

УДК: 327:004.738.5

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RESEARCH OF THE MODERN PARADIGM OF DIGITAL DIPLOMACY IN THE CONTEXT OF FOREIGN POLICY AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: THE CASE OF UKRAINE

The article explores the development trends of digital diplomacy as a modern trend in foreign policy, highlighting its critical importance as a component of information and communication technologies. The authors provide a review of scholarly literature regarding the scientific foundations and conceptual understanding of the term «digital diplomacy». The study addresses theoretical challenges, specifically the risks associated with the misuse of digital diplomacy tools, including the creation of terrorist and xenophobic groups, which necessitates the development of effective strategies to counter these threats. The article examines the particularities of digital diplomacy development in Ukraine and analyzes the opportunities for its advancement by drawing on the experiences of leading countries, thus forming a basis for the implementation of a long-term strategy to integrate into the European digital space. Analytical information is presented through a SWOT analysis of digital diplomacy in Ukraine, identifying its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. To assess the level of communication practices of Ukrainian embassies, the authors conducted a content analysis focusing on the activities of the embassies of the United States and the United Kingdom. The theoretical conclusions of this analysis may serve as a foundation for the development of communication strategies and for the strategic reconsideration of international communication policies. The article concludes that digital diplomacy is gaining increasing significance globally and, particularly, in Ukraine, necessitating detailed research in order to define priorities for diplomatic communication. Overall, the cases reviewed in the study demonstrate a general trend: digital diplomacy creates new opportunities for countries with limited resources, enhances the synergy of digital communications, becomes an indispensable component of the foreign policy toolkit, modernizes traditional diplomatic formats, and strengthens public influence through discourse in the context of contemporary geopolitical challenges.

Keywords: digital diplomacy, international relations, digital communication, strategy, communication, embassies, social media, foreign policy.

JEL classification: F5, O33, H83, D83

ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ СУЧАСНОЇ ПАРАДИГМИ ЦИФРОВОЇ ДИПЛОМАТІЇ В КОНТЕКСТІ ЗОВНІШНЬОЇ ПОЛІТИКИ ТА МІЖНАРОДНИХ ВІДНОСИН: КЕЙС УКРАЇНИ

У статті розглянуто тенденції розвитку цифрової дипломатії, сучасного тренду зовнішньої політики, виступаючи критично важливим елементом міжнародних відносин і комунікацій, що функціонують в умовах запровадження інформаційно-комунікаційних технологій, авторами проведений огляд літературних джерел щодо наукового підґрунтя та розуміння терміну «цифрова дипломатія», теоретико-методологічне обґрунтування поняття, концепції, основні цілі, переваги та виклики, а саме, ризик зловживання її інструментами, створення терористичних і ксенофобських груп що потребує розробки ефективних напрямків протидії цим загрозам; розглянуто особливості розвитку цифрової дипломатії в Україні та спроможності її на прикладі провідних країн світу, формуючи основу для реалізації довгострокової стратегії наближення до європейського цифрового простору; представлена аналітична інформація у вигляді SWOT-аналізу цифрової дипломатії в Україні з їхнім сильними і слабкими сторонами, можливостями та загрози; для оцінки рівня комунікацій посольств України досліджували контент із посольствами США і Великої Британії, теоретичні положення проведеного аналізу можуть бути використані для розробки комунікаційної стратегії, стратегічного переосмислення політики міжнародних комунікаційних відносин.

Зроблено висновок, що питання цифрової дипломатії стає все більш актуальною в світі, і в Україні, зокрема, потребує детального дослідження та дозволить визначити пріоритети дипломатичної комунікації; загалом розглянуті кейси свідчать про спільний тренд: цифрова дипломатія підвищує синергію цифрових комунікацій, стає невід'ємною частиною зовнішньополітичного інструментарію, модернізує класичні дипломатичні формати й посилює вплив на громадську думку суспільства завдяки публічному дискурсу в умовах новітніх геополітичних викликів.

Ключові слова: цифрова дипломатія, міжнародні відносини, цифрові комунікації, стратегія, комунікація, посольства, соціальні мережі, зовнішня політика.

