

# Introduction

## The Digitalization of Public Diplomacy: Towards a New Conceptual Framework

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Recent years have seen the digital disruption of diplomacy. The global proliferation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and mass adoption of social media networks created a new set of opportunities and challenges that diplomacy had to grapple with. Alongside the ability to manage consular crises in near real time and shape a nation's image, diplomats had to contend with calls for more open and transparent forms of diplomacy as well as develop a digitally literate diplomatic corps.

The disruptive nature of digitalization has also been evident in the realm of public diplomacy. Digitalization has enabled diplomats to interact with foreign populations, establish global virtual embassies and overcome traditional gatekeepers such as the news room elite. Yet digitalization has also seen the rise of an opinionated online public that is clamouring to be heard as well as the transformation of social media into competitive framing arenas in which multiple actors vie over public attention and support. More recently, digitalization has become a tool for strategic use of dis-information and mis-information.

It is amid this backdrop of digital disruption that this issue of the *Revista Mexicana de Política Exterior* (RMPE) aims to offer a more comprehensive understating of the current state of public diplomacy.

To date, scholarly work has proposed a plethora of terms in relation to the impact digital tools have had on public diplomacy including public diplomacy 2.0, digital public diplomacy and virtual diplomacy. While each

of these conceptualizations has contributed to the study of contemporary public diplomacy, they all fail to address a fundamental aspect of the digital age and that is that digitalization is a long term process and not a binary state. Indeed one cannot separate Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) into those that are digital and those that are not. Rather, each MFA is at a different stage of the digitalization process.

Markedly, public diplomacy is where digital technologies first debuted. Early uses of social media and digital platforms in the US, Israel and Sweden were all tied to a desire to communicate with online publics and create virtual relationships with these publics. Yet even in the realm of public diplomacy, digitalization remains a process rather than a permanent state.

As such, this special issue of the RMPE introduces a new conceptual framework, “the digitalization of public diplomacy”, for the study of contemporary public diplomacy. “The digitalization of public diplomacy” suggests that different MFAs, embassies and diplomats are at different stages of the digitalization process. While some may have migrated online a decade ago, others are only now venturing onto digital platforms. Moreover, it conceptualizes digitalization as a process that far exceeds the adoption of digital tools. Rather, digitalization is influencing the norms, goals and working procedures of diplomats, diplomatic actors and diplomatic institutions the world over.

In other words, “the digitalization of diplomacy” looks at the overall influence digital tools are having on the practice of public diplomacy. This framework therefore encapsulates four dimensions. The first is a *functional dimension* that focuses on the use of digital tools in public diplomacy activities. The second is a *normative dimension* that explores how the values and norms of the digital society impact the practice of public diplomacy and the functions of its practitioners. The third dimension is *analytical* and relates to the use of digital technologies to evaluate public diplomacy activities. The fourth and final dimension is *institutional* and explores how digital tools are influencing the working procedures of institutions responsible for public diplomacy activities.

Importantly, “the digitalization of diplomacy” suggests that one can no longer examine MFAs as one monolithic unit. Rather, each MFA should be viewed as is a world onto itself.

In response to the dimensions we have outlined, the contributions to this 113 issue of the *RMPE* are both practical and conceptual in nature and offer a diverse geographical perspective on the digitalization of public diplomacy. The variety of articles included in this issue can inform diplomatic strategy and everyday practice as they portray the state of the art of public diplomacy in the face of ever-expanding and overlapping digital and international spheres. In other words, how digital technologies have become highly relevant to international affairs; influencing areas such as foreign policy, security and of course diplomacy.

Our discussion begins with an article by Nicholas J. Cull that addresses the institutional dimension of the conceptual framework underpinning this special issue. Cull's paper re-examines the trial and tribulations that accompanied the digitalization of US public diplomacy. Despite the fact that many digital tools were developed on US soil, Cull demonstrates that the adoption of such tools by the State Department was a prolonged process as it challenged well entrenched diplomatic norms, beliefs and procedures. Yet Cull's paper can also serve as a roadmap – from a normative dimension – for other MFAs undergoing the process of digitalization, thus enabling practitioners to learn from the mistakes of the past and the trials of their peers in the US.

Corneliu Bjola, on the other hand, provides a relevant panoptic of forthcoming trends and countertrends facing digitalized public diplomacy. Bjola focuses his attention on the functional and institutional dimensions of our framework. He asserts that foreign ministries will have to continuously adopt new working routines and skills in order to meet the challenges and opportunities brought about by digitalization. Bjola anticipates an opportunity for MFAs to strategically envision public diplomacy as “ecosystem-based, pro-active, and network-oriented”. However, he also identifies potential trends that might negatively shape MFA digital transformations including “emotional contagion, algorithmic determinism and strategic entropy”.

Employing a normative and institutional prism, James Pamment reminds us that “the study of diplomacy's digitization is also the study of how diplomacy has met the challenge of globalisation, adapted to complex interconnectivity, and embraced the concept of the transnational audience”. Pamment's article underscores the necessity to collaborate with

stakeholders, be they other departments within an MFA or foreign audiences. Moreover he notes – especially for practitioners – a context that implicates navigating levels of uncertainty and complexity as features of the current international order, but also positively disruptive enough to make diplomatic practice receptive toward adapting to a digitalized terrain.

