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American Expertise in Utilizing Digital Diplomacy to Achieve National Interests

Introduction:

Diplomacy remains the central tool through which states achieve their national interests. In an increasingly interdependent world, the use of force to achieve these interests has become an undesirable option. Given the heavy reliance on diplomacy to meet states' needs, "non-traditional diplomacy" has emerged, with digital diplomacy being one of its most prominent examples. Digital diplomacy represents a fusion between technology, communication applications, and international relations.

The concepts of non-traditional diplomacy refer to diplomatic activities that may be conducted outside the traditional framework of the "diplomatic mission" or in coordination with non-diplomatic personnel due to the specialized nature of the task. Herein lies the concept of digital diplomacy, which among several definitions refers to the use of digital technologies to support diplomatic objectives. This study will focus on this definition, examining the United States as a case study.

Problem Statement:

Diplomacy operates between two seemingly conflicting realities: first, the state of interdependence among units of the international system, manifested most notably through trade; and second, the conflict of interests between states, a challenge nations face in their pursuit to maximize their national interests, which may conflict, overlap, or compete with those of other states.

This has created a need to develop diplomatic tools and methods a topic this study aims to shed light on by tracing the evolution of non-traditional diplomatic forms and tools, with a focus on digital diplomacy. Digital diplomacy presents new challenges while also offering opportunities through which states can maximize their national

interests and improve the effectiveness of their foreign and domestic policy implementation.

Study Objectives:

This study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- 1- To trace the development of the concept of digital diplomacy across its various definitions.
- 2- To examine the American case in the use of digital diplomacy tools, especially under Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump, and to compare their approaches.
- 3- To analyze the list of opportunities and challenges associated with states' use of digital diplomacy.



Research Questions

Within this scope, the study raises the following research questions:

- 1- What is the concept of digital diplomacy?
- 2- How did Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump employ digital diplomacy to achieve American national interests?
- 3- What are the opportunities and challenges presented by digital diplomacy tools?

Study Methodology:

The analysis in this study is grounded in the theoretical framework of Communicative Action, which posits that human interaction, in one of its fundamental forms, is more “communicative” than “strategic.” Increased communicative interaction allows individuals greater participation and choice between acceptance and rejection, ultimately leading to an “ideal communicative society” characterized by rational communication⁽¹⁾.

The researcher employs a case study approach for a detailed analysis of the American experience in utilizing digital diplomacy during the administration. Additionally, the study uses comparative analysis to highlight both the commonalities and differences in the use of digital diplomacy tools by two U.S. presidents: former President Barack Obama (2009–2017) and President Donald Trump (first term, 2017–2021).

Study Contents:

- 1- The conceptual framework of the study.
- 2- The use of digital diplomacy tools in the American case: President Barack Obama and President Donald Trump.
- 3- The challenges and opportunities that digital diplomacy presents for decision-makers.

First: The Conceptual Framework of the Study

1- Definition of the Concept of Digital Diplomacy

Understanding digital diplomacy requires a quick overview of digital transformation as a foundation. Digital transformation means: **“using data to make better and faster decisions and developing faster ways to accomplish tasks.”** In this context, digitalization provides greater access to data, which in turn offers more alternatives available to decision-makers⁽²⁾. Digital diplomacy, among its various definitions, refers

to **“the practices, procedures, and standards of conducting diplomacy in digital contexts.”**

Digital diplomacy is thus used to highlight several phenomena, such as the use of digital devices by diplomatic entities, and it also includes approaches for managing communications and social media platforms.

It is important to note that the concept of digital diplomacy is not an exception in terms of the diversity of its definitions, similar to other concepts in the social sciences. Therefore, some literature groups digital diplomacy, virtual diplomacy, cyber diplomacy, and e-diplomacy together to describe **“diplomatic work online”** in general⁽³⁾. The definition of digital diplomacy varies from one country to another. For instance, the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs refers to it as **“networked diplomacy,”** Danish diplomats call their approach **“technological diplomacy,”** while Francophone literature uses the term **“digital diplomacy.”**

Discussion of digital diplomacy is often linked to public diplomacy, which enables the dissemination and enhancement of a state’s positions on key international issues and its major initiatives more effectively⁽⁴⁾. In this context, digital diplomacy helps states address the general public, whether their own citizens or the citizens of other countries. Digital diplomacy can be seen as a term that aligns with the application of diplomacy between states and public diplomacy, between states and foreign public opinion, through digital platforms⁽⁵⁾. In this context, digital diplomacy is defined as a diplomatic process conducted in front of an audience, with the internet serving as an open space.

