Public Diplomacy as an Instrument of International Politics in the Digital Era

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the role of public diplomacy as an instrument of international politics in the digital era. The development of information and communication technology has revolutionized the way countries interact and influence global public opinion. Through a qualitative descriptive approach, this study examines how public diplomacy is utilized to build a positive image of the country, promote national interests, and strengthen relations between countries through various digital platforms, such as social media, news portals, and online campaigns. The results of the study show that public diplomacy as an instrument of international politics in the digital era has developed rapidly through the use of communication technology and social media that allows for more direct, fast, and broad interaction with the global community. The findings show that various strategies such as digital diplomacy through social media campaigns, cultural diplomacy in digital format through online festivals and exhibitions, educational diplomacy with online learning platforms and international research collaborations, to mass media diplomacy through positive and educational news have succeeded in improving a country's image, expanding international cooperation networks, and strengthening the country's position in the global arena. This study also reveals that the adaptation of public diplomacy to digital transformation is an important factor in achieving foreign policy goals and building more constructive and mutually beneficial international relations.

Keywords: *Public Diplomacy, International Politics, Digital Era, State Image, Digital Media*

Introduction

In an increasingly complex and interconnected era of globalization, public diplomacy has evolved into one of the most important strategic instruments for a country to safeguard and promote its national interests (Trisni & Putri, 2023). No longer limited to government-to-government interactions, public diplomacy focuses on direct communication with international communities to build understanding, trust, and a positive image of the country in the eyes of the world (Ma,mun, 2012). Through public diplomacy, governments seek to introduce and promote their culture, values, policies, and official positions to influence global public opinion, ultimately garnering support for the country's foreign policy (Hennida, 2009).

In a world that is increasingly open and transparent, public diplomacy becomes ever more relevant as a key strategy in international relations. Amidst the rapid flow of information and advances in communication technology that enable cross-border interactions in mere seconds, public diplomacy provides opportunities for a country to introduce, promote, and celebrate its cultural heritage, natural wealth, and noble values

to the global community (Indraswari & Hermawan, 2015). Through various channels such as cultural exchanges, international festivals, creative economy exhibitions, as well as the use of digital media and social media, countries can build positive narratives that strengthen their image and reputation on the world stage. Public diplomacy is not merely a promotional tool; it is also an important instrument for fostering mutual understanding, reducing negative stereotypes, and cultivating sympathy and support for the country's national interests (Rachmawati, 2017).

In general, public diplomacy is an activity carried out by governments to engage and communicate directly with foreign publics, with the primary goal of influencing the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of people in other countries so they align with—or at least do not contradict—the country's national interests (Trisni, 2020). Moreover, public diplomacy plays a role in facilitating mutually beneficial cooperation through enhanced mutual understanding and trust. In practice, public diplomacy heavily relies on soft power, which is a country's ability to attract sympathy and persuade others without coercion or force. This soft power is embodied through the promotion of culture, political values, legitimate foreign policies, and various educational and cultural exchange programs that build a positive image of the country worldwide (Putri & Trini, 2021).

One of the most prominent approaches in the implementation of public diplomacy is cultural diplomacy. Through cultural diplomacy, a country introduces and promotes its cultural wealth—such as art, music, dance, culinary traditions, and local values—to international audiences (Rudiawan, 2022). This can take the form of cultural festivals, art exhibitions, traditional performances, or cross-cultural collaborations aimed at fostering admiration, interest, and appreciation from foreign publics. In this way, countries not only enhance their positive image but also cultivate emotional closeness, which is a crucial asset in international relations (Soesilowati, 2017).

In addition, public diplomacy can also be realized through educational diplomacy. Student and scholar exchange programs, scholarships for study within the country, and research collaborations with foreign educational institutions serve as effective means to introduce the country's education system, academic quality, and intellectual values to young people from around the world (Wardhana & Hasran, 2022). Participants in these programs, who eventually return to their respective countries, are expected to become informal ambassadors carrying positive impressions, deep understanding, and even sympathy toward the country they visited and studied (Kristiana & Benito, 2023).

