

# The Peruvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: From Digitization to Modernization

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## **Abstract:**

Facing an internal crisis with international implications (Bagua, 2009), the Peruvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched a digitization project that ended up with a public and digital diplomacy strategy. Its results went far beyond the digital presence through websites and social networks, and had great importance in key and practical decisions on Peruvian foreign policy, such as the bilateral relation with Chile at a time when it faced a case before the International Court of Justice.

## **Key Words:**

Peru, Chile, digital public diplomacy, soft power, open diplomacy, cultural diplomacy.

## **Introduction: An International Crisis of the 21st Century**

On June 5, 2009, after several weeks of protests by representatives of native Peruvian communities in the Amazon region against some national regulations enacted as a result of the commitments signed by Peru within the framework of the Free Trade Agreement with the United States, a violent confrontation took place outside the city of Bagua (northern Peru's Amazon region) between local natives and members of the national police. As a result, 23 policemen and 10 civilians died. In the political arena, the crisis ended with the resignation of the head of the Ministry of Women and Social Development, Carmen Vildoso Chirinos, and, a month later, that of Prime Minister Yehude Simon.

Beyond both the actual disaster caused by the Bagua conflict and the death of innocents, the Peruvian State was being challenged by a communication crisis of unsuspected dimensions, which it had never before

facéd, and suffered an evident erosion not only in the domestic acceptance of the government but also in its international prestige.

The role of the mass media (especially local radio), was essential in the outbreak of this crisis. They ignored the government's official reports and played a key role not only because of their enhancement of the crisis, heating up the spirits and fueling the violent protest, but also due to their reflection of contents reported by international media. From the beginning, the information coverage was inaccurate and chaotic. The Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Rainforest (AIDSESP in its Spanish acronym), as main organizer of the protests, began talking about 40 dead natives (including three children). Others commented on "an undetermined number of [dead] civilians (including indigenous and local inhabitants)." And foreign newspapers reported more than 50 dead natives. Finally, 10 civilian deaths were verified, of which 3 presumably belonged to the indigenous communities involved in the protests. This datum was finally confirmed by the Peruvian State's Ombudsman Office and by non-governmental institutions and the Catholic Church, as well as by the Peruvian national press.

From the beginning, along with reports by the traditional media, an abundant activity was detected in social media. Non-governmental organizations and various individuals started sending letters and expressions of protest regarding this social crisis. The informative parameters of both the traditional and the unconventional media, especially international ones, were decisively marked not by printed news or press releases, but by emails, text messages and comments on the social networks. Therefore, it was the Peruvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), especially through the embassies in the United States and European countries that became aware of these communications, who collected rumors on a genocide by the forces of order in that region of the northeastern Peruvian Amazon. Although finally the number of police fatalities was more than twice the number of civilians, in social networks and other media, figures of hundreds if not thousands of civilian victims were reported, along with a reportedly indiscriminate attack against indigenous people, an abuse in the governmental reaction and a retaliation by the state, which in fact never happened.

The Peruvian MFA was overwhelmed by this communication crisis and did not have the capacity to react so as to elaborate accurate messages and find the appropriate means to respond. Beyond the usual official announcements and the communiqués sent to the embassies in order for them to get the message on to the main local media, even the possibility of publishing ads in the world's leading newspapers was considered; such was the difficulty in transmitting the government's own version of the aforementioned events. It was clear that the Peruvian MFA had not assimilated either the new language or the new form of effective communication that the 21st century had been developing and building in an accelerated manner.

## **From Crisis Management to Institutional Modernization**

The undergone crisis and its unsuspected international dimension motivated an urgent need for change, which arrived along with the support of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in the form of a diagnosis on how the MFA could modernize, both from the organizational and operative points of view. In this case, as saying goes, a crisis created an opportunity.

The Bagua crisis was the starting point that guided the analysis, focused mainly on the management of the media and the importance of social media as a source of information, considered as the immediate causes of the experienced situation. However, as the work began, the study started affecting all areas of the MFA, and even intergovernmental coordination, far beyond the communication factors.

