

Digital Diplomacy and Political Communication in the 21st Century: Navigating Challenges and Harnessing Opportunities in a Connected World

Diplomatie numérique et communication politique au XXIe siècle : relever les défis et exploiter les opportunités dans un monde connecté

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Abstract:

The main objective of this research paper is twofold. Firstly, it analyzes the diplomatic exchanges carried out in the digital era in order to systematize and clarify the concepts of digital diplomacy and public diplomacy in the academic, media, and political fields. Secondly, the paper seeks to show how the scientific usage of these terms can later be applied to political and governmental debates as a way of contributing to the reinforcement of democracy. We hope to do this by comparing how different governments disclose these economic, social, and political realities in which they live to the international community. These facts must be known to other stakeholders within the complex context of international relations. As follows, a review of the academic bibliography on international relations, particularly on diplomacy and public diplomacy, is addressed. The second section clarifies the meanings of diplomatic activities and explains the framework of diplomatic activity from the most traditional to the most contemporary. The essence of this second concept is an understanding for which we particularly value the contributions of digital native scholars.

Keywords: Diplomacy, Political Communication, Digital Era, digital diplomacy.

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Résumé : L'objectif principal de cette recherche est double. Premièrement, elle analyse les échanges diplomatiques menés à l'ère numérique afin de systématiser et de clarifier les concepts de diplomatie numérique et de diplomatie publique dans les domaines académique, médiatique et politique. Deuxièmement, l'article cherche à montrer comment l'usage scientifique de ces termes peut ensuite être appliqué aux débats politiques et gouvernementaux, contribuant ainsi au renforcement de la démocratie. Nous espérons y parvenir en comparant la manière dont différents gouvernements révèlent à la communauté internationale les réalités économiques, sociales et politiques dans lesquelles ils vivent. Ces faits doivent être connus des autres acteurs dans le contexte complexe des relations internationales. Par conséquent, une revue de la bibliographie académique sur les relations internationales, en particulier sur la diplomatie et la diplomatie publique, est abordée. La deuxième section clarifie les significations des activités diplomatiques et explique le cadre de l'activité diplomatique, des plus traditionnelles aux plus contemporaines. L'essence de ce deuxième concept repose sur une compréhension pour laquelle nous valorisons particulièrement les contributions des chercheurs natifs du numérique.

Mots-clés : Diplomatie ; Communication politique ; Ère numérique, diplomatie digitale.

Introduction

The digital era and digitalization have had a significant impact on the way the international relations system operates. It has changed not only the choice of diplomatic tools available to leaders and diplomats but has also altered the traditional concepts of diplomatic practices. In the digital era, people can communicate across continents in the blink of an eye. The same opportunities have also opened up for diplomats and political leaders around the world. Social media and other digital platforms allow leaders to communicate with their electorates and the wider public not only domestically but also internationally. It is essential, therefore, to understand and analyze the changes that digital technology has brought to diplomacy practice and political communications on a theoretical and practical level in order to fit the current global challenges.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first is the introduction. The second part briefly describes the theoretical framework of digital diplomacy and outlines the changes impelled by technology and communication in political practice. A short overview, in the following section, of the most relevant platforms used by diplomats and political leaders today will enhance their practical assumption within politics. The fourth section undertakes an exploration of the advantages and prime issues related to digital communication in politics. It critically analyzes the literature on the theoretical framework of the practice of diplomacy today and its application, to finally address the issue of fake news, misinformation, and disinformation in global politics.

2. The Evolution of Diplomacy and Political Communication

The subject of the relationship between diplomacy and the media is a classic of international relations studies. There has been a widely favorable evolution of the analysis of this relationship. At the pace that technological advances allowed, for many decades this relationship had been analyzed in the light of the media of each period, which conditioned its behavior. Based on an approach to the political and journalistic practices of the Middle Ages, that is, the forms through which the ruling elites communicated and formed public opinion through speeches, letters, public reading of documents, public ceremonies, and chroniclers, we found that among ordinary citizens the capture of the main arguments and conclusions of these documents through discussions with the ruling elites and a network of messengers, which played the articulation role of the governing, who played the role of the agenda-setters and information gatekeepers of the moment was the main means of confirmation of political truths and the formation of public opinion. During the Modern Age, it was observed that a new elite was ascending in terms of power, political and military that began to accompany the art of speaking with the mastery of the lexicon that belonged to the traditional know-how of management and that enriched, from the responsibilities acquired by the new members, the more traditional procedures with which it composed its bond with the prince's subjects. But it was also an elite on the defensive that, towards the end of the period, saw its power significantly eroded. The diffusion of the practice of reading newspapers and the spread of the literate public, eager for news, had favored the increase in political and social corruption phenomena closely linked to the enormous conditioning verified between journalists and political leaders who often use the press to promote their supremacy, defending the interests of the classes to which they belong. Only at the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century did we discover, in interaction with the American and French Revolutions, the idea and the practice of a parliamentary system, a press independent of political power and of the so-called fourth power. In this period, the function of the press was often that of acting as a beacon to guide political renewal. After the establishment of liberalism as the dominant ideology, it was gradually possible to establish the freedom to inform, laying the foundations of a free press and the principle that everyone had the right to express themselves and to be informed, even if the generalization of obligatory consensus coincided, in practice, essentially with the rights of reception of news, as there is little lyricism and much cynical realism in attributing a corresponding right to broadcast news, particularly those of opposition or social origin critical of the establishment. Only during the twentieth century did this principle become effective, either through