Overall, digital diplomacy can be defined as: **“A new form of public diplomacy that uses the internet, new information and communication technologies, and social media to enhance diplomatic ties and relations. This includes websites of foreign ministries, embassies, and international organizations, bringing greater openness and transparency to certain diplomatic practices, especially with the availability of social media platforms that enable unconditional communication.”** There is a wide range of social media platforms, but the most popular globally are: Twitter (or X), Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, with Snapchat added in some countries (including India, the United States, Pakistan, and France)⁽⁶⁾.

Digital diplomacy can be analyzed as a concept from another perspective, considering it as the

“digitization of diplomacy.” In this context, digitization refers to a long-term process whose impact extends beyond the application of modern communication technologies. It also leads to changes in the behavior and tasks of diplomats, due to the opportunity it provides for interacting with “new audiences.” Previously, “peoples” were not in direct contact with foreign heads of state. Digitization has also overcome the traditional limitations of diplomacy, as online communication, in all its forms, has facilitated cooperation, enhanced cultural exchange, and created dialogue, often with **“everyone”**⁽⁷⁾.

In general, the term “digitization” or “digital” refers to technologies related to the generation, storage, and processing of data⁽⁸⁾. Here, digital diplomacy is defined as the use of digital communication technologies (and the data they provide, which traditional diplomacy does not offer) for diplomatic purposes. It involves managing relationships between states strategically through digital platforms. Examples include communications conducted by officials working in embassies, government ministry agencies, or other military, economic, or political institutions with their counterparts in other countries⁽⁹⁾.

2- The Emergence of the Concept of Digital Diplomacy

The origins of digital diplomacy date back to the 1960s, not at the bilateral level, but at the multilateral level. Specifically, it was when the International Telecommunication Union held its first global diplomatic session with online participation in 1963. Digital diplomacy required a long time gap until 1992 before it gained widespread adoption, with the first use of email and mailing lists during the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. After another time gap, in 2007, Sweden became the first country to open an online embassy in the virtual world. Apart from these examples, major events have significantly increased the importance of digital diplomacy or, at the very least, pushed countries to pay more attention to it or enhance its tools. For example, the Arab revolutions of 2011 and beyond highlighted the growing role of social media. When the COVID-19 crisis hit in 2019, the nature of diplomatic procedures changed radically, necessitating online meetings or summit conferences, which became “normal” after the crisis passed⁽¹⁰⁾. Since then, digital diplomacy has established its pivotal importance as one of the primary tools for countries in both external and internal communication.

If diplomatic tools primarily aim to maintain national security, maximize national interests, and address any threats, digital diplomacy, which has now become a reality, has brought about changes not only in the means and tools but also in the objectives. Digital diplomacy has not emerged in isolation; rather, it has introduced several transformations in these areas. The digital transformation of diplomacy typically occurs in three main areas⁽¹¹⁾:

- A- Changes in the environment of the political, social, and economic system in which diplomacy operates.
- B- Digital transformations redistribute power in international relations due to the ownership and analysis of data.
- C- It creates a state of digital interdependence, which ultimately links to state sovereignty.

Digital diplomacy has created a new research environment, driving researchers to develop a new type of analysis, namely digital discourse analysis, as a basis for understanding the role of the United States⁽¹²⁾. The concept of “Twitter diplomacy” has also emerged in some literature, aiming to expand engagement with foreign audiences by increasing the number of “virtual opportunities” offered by the digital space⁽¹³⁾.

Digital diplomacy, therefore, represents a convergence of technologies and communication applications with international relations. Consequently, it is assumed to enhance cooperation, transparency, and public participation. It tends to blur the lines between two very different activities: using digital tools to promote diplomatic goals, and using diplomatic tools to address issues arising in the digital space⁽¹⁴⁾. In the following section, we will highlight the American approach to digital diplomacy, examining how it was understood and used to enhance national interests.

Second: The Use of Digital Diplomacy Tools in the American Case: President Barack Obama (2009–2017) and President Donald Trump (2017–2021)

1- The Importance of Studying the American Case of Digital Diplomacy:

Studying digital diplomacy necessitates focusing on the American model for several reasons:

- A- In the United States, technological products and applications have emerged that made digital diplomacy possible, whether through



communication programs and platforms or earlier software and systems (such as Microsoft Office).