An initial analysis, thus, evidenced aspects such as the technical incompetence of diplomats in communication media as a result of the type of their selection process, their training, and a structure that necessarily involves frequent rotation. This caused recurrent changes in function that necessarily generated instability and a considerable loss of resources caused mainly by the periodic alternation of officials. In this framework, the absence of solid organizational processes and mechanisms of institutional structuring (that is, independent on the functionaries currently in office) coupled with the absence of professional and qualified personnel

in areas such as communications – which for long had not not been considered essential for diplomatic tasks – generated the weakening of their resolute and functional capacity. This, together with a lack of procedures and mechanisms for fluent communication among diplomats, areas, dependencies and the missions abroad, critically affected the ability of the MFA as the main actor and visible face of Peru in the international arena, seriously distressing its global position.

The problem was not so much in the lack of digital communication channels, but the absence of public diplomacy. Addressing the digitalization of the MFA meant, therefore, its digitization and the functional modernization of the tools and channels used; the reform of regulations – which essentially affected the values of transparency, openness, relevancy granted to communication; and an institutional reform, especially in terms of procedures and personnel and their orientation to public diplomacy.

## **From Media Diplomacy to Digital Public Diplomacy**

The strategy of public diplomacy was previously non-existent in the Peruvian MFA. The conception of its role was still focused on its function as a unique actor in the international defense of Peruvian interests, ignoring the difficulty that any state today has to face with its own resources, covering each and every space that may open up. There was theoretical knowledge under which foreign policy was becoming no longer the exclusive preserve of governments; and the direct intervention of individuals and private organizations in international politics was not ignored in the setting of guidelines and strategies that greatly affect public policy, something that used to lie in the hands of the states. However, a practical translation had not been made yet so as to lead to the assumption that:

The dissemination of information will mean that power will be distributed in a broader way and unofficial networks will diminish the monopoly of traditional bureaucracy. Governments will have less control of strategies, including those of communication. They will have a lower degree of freedom when having to account for facts and will have

to share the stage with more actors. Public-private societies and the “privatization” of functions will increase.<sup>1</sup>

In other words: “Never before have so many non-state agents competed to obtain the authority and influence that once belonged only to the states.”<sup>2</sup>

From this perspective, digitalization was adopted as a lever for change in the process of adapting traditional diplomacy to digitalized public diplomacy, understanding the consequences of assuming this new scenario, perhaps the most important one, in which interactions took place on a daily basis between the various subjects, with a direct impact on international relations. Not surprisingly, countries such as Canada, the United States, Israel and the United Kingdom, pioneers in public diplomacy, were already taking the initiative by using technological tools as key instruments for their diplomatic work, thus seeking to conserve its place among the most influential countries on earth.

## From Diagnosis to Action

As a result of the diagnosis made by the MFA, an action plan was drawn up consisting of a series of objectives, the definition of the activities to be carried out, the necessary resources required, and the expected results. These could be divided into functional elements such as the installation of exclusive computer servers for the MFA, and shared with the embassies and consulates, prioritizing security, cost reduction, coordination between the different areas, the agility of maintenance, and optimization of shared resources.

Also a series of normative elements were proposed aimed at improving procedures and internal dynamics. The main one, the creation of a

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<sup>1</sup> Nye, J. (2003). *La paradoja del poder norteamericano*. Madrid, Taurus, p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> Smith and Naim (2000). *Altered States: Globalization, Sovereignty and Governance*. Ottawa.

network communication structure that, by centralizing the basic information and of interest for the institution as a whole, should grant full freedom of management to each mission abroad, which would imply that these would have the capacity (and the obligation) to offer information and provide their services, mainly consular, through their respective online platforms.

This network structure, applicable both on the web and on social networks, is fundamental for the external action of any international actor. This is not just the logic announced by authors such as Peter Drucker or the Tofflers, who argue that the information revolution is putting an end to the hierarchical bureaucratic organizations that characterized the era of the first two industrial revolutions,<sup>3</sup> but also an indispensable response to a reality, that of the new international relations.