normative and legislative adaptation, or through the disposal and independence of the media. (Adler-Nissen and Eggeling2022)

2.1. Traditional Diplomacy and Communication Channels

Traditional diplomacy dates back to the Greek organization of interstate relations, and today this ancient institution has to adapt to a constantly changing world and adjust to developments in the fields of communication and information technology. As it is an essential tool for the realization of statehood and an inalienable aspect of foreign policy formulated by its ruling regime, traditional diplomacy is still necessary today, despite being less explicit and less visible owing to the emergent networking concept of diplomacy. Diplomacy assists in improving relations with third-party countries and acts as an arbiter during conflicts; however, this traditional form of diplomacy takes place behind closed doors and does not usually enjoy any direct contact with citizens, who usually know little about what is going on inside the diplomatic system, despite the activities being carried out in their name. The nature, scope, and contents of the main components of diplomatic communication that give voice to the actions of traditional diplomacy involve permanent representations, special missions abroad, consular services, cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, and media diplomacy. These forms are currently less debated and more formalized than the new expressions that involve digital platforms. Diplomatic representations and special missions collect information and propose actions based on exchanges with the corresponding representatives, institutions, and the government of the host country. Diplomacy also bears the responsibility for advising national citizens and companies while acting as the guardian of the state's national interests and preserving its national sovereignty. Diplomatic representations also request the presence of other diplomatic missions of third countries on the basis of mutual exchanges. (Cornut et al., 2022)

2.2. The Impact of Digital Technologies

With no intention to provide an exhaustive review and starting from the supposition that information and communication technologies have the power to shape contemporary international relations, we attempt to summarize how they influence and shape diplomacy and political communication.

The Information Society, the Digital Era, and the Network Society are terms often used interchangeably to describe the current period in human society, characterized by an enormous advance in communication and constant connectivity. We live in a moment of specialization and democratization of digital technologies; they are becoming increasingly user-friendly and more diverse. New users are appearing every day, simultaneously with new uses being found in order to achieve greater social inclusiveness. This represents a drastic change in the progress of efficiency and costs of the means of information diffusion, allowing for an expansion of the agents involved, an increase in the spectrum of

information available, and the size of the public in general in direct relation to the means of diffusion of information and communication. (Tavares et al., 2022)

3. Challenges in the Digital Era

The emergence of digital diplomacy constitutes a disruptive force affecting traditional diplomatic action with far-reaching innovations, including changes in actors, an increased real-time approach, a decline in privacy, a multiplicity of channels, and changes in the dissemination, processing, and consumption of information – and how it is to be addressed. The possible benefits include a wider range and increased quality of the relationships established, the professionalization of diplomatic functions and products, a more active and influential public diplomacy, and an enhanced understanding of other cultures and societies that will be sought. On the other hand, digital diplomacy presents some challenges that must be addressed in order for it to contribute to the integration process and the maintenance of fruitful international dialogue. In this context, a first challenge lies in the ability of governments and the diplomatic system to take full advantage of the diverse and innovative functionalities offered by current digital tools and social networks. The need to modernize the organization, communication, connection, information analysis, public service realization, or public policies depends on the capabilities of the actors involved, particularly those in decision-making positions. Diplomatic and consular members must have better training in digital skills and competencies in this area. (Bjola & Manor, 2022)

