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Public Diplomacy as an Instrument for Forming the Foreign Policy Image of a State: Theoretical Principles and Applied Aspects

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ABSTRACT

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The relevance of the study is due to the growing role of public diplomacy in the context of global competition for trust, reputation and symbolic influence, when the foreign policy image of the state is formed under the influence of digital communications, cultural practices and network interactions. The purpose of the article is to theoretically generalize modern approaches to public diplomacy and justify its functioning as a holistic tool for forming the foreign policy image of the state, taking into account new technological and socio-cultural conditions. The methodological basis of the study is a complex of general scientific and special methods of cognition, in particular analysis and synthesis for systematization of theoretical approaches, a comparative method for comparing different models of public diplomacy, as well as conceptual generalization for identifying the logic of interaction of digital, cultural and information tools in the process of image construction. As a result of the study, the content of the concept of public diplomacy as a multidimensional communication mechanism that combines classical diplomatic practices with digital forms of public interaction is clarified. It is established that the effectiveness of foreign policy image formation largely depends on the consistency between the declared values of the state and real political behavior, which directly affects the level of international trust. The ambivalent nature of digital diplomacy is revealed, which, on the one hand, expands the possibilities of direct influence on foreign audiences, and on the other hand, increases the vulnerability of the image to information crises and reputational risks. The role of cultural diplomacy as a relatively stable channel for the formation of positive associations, capable of mitigating political fluctuations in the perception of the state, is substantiated. It is also shown that the use of new technologies, in particular elements of artificial intelligence, transforms the logic of foreign policy communication, requiring a revision of traditional approaches to image management. The practical significance of the results lies in the possibility of their use in developing state strategies for public and digital diplomacy, improving information policy, as well as in the activities of foreign relations bodies and think tanks involved in the formation and correction of the state's foreign policy image.



KEYWORDS

communication mechanism, information policy, cultural attitudes, building a positive image.



Публічна дипломатія як інструмент формування зовнішньополітичного іміджу держави: теоретичні засади та прикладні аспекти

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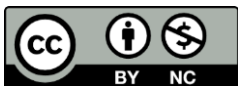
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Актуальність дослідження зумовлена зростанням ролі публічної дипломатії в умовах глобальної конкуренції за довіру, репутацію та символічний вплив. Метою статті є теоретичне узагальнення сучасних підходів до публічної дипломатії та обґрунтування її функціонування як цілісного інструменту формування зовнішньополітичного іміджу держави. Методологічну основу дослідження становить комплекс загальнонаукових і спеціальних методів пізнання, зокрема аналіз і синтез для систематизації теоретичних підходів, порівняльний метод для зіставлення різних моделей публічної дипломатії. У результаті дослідження уточнено зміст поняття публічної дипломатії як багатовимірного комунікаційного механізму, що поєднує класичні дипломатичні практики з цифровими формами публічної взаємодії. Встановлено, що ефективність формування зовнішньополітичного іміджу значною мірою залежить від узгодженості між задекларованими цінностями держави та реальною політичною поведінкою. Виявлено амбівалентний характер цифрової дипломатії. З одного боку, вона розширює можливості прямого впливу на іноземні аудиторії, а з іншого – підвищує вразливість іміджу до інформаційних криз і репутаційних ризиків. Обґрунтовано роль культурної дипломатії як відносно стабільного каналу формування позитивних асоціацій. Також показано, що використання новітніх технологій, зокрема елементів штучного інтелекту, трансформує логіку зовнішньополітичної комунікації. Практична значимість результатів полягає в можливості їх використання під час розроблення державних стратегій публічної та цифрової дипломатії, удосконалення інформаційної політики, а також у діяльності органів зовнішніх відносин і аналітичних центрів, задіяних у формуванні та корекції зовнішньополітичного іміджу держави.

КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА

комунікаційний механізм, інформаційна політика, культурні установки, побудова позитивного образу.

1. Introduction

Under current conditions, international relations are formed not only under the influence of military force or economic pressure. At the same time, communication and the ability of the state to be heard and understood beyond its own borders are of great importance. It is in this context that public diplomacy emerges as one of the tools for the formation of the foreign policy image of the state. The last combines the political, cultural, economic and informational dimensions of international interaction.

The problem of public diplomacy is of particular relevance for Ukraine in the context of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation. As a result, the country is forced to defend its own sovereignty and maintain its image in the international information space. That is why the analysis of the theoretical foundations of public diplomacy and its applied aspects, in particular on the Ukrainian example, is unique and scientifically significant.

