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SOCIAL MEDIA ASPECT OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY OF UKRAINE DURING A FULL-SCALE INVASION

Background. This article is devoted to the role of social media in Ukraine's public diplomacy during the full-scale invasion by Russia. It analyzes the use of digital platforms to shape global narratives, counter disinformation, and mobilize international support. Through a detailed examination of key campaigns, engagement metrics, and outreach efforts, the study highlights the effectiveness of Ukraine's digital diplomacy in enhancing its global image. The research also explores the challenges and limitations of digital diplomacy, particularly in engaging audiences in regions with lower responsiveness. The findings underscore the importance of strategic communication, adaptability, and technological resilience in modern public diplomacy.

Methods. The methodology includes content analysis, a comparative approach, synthesis, and a systematic approach to explore the strategic use of social media by Ukraine to promote its national interests. These methods help identify patterns in Ukraine's communication strategies, evaluate their effectiveness, and understand the broader implications for international relations. Content analysis is also applied to examine key social media campaigns, hashtags, and messages disseminated by Ukrainian officials and their impact on international audiences.

Results. The analysis revealed that Ukraine's digital diplomacy efforts successfully countered Russian disinformation and mobilized international solidarity. The Ukraine.ua ecosystem surpassed 1 billion in total reach, with Instagram alone gaining over 1 million followers. The #StandWithUkraine hashtag reached over 2.5 million users, while #BoycottRussianSport gained 10 million views. Regional analysis showed strong engagement in Europe and North America but lower interaction in Africa and parts of Asia. The campaign received the highest engagement in France (15,487 views) and Italy (14,679 views), while unexpectedly high interaction was recorded in Vietnam (2,470 views, 116 reactions). Despite these successes, engagement in Germany and the U.S. varied, highlighting the need for refined outreach strategies.

Conclusions. The study found that partnerships with global organizations, influencers and celebrities amplified Ukraine's messaging, broadening its impact. The research underscores the importance of cybersecurity measures in ensuring the resilience of digital diplomacy efforts. While Ukraine effectively leveraged digital platforms to shape international perceptions, further refinement is needed to sustain long-term engagement and expand outreach in underrepresented regions.

Keywords: public diplomacy, digital diplomacy, social media, Ukraine, disinformation, strategic communication, international relations.

Background

In the modern world, public diplomacy is one of the key tools for shaping the international image of a state and securing its interests on the global stage. Not only does it play a significant role while defining the position of the country at the international arena, but also strengthen its ties with key partners and promotes deeper understanding of major winning positions among counterparts.

In the era of digital diplomacy, challenges and threats to a country's image are emerging at a new, unprecedented rate. And responding to them requires maximum concentration and strategic planning. In the context of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, this tool has gained particular significance, becoming an important means of mobilizing support from the international community, countering disinformation, and promoting Ukrainian narratives. Social media, due to its efficiency and global accessibility, has become an integral part of Ukraine's public diplomacy, actively influencing the formation of public opinion abroad.

The relevance of the study of the social media aspect of public diplomacy consists inter alia in the active involvement of major international actors in exercising their policies via the means of social media and Internet technologies in general.

Analysis of previous studies and publications. The scientific understanding of public diplomacy as a strategic

component of international relations and soft power has been explored in the works of prominent scholars such as J. Nye, N. Cull, B. Hocking, G. Cowan, R. Entman, and A. Gilboa (Entman, 2007). Their research established the foundational principles of public diplomacy, including the importance of cultural diplomacy, international broadcasting, and exchange programs as tools for fostering mutual understanding and influencing foreign publics. Digital diplomacy, as a contemporary extension of public diplomacy, has been addressed in the works of I. Manor, C. Bjola, E. Holmes, J. Seib, and M. Castells. These researchers analyzed the transformative role of digital platforms in enhancing state communication, expanding engagement opportunities, and reshaping the dynamics of international relations in the digital age. Certain aspects of digital diplomacy, such as the impact of social media campaigns, virtual embassies, and digital branding, have been studied by scholars like D. Hocking, A. McClory, and R. Zaharna. Their contributions emphasize the importance of leveraging digital tools to amplify messages, engage diverse audiences, and build narratives that support a country's foreign policy goals.