3.1. Cybersecurity Threats

The rapid technological advances have exponentially increased the potential and effectiveness of cyberattacks. Cyber insecurities not only affect information and programming systems, but they have also led to the creation and support of social actors, not all benevolent, that try to condense some of their effects in the physical space. Concerns about using the Internet to affect the security of states have been most clearly raised by three types of actions in which cyberspace plays leading roles. The first is information theft and the use of the obtained data to carry out further attacks against states or other types of actors. The second deals with attacks intended to recede, avoid, or reduce the effectiveness of defensive or preventive measures aimed at mitigating the impact of traditional physical threats. (Ismagilova et al.2022)

The third is the direct use of the channel to damage physical objects or individuals. In all of these contexts, it is the persistence and incurability of partial infections and the limited possibility of localization of the antagonists that make the exchanges particularly exposed to these threats. Although cyber conflicts are as old as the Internet, their social repercussions, as a result of an increasingly crowded space and the higher complexity of interactions, only require attention at the beginning of the second decade of the 2000s. The threats and subsequent

policies, despite often relying on partially outdated assessments, are increasingly frequent. If in the early political debate, especially outside institutional settings, the threat of cyberattacks was brought to the forefront by a classic case of preference hoaxing. (Pollini et al.2022)

Awareness of the diffused presence of omniscient entities increasingly mediating social-life exchanges has made the link an increasingly relevant topic, reflecting growing concerns about the possible abuses of online communication concerning societies. As a result, the issue is increasingly intertwined with the slowly awakening sensitivity to cyber threats from a national security perspective, sometimes threatening its logic with consequences difficult to predict. Such intertwining is one of the most critical aspects of the current debate on cybersecurity, hampering the freedom of action of information societies and making them, if possible, more vulnerable to social and political threats, first of all emergent ones. (Li & Liu, 2021)

3.2. Misinformation and Disinformation

In our digital era, people receive information from those they trust, usually their friends or family. However, trust is not always a guarantee of the accuracy of the information. Sometimes, people who disseminate information through digital media do not bear moral responsibility for the impact of their words. They do not have enough loyalty to the sources from which they disseminate information. They do not use critical thinking and, therefore, do not fulfill their obligation to confirm the information, filter it, sort it out, and verify it. The absence of verification is a necessary condition for the consumption of fake news and for giving credibility to sources in which you believe, thinking that you can always recognize the truth. At the time of the global crisis, when part of the public feels defenseless, questions have begun to arise regarding the work of journalists to record external powers; thus, rumors and unverified reports were circulating in the media. (Winstone et al., 2021)

Until recently, no one had provided a clear definition for the phenomena related to publications on information with an emphasis on misinformation. Some people perceive the difference from the distorting message. We can say that in recent times, it has generally been common to attract more and more attention from the media related to the post-truth option, which is similar to the phenomenon of fake news culturally related to communication. The rise of disinformation reflects the social empowerment of network users. While a collective apprentice can become an influential educator, collectives of users or even autonomous networks can actually manipulate data on several Internet trade routes. It cannot be definitively determined if information is true or false, if it has been correctly processed or valid, and that both false and true information is contested and fluid. With the increasing proliferation and verification of false information, they create the conditions for the dispersion of disinformation. Moreover, misinformation generated within the channels of traditional media remains unknown. For mediatic

content such as this, the essential information may not be processed into new communication streams, but only into disinformation that addresses specific cognitive, social, and ethnocentric aspects of the audience. (Aïmeur et al., 2023)

3.3. Digital Divide

The term digital divide refers to the differences between people, countries, and regions, and between population groups, in terms of their opportunities to access and use ICT. The concept, while broadly understood in the context of worldwide Internet use, also highlights disparities in opportunities to access, use, and benefit from other digital tools and networks, including software that helps manage, analyze, or present information, services, or devices like telephones, other communication tools, multimedia, equipment, or servers. The notion of a digital divide reveals the need to pay attention to digital inclusion, particularly for marginalized groups. These groups include citizens with disabilities, elderly people, immigrants, ethnic and linguistic minorities, and rural populations with low density, low income, or low education, among others. This section includes subsections on key issues concerning the digital divide and the avatar divide. Each subsection provides a description of the concept and a discussion of the context in which it is most relevant. The section on the digital divide offers an outline of the digital divide, the causes, and the persistence of global divides. This is followed by a subsection on determinants and barriers related to the female digital divide. The next section considers how avatar divides contribute to asymmetrical power in virtual interactions. (Lythreath et al.2022)