Furthermore, public diplomacy is also carried out through media diplomacy, particularly by leveraging developments in information and communication technology in the digital era. Governments and related institutions actively produce creative content, positive news, and online campaigns aimed at global audiences through various platforms, including social media, international news portals, and online video channels (Pramadya & Oktaviani, 2021). This strategy enables the dissemination of narratives directly controlled by the country, while also serving as an effort to counter disinformation that could damage the nation's reputation. By synergistically employing cultural, educational, and media diplomacy, public diplomacy becomes a comprehensive

instrument to strengthen a country's position on the international stage (Prawiraputri & Meganingratna, 2021).

Several previous studies have examined public diplomacy in various contexts. Nye (1990) emphasized the importance of soft power as an instrument of public diplomacy to build a positive image of a country in the eyes of the world, highlighting how culture, political values, and credible foreign policies serve as primary sources of influence. Meanwhile, Zaharna (2007), in her research on network public diplomacy, demonstrated how global social networks make it easier for countries to establish two-way communication with international communities. Another study by Melissen (2005) described the evolution of modern public diplomacy, increasingly involving non-state actors and emphasizing the importance of engagement rather than merely one-way messaging. At the regional level, research by Sulianita & Qorib (2019) examined Indonesia's public diplomacy through cultural diplomacy, particularly in promoting arts and culinary traditions to ASEAN countries, which proved effective in enhancing Indonesia's positive image.

Nevertheless, most previous studies have largely focused on general concepts of public diplomacy and the application of soft power in traditional contexts or during the early stages of the digital transition. Studies that specifically describe how public diplomacy is utilized as an international political instrument in the digital era—especially those that highlight the use of the latest communication technologies, the dynamics of social media interactivity, and strategies to address global misinformation—remain relatively limited. This research seeks to fill that gap by analyzing how public diplomacy in the digital age serves not only as a tool for cultural promotion or image building, but also as a strategic instrument to influence the international political landscape, build alliances, and safeguard national interests within an increasingly complex and competitive global information ecosystem.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive analytical method (Anggito & Setiawan. 2018). This approach was chosen to gain a deep understanding of how public diplomacy is carried out by a country as an instrument of international politics in the digital era. The data in this study were obtained through library research which includes academic literature, books, scientific journals, reports from international institutions, and official publications from foreign ministries of various countries. In addition, the author also utilizes secondary data sources in the form of online media articles, results of international public opinion surveys, and foreign policy documents related to public diplomacy in the digital realm. The data that has been collected is then analyzed using content analysis techniques to identify patterns, strategies, and challenges that arise in the implementation of public diplomacy in the digital era. This study also uses a limited comparative approach to see how several countries utilize digital diplomacy in building their political influence at the international level. With this method, it is hoped that the research can produce a comprehensive picture of the strategic role of public diplomacy as a tool of modern foreign policy, while also providing

academic contributions to the development of international relations studies, especially in the field of digital public diplomacy.

Result and Discussion

In the digital era marked by rapid advancements in communication and information technology, public diplomacy in international politics has increasingly transformed and become reliant on the use of various digital platforms, particularly social media. Countries no longer depend solely on formal diplomatic channels that are closed and elitist in nature, but are now actively reaching out directly to the international community through official accounts of governments, foreign ministries, and diplomatic missions abroad. Through engaging visual content, online campaigns, international webinars, and even real-time interactions with global netizens, public diplomacy has become more personal, responsive, and adaptive to the swiftly evolving dynamics of global issues.

This technology-based public diplomacy strategy aims to build and maintain a positive image of a country in the eyes of the world, while also influencing international public perceptions and opinions to align with the national interests it seeks to achieve. With more open and interactive communication, digital public diplomacy enables countries to strengthen their soft power, promote their culture, tourism, and foreign policies in a more persuasive manner, reaching a broader audience. Ultimately, public diplomacy in this digital era is not just about delivering messages, but also about building emotional connections and long-term trust, which are crucial assets in garnering international support for various national political agendas.