Another area on which emphasis was placed was the institutional one, with regard to the preparation and technical training of the people in the MFA who were responsible for communication. A permanent training and updating system would be established for all officials, including the perspective of digital public diplomacy, offering the necessary skills for the use of technology and for online communication.

The same institutional line established the need to develop a public diplomacy plan including the participation of other agencies involved in foreign action, as well as the approval of a communication strategy for the MFA Diplomatic Information Office and a restructuring of its functions, its procedures and even the profile of those in charge.

There was also an analytical element, which led to establish a system for the permanent monitoring of information related to Peru in both traditional and alternative media, both international and national. This included a system of real-time agency alerts, which gave the MFA a capacity to respond appropriately at the communicative pace of the so-called “network society”.<sup>4</sup> A good reputation is the most important capital of a state; and

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<sup>3</sup> Drucker, Peter. *The Next Information Revolution*; Toffler, Alvin. *The Politics of the Third Wave*.

<sup>4</sup> “An emerging, alternative time, made of a hybrid between the now and the long now”. Castells, M. (2012) *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*. Cambridge. Polity Press.

the various actors, who are aware of this, use public exposure to attack both national and international prestige in its various facets through tactics such as naming and shaming.<sup>5</sup> This forces a state to be attentive to what is said about them, to prepare and validate reliably the information they produce and the information they distribute, classifying what is correct and what is important. The need to be cautious on the sources of information is also reinforced, in order to filter them adequately, and to suitably manage the information that is received and distributed among their members. In this framework, those who manage to distinguish valuable signals from disrupting ones will gain power.

According to the final report from the above mentioned diagnosis on how the MFA could modernize, the application of its recommendations would produce:

- Greater knowledge on the use and importance of ICT for the modernization of Peru's MFA and of its diplomatic commissions abroad.
- Online positioning.
- Greater coordination and collaborative work among all MFA areas and offices.
- Speeding up processes in everyday work.
- Increasing communication channels and flows, which would cease to be vertical in order to be redistributed throughout the organization.
- Speeding up in the MFA's decision-making processes and in stance-taking.
- Identification of and greater contact with traditional and new (national and international) media.
- Possibility of better positioning the MFA in both traditional and new local, national and international media.
- Adequate and prompt responses to external events.
- Opening of channels to interact with citizens.
- Optimization of services provided to citizens.
- MFA officials trained in the art of communicating.
- The MFA being efficient and effective in its daily work.

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<sup>5</sup> Nye, J. (2003). *La paradoja del poder norteamericano*. Madrid, Taurus, p. 151.

The risks and obstacles that such an ambitious project might encounter were not ignored, fundamentally the fear of change by the bureaucratic structures of the institution, and the delays in the adjustment by the officials, which might generate some disappointment at all levels and lead to the abandonment of the project. But the most important one, without a doubt, was the normative aspect derived from the adoption of network structures and logics. A structure that could be seen as an obstacle to maintaining a coherent discipline in foreign policy matters, where “decentralized action (typical of network structures) may well become a myriad of contradictory actions that eventually distort, blur and even pervert the image of the country.”<sup>6</sup> The lack of coordination and strategic planning would produce a growth crisis as a result of the difficulty of adapting structures that so far have responded to a way of understanding international relations which is now tremendously inefficient as is evidenced, as concrete problems arise.

## The Digital Structure of the Peruvian Foreign Action

As a result of the previous process, Peru currently has more than 200 diplomatic missions (59 embassies and 160 consulates) but its external action goes much further. Public diplomacy, in an average country, is digital or it is not. That is why we consider important to make a brief description of the digital structure of Peruvian foreign action.