Among Ukrainian researchers, notable contributions to the study of public and digital diplomacy have been made by scholars such as M. Ozhevan, G. Pocheptsov, V. Lipkan, and V. Dubov, N. Pipchenko, O. Kuchmii, O. Zaporozhets,

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N. Bielousova, S. Danylenko, D. Kuleba. Their work highlights the specific challenges and opportunities faced by Ukraine in utilizing digital platforms for public diplomacy, particularly during periods of geopolitical tension and conflict.

The purpose of the article is to study the theoretical foundations and practical applications of social media in public diplomacy, with a specific focus on Ukraine during the full-scale invasion. Additionally, the article aims to evaluate the effectiveness of social media in mobilizing international support, fostering global solidarity, and countering hostile narratives.

The object of research is public diplomacy as a strategic tool in international relations, while the subject of research is the role and impact of social media on Ukraine's public diplomacy efforts during the invasion.

The scientific hypothesis posits that, in the modern system of international relations, social media platforms have become a cornerstone of public diplomacy, allowing Ukraine to effectively counter disinformation, shape global public opinion, and build international coalitions in support of its sovereignty and resistance against aggression.

Methods

The methodology includes content analysis, a comparative approach, synthesis, and a systematic approach to explore the strategic use of social media by Ukraine to promote its national interests. These methods help identify patterns in Ukraine's communication strategies, evaluate their effectiveness, and understand the broader implications for international relations. Content analysis is also applied to examine key social media campaigns, hashtags, and messages disseminated by Ukrainian officials and their impact on international audiences.

Results

The biggest contribution in the development of the soft power notion and the deriving notion of public diplomacy is attributed to Joseph S. Nye, Jr. In his works Nye draws attention to the executors of these two practices. Namely, the soft power is mostly driven and executed by the civil society of the country as far as it takes its roots from the cultural backgrounds mostly, thus the government does not have much opportunity to influence its core and rather has to solely form and shape the existing flow. On the other hand, public diplomacy is largely shaped by internal and external policies of the country (Nye, & Keohane, 2007).

Mark Leonard in his studies went further into research of the pivotal aspects of public diplomacy outlining three dimensions of the notion. The first, daily communication, emphasizes immediate engagement by elucidating the rationale behind domestic and foreign policy decisions. In modern democracies, officials prioritize messaging to the press, but the internet blurs distinctions between domestic and international audiences. Crises demand rapid responses to counter misinformation and manipulative trends on social media – a challenge for bureaucracies unaccustomed to swift digital engagement (Leonard, 2002).

The second, strategic communication, centers on crafting thematic campaigns akin to political or marketing initiatives. These efforts orchestrate symbolic events and targeted messaging over a year or more to support policy objectives. Historical examples include the Reagan administration's robust public diplomacy during NATO's missile deployment negotiations, which countered Soviet influence and pacifist movements. More recently, U.S. initiatives under the Bush and Obama administrations sought to attract Muslim audiences through campaigns promoting tolerance, though with inconsistent outcomes.

The third, focused on long-term relationship-building, cultivates connections with influential individuals via scholarships, exchanges, training, and cultural initiatives.

Programs like these have shaped numerous global leaders, including Anwar Sadat and Margaret Thatcher. However, such initiatives faced cutbacks during the Trump administration, which prioritized hard power over soft-power diplomacy.

Communicative warfare is a battle without clear rules, where the attacker sets the agenda and gains an advantage by striking unpredictably and without restraint. Democracies initially struggle because they operate within ethical constraints, as seen in Russia's information war against the West (2014–2016). Victory requires adapting norms to the realities of war, which Ukraine started in 2015, and the West followed after Russia's interference in the 2016 U.S. elections (Kuleba, 2023).

