

# Public Diplomacy: The Role of Social Media in Digital Diplomacy

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DOI: [10.22178/pos.122-96](https://doi.org/10.22178/pos.122-96)

LCC Subject Category: J(1)-981

Received 20.08.2025

Accepted 27.09.2025

Published online 30.09.2025

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**Abstract.** In the digital age, characterised by rapid technological advancement, social media has become a crucial tool in public diplomacy. States, governments, organisations, politicians, and diplomats increasingly use online platforms to communicate directly with international audiences, shape public opinion, convey strategies and goals, and manage international relations. The evolution of soft power and digital diplomacy has accelerated, primarily driven by the increasing influence of social media. This paper explores the concept of public diplomacy and examines how social media influences both public and digital diplomacy. It addresses the opportunities, challenges, and risks associated with their use. Using descriptive and analytical methods, we analyse academic literature, official documents, and international reports on public Diplomacy, digital Diplomacy, and the role of social media platforms. In addition, we include specific case studies that highlight the impact and interconnection between digital diplomacy and social media. By applying qualitative analysis, this study aims to understand the broader context, strategies, and diplomatic perceptions, as well as the influence of social media in this field. The findings of this analysis highlight the growing importance and effectiveness of public diplomacy, particularly digital diplomacy. While digital platforms enhance transparency, civic engagement, and the reach of soft power, contributing to stronger international relations, they also pose significant risks, including misinformation, cyberattacks, and misinterpretation of diplomatic messages, all of which can have serious negative consequences. Public Diplomacy, digital Diplomacy, and social media are interlinked, and when used appropriately and strategically, they can yield meaningful and positive outcomes.

**Keywords:** public diplomacy; risks; digital diplomacy; social media; international communication; challenges.

## INTRODUCTION

Public diplomacy has undergone significant evolution over time, particularly with the rapid advancement of digital technologies in recent years. Historically, communication and cooperation in diplomacy were conducted through conventional media such as television and newspapers, as well as in-person meetings. However, with the rise of digitalisation and technological progress, these methods have been replaced by more sophisticated, faster, and more precise tools.

Today, politicians and diplomats can communicate more efficiently and effectively, saving time while achieving their objectives in a timely and strategic manner. These developments have brought notable benefits, including rapid and ac-

curate dissemination of information, improved national image, and the achievement of strategic diplomatic goals.

As an essential instrument of public diplomacy, digital diplomacy has emerged as a new approach enabled by technological growth. Digital Diplomacy is now integrated into the broader framework of public diplomacy, acting as a facilitator of its effective functioning and of the transmission of soft power.

Digital Diplomacy is considered a subset and an extension of public diplomacy, referring to the use of digital tools, digital media, and more broadly, social media platforms. Social media such as Facebook, Twitter (X), TikTok, Instagram, and Telegram play an increasingly unavoidable

role in diplomacy and international relations in today's technological landscape.

The role of social media in public and digital diplomacy has significantly enhanced international communication, influenced public opinion, helped counter disinformation, enabled rapid crisis communication, and improved the speed and precision of diplomatic messaging. These platforms have also been instrumental in enhancing national reputations and fostering faster cooperation and relationship-building between states, governments, organisations, and international corporations.

In this paper, we also examine specific case studies of digital diplomacy and social media in international and interstate communication, within particular circumstances and frameworks.

Despite the numerous benefits and advantages of public and digital diplomacy, especially when aligned with the role of social media and technological innovation, several significant risks and challenges remain unavoidable.

The risks associated with social media use span a wide range and affect individuals, states, governments, politicians, diplomats, organisations, and global corporations. These risks include misinformation, propaganda, platform misuse, cyberattacks, distortion of public opinion, and miscommunication of diplomatic messages. Additionally, social media can contribute to the rise of extremism, hate speech, deterioration of interstate relations, and various cyber threats, all of which are explored in detail throughout this paper.