The Chancellery website contains sections on the MFA, foreign policy, and an updated press room in which releases, notes, statements and a photo gallery are published. This site as well as its missions' sites have been renewed in depth, a reform that has been accompanied by the creation of a style guide that defines, among other things, the type of information that would correspond to each of these organizations, as well as a unification of the MFA image. This project, in the medium term, should be completed by 2018. But in 2016 it involved the creation of a unique web template especially designed for the consular offices of Perú around the

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<sup>6</sup> Melgar Valero, Luis Tomás (2009). *Thesis*. Madrid, pp. 27-30.



world, which provides not only a unique image but also unifies the processes involved in consular services.<sup>7</sup>

In the same vein, the unification of the databases of both the MFA and the embassies and consulates of Perú abroad has been proposed, with the implementation of a document management and information distribution system, accessible from the missions through a secure intranet.

Peru has 41 embassy and consulate profiles on Twitter (20% of all diplomatic representations); 102 on Facebook, 48 of embassies (46) and permanent representations (2), 57 of consulates (49), consular sections (5) and honorary consulates (3), 5 of the deconcentrated offices, offices of the Chancellery within Peru, and 10 of various accounts serving either economic diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, the Diplomatic Academy or Centro Cultural Garcilaso de la Vega. To this we should add our presence in other channels as Youtube<sup>8</sup> and Flickr.<sup>9</sup>

This highlights a strategic option for Facebook, a network in which almost all diplomatic missions are located, reaching a total of 548,559 followers. By number of followers, in addition to the page of the MFA (109,688), stand out the embassy in the USA (31,921), the consulates in Rome (33,558), Santiago (15,352) and Machala (12,437), as well as the Centro Cultural Garcilaso de la Vega accounts (16,338) and the Diplomatic Academy (16,134). In its activity,<sup>10</sup> we can see how, beyond the page of the MFA itself which is updated an average of 3.8 times a day, more than half update their page weekly, while only 10 pages update almost daily, standing out the embassies in Egypt, Morocco, France, the United States and Chile; the general consulates of Bogotá, Denver, Santiago, Barcelona and Germany; as well as an official thematic site on Economic Diplomacy. The remaining sites publish 2 or 3 times a week.

Generally, the number of reactions generated is high (19 per publication), standing out those generated by the Diplomatic Academy (115 per

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.consulado.pe/paginas/Inicio.aspx>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCB-od3hGv2VsGn2RlXWd5YA>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.flickr.com/photos/cancilleriadepetu>

<sup>10</sup> We have measured the activity monitoring the accounts between December 6, 2017 and January 1, 2018. For this we have used the computer tool "Fankarma".

publication), as well as by the embassies in Nicaragua (109 per publication), The Netherlands (65 per publication), Argentina (60 per publication), USA (59 per publication), Austria (54 per publication), Chile (43 per publication) and the United Kingdom (42 per publication); similarly, by the consulates in Milan (129 per publication), Santiago (55 per publication), Florence (43 per publication) and Rome (42 per publication). The MFA page also has a good response rate (44 per publication).

On Twitter, the total number of followers is 21,056, among which stand out the missions in the United States (4,504) and Japan (3,334); and, secondly, those in Spain (1,852) and Chile (1,538). Of the Twitter accounts, except for the missions in the United States and the United Kingdom, that tweet daily, and that of Chile, that tweets every two days, the rest of the accounts are quite irregular in content publication, approaching an average of one weekly publication.<sup>11</sup>

These institutional accounts show a good level of graphic unity and denomination, thus revealing a coordinated action, something that is also seen in the type of publications, which in all their channels replicate the statements and pronouncements of the MFA and others that are relevant to the diplomatic mission, as well as some campaigns promoted by the MFA.

## Motion is Evidenced in Progress

After an ambitious and painful change project, it was time to watch and adjust the functioning of this new digitized public diplomacy system. And very soon a first opportunity arose.

### *The Hague: Transforming a Crisis into an Opportunity*

On January 16, 2008, the Peruvian ambassador Allan Wagner, former foreign minister and appointed agent of Peru for the case of defining by

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<sup>11</sup> To measure this activity, we have also used the computer tool “Fankarma”, monitoring the accounts between December 6, 2017 and January 1, 2018.

legal means its maritime border with Chile, filed a complaint with the International Court of Justice in The Hague against the latter.