4. Opportunities in the Digital Era

In the digital era, consuls and ambassadors use social media to report on their encounters, provide information about developments in the country of residence, and show their public actions and statements made. This rich reservoir of digital declarations has collected a new direction for research in political science, international relations, new communication studies, and data analytics in computer science. The authors of this book work together examining digital diplomacy and have gathered case studies and thematic chapters by scholars from various countries. The book's research topics and the use of data provide clear descriptions of current trends in digital diplomacy by specialists with comparative and diverse perspectives. The Action is dedicated to training the next generation of researchers in diplomacy related to the digital era. The assessments of digital diplomacy in the book have significant implications for practice. While digital diplomacy has use for public diplomacy and social media as a listening tool, the nature of public digitized diplomacy will continue to evolve. It should be appreciated, nurtured, and funded by government leaders. The book is vital to opening windows for looking to the future and closing gaps of understanding by interpreting many varied forms of digital diplomacy. (Cornut et al., 2022)

4.1. Enhanced Connectivity and Access

E-diplomacy is enabling diplomats to be instantly in touch with one another as well as with their foreign ministries and with sources of information. Connectivity speeds up and enriches the processes of consultation and decision-making. Ambassadors and foreign ministers can consult and reach decisions and instructions while on the move. They can range widely in their contacts if opening a link with foreign governments or their officials throws up some kind of interference. Using private modes of e-communication makes it easier to manage communication confidentially. Consular communications can be sped up in this way, allowing governments to react more quickly to emergencies. Permanent representatives in an international conference or in some international organization concerned with particular topics or fields of activity can function more independently from their respective capitals. Diplomats are being freed up to concentrate better on their immediate business. This lively process makes negotiations at the conference or in international organizations more flexible and less bureaucratic, ensuring that the negotiators on the spot waste little of stakeholders' time. Downtime means that political contact and personal contact are now managed under the same heading, compromising several layers of private as well as official conversation. Diplomats engaging in international conversation can enjoy enhanced access to information and a wider scope of business opportunities. Diplomacy suddenly becomes a major public actor and resource. Digital interaction goes to the heart of each and every relationship in citizens' or stakeholders' relations with the government. Diplomacy uses the very same platform to carry on a more weighted business and wield more weight in general, capitalizing on its enabling characteristics, i.e., on the toolkit by which it places these peoples, ideas, and values in direct reaching distance. (Adler-Nissen and Eggeling2022)

4.2. Digital Diplomacy Tools

In the digital age, diplomacy relies on new digital communication tools that change the way communication with foreign and domestic audiences, as well as diplomacy itself, functions. Diplomatic activity is also increasingly carried out in real time and in an environment of permanent mutual information about diplomats, known as people's diplomacy, as a kind of "new public diplomacy." The development and use in practice of digital technologies to circumvent traditional diplomatic tools turn them into new digital diplomatic technologies. It is impossible to imagine modern diplomacy without email, the Internet, and of course, the use of a whole range of mass media, including television.

It is crucial to keep in mind that during the Cold War era, radio broadcasting, effective information campaigns, comprehensive advertising, and thorough audience analysis were profoundly significant for shaping a country's image amidst ideological confrontations, not only domestically but also in foreign nations. Thus, the ongoing technological advancements in modern diplomacy are

ceaseless and mirror the rapid evolution of digital technology. This section aims to shed light on the growing influence of digital technology on contemporary diplomatic practices and addresses the most prevalent applications of digital technology in diplomatic communication today: including diplomatic websites that serve vital functions, social networks that facilitate real-time engagement, and e-participation platforms that encourage citizen involvement and transparency in diplomatic endeavors. (Gumenyuk et al.2021)

4.3. Public Diplomacy through Social Media

This last section is dedicated to social media and public diplomacy. Social media has the potential to transform traditional public diplomacy. By adapting to the digital era, governments, non-governmental organizations, and multinational corporations can update and expand upon the concepts and ideals of public diplomacy. Social media provides platforms that support and encourage dialogue and engagement across borders. The central argument of this section is that by employing social media to foster interactions with target audiences, public diplomacy efforts will better resonate with those governments and non-governmental organizations are attempting to influence, whether those people are living in Western, traditionally supportive states or citizens residing in states hostile to the sending government. The challenge comes in the risk of lost control and the need to encourage the public to use the same medium to shape their conception of the sending entity. (Hedling & Bremberg, 2021)

There are several benefits of employing social media in public diplomacy. Enhanced agility enables governments and organizations to respond more quickly to global shifts or developments. It is easier for multinationals, non-governmental organizations, and governments to reach out to specific demographic segments. This valuable advantage is harder to carry out using traditional media. The conversation is a two-way process, not a top-down delivery of messages. Social media provides more opportunity to shape a discourse. It increases reach and impact, providing a cost-effective way to reach far greater audiences. Governments, non-governmental organizations, and companies find that using the Internet, linking to an acceptable story, or sending a press release through their own mailing list and then posting headlines on their company page does not work. The goal instead is to reach as much of the target audience as possible. Online conversation influencers understand that interesting stories rather than company announcements are more likely to be shared. The key is that the public expects listening and engagement to occur, or else they will feel that the public diplomacy effort is manipulative in nature. (Chernobrov2022)