The use of digital diplomacy by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine. In a time of war, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) faces a number of new additional challenges, given the complexity of shaping narratives and the great attention paid to Ukraine's subjectivity in the international arena.

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, Ukraine has become the center of global news, but the main cornerstone has been the formation of narratives about the country not by Ukraine itself, but by its neighbors, enemies, and other international actors who presented information in a biased, partisan manner and based on their own previous experience. Therefore, the main challenge for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was to take control of the media space and begin to shape a new image of Ukraine – a country at war, a country of dignity and resilience.

Just before the Russian invasion of 2022, the Ukrainian parliament passed a law allowing data to be stored in the cloud during the war and for one year afterward. And in March, the Cabinet of Ministers authorized the storage of state data in the cloud outside of Ukraine. This proved to be a far-sighted move, as it provides additional, but not complete, protection for sensitive data from cyberattacks, ensures that backups are available in the event of data centers being destroyed, and facilitates data sharing for displaced Ukrainians across Europe. Thus, all the data contained in Diia and all official Ukrainian communication channels have become protected from attacks and theft.

Due to the research by the Washington Post, Russian propaganda works mostly on the minds of those citizens who were previously predisposed in Russia's favour. Even though the research results extended to the territory of 30 miles the Ukrainian-Russian border, they make it obvious that Russian soft power aims at making a major part of the world familiar with their culture and thus easier to influence by propaganda and inflict their minds by Russian narratives (The Washington Post, 2022).

Global interest in Ukraine peaked between February 20 and March 5, 2022. According to Google trends, queries about the country were among the top five by number (third place in the "Searches" category) (Visit Ukraine Today, 2022).

In 2022, the coverage of the Ukraine.ua digital ecosystem, which unites the official website of Ukraine and our country's pages on social media, exceeded 1 billion. Ukraine.ua's Instagram page has gained more than 1 million followers and is among the top 5 official pages of countries around the world on Instagram. That is why the need to fill the information space has increased proportionally. In addition, the Russian Federation has been building powerful channels of communication to an international audience for years and filling the airwaves with relevant narratives. Having gained the audience's attention at such a price, Ukraine could not afford to lose it (Government of Ukraine, 2022).

Between February 22 and March 22, 243 posts were published on the Ukraine.ua Instagram account. The topics

included: coverage of the shelling of Ukraine by Russian troops, coverage of crimes committed by Russian troops on the territory of Ukraine, tragic stories of Ukrainians and Ukrainian refugees, successes of athletes in the international arena, support of foreign partners, world-class awards to representatives of the Ukrainian government, stories of Ukrainian resistance and resilience, publications about Ukraine in international publications, and artwork by Ukrainians and foreigners to support the country (Official Instagram page of Ukraine, 2022).

In addition, the MFA managed to launch creative partnerships with United24, influencers and world celebrities (Sean Penn, Keira Knightley, Mila Kunis, Cate Blanchett, The Imagine Dragons, etc.), creative and event agencies, chefs (Yevhen Klopotenko and Volodymyr Yaroslavsky), designers (Ruslan Baginsky) and athletes (Elina Svitolina, Andriy Shevchenko, Oleksandr Zinchenko, Yaroslava Maguchukh, etc.).

Among the cases of successful communication are the hashtags launched in the X network. #StandwithUkraine reached more than 2.5 million users. (All the following statistics was provided by MFA of Ukraine).

The #BoycottRussianSport hashtag was launched with the aim of suspending and subsequently preventing the return of Russian and Belarusian athletes to international competitions and has garnered over 10 million views. The #RussianLanguageDay in Kahovka was created because of an inappropriate greeting from the UN account on the Russian Language Day on the day the Kakhovka dam was blown up by Russian troops, which led to the ecocide of a huge area. The hashtag received more than 15 million views. Under #FreeTheLeopards, a global flash mob was launched, with participants in Ukraine and abroad wearing leopard prints and sharing photos on social media. As a result, Ukraine received Leopards II tanks. During the blackout, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched #LightUpUkraine, which resulted in more than 60 iconic buildings turning off their lights in support of Ukraine. It also raised \$2.9 million for generators for Ukrainian hospitals.