Since the War of the Pacific in year 1879, the relationship between Chile and Peru – which lost an extensive region in the south of the country in that war (which also meant that both countries began to share part of their borders, due to Bolivia's loss of its access to the Pacific Ocean) has been marked by disagreements that, only in recent decades has been countered by greater business confidence, large investments and an exponential increase in trade, intense border traffic, the growth of the population of Peruvian migrants in Santiago de Chile and a less conflictive speech.

When the government of Alan García (2006-2011) decided to file the lawsuit on the border issue, the reaction in Chile was one of such rejection that led to the freezing of relations – one of many – and the qualification of the lawsuit as an “unfriendly act”. In the long run, as we will see, in this case the crisis became an opportunity to achieve a better level of relations between both countries and, at least in the case of the Peruvian MFA, it served to strengthen the strategy and the work of the office of communication from the MFA.

### *Decisions*

The judicial case was approached from a double level, the legal one and that of public opinion. Hence, the MFA decided to define its communication process from the beginning, and to do it in a strategic way, considering the situation not as an individual battle, which would be played to a large extent in the international media, but as an occasion in which the attention of international public opinion would be placed on the Court and that Peru could take advantage of it to improve its international image and update its communication mechanisms, in line with the aforementioned Technical Cooperation project funded by the IDB.

To do so, it was necessary to take into account that the first stage of the judicial process before the International Court of Justice is behind closed doors and confidential. In that sense, a first problem that the MFA of both countries faced from the communicational point of view, had to do with the maintenance of reserve of the initial procedures and the

search for a cautious speech in the aftermath of an initial aggressive reaction by Chile. Peru sought to impose the idea that a trial is the rational way to solve such a problem and that what should be adopted was a strategy of 'separate tracks' (or *cuerdas separadas*), in which the trial did not contaminate the scope of a close and growing relationship between both countries in recent years.

Thus, a containment strategy was established, with its evident ups and downs and moments of crisis, which allowed the MFA of both countries to make efforts of rapprochement, not so much between the states as among various sectors of civil society and the media. These were always considered a key factor for the development of the process and its conclusion to be lived in a responsible manner. For example, trying to avoid exacerbations of public opinion through the media (the role of the Chilean newspaper *El Mercurio*<sup>12</sup> as promoter of the war in the Pacific has been reported in various historical research works and even in recent novels).

However, in 2012, the Peruvian MFA was faced with a dilemma, because although at the beginning the process before the Court is reserved – or rather, the documents that are presented are confidential – in the so-called oral phase or public trial, the documents lose their reserved status and can be read by anyone and the Court publicly ventilates the case. International relations, like the rest of politics, have become a credibility contest. And today, in this contest, as we have seen, not only governments participate but also a number of actors: news media, private companies, NGOs, networks of academics, politicians, citizens in general, among others. In the challenge of maintaining trust in the state – a key element to exercise public diplomacy in this new environment –, transparency becomes practically an obligation. Faced with this situation, the Peruvian MFA decided to strengthen the communication area by creating a special unit to give media support for the legal counsel that defended the case. This decision proved to be fundamental for the further development of the process and for the positive reception that the ruling of the case had in the international opinion. This decision, made by the

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<sup>12</sup> For example, Peruvian historian Carmen McEvoy, with *Armas de persuasión masiva, retórica y ritual en la Guerra del Pacífico*, or Chilean historian Carlos Trombe, whose novel *Huáscar* incorporates details on this debate.

highest authorities of the MFA, was built on the basis of one of the axes of the communication strategy that had been designed with IDB support: to seek greater transparency and better dissemination of the activities developed by the MFA, so that public opinion would have better access to learn about the decisions and actions of the Peruvian foreign policy.

As Nye points out: “Achieving sufficient credibility to attract attention and maintain that interest has become the primary political issue.”<sup>13</sup> The communication strategy of the states becomes an interesting and reliable information reference.