5. The Role of Non-State Actors

The emergence of new non-state actors in the public diplomacy field has deepened the process of redefinition of the role of the state in its external relations. In the 19th century, the nation-state completely dominated foreign policy. More

recently, during the Cold War era, non-governmental organizations played an almost negligible role in foreign policy—that game was only played by states. However, in the last decades, things have definitely changed. The power of some transnational corporations, the intensification of the integration processes of the European Union, as well as the growth and empowerment of non-governmental organizations in almost every area of the global space, are only some examples of the new context. This new situation led to the affirmation that a redefinition of power must take the entry of non-state actors into the geopolitical game into consideration. Around seventy percent of foreign posts are located in cities that have non-state actors, access to them, and their capabilities. Over a third of these posts focus on interactions with non-state actors who play a role in security, i.e., the corporate sector and the media. There is no doubt that in this new global governance landscape, traditional diplomatic action is no longer monopolized by state actors. Civil society is now another political actor, along with the media, the corporate sector, multilateral organizations, and public opinion. All of these actors sometimes adapt more quickly than states to the dynamism of the international system. (Clément et al.2021)

5.1. Impact of Non-Governmental Organizations

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are very active and prominent players in contemporary international relations. They are important buyers of scarce NGO slots at international conferences. They run large advocacy campaigns at international summits and conferences. They provide important insights into international negotiations and dispute-resolving activities. They lobby governments and intergovernmental organizations, using a variety of tactics to influence outcomes and rule enforcement. They collaborate across many issue areas and are becoming ever more complex, with global and regional reach. NGOs petition international justice systems regarding deprivations of human rights, intricate disputes in human rights, economic, social, and cultural rights, and take part as *amicus curiae* in international arbitration trial proceedings.

Despite their prominence and the wide social appeal of some international organizations, international relations theory has dedicated limited attention to non-state actors. Roles and reputation lead to distinguishing some NGOs as having global status. The increasing transnational scope of certain NGOs gives them the possibility to have a global impact. The role of some NGOs in providing intergovernmental and supranational organizations with an early warning system is effectively increasing. International organizations collaborate with certain NGOs in the early phase of international negotiations. Indeed, NGOs often abuse that role by establishing partnerships with international organizations, obtaining consultative, observer, or accreditation status, and thereby weakening global governance.

5.2. Influence of Tech Companies and Social Media Platforms

Over the past decade, diplomacy and political communication have significantly changed under the impact of the development and dissemination of digital technology. Representatives of the state apparatus use numerous digital communication platforms for the transmission and reception of information, building contacts with foreign audiences, and satisfying the demand for open, objective information on the real situation inside the country and around the world. The difficulties and challenges created by changes related to the work of diplomats and governments and communication have important common traits, regardless of geographical location. One of these changes is the transformation of the role of multilateralism institutions, influencing the position towards them, the weakening of which is largely determined by the development and establishment of digital communication platforms and techniques, disintermediation, and opacity and short-term biases. The impact of the activities of tech companies and social media platforms on the work of diplomats, as well as digital changes in diplomacy and state systems, are being actively studied. However, there are very few studies directly related to the analysis of the federated influence of these subjects on the activities of diplomacy collectively. This study is an attempt to contribute to the analysis of the influence of social media platforms and tech companies on diplomacy on a systemic basis. (Schoenefeld2021)

Foreign communication has always been an important part of the work of any state authorities for the internal audience and foreign ones, as officials have always strived to demonstrate the political, economic, social, and cultural level of life in which they take part. Digital technologies contribute to the qualitative and quantitative increase of interaction with society and state residents, as well as the formation of new methods and channels. The sphere of activity of foreign ministries and the diplomatic corps is quite limited by standard forms and communication tools, whose significance in the digital era fades against the background of the capabilities of numerous social media platforms. Diplomacy always bears a complex three-dimensional character, combining political, economic, and informational aspects, psychological and legal impact, and demonstration effects on inhabitants and organizations of the so-called third countries. The main tasks of diplomacy include obtaining political preferences, collecting information, training the ground for possible changes, maintaining preventive activities, and solving problems on a bilateral and multilateral basis. In the digital era, when there are almost no short-term prospects for direct and open information and routing, there is a significant transformation of the functions and tasks of diplomatic services, followed by changes in diplomatic networks architecture and human rights composition. Diplomatic tools provide a certain range and quality of opportunities, and the quantization of their value and importance to diplomats, as well as the objectives they are pursuing, only acquires due to their combination with content. Foreign ministries working with

technologies and digital platforms are part of their information and communication policy or brand policy related to the level of comfort and quality of life. (Schoenefeld2021)