Problem statement. For an extended period, Ukraine has remained at the center of international discourse as it confronts Russian military aggression while simultaneously striving to assert its position within the European and global security architecture. Under such conditions, traditional diplomacy has had to adapt to the emerging challenges of the information environment, where the speed of data transmission, global interconnectivity, and the multi-channel nature of communication have become decisive factors. Digital diplomacy, leveraging the capabilities of social media, official websites, and various online platforms, not only supplements classical diplomatic practices but also significantly expands the arsenal of influence and engagement with diverse audiences.

A distinct factor underpinning the relevance of this study is the urgent need to counteract Russian disinformation, which is disseminated through numerous digital channels and aimed at distorting the international community's perception of events in Ukraine. Against the backdrop of political and economic crises in various regions, foreign media and public interest in Ukraine-related issues may wane. This necessitates a proactive and professionally executed presence in the digital space to not only maintain momentum in public discourse but also to promote positive cultural, social, and economic narratives about Ukraine. In this regard, embassies serve as advanced «communication outposts», as they are best positioned to directly interact with foreign elites, media, and civil society.

Politicians and officials increasingly utilize digital channels for timely information exchange, and neglecting this trend would mean forfeiting crucial opportunities for advancing Ukraine's positions. In this context, effective

digital diplomacy can contribute to international recognition of reforms, attract foreign investment, and bolster both military and humanitarian support. It is particularly significant that the development of digital diplomacy coincides with global shifts, wherein more and more states acknowledge the power of «soft influence» and employ it as a geopolitical tool.

The formulation of conceptual frameworks and practical algorithms for digital diplomacy by Ukrainian embassies is therefore of paramount importance. The effectiveness of these efforts will determine Ukraine's ability to assert its national interests on the international stage, cultivate lasting global partnerships, and compete in the information space with countries that deploy disruptive information technologies and tactics. Given the transition of Western societies toward new standards of digital communication, a progressive strategic approach in this domain is not only a prerequisite for diplomatic support but also a key component of shaping Ukraine's positive postwar image.

Analysis of the latest research and publications. To achieve conceptual clarity, it is essential to note that within the framework of this study, the term diplomacy is understood as both a tool of foreign policy and an established method through which states articulate their international objectives and coordinate efforts to influence the decisions and behaviors of foreign governments and peoples through dialogue, negotiation, and other measures short of war. Scholar of diplomacy Lewis D. emphasized that digital diplomacy involves the use of digital communication tools (including social media) by diplomats to engage both among themselves and with wider audiences, as they actively explore innovative strategies for achieving

diplomatic goals through these digital channels (Lewis, 2014). Expanding on Lewis D.'s thesis, another scholar notes that with the rise of social media, the dynamics of diplomatic relations have undergone significant transformation. The boundaries between national and international political activity are increasingly blurred, as contemporary policy issues often transcend these divisions. The evolution of global communications and digitalization is cited as one of the main factors contributing to the erosion of state-centric authority (2018). Manor I. and Segev K. point out that digital diplomacy operates on two distinct levels: that of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the global network of embassies. This structure allows states to tailor their foreign policy messaging and nation branding strategies to the specific characteristics of local audiences—particularly their historical, cultural, and normative traditions (Manor et al., 5). In their work *Digitalization of Diplomacy: Toward Clarifying Fragmented Terminology*, the authors argue that existing terms such as «digital diplomacy» and «e-diplomacy» are insufficient to fully capture the scope of digitalization's impact on diplomatic practice. They propose the term digitalization of diplomacy, which encompasses transformations in diplomatic audiences, institutions, actors, and practices (Manor, 2018). Moreover, digital diplomacy is increasingly viewed as an extension of public diplomacy. It involves the use of digital tools and social media platforms—such as Twitter, Facebook, and Weibo—by states to engage with foreign publics, typically at minimal cost (Al-Mansouri et al., 2021). The Diplomacy.edu platform offers a comprehensive analysis of digital diplomacy and its various facets, highlighting its complexity and presenting a diverse terminology—such as «virtual», «data», «targeted», «quantum», «cyber», and «e»—to represent different dimensions of digitalization in policymaking. This multiplicity of terms leads to what has been described as the paradox of inclusion (Kurbalija, 2023). Hanson F. outlines in his work eight primary objectives of digital diplomacy such as knowledge management, public diplomacy, information management, communication and consular services, disaster response, internet freedom, external resources, and policy planning (Hanson, 2012). Exploring the distinct features of digital diplomacy, Rashica V. identified several key advantages, including: strengthening international relations; proximity to the target audience; speed and efficiency of communication; low financial cost; and strategic benefits for small states (Rashica, 2018).