The hashtag #BoycottRussianSport became popular worldwide. To this end the posts were published on the pages of 62 embassies, 5 consulates, 2 missions and MFA in X (ex Twitter). On the page of MFA the introduction video has got coverage of 826 200 and 8 040 reactions. The same video has the coverage of 27 829 accounts represented in Europe, 29 829 accounts of missions in the USA, 1 488 accounts covered by pages of embassies in Asia and Australia, and 925 accounts were reached by the pages represented in the Middle East and Africa. In total the video covered 907 415 accounts worldwide. The most successful the video became in the accounts of the embassies in the Republic of Slovenia (18 700), the Czech Republic (8 016), and the Republic of Finland (6 259). The most reactions the video got in the same countries (486, 183, 143 respectively) (All the following statistics was provided by MFA of Ukraine) (Government of Ukraine, 2022).

The video was released on Facebook, as well. On the page of MFA of Ukraine it has covered 6 000 accounts gaining 95 reactions. Additionally, it was published on 74 more pages of embassies, consulates, missions and permanent representatives of Ukraine to international organizations. The total worldwide coverage reached 80 573 accounts. The biggest coverage was reached on the pages of the French Republic (15 487), the Republic of Italy (14 679), the consulate of Ukraine in Barcelona (7 600) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2022).

In the initial framework of the campaign 15 posts (tweets) were released. All of them were provided with additional

visualization in the form of video or more often images. The topics included in the framework were the support of war by Russian sportsmen, militarization of Russian sport, the connection between Olympics and Russian military invasions, the consistency of Russian aggression, Russian attempts to use sport as a tool for conveying propaganda messages. The initial introduction of the campaign was followed by the next round of the campaign which included 15 more posts with similar topics.

As part of the #BoycottRussianSport campaign, a video was published on the pages of Ukrainian diplomatic missions abroad to draw the attention of the international community to the need to boycott Russian sport. The total reach of the video was 80,573 views, with the greatest interest recorded in European countries. At the same time, the least reactions were observed in Africa and Latin America, which may indicate a lower audience activity in these regions or a lack of presence of Ukrainian diplomacy. France (15,487 views), Italy (14,679 views), Spain (Barcelona – 7,600 views), Norway (6,697 views) and Turkey (5,650 views) were particularly well-received. In these countries, the video had a significant impact, which is explained by both the activity of the local Ukrainian community and the general support of the international community for Ukrainian initiatives. France was the leader among them, with over 15,000 views.

The highest interaction, i.e. the number of reactions, was recorded in France (684 reactions), Spain (Barcelona – 593 reactions), Norway (312 reactions), Switzerland (106 reactions) and the United States (Chicago – 101 reactions). This shows that the campaign resonated with the audience, which actively supports initiatives related to the boycott of Russian sports.

However, in some countries, the level of engagement was lower than expected. For example, in Germany (Hamburg – 295 views, 4 reactions), Cyprus (132 views, 2 reactions), Denmark (77 views, 3 reactions) and Algeria (46 views, 3 reactions), the video did not receive a significant response. This may be due to the general level of interest of the local population or the low activity of diplomatic missions on social media.

Particular attention was drawn to Vietnam (2,470 views, 116 reactions), where the video unexpectedly gained a lot of views and received a significant number of reactions. This may indicate the peculiarities of local social activism or the effective work of diplomats in this country.

Regional analysis showed that Europe remained the main platform for the campaign. Western Europe, in particular France, Spain and Italy, was the leader in terms of the number of views and reactions. Central and Eastern Europe also performed well, especially in Poland (468 views, 12 reactions), Lithuania (489 views, 13 reactions) and Latvia (446 views, 17 reactions).