Cultural Diplomacy in the Digital Era

1. Utilizing Social Media and Digital Platforms

In this increasingly advanced digital era, the use of social media and digital platforms has become one of the main strategies in public diplomacy, particularly cultural diplomacy. Countries like Indonesia can take advantage of various channels such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook to disseminate information about the nation's rich cultural heritage. Through creative, dynamic, and easily accessible visual content, Indonesia can introduce various cultural aspects ranging from visual arts, traditional music, regional dances, distinctive cuisines, to local customs. Content such as travel vlogs, cultural festival documentaries, or folk tales in animated formats have proven effective in capturing international public attention and enhancing the country's positive image.

Beyond promoting arts and traditions, Indonesia's cultural diplomacy can also be directed toward introducing the Indonesian language. Through digital platforms, light educational content can be created, such as videos introducing everyday vocabulary, basic grammar tutorials, or challenges using Bahasa Indonesia for foreign speakers. This strategy not only expands the global reach of the Indonesian language but also fosters emotional connections between international communities and Indonesia. With an interactive and entertaining approach, learning Indonesian becomes more enjoyable while simultaneously increasing foreigners' interest in delving deeper into Indonesia.

Collaborating with international influencers and content creators is also an important strategy to expand public diplomacy. Influencers with large and diverse audiences can help promote Indonesian culture to their followers through authentic and relatable content. For example, through cultural visit programs to Indonesia, influencers can share their experiences enjoying local cuisines, learning traditional dances, or wearing traditional attire, which they then post on their social media. This approach has a distinct appeal because it feels more personal and convincing compared to formal promotions.

Furthermore, digital technology also enables cultural diplomacy to be conducted immersively through virtual tours of Indonesian museums, historical sites, or natural tourist destinations. Online events such as traditional cooking classes, batik workshops, or cultural festivals broadcast live provide opportunities for international audiences to engage directly, even from afar. Moreover, developing games and applications themed around Indonesian culture can serve as both educational tools and entertainment that appeal to the global youth. Through these approaches, cultural diplomacy becomes not only informative but also interactive, creating positive experiences that are more likely to stick in the memories of international audiences.

2. Traditional Cultural Diplomacy in Digital Formats

Digital transformation has opened vast opportunities to extend the reach of Indonesia's traditional cultural diplomacy to a global level. Programs that previously could only be conducted face-to-face can now be shifted to the digital realm without diminishing the essence of cultural exchange itself. By leveraging technology, cultural diplomacy becomes not only more efficient and cost-effective but also able to reach a much wider audience across national borders.

A concrete example can be seen in the adaptation of cultural exchange programs such as the Indonesian Arts and Culture Scholarship (BSBI), which can now be developed in virtual formats. The implementation of BSBI activities virtually through regular meetings, interactive webinars, and online workshops allows international participants to continue learning about dance, traditional music, and the philosophies of Indonesian culture directly from maestros without having to travel to Indonesia. By utilizing video conferencing, recorded teaching materials, and online discussions, the transfer of cultural knowledge can still proceed effectively, and even be recorded for reuse by more participants in the future.

Additionally, art and cultural exhibitions can also be held virtually by utilizing digital galleries or interactive websites. Works of visual art, handicrafts, traditional clothing, and historical artifacts can be showcased through high-resolution photos, 360-degree videos, or three-dimensional virtual tours (3D virtual tours) that allow visitors to explore every corner of the exhibition from anywhere in the world. Such digital exhibitions not only provide an intriguing cultural exploration experience but also open promotional opportunities for Indonesia's creative economy as visitors can be directed to purchase MSME products via e-commerce links.