In the following sections, we aim to elaborate on the key points of public Diplomacy, digital Diplomacy, and the role of social media, highlighting their interconnections, benefits, and, in particular, their challenges and risks. Although technological advancements have facilitated progress and innovation in diplomacy, they have also introduced new, unavoidable challenges that require continuous attention and careful management.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*Public Diplomacy.* Public diplomacy has gained increasing momentum in recent years, even though governments and institutions have recognised and used it for some time. Scholars have developed numerous theories and definitions of this diplomatic model over time, but its

widespread use today primarily stems from significant technological advancements in our era. This model facilitates coordination with other contemporary methods and strategies, which are adapted to current technological advancements.

Many theorists, scholars, diplomats, politicians, as well as institutes and universities, have defined and explained public diplomacy in various ways. What matters most is that the goal and purpose acknowledged by all is to achieve multiple benefits and positive effects for countries and states.

According to Joseph Nye, public diplomacy is a key instrument of soft power, which refers to the ability to achieve foreign policy goals through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or payment [1]. In this regard, public diplomacy utilises a country's culture, values, and policies to influence international public opinion and promote global cooperation.

Public diplomacy is a form of foreign policy that focuses on engaging with the international public to influence perceptions, opinions, and support for a country or its policies [2]. It differs from traditional diplomacy, which primarily deals with state-to-state relations and operates in conventional ways over extended periods. Instead, public diplomacy targets citizens, communities, and non-state organisations globally by employing more sophisticated and open methods and strategies.

The primary goal of public diplomacy is to enhance a country's international image, foster improved international relations, and expand its political and cultural influence on the global stage [3]. Through public diplomacy, states construct and enhance their image worldwide. It strengthens bilateral relations and has a significant impact on the international arena. Public diplomacy offers many opportunities that benefit the state that employs it.

Through public diplomacy, a country's influence on the international stage is enhanced, presenting it with dignity and seriousness. Political, cultural, and other national values influence global public opinion.

In the information age, power is not only dependent on military and economic capabilities but also on the ability to shape others' opinions and attitudes [4]. Public diplomacy is a strategic tool for achieving this, adapting and utilising means such as media, cultural exchanges, and education.

nal programs to influence foreign public perceptions and opinions.

Public diplomacy functions best when it is well-planned, with clear and long-term goals coordinated to achieve the best possible results for the state [5]. When effectively constructed with necessary strategies and methods, public diplomacy produces positive outcomes for states. It can be coordinated and linked with various forms to maximise its impact.

In the digital era, public diplomacy can be integrated and synchronised with technology and its possibilities. "Public diplomacy is the foundation of digital diplomacy, empowering international dialogue through transparency and public engagement" [6]. The internet has transformed diplomatic practice—from one-way information dissemination to a more transparent, interactive form of communication [7]. Technological advancements and digital platforms have created significant, rapid opportunities. Below, we will elaborate on digital diplomacy, which is widely used in today's modern, digitalised era.

*Digital Diplomacy.* Digital Diplomacy encompasses a range of definitions from various scholars and authors. However, due to its broad scope and the various ways technology is applied across multiple dimensions, it is challenging to provide a single, concrete, and concise definition. The evolving nature of technological tools and platforms makes digital diplomacy a dynamic and multidimensional concept [8]. As technology has advanced, public diplomacy has evolved into new forms, interconnected methods, and strategies, including digital diplomacy. Technological advancements and the increasing demand for faster and more effective approaches have driven this shift from public to digital diplomacy.

Digital Diplomacy (also known as e-diplomacy or cyber diplomacy) refers to the use of digital technologies to conduct diplomatic activities. It is typically regarded as a subcategory of public diplomacy, aiming to foster dialogue and cooperation through digital means [9]. Regardless of the term used, digital diplomacy is a modern and advanced strategy that opens up possibilities and enables coherent development aligned with the times and technological progress.

From a scientific perspective, digital diplomacy can be understood as the intersection of international relations, intercultural communication, and modern technology—primarily shaped by

the latter. In practice, this is reflected in how diplomats, institutions, and non-state actors communicate and interact in the international arena [8]. All these multidimensional approaches are integrated and interact through digital diplomacy and technological advancements.

