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Digital Transformation of Ukraine's Public Diplomacy: Strategic Communication and Social Media Integration

Information and Communication Sciences, Doctoral School

Gustave Eiffel University, DICEN-Idf Laboratory

Doctorial Day, October 10, 2024

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Key Words:

Digital diplomacy, public diplomacy, Ukraine, social media, disinformation, strategic communication, geopolitical challenges, Twitter (X), Facebook, narrative control, real-time diplomacy.

Transformation numérique de la diplomatie publique de l'Ukraine : Communication stratégique et intégration des médias sociaux

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Journée doctorale, 10 octobre 2024

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Mots-clés :

Diplomatie numérique, diplomatie publique, Ukraine, médias sociaux, désinformation, communication stratégique, défis géopolitiques, Twitter (X), Facebook, contrôle des récits, diplomatie en temps réel.

Abstract:

This research examines the ongoing digital transformation of Ukraine's public diplomacy, focusing on the strategic use of social media platforms in response to geopolitical challenges. Utilizing a hybrid conceptual framework that merges Ilan Manor's digitalization of diplomacy and Zhao Alexandre Huang's historical-discursive approach, this study highlights how Ukraine has adapted its public diplomacy to integrate both historical narratives and digital tools for real-time communication. It explores the importance of these transformations in shaping global perceptions and countering disinformation during conflict.

Résumé :

Cette recherche examine la transformation numérique en cours de la diplomatie publique de l'Ukraine, en se concentrant sur l'utilisation stratégique des plateformes de médias sociaux face aux défis géopolitiques. En utilisant un cadre conceptuel hybride qui fusionne la numérisation de la diplomatie d'Ilan Manor et l'approche historico-discursive de Zhao Alexandre Huang, cette étude met en évidence comment l'Ukraine a adapté sa diplomatie publique pour intégrer à la fois des récits historiques et des outils numériques pour une communication en temps réel. Elle explore l'importance de ces transformations dans la formation des perceptions mondiales et la lutte contre la désinformation en période de conflit.

Introduction

The modern geopolitical landscape is increasingly influenced by digital technologies, which have reshaped traditional diplomatic practices. In Ukraine's

case, public diplomacy has evolved rapidly, driven by the need to navigate both conventional diplomacy and information warfare. In this article, we explore Ukraine's digital public diplomacy, focusing on how strategic communication via social media platforms has played a critical role in its foreign policy, particularly during the ongoing conflict with Russia.

Ukraine's public diplomacy has not only been reactive but also proactive, capitalizing on digital platforms to engage global audiences, counter disinformation, and build alliances. In the context of information warfare, public diplomacy must go beyond institutional engagement to foster transparency and real-time collaboration with diverse global audiences.

Conceptual Frameworks

The research draws upon two key conceptual frameworks:

1. Digitalization of Public Diplomacy (Ilan Manor):

Manor defines the digitalization of diplomacy as an evolving process that transforms how governments engage with both domestic and international audiences. The use of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook has introduced a more participatory and transparent form of diplomacy. These platforms allow for two-way communication, rapid information dissemination, and real-time diplomatic engagement. For Ukraine, this shift has been crucial in countering Russian disinformation and in rallying international support (Manor, I. (2017)).

Ilan Manor defines the digitalization of diplomacy as an ongoing process that reshapes four key areas of diplomacy: institutions, practitioners, audiences, and practices.

Digitalization as a Process: Diplomacy evolves with digital technologies, requiring diplomats and Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) to adapt continuously to new tools and strategies.

Impact on Institutions: MFAs integrate social media and digital platforms, reshaping policies and procedures to engage in real-time, data-driven diplomacy.

Practitioner Shifts: Diplomats engage more openly with online publics and non-state actors, forming temporary alliances and using digital platforms to advance diplomatic goals.

Audience Transformation: Social media enables two-way communication, fostering transparency and interaction with global audiences.

Real-Time Diplomacy: Digital diplomacy becomes collaborative and networked, emphasizing speed and engagement during crises and international events.

Role of Social Media

Manor emphasizes that social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook) are central tools for MFAs to shape global narratives, counter disinformation, and engage with international audiences. These platforms facilitate real-time communication and allow direct, two-way interaction, transforming diplomacy into a more transparent and participatory practice. Social media helps diplomats reach global audiences quickly, managing crises and building broader networks. Manor, I. (2017, August).