As a result of this, and together with the creation of an ad hoc communication team for the oral phase of the international trial, Peruvian authorities decided to work in an open dialogue with the Chilean MFA, to ensure that the International Court of Justice would be given extensive media coverage on the case in this public phase of the trial, achieving unprecedented events such as allowing live broadcast of the court hearings with a clear and common television signal for the two countries, and facilitating simultaneous interpreting into Spanish – not an official language of the Court – so that both Chileans and Peruvians could access the proceedings in their native tongue. Both decisions proved to be positive also in the perception of the Peruvian and Chilean public opinion.

### *Actions*

The communications group, which was made up of a group of young diplomats led by a prestigious journalist, sought, first of all, to “translate” to everyday language the highly complex legal documents that would be presented, in order to allow journalists and laymen understand the proceedings in the public phase of the trial.

In this way, a first action was to develop guides, manuals, instructions, glossaries, presentations, etc. These tools were uploaded to a web platform especially developed for the case and delivered to the media, with which an intense information program was also developed, with presentations to almost all the main media of the written press, radio,

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<sup>13</sup> Nye, J. (2003). *La paradoja del poder norteamericano*, Madrid, Taurus, p. 130.

television, and also with non-traditional media – web platforms and opinion blogs, as well as community managers of all media – in Lima and in other regions of Peru, with an emphasis on southern Peru, which is the bordering area with Chile.

These actions helped not only to guide opinion makers and journalists, but also to create trust and direct contact with journalists providing them with communication advice, which could go directly to those responsible of handling the media contents. During the Court's ruling, one of these journalists – who had held for the first time the position of head of the MFA communication office created with the new organization proposed after the IDB's report – accompanied the team of correspondents at the Court's headquarters, facilitating them both the information and the “translation” of the legal aspects of the case from first-hand and in real time, which allowed building a “narrative” on the importance of the case and its possible outcome.

After this oral phase – December, 2012 – a waiting period of more than a year elapsed, as the Court's ruling was issued on January 27, 2014. During all that time the accompaniment of the media continued, intensifying as the time of the ruling was approaching. The communication consultancy was incorporated into the General Office of Communication of the MFA, giving continuity to the work designed years before, and there was a strengthening the work related to communications within the institution itself. MFA's work would be later recognized in Peru with the prestigious award for “good government practices”, bestowed by the non-governmental organization Ciudadanos al Día, “for building a relationship of trust” with the communication media.<sup>14</sup>

Among the main and innovative actions developed by the MFA was the digitization of support for journalists in real time – through tools such as Whatsapp or Messenger – and the work that was done with some high-traffic web platforms and opinion leaders in social networks, whose coverage enjoyed a high audience both in Peru and in Chile, especially among the public most reluctant to traditional media.

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.andina.com.pe/agencia/noticia-cancilleria-obtiene-premio-buenas-practicas-gestion-publica-515053.aspx>

It should be noted that in public opinion surveys, knowledge about the judicial case reached 84%, and positive reactions to the Court's ruling and the work of the Peruvian MFA far exceeded a passing approval grade in the rating, while on both sides of the border Peru was perceived as winner in the process,<sup>15</sup> which even resulted in an improvement in the approval rate of the current Peruvian president.

### *A Curious Digital Crisis*

Relationships in the maritime controversy between Chile and Peru also generated an anecdote that is worth of being registered by the Guinness digital public diplomacy records. Indeed, it is the first retweet that has provoked a formal diplomatic complaint. The retweeted content was a map with the Peruvian position on the boundaries between Chile and Peru, after the decision of The Hague Court, initially published in a traditional media outlet, both in its digital and paper versions and that was distributed by the medium's social channels. The Peruvian Embassy in Washington picked up the map in a press clip and launched it via Twitter, and this was in turn retweeted by the official account of the MFA. It was this retweet – picked up by a traditional Chilean mass medium<sup>16</sup> – that caused the anger of some Chilean congress members and politicians who consequently put pressure on the Chilean MFA in order to submit a formal complaint to the Peruvian government, which was thus the first diplomatic note known as having been originated by a retweet.