Digital Diplomacy involves the use of digital technology, the internet, and social media by governments and international organisations to communicate, promote foreign policy, and build relationships with international audiences [2]. Digital Diplomacy plays a vital role due to its speed and its ability to enable direct communication with global impact, influencing public opinion worldwide. The role of public diplomacy is to improve and build an international image in a more accessible, easier, and faster way. Additionally, during challenging times, crises, or pandemics – such as the COVID-19 pandemic – this diplomacy has played a highly significant and beneficial role. Furthermore, digital diplomacy is essential because it is fast, transparent, and has a broad international reach and impact.

Digital Diplomacy operates through a combination of strategies and technological tools that enhance its effectiveness and credibility. It operates on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Telegram, offering quick and easy access. Governments and ministries also utilise various online platforms and official websites to engage in public diplomacy. Digital Diplomacy also includes engaging non-state actors, analysing data, measuring public opinion, responding to public feedback, and adapting political and diplomatic strategies accordingly.

Digital Diplomacy is a crucial tool for shaping a state's interests and influence in the international and technological arenas. "Digital diplomacy is a key tool for exercising soft power, as in the information age, soft power depends more on being present and credible in digital spaces than on the number of embassies" [10]. Thus, as Nye emphasises, the value of digital diplomacy and its impact through soft power is increasingly growing and strengthening.

In practice, digital diplomacy has become a central part of public diplomacy due to the speed of information, the ability to interact with the public, and the capacity to reach global audiences in real-time [11]. Therefore, digital diplomacy, as a tool of public diplomacy, presents numerous rapid and diverse opportunities. To achieve this accessibility and effectiveness, public diplomacy

uses technological methods and tools that facilitate and enhance these aspects, primarily social media.

*The Role of Social Media.* Social media has brought about a significant technological revolution in today's world, facilitating global communication by increasing the speed of access and message transmission. Social platforms, such as Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and LinkedIn, have made it easier for politicians and diplomats worldwide to communicate and disseminate their messages. Different actors can use these media to advance their countries' interests, strategies, and specific goals, creating a highly advanced and facilitative space.

Social media has simplified communication for society. Its role includes communication and interaction, information and education, marketing and business, shaping public opinion, international influence, image improvement, cultural awareness, and political and diplomatic uses.

Governments use social media to communicate directly and personally with international audiences. Political leaders often use videos, photos, and posts with clear messages to build their country's image and convey diplomatic messages [12]. Social media has made government work more efficient and accelerated communication, making it faster and easier. Now, through social media, transmitting and sharing messages with the public is very easy and quick. Improving a country's image has never been easier or more effective thanks to social media. Investment, strategy, and impact through social media directly shape countries' images.

Online campaigns and hashtags create opportunities for massive information dissemination and global mobilisation of public opinion [3]. For example, digital initiatives can promote international cooperation or quickly and specifically raise awareness among audiences about global issues, without the need for traditional diplomatic intermediaries or lengthy, costly forms with limited effect.

Official Ukrainian accounts on Twitter, such as @Ukraine and @DefenceU, used memes and digital narratives to gain international support and combat Russian propaganda [13]. This recent concrete example clearly illustrates the role of social media and digital diplomacy in crises, countering negative propaganda in international public opinion.

Effective use of social media can help governments build political and economic support, increase transparency, and facilitate citizen participation [11]. Social platforms enable the sharing of real-time information and create spaces for international discussions, increasing sensitivity to diplomatic initiatives and strengthening connections with global actors [14]. Social media plays a significant role in diplomacy because it offers speed, interactivity, global reach, transparency, and considerable facilitation. Specific messages or information can be quickly presented and delegated through social media. Often, clarifications on various issues are made within minutes or seconds via social media by different diplomats and politicians.