Besides, noteworthy is the official policy document Digital Strategy of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which outlines the country's approach to integrating digital technologies into diplomatic practice since 2012. It underscores the transformative impact of digital tools on diplomatic communication, policy formulation, and the evolving role of the diplomat in the international arena (Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Digital Strategy. 2012. URL: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/>).

Meanwhile, scholars Kulishov V. and Maksimova I. emphasize that while digital diplomacy is indeed a vital instrument of contemporary foreign policy and international relations, it is not a universal solution to all diplomatic

challenges. The effectiveness of digital diplomacy, they argue, depends on its alignment with strategic objectives and national communication strategies, and it should not serve as a replacement for them. In other words, there must be a balanced integration of both traditional and digital tools (Kulishov et al., 2023).

Although the topic of digital diplomacy has generated considerable academic interest, it still requires a more systematic investigation of both global and national practices, particularly in light of the emerging geopolitical challenges that modern societies now face.

Purpose of the article. The primary objective of this study is to substantiate and develop a strategy of digital diplomacy for Ukrainian embassies, aimed at increasing international support for Ukraine through the effective use of digital communication channels. The research seeks to define and conceptualize the notion of digital diplomacy based on an analysis of scholarly perspectives and theoretical approaches within the field of international communications; to identify the core instruments of digital diplomacy employed in contemporary global practice and to examine their specific applications within the context of foreign policy activities; to highlight key trends and the most effective approaches for shaping a positive international image and garnering foreign support; and to propose a practical algorithm for the creation and implementation of a digital diplomacy strategy tailored to the needs and capacities of Ukrainian diplomatic missions.

Main results of the study. Digital diplomacy in Ukraine is officially referenced in the Public Diplomacy Strategy adopted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2021. It is defined as a component of public diplomacy that involves the use of digital technologies and platforms to promote and safeguard national interests. Specific areas of activity include cooperation with international digital platforms to shape a positive image of Ukraine and protect national security, the organization of public events via digital tools, and the use of social media and online communities. To achieve these objectives, closer cooperation with major technology companies is being fostered through joint efforts by the Ministry of Digital Transformation, diplomatic missions, and international digital platforms (Public Diplomacy Strategy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2021–2025, URL: <https://mfa.gov.ua/storage/app/sites/1/Стратегии/public-diplomacy-strategy.pdf>).

A notable feature of Ukraine's strategy is its emphasis on viewing the protection of national interests through the lens of communication as a tool for promoting the country's image as a «digital state». A positive example of this approach is Ukraine's participation in the 2023 G7 Ministers' Meeting on Digitalization and Technology (Japan), where it presented its experience in building a digital society. The meeting also underscored international priorities such as the development of secure and resilient digital infrastructure, the protection of supply chains, and the advancement of human-centered artificial intelligence in line with OECD principles. (URL: <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/en/news/mintsyfyry-vziala-uchast-u-zasidanni-ministriv-tsyfrovyzatsii-g7>). The above

mentioned developments indicate that Ukraine is steadily enhancing its capacity in the field of digital diplomacy, while simultaneously strengthening institutional mechanisms for cooperation with major global players—most notably, the European Union. Joint initiatives and participation in international agreements underscore Ukraine's commitment to upholding Western European principles for the governance of digital technologies (Omelianenko, 2023).

Technological diplomacy in Ukraine has acquired particular importance due to the country's extensive partnerships with transnational IT corporations (Big Tech) and the growing need for their support during the war. However, even prior to the full-scale invasion, collaboration with the private sector was actively developing—especially in the sphere of deploying 5G infrastructure. A partnership with Ericsson aimed to strengthen mobile communication capacities and expand digital opportunities for Ukrainian society (The Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine and Ericsson will cooperate to develop next-generation 4G (LTE-Advanced) and 5G networks, February 25, 2020. URL: <https://thedigital.gov.ua/news/mintsifra-ta-ericsson-spivpratsyuvatimut-zadlya-rozvitku-merezh-novo-pokolinnya-4g-lte-advanced-ta-5g>). At the same time, cooperation with global actors such as Huawei has demonstrated that geopolitical considerations play a significant role in shaping state strategies concerning technological choices. In the context of European integration, Ukraine seeks to adhere to EU approaches to mitigating risks to critical infrastructure, which necessitates aligning partnerships with the standards and strategic interests of the European Union.

