expanding the soft power influence and impact of the country's foreign policy.

Stages of Digital Diplomacy

Digital diplomacy can be associated with eight general objectives, namely: knowledge management, public diplomacy, information management, consular communication and response, disaster-related response, internet freedom, external resources, and policy planning. In the development of digital diplomacy, there are three levels of implementation carried out by the state, namely the initial stage, the middle stage, and the final stage (Bjola & Holmes, 2015).

Initial Stage, this stage is characterized by the availability of communication and information technology services used in diplomacy, as well as the availability of online portals. At this stage, countries begin to realize the potential and usefulness of technology in facilitating communication and interaction with international actors. The country began to develop official websites and social media as channels to disseminate information, convey diplomatic messages, as well as promote national interests. The use of technology at this stage is still limited and has not been fully optimized in the implementation of diplomacy (Melissen, 2005).

Middle Stage, this stage is characterized by more active interaction between the government and citizens through digital platforms. The state began to utilize social media and communication applications to interact directly with the public, including citizens who are abroad. In addition, countries also use digital platforms to convey diplomatic messages, respond to global issues, and build relations with the international community. At this stage, the country began to increase its capabilities and expertise in using communication technology to achieve diplomatic goals (Melissen, 2005).

Final stage, this stage is characterized by the existence of very advanced and complete communication features in supporting diplomatic efforts through digital devices. At this stage, the country has adopted the latest technology and implemented advanced features, such as big data analysis, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality technology. Countries are able to use these tools to efficiently collect and analyze information, predict global trends, formulate smarter policies, and respond quickly to change. At this final stage, the country has achieved a high

level of progress in the use of digital diplomacy and can optimize the potential of technology to achieve national interests more effectively (Bjola & Holmes, 2015).

The use of social media as a tool to support public diplomacy activities allows countries to establish relationships with the public more broadly. This can be seen from three main aspects: digital agenda setting, presence expansion, and digital conversation generation. Within the framework of *new public diplomacy*, this phenomenon relies on media richness, where high capacity for informational feedback enables a dynamic, two-way dialogue between the state and the global public. Social media has the ability to disseminate information to the public quickly and widely. By using social media, diplomats can set agendas or topics to be discussed on digital platforms. They can share information, news, and diplomatic messages with the public through posts, videos, or other content. Through the digital process of agenda setting, social media provides opportunities for diplomats to influence conversations and discussions at the wider community level (Manor, 2019).

Social media is also used by diplomats as a means to promote activities and events conducted by the country. By leveraging social media platforms, countries can expand their presence in the digital world and reach a wider audience. Diplomats can share photos, videos, reports, and information related to their countries' diplomatic activities, state visits, international conferences, or cultural activities. The application of this communication strategy serves an *identity-projecting function*, allowing state institutions to visually demonstrate their cultural values and distinct national identity on the global stage. Thus, social media becomes a place to build a positive image and increase understanding of the country in the eyes of the international community (Chudory & Novendari, 2022).

Digital diplomacy allows diplomats to interact directly with the public and results in a two-way dialogue. Social media provides a space for diplomats to respond to comments, questions, or input provided by the public. Diplomats can take advantage of comments, direct messages, or live sessions to communicate with the public. Through digital conversation generation, diplomats can listen to public opinion, explain state policies or positions, and build closer and more transparent relationships with the international community. This interactive approach also fulfills a *cognitive function*, ensuring that international communication acts as an educational gateway to enrich collective public knowledge globally (Chudory & Novendari, 2022).

The Challenges of Digital Diplomacy

There are several figures and challenges that criticize or face the ease and challenges of digital diplomacy in international relations. Criticism leveled by US Secretary of State John Kerry in 2016 highlighted the importance of a more sensitive approach to diplomacy and public life. Kerry stressed the need to listen carefully and respond to international challenges with honesty, determination, and conviction, highlighting the downsides of using oversimplified social media slogans and text messages as a key tool in diplomacy.