6. Case Studies and Examples

The technicity of diplomacy is an inexhaustible source of case studies, often spectacular but sometimes polemical as well, notably in the field of digital-era political communication. By virtue of their diplomatic micro-environment, embassies play the role of human seawalls amidst a sea of technology, enabling the continuity of the delicate missions of credit and identity. Beyond protection and analysis, they have found there, from time to time, tools for their furtive or submerged actions. Digital diplomacy encourages new forms of communication, even profit-making ones. Sometimes it also helps citizen actions to emerge, like the one that consisted of leading the fight to defend an Italian citizen who was forced, following a fatal accident, to undertake a judicial itinerary in a foreign country unjustly accused. But altogether, the stakes are higher. The recent crisis with Russia following the intervention of French diplomacy to help a Franco-Russian woman is in that regard very significant.

The success of digital technologies in the field of diplomatic micro-environments is still today the one that allows everyone, as a private individual, to express themselves, to be in touch with their close relatives or to meet others, in the greatest respect for privacy and security. The fact still remains that not only does the diplomat obey the principles of interdependence, the first of which is "think globally, act locally", but he also plays a practical role with the interfaces of the State allowing to link the international scale to the hypersensitive context of the place. The more he invests in the digital exchanges of his micro-environment, the more he is attentive to the sensitivity of the information, the more his institution gains in the influence of non-linguistic communication, understanding and clarity, to reach his partners to be understood and seen. The more the dichotomous influence of the digital era is imposed on our organizations, the more the embassy and its action should ensure rigor in their communication. Today this consistency of microelectronics paves the way for the place of ergonomics in the structure of digital culture.

6.1. Use of Digital Tools in International Crises

The main claim of the chapter is that the use of social media to engage domestic and international audiences plays a critical role in a country's attempts to shape the narrative, control messages, and avoid diplomatic isolation as part of the overall conflict management toolkit. This is particularly true in the case of pluralistic states at war or in periods of military escalation, where the narratives and messages shaping the ongoing conflict are being shaped and disseminated both by internal and external actors, and the stakes are high for the involved parties, both in military and reputational terms. However, there is scarce research

on the social media strategies adopted by the non-Western actors involved in international crises, and an outright absence of knowledge regarding whether these actors also resort to deniability or reciprocity tactics.

Unfortunately, the digital nature of the social media narratives also means that they have the potential to amplify the narratives containing propaganda and misinformation, although it is not necessarily the case that an increase in the volume or speed of information implies a decrease in the quality of the communication. There is an inherent element of the logic of quantity proposed by both the growing complexity of the social media landscape and the potential of the digital environment to be exploited for disruptive informational power dispersion reasons.

6.2. Successful Digital Diplomacy Campaigns

To identify the most successful examples of digital diplomacy campaigns, the impact of the campaign must be directly linked to the policy objective and outcome of the campaign. Many ministries of foreign affairs have employed persuasive communication in their digital diplomacy efforts and increased their web presence and digital activity, but not all social media campaigns are successful. For instance, the Israel Defense Forces frequently engage in rhetorical warfare with enemy lists that publicly target Hamas as its number one enemy and Hezbollah as its potential number one enemy. While the persuasive communication efforts employed by the Israel Defense Forces may have attracted public attention to attacks against Hamas and Hezbollah, they reinforce the negative image of Israel as an aggressor on social media in a world that is increasingly sensitive to the ethical dimensions of conflict. (Workneh, 2024)

In contrast, effective digital diplomacy should facilitate power sharing and vertical communication via social media, engaging differing groups during peacemaking efforts. The Egyptian Revolution was a digital diplomacy success because of the people, not the technology. The digital technology served as a barometer to measure and analyze the Egyptian people's pro-democratic movements. The government of Egypt, knowing that the world was watching in real-time via social media, then decided against extreme violence, aiding the peaceful revolt. (Schoenefeld2021)(Workneh, 2024)