2. **Historical-Discursive Analytical Method (Zhao Alexandre Huang):**

Huang's framework focuses on the role of historical narratives and discourse in shaping public diplomacy institutions. It combines historical institutionalism with discursive analysis to understand how governments institutionalize public diplomacy practices over time. For Ukraine, the historical narratives of sovereignty,

independence, and cultural identity play a significant role in legitimizing its public diplomacy efforts, especially in the context of Russia's aggression (Huang, Z. A. (2021).

This conceptual framework introduces an interpretative sociological approach to studying the formation and evolution of public diplomacy institutions, focusing on how governments rationalize and institutionalize public diplomacy through a historical-discursive lens (Huang, Z. A. (2021).

Cognitive analysis plays a central role in understanding how governments frame and formulate public diplomacy strategies. It identifies the cognitive and normative frames that underpin policy-making, linking these frames to broader historical and institutional contexts. This analysis allows us to explore how ideas, beliefs, and values shape public diplomacy, guiding the direction of institutional change.

Historical-Discursive Approach:

The historical-discursive method integrates elements of historical institutionalism and discursive analysis to study the institutionalization of public diplomacy. This approach examines how political discourse, historical events, and social context interact to shape the establishment and evolution of public diplomacy institutions. By analyzing official narratives, political speeches, and diplomatic rhetoric, the framework uncovers how governments justify and legitimize their foreign policy objectives through discourse.

Institutionalization of Public Diplomacy:

The framework explores the dynamic relationships between institutions and political actors, highlighting the continuous process of institutional change in public diplomacy. It demonstrates how governments use rhetorical and discursive practices

to institutionalize public diplomacy, adapting to new geopolitical contexts and evolving social expectations.

This conceptual framework presents the historical-discourse analytical method as a powerful tool for understanding the development of public diplomacy institutions. By integrating cognitive analysis with historical and discursive perspectives, the framework sheds light on how governments shape, legitimize, and evolve their public diplomacy efforts over time.

Sub-Conceptual Framework: The Integration of Historical and Digital Approaches

By integrating Manor's digitalization of diplomacy and Huang's historical-discursive approach, we can better understand the dynamic ways Ukraine's public diplomacy has evolved. On one hand, historical narratives help Ukraine project a coherent image of national identity. On the other hand, digital platforms allow Ukraine to engage with global audiences in real-time, directly influencing international perceptions and countering disinformation campaigns. This hybrid approach has been essential in Ukraine's efforts to sustain international support amidst geopolitical challenges.

Public diplomacy, characterized by the utilization of direct communication strategies by global actors to convey and implement foreign policies, plays a crucial role in influencing international public opinion (Huang, 2021, p.204). Aligned with digital advancements, especially through social media platforms, it enables wider outreach and interaction with the international public. In the contemporary landscape of warfare, public diplomacy assumes a critical role in shaping perceptions of conflicts.

Digital diplomacy refers to the strategic use of digital technologies by foreign ministries and international organizations to engage with global audiences and advance foreign policy objectives. It encompasses various activities, including social

media engagement, virtual meetings, and digital communication tools (Manor & Huang, 2022b).

Information warfare involves the strategic utilization of information to accomplish military, political, or societal aims, including the manipulation of information to impact perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours on a global level.

Advancements in mass communication platforms have shaped the evolution of information warfare into digital warfare, where military activities are conducted in the digital domain (Romanyuk & Kovalenko, 2023).

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What institutional and policy frameworks underpin Ukraine's public diplomacy efforts on social media, and how do these frameworks shape its strategies for digital engagement?

Observation Period: 2022–2024

Platforms: X (formerly Twitter), Facebook

Validation: This question is aligned with historical-discursive framework, as it explores the institutional context and policy foundations, while also touching on digitalization framework by addressing digital engagement strategies.

Research Question 2: How does the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry employ digital platforms as strategic instruments for information warfare and geopolitical influence?

Observation Period: 2022–2024

Platforms: X (formerly Twitter), Facebook

Validation: This question is directly connected to digitalization framework and the broader context of digital warfare, emphasizing the strategic use of digital tools for geopolitical influence and countering disinformation.

Research Question 3: What are the key features of Ukraine’s approach to digital diplomacy, and how do these practices reflect its effectiveness in shaping international perceptions and promoting state narratives?