Big Data analytics and artificial intelligence (AI) are

increasingly integrated into the mechanisms of digital diplomacy, helping to rapidly collect, process, and analyze large volumes of information circulating through open sources, social media, and online media platforms. Analytical algorithms can be used to identify trends, predict reactions to particular statements or decisions, and monitor disinformation campaigns or bot farms that may harm the country's international image. At the same time, such approaches require a balanced consideration of ethical issues, especially regarding privacy, secure data storage, and the potential risks of excessive automation in diplomatic processes—where personal communication often remains essential for building trust (Bjola et al., 2024).

The application of AI in diplomatic practice opens up new and transformative opportunities, including the enhancement of diplomat training programs, forecasting political crises and humanitarian emergencies, establishing virtual embassies, and appointing digital ambassadors. These developments signal a shift toward a more dynamic and technologically integrated approach to diplomacy (R1).

A crucial aspect of technological diplomacy remains the support of Big Tech in enforcing the «digital blockade» against Russia. Microsoft announced a \$100 million technology assistance package for Ukraine, while Google contributed \$15 million, implemented air raid alert notifications for Android users, and expanded its Project Shield initiative to protect Ukrainian websites from DDoS attacks (Walker, 2022).

In order to assess Ukraine's digital diplomacy more comprehensively and identify its strengths and weaknesses, the authors conducted a SWOT analysis of Ukraine's digital diplomacy (Figure 1).



Fig. 1. SWOT Analysis of Ukraine's Digital Diplomacy

Source: compiled based on data from Omelianenko, 2023

The conducted SWOT analysis demonstrates that the development of Ukraine's digital diplomacy holds strong potential to reinforce the country's international agency and improve its geopolitical standing. However, to achieve substantial outcomes, it is necessary to enhance inter-agency coordination, strengthen cybersecurity, raise public awareness and engagement, and continue expanding strategic partnerships with key global actors.

Within the context of digital diplomacy, entities such as the European Union, NATO, and Ukraine each utilize digital channels in distinct ways to advance their global influence. Nevertheless, all three pursue the shared objective of engaging wide audiences and cultivating favorable perceptions of their actions. The EU, despite its internal institutional complexity, actively uses virtual platforms and social media to project unity and promote its values, while also facing the challenge of coordinating the diverse voices of its member states. NATO, given its security-focused mandate, places emphasis on public-facing communication strategies to consolidate support among member countries and the broader international community; however, in times of crisis, its emphasis on collective defense often pushes the "soft" dimensions of diplomacy into the background. Ukraine, while deeply immersed in war,

simultaneously demonstrates creative and dynamic use of digital tools that enable it to mobilize international sympathy and explore new formats of cooperation with key partners. This underscores the emergence of digital diplomacy as an inseparable component of contemporary international relations and highlights its capacity to shape the global agenda in substantive ways.

The communication policies of Ukrainian embassies are among the key instruments of foreign policy, aimed at advancing national interests, cultivating a positive international image, and ensuring that foreign audiences remain informed about current events in Ukraine. To assess the specific features of embassy communication, the authors analyzed the content disseminated by the Embassy of Ukraine in the United States and the Embassy of Ukraine in the United Kingdom during January 2025.

The official website of the Embassy of Ukraine in the United States (<https://usa.mfa.gov.ua>) plays a vital role in facilitating communication between the Embassy, the public, and international audiences. The distribution of retweet sources—particularly those most frequently cited in the Embassy's account—is illustrated in Figure 2, reflecting the coordinated efforts of Ukraine's diplomatic institutions in the context of digital diplomacy.