In another conceptually driven piece, which is exemplified through three case studies, Alister Miskimmon, Ben O’Loughlin and Laura Roselle introduce the Strategic Narrative approach to public diplomacy. By examining all four dimensions of our framework, this contribution demonstrates how the digitalization of public diplomacy can bring strategic value to MFA communication. This article should prove useful for MFAs seeking to craft and disseminate a global narrative *vis-à-vis* those of other international actors.

Beyond conceptual pieces, Juan Luis Manfredi and Alejandro Ramos Cardoso refer to the contested digital space for diplomats regarding dis-information, pointing out functionally that the digital skills diplomats require are those that enable ethically guided and appealing narratives to break through the dis-information confusion. Manfredi and Ramos concentrate their arguments on the normative dimension of our framework, but also demonstrate the normative dimension’s inherent linkage to the institutional one as norms often influence working routines.

Likewise, Daniel Aguirre Azócar and Matthias Erlandsen also envision a normative-institutional linkage when referring to challenges and opportunities for Latin American MFAs confronting modernization of diplomatic practices via digitalization. For them, Latin America, as a whole, has embraced a rhetorical digitalization of international issues that concern the whole world from a public diplomacy standpoint, but for the most part what is observable are localized crisis-driven actions that establish a diverse – oftentimes sporadic – form of PD engagement with international audiences.

Alejandro Neyra and Rafa Rubio focus on the case study of the Peruvian MFA and describe how an internal crisis compelled the MFA to shape international opinion via the establishment of digital public diplomacy activities and a digital strategy that focused on a maritime dispute with Chile. This article demonstrates how the functional dimension, the need to shape public opinion during a crisis, leads to nor-

mative change as the Peruvian MFA and its embassies were eventually compelled to embrace digitalization.

Beyond Latin America, Ilan Manor and Marcus Holmes examine Palestine's use of a Facebook Embassy to stimulate dialogue and facilitate understanding between Palestinians and Israelis. Their article demonstrates how virtual embassies can be used to overcome the limitations of traditional diplomacy, such as lack of bi-lateral ties between Israel and Palestine. Their article focuses on the functional dimension of digitalization and the opportunities it has brought with it to public diplomacy.

Examining the presence of all four dimensions of our conceptual framework, Efe Sevin focuses on the one-year anniversary of the failed Turkey coup attempt and how the Erdoğan government framed international audiences view on the event and its culprits through a social media campaign. Sevin's paper provides a relevant glimpse into crisis communication and public diplomacy as practiced via Twitter by the Turkish MFA and its Embassies.

Finally Nancy K. Groves, Chief of the United Nations Social Media Team, offers insight on her first-hand experience implementing social media campaigns that literally speak to the world in several languages. Groves' article is especially insightful as it deals with recent reforms to the UN's social media activities, especially within the realm of public diplomacy. These reforms were meant to increase the social media team's ability to counter negative rhetoric about the UN and dis-information campaigns against the UN. Clearly, Groves' piece provides ample evidence of institutional and analytical dimensions proposed for this special issue, where a shift in working procedures meant internalizing and consolidating procedures and evaluative tools for UN public diplomacy.

In the book review section, *Política global y sociedad civil en las Américas. Nuevas diplomacias en Argentina y México* by Antonio Alejo Jaime is analyzed by Rebecka Villanueva Ulfgard. As part of a growing bibliography on diplomacy, the review is relevant to the conceptual framework present throughout this special issue. Undoubtedly digitalization, as a multidimensional force, has both triggered change in society and specifically in diplomatic thinking and action as both the theory and practice of diplomacy are now in constant flux. Digitalization in its multidimensionality, as mentioned entails looking inside of the bureaucracy

of the MFA and its public servants as they implement diplomatic activities. Relatedly, Villanueva Ulfgard points out that the author's objective for the subject treated in this book is to build interdisciplinary bridges as diplomacy as practice is undoubtedly being challenged by a post-state impetus or a landscape of non-state actors. Indeed, Alejo's book fits within the discussions found within each article, as well as within the diplomatic studies literature that Villanueva Ulfgard so remarkably notes.

To conclude, as coordinators of this 113 special issue of the RMPE our editorial task was to bring to the Spanish-speaking audiences world renowned and emerging voices in the field of public diplomacy. To do so, we have introduced a new conceptual framework that we believe is helpful in comprehending the process of the digitalization of diplomacy which started nearly a decade ago. The value of this issue lies not only in its authors but also in its diverse case studies which introduce audiences to US American, Turkish, Palestinian and UN public diplomacy activities. Indeed, our expectation, but mostly hope, is that this issue of the RMPE will prove beneficial through the accounts provided by each author, and the key takeaways they offer at the end of each article.

We end this introduction, expressing our gratitude to Natalia Saltamacchia Ziccardi, María Constanza García Colomé, the translators associated to the Instituto Matías Romero, each author, and to our families and friends; thank you for your constant support.

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