7. Ethical and Legal Considerations

The ethical questions on digital diplomacy conclude the matter. In the writings of theoreticians that concern the field, the debate on ethical protocols is still rather quiet. The related projects, however useful, are not general in nature, but specific or related to an affiliated organization. A Universality Protocol, for example, regarding the conduct of purist digital diplomacy – is it actually a wish, something that refers to a fictitious reality? For normative aspects or guidelines, we can perhaps find in the field of political communication and target them to our reality. An example is a code of ethics: if within internal disputes, it cannot be considered

standard by consensus, it can serve to start the discussion on the guidelines within its jurisdiction, thus serving as a reference for the definition of common protocols. The outcome is a discussion that is not only within academic institutions. What does our practice look like at times? A consistent flow of tweets, posts, and messages that inscribe the everyday work of the operators – and therefore the core of digital diplomacy – from a strictly political perspective, where the focus is on government communication. Not that politics should not be a predominant priority; clearly, within the role, it is an integral part of it.

7.1. Privacy and Data Protection

Privacy and data protection are included for the first time as two different rules, as fundamental rights in the new EU legal framework. Everyone has the right to respect for his or her private and family life, home, and communications, while personal data is protected. The term personal data is "any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person" in a wide sense, emphasizing the fact that, in some cases, data that is not nominally linked to an individual could still be considered personal data if there are chances to single it out.

In the last couple of years, personal data handling has become both a significant economic matter and a fundamental obstacle to privacy management because not only is the knowledge of the benefits kept among specialists who deal with the matter on a daily basis, but society in general feels a bit overwhelmed by the complexity of the regulation and ill-equipped to understand its implications. An illustration of this can be seen in the ethical and legal breaches regarding the personal data of up to 87 million users, some of whom are EU citizens, for which the company faced heavy fines and a decrease in the trust placed in it by the public. Additionally, the regulation has a global reach as it is the first time that an EU law tackles a significant global issue, regardless of the physical location of the entity processing data. The legal principle of extraterritoriality, already known in some specific cases, allows the EU to extend its legal jurisdiction beyond its borders, which was applied to data management when the regulation was launched, questioning the right of companies located outside the European jurisdictional boundaries to operate without being subject to the regulation itself.

7.2. Digital Diplomacy Ethics

Digital diplomacy, or eDiplomacy, refers to the legitimate deployment of digital methods for the purpose of furthering diplomatic work. Strategy, as well as both content and functionality design, should be ethically grounded in the principles that materialize in international law. Some of the guidelines that derive from the analysis of the workings of traditional diplomacy turn out to be equally valuable for nurturing eDiplomacy, too. In general, there seems to be a broad consensus regarding the notion that ethical codes and guidelines should be fostered over time by the public after reviewing debate and consensus through inclusive consultation, while the emerging legal framework may end up reflecting them by mirroring

generally agreed-upon basic values and widely recognized practices. Furthermore, as with traditional diplomacy, the need exists to educate both staff and contractors involved in eDiplomacy on ethics and best practices. (Schoenefeld2021)

The promotion of data privacy and data protection always represents a major concern in both research and education about social media strategy. First, when approaching eDiplomacy, and particularly social media management, the deployment of digital content should always adhere to a specific and unique human rights-based code of conduct that is essential to protect the freedom of expression of political figures from all possible walks of life engaged in political communication. In social and political discourse, digital content may indeed be used as a convenient and effective tool for both nation and policy promotion, while, for a lesser-known trend, discourse may also be used as a device for the defamation of opposing leaders. In this direction, possible new data protection requirements need to be fulfilled by technology vendors in the era of social media. Second, ethical concerns about the publication of diplomats' personal information have been evoked repetitively. (Workneh, 2024)

8. Future Trends in Diplomacy and Political Communication

In the future, one possible scenario is that diplomacy will become a challenge rather than a domain where states behave routinely, respecting and obeying the accepted norms. However, empirical evidence from diplomacy in the past Digital Era—shown in the form of tweets, YouTube videos, and countless retelling media stories—will transform into documents and compile the annals of future generations. These will be referred to and used as first-party evidence. Other histories have to be interpreted with caution, but this account captures moments in the career of real persons in the murk of real-time events, critical of still-active polemics. It will be argued and rebutted and shape history. There are other difficulties for today's diplomats. Future citizens engaging with the annals of their time may, in 2050 or 2100, ask awkward questions of the institution of diplomacy. How twisted are the wires of politicians now? What hope of calm individual reflection, the cutting judgment parodied until the public is taken, and having to recapture decision.