### **Open Diplomacy: Peruvian Nationals as Citizen Ambassadors**

One of the most relevant elements of this digitalized public diplomacy is that of the entry of new actors, who pose new challenges to the foreign

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<sup>15</sup> <http://gestion.pe/politica/mayoria-peruanos-y-chilenos-cree-que-peru-gano-fallo-baya-segun-encuesta-datum-y-novomerc-2087797>. <http://peru21.pe/politica/ipsos-peru-aprobacion-humala-sube-33-mejor-nivel-ocho-meses-2170325>.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.lasegunda.com/Noticias/Politica/2014/02/911964/peru-difunde-dossier-con-mapa-en-que-desconoce-limite-terrestre-chileno>.

policy of the states, especially in the field of communication. The diversity of the public and the playing fields in which this soft power is disputed, makes the best strategy is a network strategy, which goes on to build and maintain trust relationships that involve as many actors as possible.<sup>17</sup>

A state should not only share the stage with these private actors but should absorb feedback from them, adapting themselves to their different structures and procedures, and becoming aware that sharing certain information and distributing has an impact in the increase of their soft power. In the knowledge society, an effective leadership requires a dialogue with the different actors.

This is about taking advantage of what Melgar calls micro-networks, which, in addition to being identified with public diplomacy, are usually identified by concepts such as multi-track diplomacy or civil diplomacy. These are informal networks, sometimes temporary, for specific purposes, and are configured by a pattern of social interaction that can be managed by the embassy or the cultural institute abroad as a more or less central hub including a huge list of actors with relevance to the country's public diplomacy.

Among these actors, in addition to private companies, NGOs and experts mentioned above, facilitators, opinion leaders, journalists, religious centers, etc., should have prominent roles, cultivating alongside members of the community networks, which do not have to share the nationality of the country that promotes these strategies, or even have a strictly national motivation.

Today, many more people have access to information, messages go further, faster and with fewer intermediaries, power over information is more broadly distributed than before, moving away from governments towards that wide range of actors that we have pointed out before. In this context, the policy of a state cannot continue to be based on the control of information circulation. Those who try face a high cost and finally frustration. Governments are discovering that, if they want to play a relevant role in the international stage, they have to dispense with the barriers that impede the exchange of information, resigning to the traditional trap of

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<sup>17</sup> Ref. Melgar Valero, *op. cit.*, p. 27.



keeping information hidden in a black box, something that in the new situation would be suicidal.

Instead of reinforcing centralization and bureaucracy, the option of governments requires a radical change in their attitude towards information – which in the current scenario allows them to take advantage of new information technologies for creating and cultivating new international communities in the network.<sup>18</sup> In this sense, it is worth mentioning the work of the Embassy of Peru in Chile, which has tried to convert Peruvian immigrants in Chile and their work in an additional asset for its communication strategy. For this purpose, in 2015 a section of public diplomacy was created including the cultural and press areas, seeking to develop actions that allow, among other things, to build on the positive aspects of the image of Peru and Peruvians in Chile so as to favor a positive narrative.

### *Between Networks Wars and Love that Enters Through the Stomach*

Quite a few controversies have been generated over the years by the presence of Peruvians in Chile, the largest migratory flow of which took place in the second half of the 1990s, as a result of the political and economic crisis in Peru. Just a few years ago, the then mayor of Santiago de Chile said that Peruvians brought bad smells to the city's main plaza and its surroundings, where there were "street cookeries"<sup>19</sup> – in Peru, food "on the way" prepared by street vendors. And it is known that Peruvians who live mostly in the neighborhoods of downtown Santiago, Recoleta and Independencia, are called "pigeons" or "dove-eaters" because they are accused of eating such birds when they have food shortages.<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, there have been quite a few claims stemming from Peru that Chile appropriates Peruvian flag products such as *pisco* – a grape liquor originally produced in Peru, with a national designation of origin in

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<sup>18</sup> Nye, J. (2003), *La paradoja del poder norteamericano*, Madrid, Taurus, p. 83-85, 95.