2. Literature Review

The analysis of the current scientific body on the problems of public diplomacy testifies to the essential evolution in understanding its role in the formation of the foreign policy image of the state, which reflects the shift from classical communication models to multidimensional, digitally mediated forms of interaction. In the works devoted to digital diplomacy, it is emphasized that the use of online platforms is not reduced to a simple transfer of traditional tools to the virtual space. Thus, Mazumdar [1] shows that digital diplomacy forms qualitatively new modes of public engagement, within which foreign audiences cease to be passive recipients of messages and acquire the characteristics of a co-creator of the state's image narratives. The author comes to the conclusion that Internet-oriented practices change the very logic of public diplomacy, strengthening horizontal ties and increasing the sensitivity of the image to the dynamics of network discussions, which at the same time creates both new opportunities and risks for state foreign policy.

The problem of ambivalence of public diplomacy is developed in the study of Salman and Burton [2], who propose to distinguish between positive and negative strategies of public diplomacy on the example of the states of the Arabian Gulf. Their conclusions show that public diplomacy can not only strengthen the foreign policy image but also provoke reputational losses if manipulative or overly propagandistic approaches are used.

A new dimension in public diplomacy research is related to technological acceleration and the introduction of artificial intelligence. Bjola and Manor [3] outline several scenarios of the impact of generative AI on digital diplomacy, demonstrating that these technologies can radically change the processes of production and dissemination of foreign policy messages.

In the national scientific discourse, the emphasis is placed on the institutional and political foundations of the formation of the international image of Ukraine. Tkachuk [4] substantiates that the state information policy performs an integrative function between external and internal communication, influencing not only the reputation of the state abroad, but also the perception of its political subjectivity. The author establishes that the fragmentation of information initiatives and the lack of strategic coordination reduce the potential of public diplomacy as an instrument for long-term image positioning of Ukraine.

The cultural dimension of public diplomacy is revealed in the works of Rudnieva et al. [5], which prove that cultural diplomacy is one of the most stable channels for the formation of a positive image of the state. Researchers show that cultural projects and symbolic practices contribute to the consolidation of associations with national identity and values that are less susceptible to political conjuncture.

3. Problem Statement

In modern conditions of globalization and digitalization, public diplomacy has become an important tool for shaping the foreign policy image of the state, as it enables governments to communicate directly with foreign audiences, promote national interests, and strengthen international trust. This issue is especially relevant for Ukraine in the context of armed aggression by the Russian Federation, which has intensified the struggle not only on the battlefield but also in the international information space. Under these circumstances, there is a need to study the theoretical foundations,

instruments, and practical mechanisms of public diplomacy, as well as to assess its effectiveness in forming a positive international image of the state, ensuring international support, and counteracting disinformation in the context of contemporary geopolitical challenges.

4. Methods and Materials

The empirical and source basis of the study was regulatory legal acts and program-strategic documents in the field of foreign policy and communications of the state, official materials of public diplomacy institutions, as well as open digital data from official web resources and verified pages in social networks reflecting the practices of forming a foreign policy image. In addition, scientific works on the theory of international relations, strategic communications and “soft power” made it possible to clarify the conceptual and categorical apparatus and operationalize key variables.

Methodologically, a set of complementary approaches has been applied. Theoretical analysis and synthesis are used to generalize scientific interpretations of public diplomacy and build the logic of research; comparative and structural-functional methods – for comparing the tools of public diplomacy and their roles in image formation. Content analysis of official communications and media materials ensured the identification of dominant narratives, target audiences and communication frames; The case method made it possible to analyze applied practices in terms of their effectiveness. To interpret the impact of the tools, elements of qualitative assessment of effectiveness based on indicators of coverage, engagement, tone of messages and consistency of messages with foreign policy goals are applied.

5. Results and Discussion

The term “public diplomacy” has several general interpretations reflecting the development of this concept over time [6]. First of all, it is a form of direct communication between the state and a foreign audience, aimed at shaping its views and influencing the decisions of the governments of other countries. In a broader sense, public diplomacy can be considered as an instrument through which the government spreads abroad the idea of its own national ideas, values, culture, political institutions and strategic goals. In addition, public diplomacy covers activities in the spheres of information, education and culture, through which the state tries to influence the foreign policy positions of other countries, interacting with their community. Historically, public diplomacy has been focused mainly on intergovernmental communication. Its key task was to inform, persuade, or mobilize external audiences in support of national interests and foreign policy. However, today, public diplomacy has significantly expanded its format and increasingly involves direct contact between people. Such a transformation is due to the growing role of community opinion in international processes and the intensification of interpersonal relations, which significantly affect the image of the state in the world [7, p. 143].