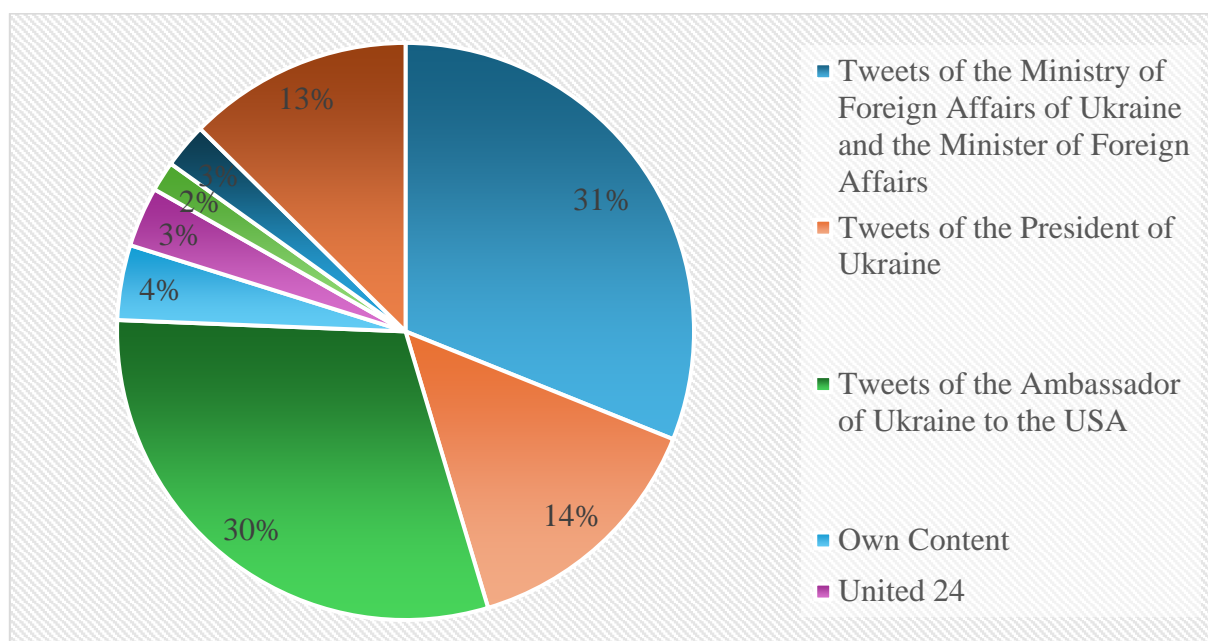


Fig. 2. Content of the Official X (Twitter) Account of the Embassy of Ukraine in the United States (by Source of Origin)

Source: compiled based on author monitoring, January 2025

This communication approach enables the Embassy not only to disseminate its own messages but also to actively engage with other key diplomatic actors of Ukraine. It contributes to strengthening the synergistic effect of communication, wherein multiple channels operate in tandem to achieve common foreign policy objectives. The official website of the Embassy of Ukraine in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (<https://uk.mfa.gov.ua>), as well as its official Instagram account (@ukrembassy_uk), serve as additional communication tools that reflect the multidimensional nature of modern diplomacy (Figure 3).

The effectiveness of communication by diplomatic institutions largely depends on a combination of traditional formats (such as official websites and press releases) and digital tools (including social media accounts). For instance, the official websites of the Embassies of Ukraine in the United States and the United Kingdom provide structured information on the priorities of bilateral relations, procedures for consular services, and updates on the activities of the respective institutions. User-friendly navigation, multilingual content, and the availability of contact information enhance the quality of interaction with audiences.

Overall, the analysis indicates that Ukrainian diplomatic institutions are increasingly adopting a comprehensive, multimedia-based approach in their communication activities. They actively utilize official websites, social media platforms, and public events to clarify Ukraine's position, engage partners, build public support, and promote a

positive international image of the state. The ability to promptly and systematically disseminate accurate information during wartime is critical to countering Russian aggression and consolidating global support for the defense of international law.