<sup>19</sup> <http://rpp.pe/peru/actualidad/alcalde-chileno-denuncia-que-grupos-de-peruanos-generan-malos-olores-noticia-257739>.

<sup>20</sup> <https://espanol.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20090621104454AAAtmf9>.

each of the countries – and the *suspiro limeño* – a traditional dessert now industrially manufactured in Chile – or, more recently, the *picarones* – fried doughnuts made of sweet potato and served with honey which, in fact, have been prepared since colonial times throughout the continent, like the “alfajores” and various other desserts of Spanish heritage.

As it can be seen, many of these “wars” that are aired particularly in social networks and popular mass media have to do with a curious expression that in Peru is venerated almost as a faith and that, thanks to a narrative created by Peruvian chef and entrepreneur Gaston Acurio, has allowed Peruvians – especially chefs, but not exclusively them – to become proud representatives of Peruvian cuisine both locally and abroad. Chile, naturally due to its geographical proximity and high contact with Peru, has been one of the first places to be “conquered” by Peruvian gastronomy. While Lima has become one of the preferred destinations for (of course) “gastronomic tourism” by the upper sectors of society, there are more than four hundred Peruvian restaurants in the Metropolitan Region of Santiago, which has become the city with the largest number of Peruvian cuisine businesses outside of Peru. This is not only surprising considering the previously described background, but “it is good for those who can enjoy a tasty *lomo saltado*, an *ají de gallina*, a *seco de cabrito*, and also for our economy”, in the words of Chile’s President Bachelet.<sup>21</sup>

In order to guide consumers facing so many culinary offerings in Chile, a virtual version of a Gastronomic Guide for Peruvian Restaurants in Chile was launched in 2015, under the slogan “*Perú, mucho gusto*” (*Translators’s note*: A wordplay in Spanish combining “very tasty” and “pleased to meet you”).<sup>22</sup>

### *Public Diplomacy and Peruvian Books in Chile*

In addition to the use of tools such as the “Peru brand” – Chile is a place where this brand is highly recognizable – or the implementation of social

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<sup>21</sup> <https://prensa.presidencia.cl/lfi-content/uploads/2016/05/may172016brm-extranjeria-y-migracion-final.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.ocexperuenchile.cl/restaurantes-peruanos-en-chile.php>.

network campaigns to promote tourism attractions and relevant cultural activities, Peru has been chosen as the guest country for the International Book Fair of Chile (FILSA) in 2018.

This designation has involved successful preparatory events that have allowed the development of binational projects linked to the publishing sphere. In 2016 the event “La nueva invasión” (The New Invasion), held under the responsibility of the Embassy along with binational and independent publisher Estruendomudo, generated dialogues involving Peruvian and Chilean authors and culminated with the presentation of two anthologies of authors from both countries.

Likewise, Peru was invited to various local fairs in Chile, such as the one in La Reina in Santiago and Viña del Mar, a fact that has allowed for more authors and creators to be known besides those already renowned in Chile. The purpose is that the FILSA 2018 fair be a platform for common projects – plans already include an edition of “Historia Secreta del Perú y Chile” (A Secret History of Perú and Chile), over the basis of homonymous books that have been highly successful in critics and sales in both countries – including other artistic expressions.

## Learned Lessons

Digitization, beyond increasing audiences, leads to the modernization of foreign policy. Its implementation highlights the importance of public diplomacy for action abroad and sets forth the need for changes in channels, organization, work procedures and decision making, and resource distribution.

By generating international attention, foreign “conflicts” may become a great opportunity for public diplomacy, but call for specific equipment and channels.

The greatest asset of digital public diplomacy is the people themselves who, in fields such as gastronomy or culture and with a good strategic orientation, can become the best ambassadors of a country.