Meanwhile, organizing cultural festivals online is another form of traditional cultural diplomacy that has transformed through digital media. These festivals can combine dance performances, traditional music, interactive culinary sessions, and

cultural competitions in live streaming formats broadcast on platforms such as YouTube, Facebook Live, or Instagram. International viewers can participate by sending videos of themselves dancing regional dances, cooking Indonesian dishes, or interacting directly with artists through Q&A sessions. In this way, online cultural festivals not only preserve Indonesia's cultural spirit in the eyes of the world but also strengthen the emotional connection of the global community to Indonesia's uniqueness and cultural richness.

3. Building Awareness and Engagement through Cultural Dialogue

In the context of public diplomacy, particularly cultural diplomacy, building international public awareness and engagement is a crucial aspect. One strategic effort that can be undertaken is organizing online cultural dialogues. These activities can involve academics, cultural practitioners, artists, students, and international communities to discuss various topics related to Indonesia's traditions, noble values, and cultural heritage. Through such interactive discussions, a space for exchanging ideas is created that can enrich the perspectives of both parties. Moreover, cultural dialogues serve as an effective medium for fostering mutual respect among nations and reinforcing Indonesia's image as an open, tolerant, and culturally rich country.

Besides dialogues, another important step in raising awareness is carrying out well-planned digital campaigns. These campaigns can be designed to educate the global public about the importance of preserving Indonesian culture while highlighting the role of cultural diplomacy as a peaceful and constructive instrument of international politics. Campaigns can be realized through inspiring short videos, infographics, social media stories, and online challenges that invite public participation in introducing certain cultural elements such as batik, angklung, or folk tales. By leveraging digital platform algorithms, these campaigns can reach broader and more relevant target audiences.

Through cultural dialogues and awareness campaigns, Indonesia not only expands its international network but also reaffirms its identity on the global stage. Increasing international public awareness of Indonesian culture will directly impact the country's positive image and open broader opportunities for cooperation in tourism, education, and the creative economy. Furthermore, the involvement of the global community in campaigns to preserve culture also strengthens the position of Indonesia's cultural diplomacy as an effective soft power tool in achieving national interests in this era of globalization and digitalization.

Educational Diplomacy in the Digital Era

1. Utilizing Digital Platforms

Social media has become one of the most effective digital platforms for disseminating information about a country's education system. Through channels such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and TikTok, governments or educational institutions can share success stories of alumni, innovations in education, as well as testimonials from international students. Visual content such as photos and short videos allows messages to be delivered quickly and attractively, thereby fostering a positive image of educational quality in the eyes of the global public. Moreover, the two-way interaction that occurs through comments or online discussions also creates opportunities to answer questions and build more personal relationships with international audiences.

In addition to social media, official websites and educational portals serve as comprehensive information centers. These sites can provide details about national curricula, lists of universities, scholarship programs, research opportunities, and enrollment procedures for foreign students. With user-friendly interfaces available in multiple international languages, these websites make it easier for prospective students and researchers from abroad to access the information they need. Such portals can also offer interactive features like chatbots, online application forms, and Q&A forums, further facilitating cross-border communication.

The use of digital platforms is also reflected in the organization of webinars and online conferences. These activities are not only a means of knowledge transfer but also platforms that bring together students, researchers, and academics from various countries in a single virtual forum. With video conferencing technology, scientific discussions, research presentations, and workshops can be conducted without geographical boundaries. This encourages the formation of international collaborations in education and research, and strengthens a country's role in intellectual diplomacy at the global level.

Lastly, publishing digital content such as popular articles, documentary videos, and educational infographics is an important strategy in promoting an education system. These contents can highlight the strengths of teaching methods, research facilities, and inclusive, multicultural academic cultures. Through a narrative approach that is light yet informative, the international public can gain a comprehensive picture of the educational quality on offer. This strategy not only enhances a positive image but also attracts foreign students to continue their studies or conduct research in the country.