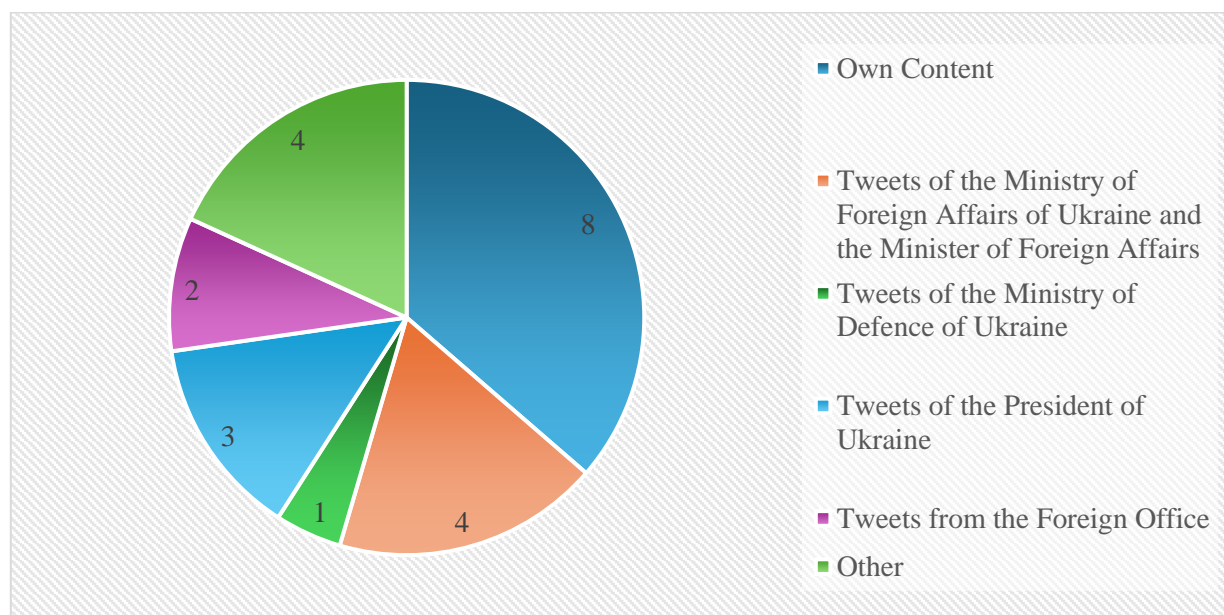


Fig. 3. Content of the Official X Account of the Embassy of Ukraine in the United Kingdom (by origin).

Source: compiled based on the author's monitoring, January 2025

In view of the above findings, the following key directions for the strategic priorities of Ukraine's embassies can be identified:

- first, it is essential to broaden international support for Ukraine by disseminating information on the military situation, ongoing economic reforms, and the need for financial and humanitarian assistance;
- second, systematic counteraction to disinformation remains highly relevant, including the prompt refutation of fake news and coordinated informational efforts with other Ukrainian agencies;

- third, the promotion of Ukrainian culture, arts, and historical heritage continues to be a priority, as it helps attract additional audiences and fosters lasting positive associations;

- finally, ensuring effective consular support, providing timely information to Ukrainian citizens abroad, and facilitating access to government initiatives remain crucial tasks.

The authors present a structured example of the proposed strategic priorities and objectives for Ukraine's digital diplomacy (Table 1).

Table 1

Strategic Goals and Objectives of Ukraine's Digital Diplomacy

| Goals | Objectives |
|--|---|
| Strengthening international support for Ukraine | – Increase awareness among foreign audiences about the war and its consequences. – Communicate the importance of military, financial, and humanitarian assistance. – Establish and maintain contacts with policymakers, experts, and civil society organizations. |
| Countering disinformation and Russian wartime narratives | – Promptly debunk fake news and propaganda. – Present verified evidence of Russian war crimes. – Coordinate information strategies with other Ukrainian institutions. |
| Promoting Ukrainian culture and heritage | – Position Ukraine as an integral part of the European and global cultural community. – Engage artists and cultural figures in joint projects with British and American partners. |
| Ensuring effective consular and informational support | – Provide Ukrainian citizens with timely and accessible information on document processing, legal aid, and other services. – Disseminate information about government initiatives such as "Grain from Ukraine" and other humanitarian programs. |