In North America, the situation was not uniform: in Chicago (1,555 views, 101 reactions), the campaign received a strong response, while in the rest of the US, the reach remained relatively low (New York – 140 views, 6 reactions; US overall – 502 views, 31 reactions).

In Asia and Oceania, the figures were moderate, but in some countries they exceeded expectations. For example, Korea (352 views, 15 reactions), Malaysia (190 views, 49 reactions), Singapore (232 views, 13 reactions) and Thailand (308 views, 9 reactions) showed an average level of engagement.

In Africa, the best result was recorded in Egypt (947 views, 50 reactions), while in the rest of the countries the campaign did not gain much traction (Algeria – 46 views, 3 reactions; Tunisia – 177 views, 2 reactions; Kuwait – 250 views, 21 reactions; UAE – 104 views, 37 reactions).

In general, the #BoycottRussianSport campaign achieved significant international publicity, but the analysis showed that there is room for improvement in its effectiveness. More attention should be paid to intensifying outreach in Germany and the United States, as well as researching the reasons for the success of the campaign in Vietnam in order to use this experience to expand the audience in other countries. The results demonstrate that the topic of boycotting Russian sports is of considerable interest in certain regions, and this should be taken into account for future communication strategies.

In this way, the MFA managed to keep the audience's attention and create content to voice its own version of the war. The content was aimed at destroying Russian narratives and highlighting real events, as well as Russian crimes on the territory of the state. We also managed to use partnership tools, thanks to which the messages were received by a wider audience and we managed to achieve not only the goals of informing, but also integration and fundraising. The tremendous reach and high level of engagement demonstrate the success of the campaigns.

Discussion and conclusions

The analysis of Ukraine's public diplomacy through social media during the full-scale invasion highlights the transformative role of digital platforms in shaping international opinion, countering disinformation, and mobilizing support. The strategic use of social media has enabled Ukraine to amplify its narratives, engage with global audiences, and build coalitions in support of its sovereignty.

One of the key successes of Ukraine's digital diplomacy has been its ability to counter Russian disinformation effectively. By utilizing platforms such as Instagram, Twitter (now X), and Facebook, the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has shaped narratives that present Ukraine as a nation of resilience, dignity, and defiance against aggression. The rapid dissemination of fact-based content has helped dismantle manipulative propaganda and ensured that the global community receives accurate information about the war.

Additionally, Ukraine's ability to mobilize international solidarity through social media campaigns has been remarkable. The success of initiatives such as #StandWithUkraine, #BoycottRussianSport, and #LightUpUkraine demonstrates the effectiveness of strategic digital campaigns in fostering global engagement. The participation of international celebrities, influencers, and public figures further amplified Ukraine's messaging, ensuring broad reach and impact.

However, despite these successes, the analysis also highlights the need for continuous adaptation and refinement of digital diplomacy strategies. While the campaigns resonated strongly in Europe and North America, engagement levels were lower in regions such as Africa and parts of Asia. Addressing this gap requires tailored messaging and enhanced diplomatic outreach to increase support in underrepresented areas.

The study also underscores the importance of sustained investment in digital infrastructure and cybersecurity. The proactive steps taken by Ukraine to protect its data and communication channels were crucial in maintaining information flow during wartime. Ensuring long-term resilience against cyber threats will remain a priority as digital diplomacy continues to evolve.

Despite the significant findings, this study has several limitations. First, the analysis primarily focuses on quantitative engagement metrics such as views, reactions, and shares, which may not fully capture the depth of

audience perception and sentiment. Future research should incorporate qualitative methods, such as sentiment analysis and audience surveys, to gain deeper insights into the effectiveness of messaging.

Second, the study is limited by the availability of public data on social media engagement. While major campaigns have been examined, access to internal government analytics and decision-making processes could provide a more comprehensive picture of the strategic planning behind digital diplomacy efforts.