As a concrete example, Indonesia recently faced severe digital pressure following the death of a Brazilian citizen, Juliana, which triggered a massive wave of criticism from Brazilian netizens who previously condemned Indonesia via

social media. The online outrage was fueled by viral narratives that questioned Indonesia's handling of the situation, highlighting how quickly digital platforms can be utilized to damage a nation's image globally. However, after further developments, the tide of digital opinion shifted, and the Brazilian netizen community eventually issued an apology regarding their previous actions toward Indonesia. This case mirrors the volatile dynamics of crisis management involving foreign nationals, such as the previous incident where Brazilian tourists met with an accident on Mount Rinjani. Gaps in communication and rapid social media exposure similarly led to asymmetric digital attacks, where foreign users swarmed the digital accounts of Indonesian authorities, proving that external publics can easily weaponize digital platforms to launch attacks that damage a country's tourism and reputation under extreme digital pressure (Manor, 2019).

In addition, the challenge faced by the Indonesian government is the delay in utilizing technological advances and executing digital diplomacy effectively during crises. This vulnerability provides a window of opportunity for foreign digital crowds to swarm state channels and solidify a negative image of Indonesia's state apparatus through social media platforms. Countries such as the United States, Australia, and Canada have prepared structural crisis-response digital units early on, while Indonesia remains limited and reactive in its strategic digital deployment.

In today's era of powerful, algorithm-driven media, a country's image can be easily damaged in a very short period through coordinated digital attacks and viral foreign backlash (Bjola & Holmes, 2015). Therefore, it is important for the Indonesian government to master technology and digital media strategically to build a resilient positive image and strengthen public diplomacy. By proactively managing digital spaces and engineering timely, factual narratives, Indonesia can counter foreign digital attacks and maintain the confidence of international partners for mutually beneficial cooperation.

In facing this challenge, the Indonesian government needs to radically improve its understanding and operational capabilities in digital diplomacy. This includes formulating media strategies backed by data analytics, building a positive image through high-quality visual content, responding to digital attacks with solid, real-time arguments, and maximizing digital communication channels to protect national security interests and foreign policy reputations. In conclusion, the power of social and digital media in public diplomacy provides both immense advantages and volatile challenges for countries. Wise, swift, and highly strategic use of digital technology remains the ultimate key to reinforcing modern diplomacy and safeguarding a nation's global standing.

CONCLUSION

This The development of communication and information technology in the digital era has dramatically changed the paradigm and strategy of diplomacy. Diplomacy is no longer limited to the mere use of military or economic force, but also involves the influence of culture, values, and broader public diplomacy. This change is driving the transformation from hard power diplomacy to soft power, and now, towards smart power diplomacy.

Digital diplomacy is a direct result of the development of communication and information technology. The flow of globalization supported by such technologies has overcome the barriers of time and space that previously limited the interaction and exchange of information between local and global communities. Geographical and time constraints are no longer obstacles in interacting and establishing relationships. In this context, changes occurring at the local level reflect what is happening globally, and vice versa.

The digital age opens up new possibilities in overcoming the limitations of space and time. Relationships between power structures and societal actors that were previously physically confined have now become possible. With the advent of digital technology, social influence and interaction can transcend geographical boundaries and time. Place (space) in this context becomes like a delusion (phantasmagoric), where events and social influences are not limited to the physical location of the event itself.

This shows that digital diplomacy has created a fundamental change in the way countries relate and communicate with each other. Faster, broader, and more open communication and exchange of information through digital platforms enables countries to conduct diplomacy more effectively and efficiently. However, these changes also pose new challenges, such as security and data privacy concerns, as well as competition in influencing global public opinion. Therefore, it is important for countries to continuously evaluate and develop digital diplomacy strategies that are adaptive and responsive to technological developments and global dynamics.

Political and foreign policy decision-makers need to open themselves up to digital diplomacy. Digital diplomacy allows the formation of a network society where diplomatic messages can provide many benefits and brilliant achievements aimed solely at the public interest itself.

By involving the public in the digital diplomacy process, political and foreign policy decision holders can harness the public's potential and contributions more effectively. They can benefit from active public participation in producing and disseminating information, as well as encouraging the formation of communities based on the public interest. In this regard, digital diplomacy opens up opportunities to achieve greater achievements and goals in foreign policy by leveraging the power and active role of the public who are increasingly involved in the diplomatic process.

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