Observation Period: 2022–2024

Platforms: X (formerly Twitter), Facebook

Validation: This question is relevant to both historical narratives and digitalization approach, focusing on the features of digital diplomacy and how they contribute to shaping global perceptions and promoting Ukraine’s state narratives.

Research Framework and Research Methodology

Research Framework

Historical and Institutional Overview

Examines the historical and institutional framework of Ukraine’s public diplomacy, including its foreign policy decision-making processes and the evolution of public diplomacy strategies.

Public Diplomacy Digital Transformation

Analyzes the shift to digital platforms, particularly platform X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook, and how Ukraine’s public diplomacy strategies have adapted to these platforms.

Digital Diplomacy in Action

Focuses on the strategic deployment of digital diplomacy by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, highlighting information warfare campaigns and narratives during 2022-2024.

Comparative Analysis

Conducts an analysis of Ukraine’s digital diplomacy, emphasizing its strategies, approaches, and narratives on social media platforms to influence global perceptions.

Research Methodology

Theoretical Foundation with the historical-discursive approach, the strategic foundations and cognitive mechanisms underpinning Ukraine's digital public diplomacy. It merges historical institutionalism with cognitive policy analysis to scrutinize the strategic use of digital & public diplomacy, forming the analytical basis for investigating narrative strategies in the digital age.

Analysis of the official documents & digital media outputs from the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry. The goal is to delineate the strategic bases of its digital diplomacy efforts, identifying frameworks employed in their geopolitical engagements

Fieldwork methods: the nethnographic observations & participatory analysis on digital platforms, alongside a critical examination of relevant literature.

Analytical Framework with a mixed-methods approach, incorporating social network, statistical, and narrative analyses to understand the strategies of digital diplomacy during the war.

Preliminary Findings

Ukraine’s Pre-2022 Invasion: Stages of the Development of the Foreign Policy

Stage	Years	Description	Key Events
Period of Neutrality	1990–2014	After independence, Ukraine declared neutrality, avoiding military alliances and adhering to non-nuclear principles, solidified in the 1996 Constitution.	1990: Declaration of Sovereignty, establishing neutrality. 1994: Budapest Memorandum—Ukraine gave up its nuclear arsenal in exchange for security assurances.
Multi-Vector Foreign Policy	1994–2004	Under President Leonid Kuchma, Ukraine maintained balanced relations with Russia, the West, and global powers, protecting its sovereignty while avoiding deep commitments to either side.	1994: Signed the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU. Joined NATO's Partnership for Peace.
Pro-Western Foreign Policy	2005–2010	After the 2004 Orange Revolution, President Viktor Yushchenko pursued closer integration with NATO and the EU, marking a shift toward Western-oriented policies.	2005: NATO membership declared a national goal. 2008: NATO Bucharest Summit acknowledged Ukraine's future membership without specifying a timeline.

Pro-Russian Foreign Policy	2010–2014	Under President Viktor Yanukovich, Ukraine strengthening ties with Russia, halting progress toward NATO and the EU.	2010: Law reaffirming Ukraine’s non-aligned status. 2013: Euromaidan protests erupted after Yanukovich refused to sign the EU Association Agreement.
Shift Toward EU and NATO	2014 Onwards	Following Russia's annexation of Crimea and the 2014 Euromaidan Revolution, Ukraine decisively shifted its foreign policy toward closer integration with the West, the EU, and NATO.	2014: Ukraine abolished its non-aligned status. 2019: Constitutional amendments enshrined Ukraine’s goal of joining the EU and NATO. 2022: Ukraine was granted EU candidate status.