B- Despite the first point, the United States is the most influential in terms of global digital breakthroughs, especially at the governmental level. This raises questions about the ability of the producing state to protect its data, as there have been multiple instances where it has struggled to manage breaches (such as the WikiLeaks case). It's worth noting that the number of data breaches in the U.S. has significantly increased, from only 447 in 2012 to more than 3,200 in 2023⁽¹⁵⁾.

C- Digital technology in general, and social media platforms in particular, have always been integral to the U.S.'s international relations agenda and its framing of conflicts. A prominent example of this is TikTok, which remains a point of contention between the U.S. and China, with the U.S. considering it a national security issue.

D- The case of President Donald Trump's use of digital diplomacy represents a central aspect of communication and the dissemination of his policies and decisions.

These examples, in reality, call for a detailed analysis, which will be addressed thoroughly. For this purpose, two main points will be discussed: The first point will focus on the overall use of social media platforms in the United States, followed by the second point, which will address the actual use of digital diplomacy by the two U.S. presidents: Barack Obama (2009-2017) and Donald Trump (2017-2021).

2- Analytical Overview of Social Media Platform Usage Globally and in the United States:

Facebook leads the global social media platforms, with over 3.5 billion users, making it the most followed and widely used platform. It is followed by YouTube, with approximately 2.7 billion users, and WhatsApp with around 2.4 billion users. Twitter, now rebranded as X, ranks fifteenth with a total of around 600 million followers globally. In terms of usage frequency, YouTube surpasses all other platforms with a total of 73 billion user visits, while Facebook receives 13 billion, and X (formerly Twitter) gets 4 billion monthly visits. It is worth noting that reports identify 35 social media platforms as the most popular and widely used globally⁽¹⁶⁾.

When looking at the most popular social media platforms in the United States in 2024, the ranking mirrors global trends, with Facebook leading at 77%, followed by YouTube at 65% of total users. Users flock to YouTube for a wide range of educational, entertainment, music, and informative content. X ranks sixth with 32% of U.S. users, serving as a key platform for interaction, breaking news updates, and following public figures. In other words, it is a primary means for Americans to engage in public affairs⁽¹⁷⁾.

These statistics highlight the significant role of "digitization" in the United States. According to reports published in 2024, there are 331.1 million internet users in the U.S., with an internet penetration rate of 97.1%. Of these, 239.0 million are social media users, representing 70.1% of the total population of 340 million, with 83.4% living in urban areas. The average age of the U.S. population is 38.2 years. These figures underscore the reliance on social media platforms and validate the importance of digital diplomacy at the governmental level⁽¹⁸⁾.

We now turn our attention to X (formerly Twitter), which became a key platform for both U.S. Presidents Barack Obama (2009-2017) and Donald Trump (2017-2021). Twitter was founded in 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams, and Biz Stone, and was sold to Elon Musk in 2023 for \$44 billion, who rebranded it as X. Twitter entered the social networking scene with microblogging, allowing users to engage in conversations and follow updates on events and news. Twitter's style aligns with American culture (practicality), where instead of posting long or detailed content, users "tweet a term now embedded in American popular culture. In terms of social media site visits, X ranks fourth in the U.S., after Facebook and others. X users enjoy "following celebrities," with controversial figures often attracting more followers than others. (19)

When examining the two presidents under study, we find that President Trump is indeed among the ten most influential and followed accounts on X (formerly Twitter), which indicates that he neither misjudged the platform nor failed to achieve his communication objectives. Moreover, he is not the only politician or U.S. president who

places significant importance on Twitter. Former President Barack Obama ranks as the second most followed individual, surpassed only by the platform's new owner, Elon Musk. The following section will provide a detailed analysis of how both presidents employed digital diplomacy⁽²⁰⁾.

3- Actual Use of Digital Diplomacy by U.S. Presidents Obama (2009–2017) and Trump (2017–2021):

The origins of digital diplomacy in the American context can be traced back to 2006, with the establishment of the U.S. Digital Outreach Team separate from ongoing activities related to big data analysis and social media algorithm processing⁽²¹⁾. This team was created as a new chapter in U.S. public diplomacy, primarily aimed at engaging directly with citizens in the Middle East by disseminating messages about U.S. foreign policy on online forums⁽²²⁾.