Third, the study primarily examines the impact of Ukraine's public diplomacy efforts on Western audiences. Limited engagement from regions such as Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia suggests a need for further research into the effectiveness of digital diplomacy in these areas. Understanding cultural and geopolitical factors that influence engagement levels could help refine future strategies.

Finally, the rapidly evolving nature of digital diplomacy means that findings may become outdated as new technologies and platforms emerge. Future studies should continuously monitor shifts in social media trends and their implications for public diplomacy strategies.

In conclusion, Ukraine's use of social media in public diplomacy has been a powerful tool for shaping global perceptions, garnering international support, and countering hostile narratives. The findings of this study emphasize that digital diplomacy, when strategically executed, can serve as a critical instrument in modern international relations. Moving forward, further research should explore innovative ways to enhance engagement across diverse global audiences and assess the long-term impact of these digital efforts on Ukraine's international standing.

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СОЦІАЛЬНІ МЕДІА ЯК АСПЕКТ ПУБЛІЧНОЇ ДИПЛОМАТІЇ УКРАЇНИ ПІД ЧАС ПОВНОМАСШТАБНОГО ВТОРГНЕННЯ

Вступ. Стаття присвячена ролі соціальних мереж у публічній дипломатії України під час повномасштабного вторгнення Росії. У ній аналізується використання цифрових платформ для формування глобальних наративів, протидії дезінформації та мобілізації міжнародної підтримки. Завдяки детальному вивченню основних кампаній, показників активності та інформаційно-пропагандистських зусиль, дослідження висвітлює ефективність цифрової дипломатії України у зміцненні її глобального іміджу. У дослідженні також розглядаються виклики та обмеження цифрової дипломатії, зокрема у залученні аудиторії в регіонах з низьким рівнем реагування. Результати дослідження підкреслюють важливість стратегічної комунікації, адаптивності та технологічної стійкості в сучасній публічній дипломатії.

Методи. Методологія включає контент-аналіз, порівняльний підхід, синтез і системний підхід для дослідження стратегічного використання соціальних мереж Україною для просування своїх національних інтересів. Ці методи допомагають виявити закономірності в комунікаційних стратегіях України, оцінити їх ефективність та зрозуміти наслідки для міжнародних відносин. Контент-аналіз також застосовується для вивчення ключових кампаній у соціальних мережах, хештегів і повідомлень, поширюваних українськими посадовцями, та їх впливу на міжнародну аудиторію.

Результати. Аналіз показав, що завдяки зусиллям цифрової дипломатії Україна успішно протидіяла російській дезінформації та мобілізувала міжнародну солідарність. Загальна кількість користувачів екосистеми Ukraine.ua перевищила 1 млрд, при цьому лише Instagram отримав понад 1 млн підписників. Хештег #StandWithUkraine охопив понад 2,5 млн користувачів, а #BoycottRussianSport отримав 10 млн переглядів. Регіональний аналіз показав високу активність у Європі та Північній Америці, але нижчу взаємодію в Африці та деяких частинах Азії. Кампанія отримала найбільше залучення у Франції (15 487 переглядів) та Італії (14 679 переглядів), тоді як несподівано високий рівень взаємодії був зафіксований у В'єтнамі (2 470 переглядів, 116 реакцій). Незважаючи на ці успіхи, залученість у Німеччині та США була різною, що підкреслює необхідність удосконалення інформаційно-пропагандистських стратегій.

Висновки. Дослідження показало, що партнерство з глобальними організаціями, впливовими особами та знаменитостями посилює позицію України й розширює її вплив. Дослідження підкреслює важливість заходів кібербезпеки для забезпечення стійкості зусиль цифрової дипломатії. Хоча Україна ефективно використовувала цифрові платформи для формування міжнародного сприйняття, необхідне подальше вдосконалення для підтримки довгострокової взаємодії та розширення охоплення в недостатньо представлених регіонах.

Ключові слова: публічна дипломатія, цифрова дипломатія, соціальні медіа, Україна, дезінформація, стратегічні комунікації, міжнародні відносини.

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