Ukraine’s Pre-2022 Invasion: Stages of the Developments of the Public Diplomacy

Stage	Years	Description	Key Milestones
Early Stages	Pre-2005	Ukraine's public diplomacy was fragmented, focusing on educational and cultural promotion without a unified branding strategy.	Cultural-Information Centres (2006): Established by Presidential Decree No. 142/2006 to promote international cooperation in culture, education, science, tourism, and sports while maintaining ties with the Ukrainian diaspora.
Strategic Shift	2005–2010	Ukraine adopted a structured approach, launching state-led initiatives to improve its international image, particularly in cultural, tourism, and European integration projects.	2007 – Euro 2012 Promotion : Ukraine's preparation for co-hosting Euro 2012 with Poland began in 2007. This was a significant public diplomacy initiative aimed at improving Ukraine's global visibility and tourism potential through sports diplomacy. Various campaigns were launched to promote Ukraine's cultural heritage and infrastructure development to attract international attention 2007 – "Ukraine – The Open Door" Campaign: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs initiated the "Ukraine – The Open Door" campaign in 2007. This public diplomacy effort aimed to promote Ukraine as an attractive destination for tourism and business. Cultural festivals, exhibitions, and media outreach programs were organized globally to enhance Ukraine's image abroad 2007 – Open Ukraine Foundation: In July 2007, Arseniy Yatsenyuk established the Open Ukraine Foundation. This foundation aimed to strengthen Ukraine's public diplomacy by promoting the country's international reputation. Key initiatives included organizing the Kyiv Security Forum, an annual event that brought together regional and international actors to discuss security issues.
Brand Development	2010–2013	Ukraine introduced the "Ukraine" brand to boost its international presence through global events such as Euro 2012, aiming to attract foreign investment and improve its global standing.	2010 – Introduction of the "Ukraine" Brand: In 2010, Ukraine introduced the "Ukraine" brand, a significant public diplomacy initiative aimed at boosting its international presence. This initiative sought to attract foreign investment and improve Ukraine's global standing through participation in large-scale events like Euro 2012. The brand also promoted Ukraine as a country open to tourism, business, and international cooperation. 2011–2012 – Promotion of Euro 2012: Continuing from the earlier efforts, in 2011 and 2012, the promotion of Euro 2012 remained a central part of Ukraine's public diplomacy. The tournament not only brought global attention to Ukraine's ability to host international events but also provided a platform for promoting Ukrainian culture and enhancing its international image
Strategic Renewal	2014–2020	After the 2014 geopolitical crisis, Ukraine's public diplomacy focused on countering Russian aggression and disinformation, updating its communication platforms for global outreach.	Sustainable Development Strategy "Ukraine-2020" (2015): Promoted the "Ukraine" brand globally. Creation of Public Diplomacy Department (2015): Formed to manage Ukraine's international image-building efforts. Social Media Rebranding (2015–2016): Revamped social media presence. Concept of Promoting Ukraine Globally (2016): Aimed at

			<p>advancing Ukraine's political, economic, and socio-cultural interests.</p> <p>Doctrine of Information Security (2017): Focused on countering Russian disinformation.</p> <p>Ukraine NOW (2018): National brand to promote investment and tourism.</p>
Communicative Engagement Era	2021–2024	Focused on global engagement, particularly with African and Asian nations, while enhancing Ukraine's image through digital platforms.	Public Diplomacy Strategy (2021): A five-year strategy focused on institutionalizing public diplomacy efforts through cultural, economic, and digital platforms.

Ukraine's Communicative Engagement Era: 2021–2024

Direction	Description
Cultural Diplomacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aims to improve recognition of Ukraine's cultural diversity and create a positive attitude abroad. - Promotes national achievements and fosters trust and understanding.
Expert Diplomacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Involves systematic work with expert communities, think tanks, and research institutions. - Aims to influence foreign policy through formal and informal channels.
Economic Diplomacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focuses on promoting Ukraine's investment, tourism, and exports. - Public diplomacy tools are used to enhance Ukraine's international economic presence.
Culinary Diplomacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aims to shape Ukraine's image through the promotion of national cuisine and culinary arts. - Supports foreign trade and investment through enogastronomic tourism.
Scientific & Educational Diplomacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Builds partnerships with other countries and addresses global and national challenges through science and education. - Uses scientific achievements to inform policy decisions.
Digital Diplomacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Involves using digital platforms to protect national interests. - Engages in direct communication via social media to shape foreign citizens' perceptions of Ukraine.

Sports Diplomacy

- Promotes international dialogue through sports events.
- Strengthens intercultural ties and contributes to the country's global prestige.

Ukraine's Communicative Engagement Era: 2021–2024

Principles of Public Diplomacy

Principle	Description
Project Management	All public diplomacy activities are based on principles of project management, including leadership, accountability, and control.
Innovation	Public diplomacy actors utilize new technologies and innovative approaches to improve operational efficiency.
Respect for Cultural Diversity	Acknowledges and preserves cultural diversity, counteracting discrimination and hostility in public diplomacy activities.
Human Centricity	Focuses on the highest value of human beings and their rights.
Responsibility	Complies with laws and ethical standards, both domestically and internationally.