*Challenges and Risks.* However, the use of social media in diplomacy is not without risks. Disinformation and propaganda can undermine official messages [14]. Everything in life has its advantages, but it also carries disadvantages, challenges, and risks that often prevent its full and secure use at maximum effectiveness. The use of digital diplomacy and social media carries its own risks and poses a significant challenge in the era of digitalisation and advanced technology. Disinformation and propaganda in the technological arena pose serious threats, especially to states. These risks carry unpredictable, rapid consequences that can be severe and costly.

The risks associated with social media have significant consequences, including hatred, disinformation, hacking, and psychological, political, and diplomatic impacts on society and states.

Cybersecurity is another concern, as online platforms are vulnerable to attacks and hacking that can compromise diplomatic information [11]. Additionally, digital messages are often interpreted out of context, leading to misunderstandings or international tensions [2]. Online platforms and social media are vulnerable to attacks. They are usually difficult to defend against, given technological advancements, the varying scales of cyberattacks, and the significant capabilities of different hackers who use various methods and tactics. Interference with messages and communications often leads to misunderstandings and misinterpretations, resulting in negative consequences.

Hacking, cyberattacks, and access to sensitive and confidential information pose risks to the stability of relations between states and can disrupt them, potentially leading to more severe and

harmful consequences. The dangers of social media also include the rise and spread of extremist ideologies, which cause consequences for international security. Moreover, sudden, unpredictable diplomatic crises arise when leaders, politicians, or diplomats post ill-considered or unanalysed statements, which quickly escalate into international crises and damage relations.

An example of such incidents is the US-North Korea case (2017-2018), in which US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un exchanged threatening, unprecedented messages via Twitter, sparking panic and fear of escalation and possible military intervention, intensifying the situation. "...Donald Trump posted a tweet sharing a letter from Kim Jong-Un, describing it as a 'very nice note' and saying 'great progress is being made'" [15]. This suggests that haste and the sharing of specific messages on social media often lead to unpredictable and provocative tensions.

Misunderstandings, provocations, external interference, cyberattacks, disinformation, misinterpretation of diplomatic messages, and numerous other actions pose significant risks and challenges for digital diplomacy and the use of social media in the digital age.

## CONCLUSIONS

Public diplomacy, intertwined with digital diplomacy as one of its key components, along with the role of social media, has transformed the way diplomats, governments, states, and organisations interact with the international public to pursue their interests and goals.

This study demonstrates that digital diplomacy and social media have transformed the nature of diplomatic and political communication by enabling rapid and transparent interactions with global audiences. At the same time, these developments pose risks and challenges, including disinformation, sudden diplomatic crises, increased tensions in international relations, incitement to

hatred, and other negative consequences, as evidenced by concrete cases from the past.

This paper's findings demonstrate that public diplomacy utilises digital diplomacy as a method and tool, closely coordinating it with social media. These results are based on the literature reviewed and the research conducted throughout this analysis. Practically, the role of social media is especially significant in the current era of technological development. For example, Ukraine's use of social media to gain international support, shape global opinion, and counter Russian propaganda and disinformation clearly illustrates this. The role of social media is also evident in the case of US-North Korea exchanges (2017-2018), where US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un exchanged threatening messages via social media platforms, with significant effects on international public opinion.

Based on the analysis presented in this study, the researcher recommends that political and diplomatic institutions develop policies for the use of digital diplomacy and social media. These institutions should also train and prepare diplomatic personnel to use digital tools effectively, following established frameworks and guidelines that prevent mistakes, misunderstandings, and misinterpretations of messages. Moreover, monitoring and analysing the use of digital diplomacy and social media by institutions, diplomats, governments, and states is crucial. Digital monitoring and analysis, supported by technology, help prevent errors, miscommunications, misuse, attacks, disinformation, and other adverse effects that pose challenges and risks.

In conclusion, this analysis clarifies and contributes to the understanding of the complex role that social media plays in global politics and contemporary diplomacy, providing a foundation for more effective policies and diplomatic actions in international communication in the digital age, amid ongoing technological developments.

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