A. President Barack Obama (2009–2017):

• Domestically:

President Obama was the first U.S. president to use Twitter, sending his first tweet in June 2009. One of his most retweeted posts was a photo of him looking through a window at a group of children from diverse racial backgrounds. This tweet was retweeted 1.6 million times. Thus, Twitter proved to be an exceptionally effective tool for delivering messages to the American public and rallying support. In fact, Twitter has become the preferred social media platform for governments and foreign ministries, as evidenced by the presence of approximately 856 Twitter accounts belonging to heads of state, governments, and foreign ministers from 193 countries. Since his 2008 campaign, Obama demonstrated a keen interest in empowering digital experts, promoting “digital innovations,” and expanding “virtual opportunities,” grounded in his firm belief that digital diplomacy and cyberspace have the potential to broaden public engagement not only at the domestic level but also globally⁽²³⁾.

In light of this, the Obama administration introduced the “Diplomacy 2.0” policy, which significantly increased governmental reliance on Twitter and other social media platforms. His campaign made extensive use of platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. It can be argued that digital diplomacy was one of the

most influential factors contributing to his 2008 electoral success.

• Internationally:

The domestic success of digital diplomacy under President Obama spurred his interest in leveraging it on the international stage. This led to an increased use of social media platforms as tools to strengthen the relationship between governments and individuals. President Obama adopted a hybrid strategy that combined the internet with social media tools, with a particular focus on reaching young people⁽²⁴⁾. In other words, President Obama was able to directly engage a “hard-to-reach” demographic, enabling rapid influence and mobilization of support. These successes heightened interest in using digital platforms to bridge political divides. As a result, the United States, through digital diplomacy and its tools, became more actively engaged abroad and adopted digital diplomacy as a foundational element of public diplomacy aimed at enhancing the overall global image of the United States.

B. President Donald Trump (2017–2021):

As previously noted, President Obama made significant use of digital diplomacy. However, while President Trump's model is arguably more well-known, it is by no means the only American example.

• Domestically:

President Trump brought the traditionally closed decision-making chambers into the digital space, using his Twitter account to address both the American public and the global audience. In doing so, he introduced a radical shift in diplomacy not only in terms of the medium but also in the nature of the message itself, which was often condensed and framed within Twitter's 280-character limit, in line with the platform's rules⁽²⁵⁾.

• Internationally:

President Trump also relied on Twitter to publicize his achievements and communicate political successes to both American and international audiences. A prominent example is his role in the normalization agreements signed between Israel and four Arab states: the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco. These agreements marked a significant geopolitical shift in the Middle East and can be regarded as a notable success of Trump's foreign policy⁽²⁶⁾.



C. A Comparison Between the Digital Diplomacy Approaches of Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump:

- President Trump's model of digital diplomacy notably diverged from that of his predecessor, especially when considering the tone and language he employed on social media. Unlike the refined and carefully crafted language typically associated with diplomacy, Trump's communication style was often blunt and unfiltered. On several occasions, his tweets even reflected what some considered to be racially charged or offensive sentiments directed at both U.S. citizens and foreign governments. This approach may reflect his broader conservative orientation as a representative of the Republican Party. Consequently, it is unsurprising that some academic studies have referred to Trump's method of using social media as "the mockery of digital diplomacy"⁽²⁷⁾.
- In other words, President Trump's use of digital diplomacy stands in contrast to the more conventional use adopted by global leaders and diplomats such as President Obama who used social media to build positive images and foster direct engagement with target audiences. Obama's example, including the widely shared photo of him with children from diverse backgrounds, illustrates how digital diplomacy can be a powerful tool not only for expressing positions on various issues but also for conveying values and shaping a favorable national image. This helped government officials create a constructive narrative around the country they represent and encouraged the public to actively participate in online political discourse.
- In contrast, President Trump paid less attention to these dimensions. His digital diplomacy tended to stray from traditional diplomatic norms, favoring a direct and confrontational tone, often at the expense of nuance and strategic messaging. As a result, his approach lacked the positive image-building component that characterized Obama's use of digital platforms. Nonetheless, because digital diplomacy enables extremely rapid communication, it has become increasingly difficult to ignore or downplay its impact regardless of how it is used⁽²⁸⁾.
- President Trump devised alternative methods for using Twitter to communicate his messages directly to his supporters⁽²⁹⁾. The effectiveness of this approach was well documented during his election campaign. Through digital diplomacy, he was able to bypass and in some cases undermine traditional media channels. However, this strategy placed Trump at the center of intense scrutiny on both domestic and international fronts. His use of digital diplomacy sparked ongoing debate and constant evaluation, as it introduced a new category of content unpredictable and mixed in tone that was crafted and disseminated through social media platforms. President Trump prioritized digital diplomacy as the primary channel for announcing his decisions, a practice not adopted by any previous U.S. president. Examples include his announcement of the United States' withdrawal from the Iran nuclear agreement and his recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. These were unilateral actions that not only ignored international law and norms but also defied numerous United Nations resolutions⁽³⁰⁾. In doing so, President Trump elevated digital diplomacy from simply moving diplomacy out of closed-door settings to a new, more forceful and transparent level at least from his perspective. Yet, this approach often provoked controversy and, at times, triggered crises between the U.S. government and the international community⁽³¹⁾.
- Digital diplomacy under President Barack Obama largely achieved the objectives for which it was designed. However, the same cannot be said for President Donald Trump. The growing controversy surrounding Trump's approach to digital diplomacy ultimately led to an unprecedented move by the digital platform Twitter: in January 2021, Twitter permanently suspended President Trump's account, citing the risk of further incitement to violence⁽³²⁾. In addition, Twitter's management announced further measures to ensure that the ban could not be circumvented. These actions represent a set of extraordinary and unprecedented measures, as well as the introduction of new concepts within the realm of digital diplomacy. Such measures are likely to prompt increased caution among other world leaders not only due to the political embarrassment