The Dimensions of Work (Digital Diplomacy)

Dimension	Dimension
Interaction with international digital platforms	Promotes Ukraine's positive image and protects national security through international digital platforms.
Use of digital tools	Organizes public diplomacy events and projects using digital tools.
Social media engagement	Uses social media and online communities to create a positive image of Ukraine and promote national interests.

Collaboration with global platforms

Collaborates with Ukraine's Digital Ministry and platforms like Facebook, Google, Netflix, and HBO to promote Ukraine globally.

Ukraine's Communicative Engagement Era: 2021–2024

Communicative Engagement Era	2021–2024	Focused on global engagement, particularly with African and Asian nations, while enhancing Ukraine's image through digital platforms.	Public Diplomacy Strategy (2021): A five-year strategy focused on institutionalizing public diplomacy efforts through cultural, economic, and digital platforms. Foreign Policy Strategy of Ukraine (August 26, 2021) Communication Strategy for Ukraine-Africa Relations (2024-2026) Communication Strategy for Ukraine – Latin America and the Caribbean States (2024-2026)
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Projects:

BRAND UKRAINE International Conference 2024

The first international conference on Ukraine's national brand in the context of the full-scale war.

Nations Against Disinformation 2.0

Countering propaganda and fake news in the age of AI.

What We Are Fighting For 2.0: Thanksgiving Day Campaign

A digital campaign created for Thanksgiving, highlighting the value of American aid to Ukraine through real human stories.

What We Are Fighting For

An international communication campaign emphasizing the 603,628 reasons Ukrainians continue to fight for freedom and peace.

#FreeTheLeopards

A flash mob campaign advocating for the supply of German Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine.

Russia's Famine Games

Campaign aimed at unveiling the truth about Ukraine's food supplies during the war and countering Russia's narratives.

Data-driven Campaign to Counter Disinformation in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East

Focused on tackling disinformation in these regions.

#TheUnityWave

An Instagram flash mob uniting Ukrainians and the British on the eve of the Eurovision 2023 final in Liverpool, part of the #OpenYourHeartForUkraine campaign.

Eurovision 2023

A project by Ukraine.ua presenting Ukraine to the Eurovision Song Contest 2023 audience, featuring a communication campaign and interactive space at Eurovision Village in Liverpool.

Russia's War Crimes

An online archive documenting war crimes committed by Russia.

Ukraine.ua

Ukraine's official website and social media profiles.

Culture: From Idea to Ideology

A communication campaign featuring an interactive quiz and a series of articles.

Cities of Freedom

A campaign depicting cities of Ukrainian freedom and what they were like before the full-scale war.

Ukraine's Communicative Engagement Era: 2021–2024

The screenshot shows the website's header with navigation links: DISCOVER, INVEST & TRADE, STUDY, FAQ, EN, and UKRAINE IN PICTURES. The main banner features a sculpture of the word 'FINE' made from debris, with the text: "I'm fine" in Ukrainian way; a sculpture of Ukrainian resilience for Burning Man was created from street signs, fences, and gates from across Ukraine, each piece bears damage by bullets and shrapnel.

Below the banner is a horizontal bar chart titled "Distribution of Languages for Ukraine.ua on 07/10/2024". The chart shows the following data:

Language	Relative Frequency
Hebrew	High
Spanish (ES)	Medium-High
Chinese	Medium
Arabic	Medium-Low
French (FR)	Low-Medium
German (DE)	Low
Turkish (TR)	Low
English (EN)	Low

To the right of the chart is a "Future Ukraine" campaign banner with the text: "Let's light up Future Ukraine. The vision of a beautiful, free and strong Ukraine is already being built today. Despite the bombings, pain, and hardship, Ukrainians plan to renew their beloved country with hard work and passion. Support us in building a brighter future. Together." Below this is a "Follow us" section with social media icons for Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, LinkedIn, X, WhatsApp, Telegram, RSS, and YouTube.