Source: compiled by the authors

The strategy of digital diplomacy aimed at maintaining international attention on Ukraine is based on a set of key

components, each characterized by specific implementation features. One of the primary tasks is the development

of information messages that take into account the cognitive characteristics of the target audience. This requires the creation of content with clear and concise structural formatting, combining analytical depth with emotional elements, in order to foster long-term engagement and promote a deeper understanding of the situation in Ukraine. Another essential aspect is multilingualism and the use of multimedia tools. Content should be tailored to English-speaking audiences as well as to the Ukrainian diaspora, thereby contributing to the consolidation of international support. In particular, the use of video materials, infographics, and virtual exhibitions helps to mitigate the effects of «negativity fatigue» by diversifying the modes of communication. It is advisable to apply communicative models that integrate cognitive and emotional components, drawing on concrete examples such as cultural events, volunteer success stories, and explanations of mechanisms of international assistance. A vital element in the implementation of the digital diplomacy strategy is analytical support. This includes continuous monitoring of audience growth dynamics, analysis of mentions in international media, and comparative evaluation of the effectiveness of different communication channels. Such analytical work underscores the need for interim adjustments and coordinated action among governmental bodies and non-governmental actors—including diaspora communities and charitable organizations—thereby reducing the risk of disinformation influence. Within a scientific and practical framework, it is beneficial to systematize the key elements of the strategy and the specific features of their implementation. A scholarly approach to strategic design, coupled with ongoing analysis of changes in the external environment, enables embassies to respond promptly to emerging challenges, adapt their communication formats, and achieve maximum informational impact within a rapidly evolving media landscape. The strategy of digital diplomacy, which integrates diverse formats of information delivery, multilingualism, analytical monitoring, and an extensive network of cooperation with non-governmental organizations and diaspora communities, demonstrates a high potential for effectiveness. Its primary value lies in its capacity to sustain international attention on developments in Ukraine, despite the phenomenon of “war fatigue” and the increasing competition within the global information landscape. Successful implementation of this strategy requires a range of resources from diplomatic missions. First and foremost, it necessitates the involvement of qualified digital communication specialists capable of working efficiently with social media platforms, official websites, and analytical tools. Stable financial support is also essential for technical infrastructure, the organization of cultural and educational initiatives, and the production of high-quality multimedia content. Additionally, coordinated efforts with temporary diplomatic missions and the diaspora significantly enhance the strategy’s impact, as diaspora communities are particularly well-positioned to effectively disseminate key messages within local populations (Sheludiakova et al., 2021). The overall impact of implementing such a strategy is measured not only by the expansion of international support in military and political spheres, but also by the deeper

penetration of Ukrainian cultural and informational content into various segments of Western society. Over time, this contributes to the formation of a more resilient and positive image of Ukraine—one that is not solely dependent on breaking news about war or political controversy. Sustained international attention to Ukrainian issues, in turn, enhances the country’s investment attractiveness, strengthens public diplomacy, and broadens the prospects for cooperation in scientific, educational, cultural, and even tourism sectors in the long term. This multifaceted influence helps lay the foundation for a broad-based coalition in support of Ukraine, ensuring the continued presence of Ukrainian topics in global and socio-political discourse.

Conclusion. A synthesis of international research and empirical evidence confirms that digital diplomacy opens new avenues for countries with limited resources, enabling them to more effectively communicate their narratives and shape their international image. At the same time, it presents additional risks—chief among them being cyber threats, the spread of disinformation, and the challenges of monitoring and regulating information flows. These risks demand from diplomats a high level of digital literacy, adaptability, and coordination with adjacent entities responsible for information security and communication strategies.

In general, the examined case studies reflect a broader trend: digital diplomacy is becoming an integral component of foreign policy instruments, as it accelerates message dissemination, modernizes traditional diplomatic formats, and enhances influence over public opinion. The thesis is confirmed that a well-designed social media strategy, coupled with robust cybersecurity, is crucial for countering hybrid threats, reinforcing a country’s international reputation, and maintaining value-based narratives, even during periods of acute crisis.

However, the implementation of communication strategies requires a constant balance between highlighting threats (particularly war crimes committed by the Russian Federation) and emphasizing Ukraine’s potential in cultural, economic, and technological domains. This dual focus not only attracts external support at both governmental and non-governmental levels, but also fosters greater engagement from foreign citizens, journalists, experts, and investors. The success of such efforts depends on the presence of a unified informational agenda, sufficient resources—particularly qualified digital communication specialists—and the ability to align the work of diplomatic missions with the overarching foreign policy strategy and the initiatives of other government agencies.

In conclusion, Ukraine’s modern diplomatic, and especially digital, engagement in countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom illustrates the critical importance of a comprehensive communication approach. This approach enables the effective defense of national interests on the international stage, supports the formation of strategic partnerships, and contributes to uniting the global community around the defense of Ukraine’s sovereignty and security through public diplomacy.

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