

DIGITAL DIPLOMACY AS A NEW INSTRUMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Abstract: This thesis examines digital diplomacy as a new and increasingly important instrument of international relations. In the modern information age, diplomatic activity is no longer limited to traditional negotiations, official meetings, and written correspondence. Digital technologies, social media platforms, online communication channels, and virtual public diplomacy have changed the way states interact with foreign audiences, international organizations, and global society. Digital diplomacy enables governments to promote national interests, strengthen international image, respond quickly to crises, provide consular support, and communicate foreign policy positions more effectively.

Key words: digital diplomacy, international relations, foreign policy, public diplomacy, social media, digital communication, cybersecurity.

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, international relations are being transformed by digital technologies. Traditional diplomacy was mainly based on official negotiations, diplomatic notes, closed meetings, embassies, international conferences, and direct communication between governments. However, the rapid development of the Internet, social media platforms, artificial intelligence, digital communication tools, online media, and virtual meeting systems has created a new diplomatic environment. In this context, digital diplomacy has emerged as a new and powerful instrument of international relations.

Digital diplomacy can be defined as the use of digital technologies and online platforms by states, foreign ministries, diplomats, international organizations, and political leaders to communicate, influence, negotiate, promote national interests, and manage international relations. It includes the use of official websites, social media accounts, online press briefings, virtual summits, digital consular services, e-participation, cyber communication, and public diplomacy campaigns.

The importance of digital diplomacy has increased because global communication has become faster, more open, and more interactive. According to the International Telecommunication Union, around 6 billion people, or about three-quarters of the world population, were using the Internet in 2025 [7]. This means that diplomatic messages can now reach millions of people instantly. In addition, DataReportal stated that there were 5.79 billion social media “user identities” worldwide at the beginning of April 2026 [8]. Although this figure does not always represent unique individuals, it still demonstrates the enormous scale of online communication.

These statistics show that diplomacy is no longer limited to government-to-government interaction. Today, governments also communicate directly with foreign publics, diaspora communities, journalists, experts, civil society, and ordinary citizens. As a result, digital diplomacy has become an essential part of modern foreign policy.

The relevance of this topic is connected with the growing role of information, image, soft power, cybersecurity, and public opinion in world politics. States now compete not only through military and economic power, but also through narratives, digital visibility, strategic communication, and online influence. Therefore, studying digital diplomacy is necessary for understanding the changing nature of international relations.

Literature Review

The academic study of digital diplomacy is closely connected with broader discussions about globalization, public diplomacy, soft power, digital communication, and the transformation of statecraft. Scholars generally agree that digital technologies have not completely replaced traditional diplomacy, but they have significantly changed its methods, speed, audience, and instruments.

Nicholas Westcott was one of the early scholars who analyzed the influence of the Internet on international relations. In his work “Digital Diplomacy: The Impact of the Internet on International Relations,” Westcott argues that the Internet changes the relationship between governments, citizens, and international actors [1]. His approach is important because it explains digital diplomacy not as a simple technical innovation, but as a structural change in global politics. The Internet increases the number of actors involved in international discussions and makes information flow faster than before.

Corneliu Bjola and Marcus Holmes also made an important contribution to the study of digital diplomacy. Their book “Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice” analyzes digital

diplomacy as a form of change management in international politics [2]. They emphasize that foreign ministries and diplomats must adapt to digital transformation. This means that diplomats should not only understand international law and negotiation, but also social media communication, online audience behavior, digital reputation, and crisis messaging. Their work shows that digital diplomacy requires new professional skills.

Ilan Manor's research focuses on the digitalization of public diplomacy. According to Manor, digitalization changes the institutions, practices, and audiences of diplomacy [3]. His approach is especially useful because it shows that digital diplomacy is not only about using Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, or official websites. It is a deeper institutional process in which foreign ministries redesign their communication strategies, adopt new technologies, and engage with foreign publics in more interactive ways. In this sense, digital diplomacy is part of the modernization of state institutions.

Constance Duncombe's research on Twitter and diplomacy demonstrates how social media can influence diplomatic recognition and negotiation [4]. Her study of Iran–US relations shows that social media can become part of diplomatic strategy. This is significant because it proves that digital platforms are not only tools for public announcements; they can also shape the political atmosphere around negotiations and influence how states represent themselves.

Hocking and Melissen explain that diplomacy in the digital age has become faster, more complex, and more public [5]. Social media creates a real-time dimension in diplomacy, but it also increases risks. A diplomatic message that was previously carefully prepared for official channels can now be published instantly and interpreted by millions of people. This speed can help governments respond quickly to crises, but it can also create misunderstanding, misinformation, or diplomatic tension.