The term “public diplomacy” first appeared in 1856 on the pages of the London newspaper *The Times*, where it denoted manifestations of culture and politeness. This concept was introduced into scientific discourse only in 1965 by Edmund Gullion, dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Taft University (Medford, MA). The need for a new term arose due to the negative connotations of the word “propaganda”, which no longer corresponded to modern approaches to international communication. In his definition, Gullion emphasized that public diplomacy involves influencing the public opinion of another country in order to shape its perception of the policy of a particular state [7, p. 143].

The concept of “soft power” occupies a key position in the system of understanding modern public diplomacy. Its establishment began after the First World War. In 1917, on the initiative of President Woodrow Wilson, the Committee on Public Information was created under the leadership of George Creel. Also known as the “Creel Committee”. Its main goal was to form a positive image of the United States in the world. The term “soft power” itself appeared much later, in 1990. This was after Joseph Nye published his book *A Call to Leadership: Changing the Nature of American Power*. According to Nye, the basis of this influence is the culture of the country, its political values, ideology and the nature of foreign policy. The concept of “soft power” is closely related to several liberal theories of international relations, in particular with the theory of democratic peace, commercial liberalism and international organizations. Nye noted that globalization gradually reduces the absolute power of states in international politics and instead strengthens the role of non-state actors. At the same time, he

emphasized that the military potential of a country can also influence the formation of its “soft power” [7, p. 146]. In the background, Nye promotes the idea of “smart power” – a balanced combination of “hard” and “soft” power. He also emphasizes that culture is an important source of soft influence, and public diplomacy is one of the main tools for its implementation.

Analyzing the development of public diplomacy, it is advisable to refer to the concept proposed by Eitan Gilboa, a professor at Harvard University and director of the Center for International Communication at Bar-Ilan University (Israel). In his research, the scientist singled out and described in detail three key models of public diplomacy: the classical model of the Cold War period, the non-state transnational model, as well as the model of internal PR [8, p. 25]. To clearly distinguish these approaches, E. Gilboa proposed five basic variables (Table 1), among which the key actors and initiators of public diplomacy, its goals, the types of media involved, as well as the tools and methods of influence used within each model are decisive.

Table 1. Models of public diplomacy according to the concept of Eitan Guilbeault

Criterion (variable)	Basic model (Cold War)	Non-state transnational model	Internal PR model
Main actors	Nation states (superpowers: USA, SRC)	Non-state actors: NGOs, community movements, influence groups, individuals	Governments acting indirectly through PR companies and lobbyists
Initiators	State governments and official institutions	Non-state structures, transnational networks	Government agencies involving commercial intermediaries
Main objectives	Formation of a positive image of the state; ideological confrontation; long-term impact on the public opinion of foreign societies	Mobilization of international support; creating external pressure on the governments of the target countries for political change	Providing political and community support in the target country; increasing the legitimacy of government actions
Types of media	International broadcasting (radio, official information channels)	Global information networks, media events, international platforms	National media of the target country, controlled or mediated through PR structures
Means and methods of public diplomacy	Dissemination of “objective” information, counteraction to internal propaganda of other states, ideological communication	Community pressure campaigns, information campaigns, use of transnational solidarity networks	Lobbying, PR campaigns, formation of local support groups, public opinion research (“strategic public diplomacy”)
Nature of the impact	Direct, state-centric, ideologically colored	Decentralized, networked, transnational	Indirect, hidden, adapted to the local context
Historical/practical example	The confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War	Campaigns for democratic reform in China	Hiring of the PR firm <i>Hill and Knowlton</i> by Kuwaiti monarchs during the Gulf War (1990–1991)

Source: Compiled on the basis [7; 8].

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, traditional approaches to public diplomacy were reconsidered. In response to new global challenges in scientific and political discourse, the term “new public diplomacy” appeared, proposed in 2008 by the Deputy Secretary of State of the United States James Glasman. This approach involved the active use of digital tools – social networks, blogs and mobile sites – primarily for the implementation of US foreign policy tasks, in particular in countering terrorism. The emergence of the concept of “new public diplomacy” reflected deeper transformations of the early 2000s [8, p. 24]. First of all, we are talking about a change in the global communication environment, in which information has become available to a wide range of users, and the border between professional journalists and bloggers has been significantly reduced. Others are increasingly turning into influential actors in public diplomacy, sometimes surpassing traditional media in terms of influence.