The infographic features a header with a world map highlighting Ukraine and the text: "RUSSIA INVADIED UKRAINE. WHY DOES THIS MATTER TO THE WORLD? 857th day. 10-year-long Russian occupation of Crimea and parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions." Below this is a central graphic for "WAR.UKRAINE.UA" with various statistics:

- 10,4 MLN impressions on Google
- 2,7 MLN unique users
- 190+ countries reached
- 5,5 MLN pageviews
- 1:49 average time spent on the website among organic search users
- 8 languages
- 5,3 MLN backlinks
- 15,1 average position on Google

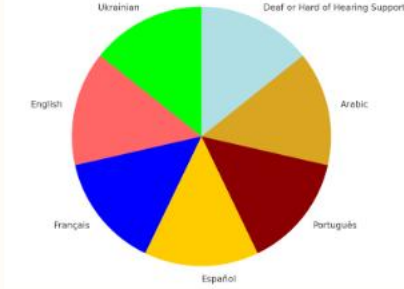
To the right is a pie chart titled "Data on 07/10/2024 - Equal Distribution of Languages war.ukraine.ua" showing the following language distribution:

Language	Relative Frequency
English (en)	High
Russian (ru)	High
Chinese (zh)	Medium
Arabic (ar)	Medium
Italian (it)	Medium
Spanish (es)	Medium
French (fr)	Medium
Thai (th)	Medium
German (de)	Medium

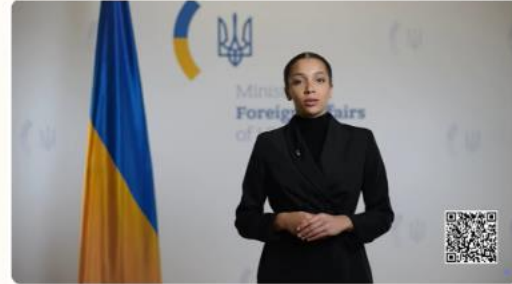
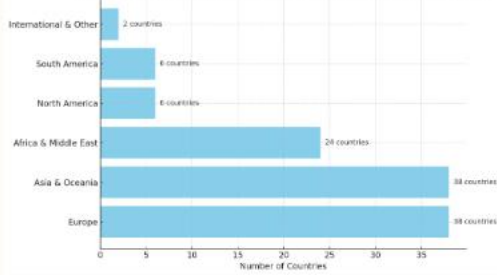
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF Ukraine



Languages Supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine



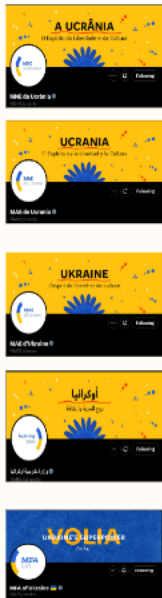
Foreign Diplomatic Institutions in Ukraine by Region (As of 07/10/2024)



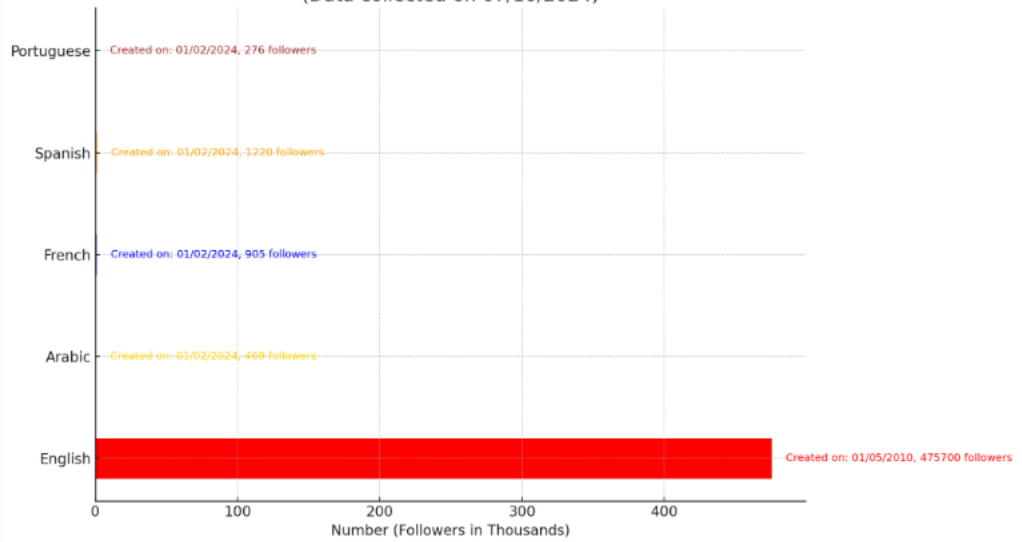
Meet Victoria Shi, the world's first AI spokesperson for Consular Affairs on 01/05/2024