Rashica discusses both the benefits and risks of digital diplomacy [6]. According to this view, digital diplomacy helps states promote their interests, increase transparency, communicate with citizens, and expand international influence. However, it also creates challenges such as cyber threats, online propaganda, fake news, digital manipulation, and loss of control over information. This balanced approach is important because digital diplomacy should not be viewed only positively. It is both an opportunity and a risk.

The concept of soft power is also important for understanding digital diplomacy. Joseph Nye explains soft power as the ability to influence others through attraction rather than coercion. Digital diplomacy is closely connected with soft power because states use digital platforms to

promote culture, values, education, tourism, national image, and international cooperation. For example, a country may use social media to promote its cultural heritage, educational opportunities, humanitarian activities, or peace initiatives.

The reviewed literature shows that digital diplomacy is a multidimensional phenomenon. It combines public diplomacy, strategic communication, information technology, cybersecurity, international image-building, and crisis management. The literature also confirms that digital diplomacy has become an important instrument of international relations because it allows states to communicate faster, reach wider audiences, and influence international narratives more effectively.

Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research methodology supported by descriptive and analytical methods. The main method is document analysis. Academic books, scholarly articles, reports of international organizations, and statistical data were examined in order to identify the role of digital diplomacy in modern international relations.

The research is based on the following main questions:

What is digital diplomacy and how does it differ from traditional diplomacy?

Why has digital diplomacy become an important instrument of international relations?

What are the main advantages and risks of digital diplomacy?

How do modern statistics demonstrate the growing importance of digital communication in diplomacy?

The descriptive method is used to explain the meaning, forms, and functions of digital diplomacy. The analytical method is used to examine how digital diplomacy influences foreign policy, public diplomacy, crisis communication, international image, and cybersecurity. The comparative method is also applied to compare traditional diplomacy and digital diplomacy.

The study uses secondary data from reliable international sources. Statistical data from the International Telecommunication Union, DataReportal, and the United Nations E-Government Survey are used to support the analysis. These sources are important because they provide measurable evidence of global digital transformation.

Analysis and Results

The analysis shows that digital diplomacy has become a significant instrument of international relations because it changes the way states communicate, influence foreign audiences, and participate in global political processes. Unlike traditional diplomacy, which

mainly depends on official meetings, diplomatic correspondence, embassies, and intergovernmental negotiations, digital diplomacy uses modern information technologies to make diplomatic activity faster, wider, and more interactive.

One of the most important features of digital diplomacy is the speed of communication. In traditional diplomacy, official statements and responses often require long preparation and formal procedures. In the digital environment, foreign ministries, embassies, international organizations, and political leaders can publish official positions immediately through websites, social media platforms, and online press services. This is especially important during international crises, natural disasters, military conflicts, evacuation processes, pandemics, and emergency situations. For example, during a crisis abroad, an embassy can use digital platforms to inform citizens about safety measures, evacuation routes, visa procedures, emergency contacts, and travel restrictions. This proves that digital diplomacy is not only a political instrument, but also a practical tool for protecting citizens abroad.

Digital diplomacy also expands the audience of diplomatic communication. Traditional diplomacy was mostly focused on relations between governments and official representatives. However, digital diplomacy allows states to communicate directly with foreign citizens, journalists, experts, students, tourists, investors, diaspora communities, and civil society organizations. This creates a new form of public diplomacy, where governments can explain their foreign policy, promote national interests, and strengthen their international image without depending only on traditional media channels.

The growth of global Internet use clearly demonstrates why digital diplomacy has become so important. According to the International Telecommunication Union, around 6 billion people used the Internet in 2025, while approximately 2.2 billion people still remained offline [7]. This statistic shows that digital platforms provide enormous opportunities for diplomatic communication. At the same time, it also reveals the problem of digital inequality. Countries with developed digital infrastructure have more opportunities to conduct effective digital diplomacy, while countries with limited Internet access may face difficulties in participating fully in the global digital environment.

Social media has become one of the most influential spaces for digital diplomacy. DataReportal reported that there were 5.79 billion social media user identities worldwide at the beginning of April 2026 [8]. Although this number may include duplicate accounts and organizational profiles, it still shows the huge scale of online communication. For this reason,

many foreign ministries and embassies actively use platforms such as X, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Telegram to share official statements, promote cultural diplomacy, provide consular information, and respond to global events.