At the same time, the general political context has changed. Public diplomacy has acquired a multi-substituting and multilateral character. In these conditions, not only is the translation of one’s own values of key importance, but also constant feedback from the external audience. The latter influences both the communication of governments and their political decisions. As a result, the classical model of

“fighting for the heart” gradually loses its effectiveness. Modern public diplomacy also has a distinctly applied character. Its tools are selected depending on specific tasks. Foreign policy guidelines can change in the short-term perspective, cultural attitudes – in the medium-term perspective, while the transformation of values requires a much longer time, usually not less than one generation. The renewed understanding of public diplomacy has received broad support in the academic community. In particular, Nicholas Kull identifies three key features of modern public diplomacy: the active use of information and communication technologies, dependence on content created by users (comments, blogs, etc.), as well as functioning within horizontal networks [8, p.25].

Digital diplomacy tools enable states to respond quickly to international challenges, effectively convey reliable information, and counter disinformation that can damage their international image. Thanks to the development of digital technologies, the possibilities of public diplomacy have significantly expanded (Table 2). An important role in this process is played by the so-called “Twitter diplomacy”, which has become one of the key channels of communication with a global audience. State leaders and official institutions actively use social networks to present their own positions, promptly respond to crisis situations and form a positive image of the state. According to the Pew Research Center (2024), the active presence of states in social networks is associated with an improvement in their international perception, especially among the younger generation [9, p. 379].

Table 2. Digital Public Diplomacy Tools and Their Impact on the Formation of the State's Foreign Policy Image

Digital Diplomacy Tool	Basic functions	Target audience	Image effect
Official accounts of state institutions in social networks	Prompt information, clarification of foreign policy positions, crisis communication	International community, media, expert communities	Formation of an image of an open, transparent and responsible state
“Twitter diplomacy” of political leaders	Personalization of foreign policy, quick response to events, signaling of positions	Global audience, youth, political elites	Increasing the recognition of the state, strengthening emotional trust
Digital platforms for strategic communications	Promoting national narratives, countering disinformation	International partners, think tanks	Strengthening the state's reputation as a reliable and predictable actor
Online Cultural and Educational Diplomacy	Dissemination of cultural values, academic mobility, digital exchanges	Students, scientists, cultural communities	Formation of a long-term positive image and “soft power”
Digital communications and big data analytics	Monitoring of international perception, adaptation of messages	State institutions, diplomatic services	Improving the effectiveness of image strategies and reputational value

Source: Authors' own development.

Interesting in the context of this topic is the experience of Ukraine. It consistently asserts itself in the international arena as a European state. That is, it strives to be a country that shares the values of the democratic world. The key priority of its foreign policy is the course towards European and Euro-Atlantic integration. At the same time, the Russian annexation of Crimea and the occupation of part of the territories in the east of Ukraine had a significant impact on the international information perception of the state. In the global media space, these events were often summarized under the concept of “Ukrainian crisis”. Sociological studies of that period showed a low level of awareness. Thus, every fifth inhabitant of the European Union did not distinguish between Ukraine and Russia, and for every tenth, Ukraine was associated primarily with poverty. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation in 2022 radically changed this picture. Open aggression against a sovereign state, massive war crimes and heroic resistance of Ukrainian society have attracted unprecedented attention of the world community. Ukraine began to be perceived not as an object of “crisis”, but as a sovereign actor of international relations, defending not only its own independence, but also fundamental European values – freedom, democracy and the rule of law [10, p. 292].

According to the Public Diplomacy Strategy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine for 2021–2025, public diplomacy is interpreted as a complex mechanism of communication between the state and the community of other countries, aimed at forming a positive public opinion abroad, promoting Ukraine's national interests and achieving its foreign policy goals. The conceptual basis of this strategy

was the national brand Ukraine Now, developed in 2018 with the aim of a systematic and recognizable representation of Ukraine in the world. In the context of a full-scale war, public diplomacy acquires special importance, since its main task is to present Ukraine as a strong and indomitable state, to convey to the international audience the strength of Ukrainian society, its democratic values and desire for freedom, as well as to actively search for and consolidate international support in the confrontation with the aggressor [11]. The developers of the Public Diplomacy Strategy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine for 2021–2025 have identified seven main areas of its implementation (Table 3), among which are: economic, cultural, expert, culinary, scientific, educational and digital diplomacy. Their combination should provide a comprehensive and coherent approach to Ukraine's advancement in the international arena.