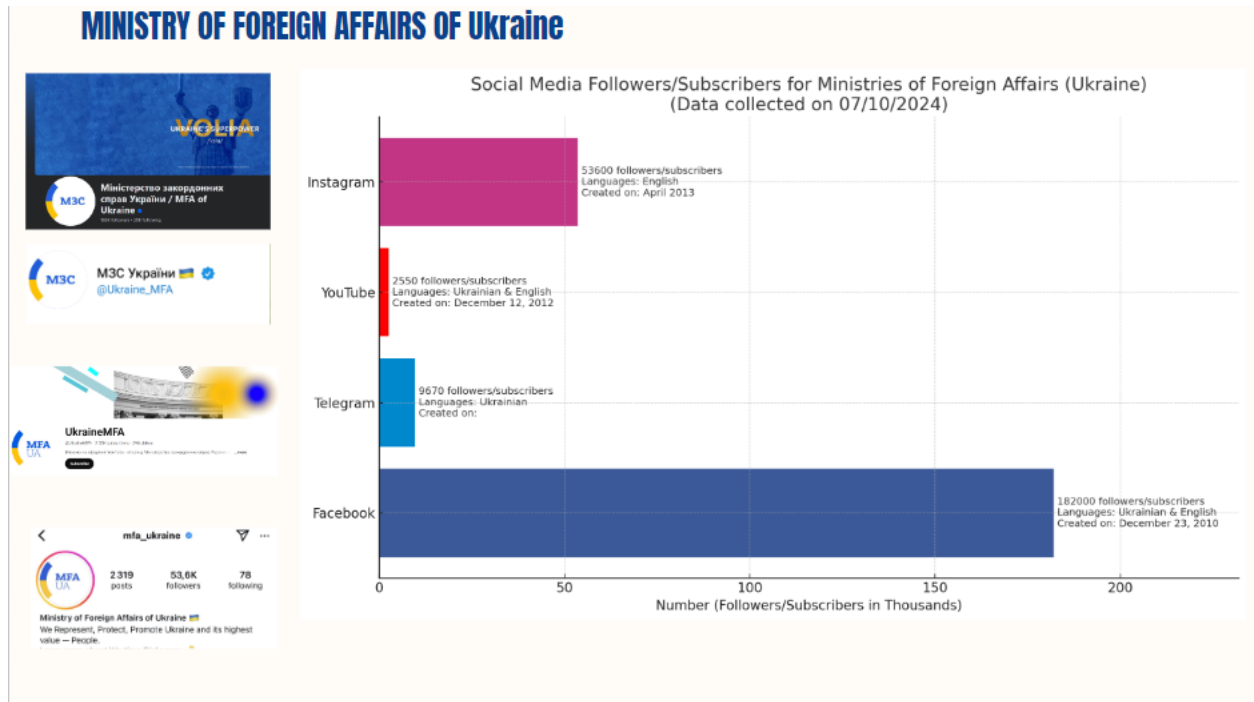
The Ministry of Foreign Affairs protects Victoria Shi's videos from fakes by including a QR code linking to the official MFA website. Videos without this code or leading to other sites are not authentic.

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF Ukraine



Platform X - Social Media Followers of Ministries of Foreign Affairs (Ukraine) (Data collected on 07/10/2024)





Conclusion

The digital transformation of Ukraine's public diplomacy is emblematic of how modern states must adapt to both historical and technological shifts. Ukraine has successfully integrated historical narratives with digital tools to strengthen its diplomatic presence, manage international perceptions, and counteract disinformation during a period of intense geopolitical conflict. This hybrid approach has proven effective in advancing Ukraine's foreign policy goals and will likely continue to evolve as digital technologies further shape global diplomacy.

Preliminary Findings Summary:

1. Digital tools are central to Ukraine's public diplomacy, allowing real-time engagement with global audiences.
2. Historical narratives provide a strong foundation for Ukraine's public diplomacy, especially in legitimizing its foreign policy objectives.

This article merges the uploaded material on Ukraine's public diplomacy with broader discussions on digital diplomacy frameworks. It provides a comprehensive analysis that can be useful for readers interested in the intersection of history, technology, and diplomacy.

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