Digital diplomacy strengthens public diplomacy because it creates two-way communication between states and society. In the past, diplomatic communication was usually one-directional and formal. Today, people can comment on official posts, ask questions, share information, criticize decisions, and participate in online discussions. This makes diplomacy more open and visible. For example, a country can use digital campaigns to promote its culture, tourism potential, education system, investment opportunities, reforms, and peace initiatives. Such activities help increase soft power and build a positive national image.

Another important result is that digital diplomacy supports international cooperation. Online conferences, virtual summits, digital platforms, and electronic document exchange make cooperation between states and international organizations faster and more flexible. During global crises, countries can coordinate their actions without waiting for physical meetings. This was especially visible during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many diplomatic negotiations, international consultations, and multilateral meetings were organized online.

Digital diplomacy is also closely connected with the development of digital government. The United Nations E-Government Survey 2024 assessed digital government development in all 193 UN Member States [9]. The report showed that digital government services are becoming more widespread around the world. This is important for diplomacy because strong digital government systems help states provide better online consular services, electronic visa procedures, digital registration, online citizen support, and faster communication with people living abroad.

The analysis also shows that digital diplomacy has become an important tool of soft power. Through digital platforms, states can promote their culture, language, education, values, national achievements, and foreign policy priorities. For example, online cultural festivals, virtual exhibitions, international webinars, educational exchange campaigns, and digital tourism promotion can strengthen a country's image in the international arena. In this way, digital diplomacy helps states influence others not through pressure, but through attraction and positive communication.

However, digital diplomacy also creates serious challenges. One of the main risks is misinformation. False information can spread very quickly on digital platforms and damage

relations between states. Online propaganda and information manipulation may influence public opinion, create distrust, and increase political tensions. Cybersecurity is another serious issue. Diplomatic websites, official accounts, databases, and communication systems can become targets of hacking, cyber espionage, and data theft. If an embassy's official account is hacked, false statements may be published and cause diplomatic misunderstanding. Therefore, digital diplomacy requires strong cybersecurity measures and professional digital communication strategies.

Digital diplomacy also changes the professional requirements for diplomats. Modern diplomats need not only knowledge of international law, diplomatic protocol, negotiation, history, and foreign policy, but also digital literacy. They must understand social media communication, online audience behavior, crisis messaging, media ethics, cyber risks, and information security. This means that diplomatic education and training should include modern digital skills.

The results of the study show that digital diplomacy has several major advantages. It increases the speed of communication, expands diplomatic audiences, strengthens public diplomacy, supports international cooperation, improves consular services, and promotes national image. At the same time, it creates risks related to misinformation, cyber threats, digital inequality, emotional public reactions, and loss of control over information.

Thus, digital diplomacy should not be understood as a replacement for traditional diplomacy. Instead, it should be considered a modern instrument that complements traditional diplomacy and makes it more effective in the digital age. Successful digital diplomacy requires strategic thinking, accurate information, cybersecurity, professional communication, and responsible use of online platforms.

Conclusion

In conclusion, digital diplomacy has become an important new instrument of international relations. The development of the Internet, social media, digital government, artificial intelligence, and online communication platforms has changed the way states conduct foreign policy. Diplomacy is no longer limited to official meetings, diplomatic correspondence, and closed negotiations. It now includes online communication, digital public diplomacy, virtual meetings, social media campaigns, digital consular services, and strategic narrative-building.

The study shows that digital diplomacy increases the speed and reach of diplomatic communication. It helps states promote national interests, strengthen international image,

communicate with foreign audiences, support citizens abroad, and respond quickly to crises. Exact global statistics also confirm the importance of this field. In 2025, around 6 billion people used the Internet, and in April 2026, 5.79 billion social media user identities were recorded globally. These numbers prove that international relations now operate in a highly connected digital environment.

However, digital diplomacy also creates challenges. Misinformation, cyberattacks, propaganda, emotional online reactions, and digital inequality can negatively affect international relations. Therefore, states must develop responsible digital diplomacy strategies. They should train diplomats in digital literacy, protect diplomatic information systems, communicate accurately, and avoid manipulative online behavior.

Overall, digital diplomacy is not a temporary trend. It is a structural transformation of international relations. Its effective use depends on professional communication, technological capacity, cybersecurity, transparency, and strategic thinking. In the modern world, a state that cannot communicate effectively in the digital sphere may lose influence in international politics. For this reason, digital diplomacy should be considered one of the key instruments of contemporary foreign policy.

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