Table 3. Main Directions of Public Diplomacy of Ukraine (2021–2025): Goals, Tools and Institutional Implementation

Public diplomacy	Key objectives	Basic tools and mechanisms	Key Institutions/ Implementation Examples
Economic diplomacy	Integration of Ukraine into the world economy; formation of a positive investment and business image; Export and tourism support	International negotiations; participation in international economic organizations; investment forums and exhibitions; business consultancy; Promotional campaigns	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine; UkraineInvest; Entrepreneurship and Export Development Officer; NAZOVNI platform; Diia.Business
Investment Component of Economic Diplomacy	Attraction of foreign direct investments; protection of investors' rights; improving the business climate	Investment climate analytics; regulatory and legal support; meetings with investors; Organization of investment visits	UkraineInvest (established in 2016)
Export diplomacy	Promotion of Ukrainian goods and services; diversification of sales markets	National stands at international exhibitions; marketing campaigns; grants; Search for partners	Entrepreneurship and Export Development Officer; Diia.Biznes
Tourism diplomacy	Increasing Ukraine's international attractiveness; Formation of a tourist brand	Participation in international tourism exhibitions; memorandums with international partners; cooperation with the WTO	State Agency for Tourism Development
Humanitarian and security (economic component)	Consolidating Ukraine's image as a guarantor of global food security	International Humanitarian Programs; Interstate partnerships	Grain from Ukraine initiative in partnership with the World Food Programme
Regional Communication Strategies (Africa)	Formation of a holistic image of Ukraine; countering disinformation of the Russian Federation; Development of partnerships	Diplomatic tours; opening missions; information campaigns; Strategic communications	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine; Communication Strategy "Ukraine – African States" (2024–2026)
Regional Communication Strategies (Latin America and the Caribbean)	Strengthening the information presence; support for the Peace Formula; development of multilateral cooperation	Work with media, journalists, and influencers; Communication support for diplomatic missions	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine; Communication Strategy "Ukraine – Latin American and Caribbean Basin States" (2024–2026)
Cultural diplomacy	Popularization of Ukrainian culture; formation of a positive attitude towards Ukraine	Festivals; exhibitions; film screenings; musical and literary projects; Art campaigns	Ukrainian Institute; Ministry of Culture and Culture; UCF; State Film Agency; PEC and others.
Science and Education Diplomacy	Development of international academic relations; intercultural dialogue; dissemination of knowledge about Ukraine	Academic mobility; joint scientific projects; Educational Programs	Erasmus+; Universities and scientific institutions
Sports diplomacy	Strengthening the international press; development of intercultural dialogue	Participation in international sports competitions; Sports exchanges	Sports federations; State and community institutions
Digital diplomacy	Protection of national interests; international information presence; countering disinformation	social networks; digital platforms; Online campaigns	Portal war.ukraine.ua; pages of Ukraine's diplomatic institutions abroad

Source: Compiled on the basis [10; 11].

Thus, the above table clearly demonstrates that the public diplomacy of Ukraine in 2021–2025 is being formed as a complex system. Its development testifies to the desire of the state not only to protect national interests in wartime, but also to build long-term partnerships based on trust and mutual benefit. At the same time, the effectiveness of these areas directly depends on further institutional support and professional coordination of actions between the state and civil society.

The results of the analysis of the key areas of public diplomacy make it possible to identify three interrelated components in its structure, each of which is responsible for the formation of unique image characteristics of the state. The geopolitical direction creates the idea of the country as a certain geographical space, within which its domestic and foreign policy is implemented. The marketing direction focuses on the promotion of economic processes and opportunities of the state in the world arena. The branding direction, relying on the recognition of official and informal symbols, contributes to the formation of a consistent and understandable image of the state in the international space. At the same time, diplomatic technologies will become a set of well-thought-out and purposeful measures aimed at attracting new external actors, cooperation with which can increase the international authority of the country [12, p. 127]. In the context of globalization, states consciously invest in the formation of a positive international image, using the tools of “soft power” and public diplomacy. They themselves become important mechanisms for protecting national interests, attracting foreign investments, and generally strengthening the influence of the state in the world.

6. Conclusions

The analysis shows that public diplomacy has turned into a complex tool for the formation of the foreign policy image of the state. It goes beyond the traditional diplomatic communication, covering a wide range of actors, channels and practices. The concepts of “soft” and “smart” power, as well as the models of public diplomacy proposed by leading researchers, allow for a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of the state’s influence on international community opinion.

Ukraine’s experience convincingly demonstrates that public diplomacy is a strategically important element of foreign policy. Russia’s full-scale invasion in 2022 became a catalyst for rethinking Ukraine’s information presence in the world. The implementation of the Public Diplomacy Strategy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine for 2021–2025 indicates the desire of the state to build an integral system of image-making.

At the same time, the effectiveness of public diplomacy directly depends on the institutional capacity of the state, the availability of professional personnel and stable financing. With the further development of these components, public diplomacy can become for Ukraine not only a means of protecting national interests. But also, a powerful resource for long-term international partnership, building trust and establishing a positive image of the state in the global dimension.

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