2. Student Exchange Programs and Scholarships

International scholarship programs are one of the key instruments in educational diplomacy. By offering scholarships for foreign students to study domestically, a country not only helps improve the quality of global human resources but also introduces its education system, culture, and values to young people from various nations. Through these programs, scholarship recipients experience academic and social life firsthand, creating positive impressions and strong emotional ties with the host country. On the other hand, scholarships for local students to study abroad also open opportunities for the exchange of knowledge and broaden international perspectives, which ultimately brings benefits for national development upon their return.

Beyond full scholarships, student exchange programs are an effective means to increase intercultural understanding and build global networks. In these programs, students may spend one or two semesters at partner institutions in other countries. Learning in a different environment allows them to directly understand local perspectives, traditions, and social norms. These programs are often accompanied by cultural activities, field visits, and cross-country project collaborations that strengthen interactions. Thus, student exchanges play a strategic role in fostering closer ties between nations from an early age and cultivating mutual respect among young generations.

International internships complement the educational diplomacy ecosystem. By providing internship opportunities for foreign students in government sectors, industries, and research institutions, a country can promote its professional strengths as

well as a dynamic and innovative work environment. For foreign students, internships are valuable experiences that not only expand practical skills but also introduce them to the host country's policies, work systems, and professional culture. Relationships built during internships can grow into strong international networks, which in the future are highly beneficial for bilateral or multilateral cooperation across various fields.

3. Research Collaboration

Research cooperation in the form of collaborative projects between educational institutions and researchers across countries is a strategic step to strengthen educational diplomacy while advancing knowledge. By combining expertise, resources, and perspectives from different countries, collaborative projects can produce more comprehensive and applicable innovations to solve global problems such as climate change, public health, or digital transformation. Moreover, these joint projects serve as an effective medium to increase the visibility of a country's educational institutions on the international stage, demonstrating a serious commitment to supporting the global development of science and technology.

Researcher exchanges are a concrete form of higher education internationalization that is being increasingly promoted. Through such programs, researchers can pursue advanced studies, conduct joint research, or teach at overseas institutions. These activities provide great opportunities to exchange research methods, analytical approaches, and academic insights that may not yet be developed in their home countries. In addition to enhancing individual researcher capacity, these exchanges also contribute to the formation of sustainable cross-country scientific networks, thereby facilitating future collaborations in various multidisciplinary projects.

The organization of international conferences, seminars, and symposiums also plays a crucial role in strengthening research collaboration. These forums bring together researchers, academics, students, and practitioners from different countries to present the latest research findings, discuss current issues, and formulate future research agendas. Besides being arenas for exchanging ideas, international conferences also enhance the scientific reputation of the host country and open opportunities for signing memorandums of understanding (MoUs) between universities or research institutions. Thus, the sustainability of research collaborations can be maintained formally as well as through informal networks formed during these events.

Media Diplomacy in the Digital Era

1. Digital Diplomacy

In today's digital era, social media has become one of the main instruments of public diplomacy used by countries to reach global audiences directly and effectively. Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram enable governments and diplomatic representatives to build a positive image, communicate foreign policy, and respond to international issues swiftly. Through professionally managed official accounts, countries can project a humanistic, progressive, and open side, ultimately strengthening good relations with the international public. Active presence on social media also makes communication more personal and interactive, bridging the gap between governments and the global community.

To maximize the impact of digital diplomacy, creating relevant and engaging digital content is crucial. Countries can produce short videos, infographics, articles, and podcasts that highlight cultural, tourism, educational, or technological achievements. These contents not only serve as sources of information but also act as storytelling tools that introduce national identity in formats more easily accepted by various audiences. This strategy has proven effective in capturing global attention while increasing engagement with international publics.

Beyond one-way information dissemination, digital diplomacy is also aimed at encouraging public participation through online campaigns, interactive quizzes, and open discussion forums. Active participation of the international community helps build a sense of closeness and creates a global community more concerned with the issues being raised. These activities can expand international networks and serve as constructive dialogue spaces to support diplomatic goals, such as campaigns on peace, the environment, or human rights.