Ambassador Herro Mustafa, for the United States in Bulgaria, believes that diplomacy should endeavor to stay ahead of the technological curve. She explains that staying ahead means learning how to use and leverage new technologies in an increasingly competitive and interconnected world. Furthermore, Ambassador Mustafa added that foreign service officers should be efficient and suitable communicators on a range of platforms. We are in a new era of diplomacy, where we are expected to communicate in a timely and relevant manner. Diplomacy must also be creative and bold in using technology from new media to e-diplomacy, in meeting the challenges of global diplomacy posed by the rapid pace of technological change. Diplomacy should also focus on protecting consumers from emerging digital threats. Embassy Sofia works to educate Bulgarian

consumers on the risks of using digital platforms and to locate illegal content in the digital ecosystem, which creates a competitive cost for diverse IT companies. Online content management for the Bulgarian Embassy and the Bulgarian Digital Compact on Child Sexual Abuse seeks to address the distinctive cybersecurity priorities of Bulgaria. (Yeşiltaş et al., 2022)

8.1. Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a key driver of digital transformation in the 21st century. At the most fundamental level, AI acts as cognitive support to human decision-making and as a mediator between the human interfaced with an AI system and the natural realm it orders. Applied to political communication and influence, AI is central to the digital tools that direct, distort, and disrupt international diplomatic dialogue. The variety of tasks to which AI is already, or will in the future be, applied in the diplomatic domain is, of course, always subject to the constraint that its *raison d'être* as a technology is essentially commercial. This provokes the question of how to best balance the undoubtedly indispensable role of AI in diplomacy with the fact that the interests of businesses often diverge from the political and public values that inform how and why diplomacy is performed. This chapter posits that for international diplomacy, AI can only be effectively regulated through the practical geometry that characterizes diplomacy itself. All else being equal, equilateral relations between the foundational components of digital diplomacy correspond to a set of horizontal and vertical regulatory principles that safeguard and define the enduring implementation of the core experiences, practices, and values of diplomacy. The chapter concludes with suggestions for a principles-based approach to practically regulating AI-based diplomatic tools from three different perspectives: domestic-sphere ethical guidelines, sector-wide governance, and international frameworks. (Schoenefeld2021)

As a cornerstone of the digital transformation of the 21st century, artificial intelligence (AI) permeates social, private, and public life alike. AI not only acts as cognitive support to human decision-making but also as a mediator between the human interfaced with an AI system and the natural realm it orders. In foreign policy and diplomacy, AI delivers analysis on political processes and public opinion, facilitates translation and interpretation, speeds up and enhances the efficacy of administrative and bureaucratic tasks, assists in economic sector regulation, supports conflict resolution and the implementation of peace treaties, optimizes trade and diplomatic service, and provides human-like decision-making for robots that can perform tasks that are dangerous for humans. At the public international level, the AI offices of foreign and diplomacy-focused ministries have negotiated mutually beneficial bilateral agreements for the future application of AI.

8.2. Virtual Reality in Diplomatic Relations

Though still greatly underused, virtual reality technology has an unexpressed potential to help diplomacy reach its aims of fostering dialogue, facilitating understanding, and developing trust. By fully engaging the listeners in a different environment from the one they are used to, virtual reality can help them better understand the nature and contributing factors of a crisis, observe quickly changing events in real time, and feel the reality of the scene, which increases involvement and encourages them to invest more resources – time, money, and political commitment – in stabilizing the situation. Virtual reality could also be used as a tool for creativity to produce ideas on how to recover from crises. The committed diplomatic activity lays down the roots and the founding principles of a robust legal and political system, allowing the people in the affected communities, including the general public, to create and enjoy a flourishing political life. Defending this activity is not merely a matter of promoting or protecting one distinctive aspect of international law, its community, reputational, and social interests, but a broader matter of protecting the fundamental principles of constitutionalism on which the lives of all humans and communities are grounded. (Workneh, 2024)

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, digital diplomacy is revolutionizing the way in which diplomats represent their nation, disseminate information, listen, and communicate with their citizenry, one another, and non-state actors. Though replete with challenges that will impel diplomats to adapt and inevitably alter fundamental diplomatic institutions, goals, and practices, digital diplomacy also presents an unprecedented avenue of opportunities, allowing diplomats and diplomatic systems to harness digital technology, reap the benefits of the digital era, and become more effective and relevant. By considering and adapting to the democratic deficit challenge that the digital era brings, foreign services and international organizations should be able to exploit their connection and rapport with citizens and become more effective political actors within democracies. Overcoming the democratic and self-governance challenges that the digital era presents to interstate communication is a crucial goal that lies within reach of democratic states and their citizens.

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Pr. SIHEM BENRAHOU

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