In a digital world rife with hoaxes and misinformation, maintaining information accuracy becomes both a challenge and a priority in digital diplomacy. Countries must ensure that messages distributed through digital channels are transparent, verifiable, and based on valid data. Efforts to combat disinformation are carried out through official clarifications, publication of valid data, and cooperation with digital platforms to curb the spread of fake news. This is vital to uphold the country's credibility in the eyes of the international community.

Digital diplomacy does not stop at information dissemination but also leverages data analytics to measure how far digital campaigns reach audiences and influence public opinion. By analyzing data on interactions, sentiment, and trends on social media, governments can understand the preferences and concerns of global society. This information serves as a foundation to formulate public communication strategies that are more targeted, adaptive to global dynamics, and responsive to emerging issues.

2. Mass Media Diplomacy

In the context of public diplomacy, mass media plays a crucial role as a communication bridge between countries and the international community. Therefore, building good relations with various media outlets—both national and international—is a strategic step to ensure that reporting on foreign policies or global issues can be delivered accurately, in a balanced manner, and within the right context. This cooperation is not only in the form of one-way information distribution but also includes discussions and collaborations in exploring relevant issues, thereby creating objective narratives and strengthening the country's positive image in the eyes of the global public.

Governments and diplomatic representatives also actively engage in media relations through various mechanisms such as press conferences, interviews, briefings, and the release of press statements. These activities aim to provide clarifications or official explanations on foreign policy, international cooperation, or sensitive issues to prevent misunderstandings among the global public. Good relations with journalists and editorial teams allow diplomatic messages to be distributed more effectively and widely, while also increasing public trust in the information conveyed.

Besides relying on hard news coverage, public diplomacy through mass media is also realized through collaborations to produce engaging and educational content such as features, documentaries, or talk shows discussing foreign policy, culture, or the country's role in global issues. With a more narrative and in-depth approach, the international community can gain a more comprehensive understanding of a country's position on various global matters. Such content also contributes to building the image of the country as an open, cooperative, and responsible international actor.

Public diplomacy through mass media is also closely linked to efforts to support quality, transparent, and independent journalism. Countries can facilitate training, residency programs, or reporting grants for international journalists to deepen their insights into domestic issues. This is important to ensure that the resulting coverage is not only accurate but also balanced and avoids bias or stereotypes. In this way, the global public can access more in-depth and credible information, which can serve as a foundation for constructive dialogue in international relations.

Conclusion

This study shows that in the digital era marked by the rapid development of communication and information technology, public diplomacy has undergone a significant transformation, becoming more interactive, dynamic, and technology-based. Countries utilize various digital platforms and social media not only to convey their foreign policies, but also to build a positive image, introduce culture, and strengthen relations with the international community. The use of social media, websites, educational portals, webinars, creative digital content, and data analysis are important elements in supporting the goals of modern public diplomacy. In addition, traditional cultural diplomacy has also adapted to utilizing digital technology. Cultural exchange programs, art exhibitions, cultural festivals, and cultural dialogues are now widely held online so that they can reach a wider audience across national borders. This approach not only introduces a country's cultural heritage and language, but also builds a sense of mutual respect and deeper understanding between nations. Public diplomacy in the field of education also plays a strategic role. Through the development of digital learning platforms, technology-based curricula, and international research collaborations, countries can demonstrate their commitment to supporting the advancement of global science and innovation. This simultaneously strengthens soft power in a constructive way, creates cross-country academic networks, and opens up opportunities for long-term collaboration. Overall, this study underlines that public diplomacy in the digital era is not only about how a country promotes itself, but also about how the country actively builds a global communication ecosystem that is transparent, participatory, and mutually beneficial. By maximizing the potential of digital diplomacy, mass media, cultural diplomacy, and education, countries can increase their competitiveness, expand their positive influence, and strengthen their position in international politics. This study also shows the importance of continuous innovation in public diplomacy strategies in order to be able to answer the challenges of digital disruption and the dynamics of increasingly complex relations between countries.

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