such actions can bring, but also because they highlight the immense power of social media platforms, which in this case was shown to exceed even that of a sitting head of state.

- President Barack Obama relied on traditional diplomatic mechanisms and communication channels alongside digital diplomacy. In contrast, President Donald Trump placed his primary focus on digital diplomacy. As a result, while digital diplomacy did not fundamentally alter the roles of American institutions during Obama's tenure, the situation was markedly different under Trump. President Trump's approach to digital diplomacy ushered in changes within the American political landscape, notably shifting partisan competition into the realm of digital diplomacy. Following his Twitter ban, Trump accused Twitter employees of colluding with the Democratic Party to remove his account. The ban itself also ignited significant debate among civil rights leaders, many of whom criticized tech platforms, arguing that their decisions contributed to the spread of hate speech and social division even as they claimed to be enforcing accountability⁽³³⁾. This sentiment was echoed by Michelle Obama, who tweeted shortly before the ban: "Now is the time for Silicon Valley giants to stop enabling this monstrous behavior and permanently ban Trump." This episode highlights how digital diplomacy, particularly when heavily prioritized over traditional statecraft, can provoke institutional tensions, political polarization, and unprecedented questions about the power of tech companies versus elected officials⁽³⁴⁾.
- The outcomes of digital diplomacy varied significantly between the two presidents. In the case of Barack Obama, he became the most-followed political figure on the X platform (formerly Twitter) worldwide. By contrast, President Trump was permanently banned from the platform. This ban represents the most comprehensive penalty ever imposed by a major social media company against a sitting head of state, especially considering that it was not preceded by any formal warning. Twitter had gradually escalated its actions by attaching fact-check labels and warning tags to Trump's tweets throughout the year particularly those related to COVID-19

and the presidential election culminating in the unprecedented step of a permanent suspension⁽³⁵⁾.

- This situation underscores how digital diplomacy is reshaping the balance of power within the American political system, redefining the hierarchy of decision-makers. President Trump made a sudden return to Twitter in November 2022, enabled by the platform's new owner. However, he did not resume posting on X. Due to the central role that digital diplomacy played in his political strategy, Trump created an alternative platform: Truth Social. He agreed to an exclusivity clause whereby he would not post on any other social media platform for at least six hours after publishing on his own platform⁽³⁶⁾. Trump has also used Truth Social to publicize updates related to his legal issues, including indictment news and developments in ongoing investigations⁽³⁷⁾. This move reflects how digital diplomacy not only serves as a tool for international engagement or public messaging but also becomes a personalized channel for political maneuvering, legal narrative control, and strategic communication outside traditional media structures.
- Digital diplomacy was originally designed to enhance positive perceptions across the globe and foster greater global connectivity. Within this framework, some U.S. presidents used digital platforms to engage with foreign audiences. However, President Trump's objectives were more varied; he relied on social media not only for public communication but also as a tool for policy-making and decision-making. Thus, the American model of digital diplomacy includes two distinct approaches: One focused on constructing a positive national image, and the other centered on building a personal brand image. Both approaches aimed at mobilizing support domestically and internationally⁽³⁸⁾. The following table provides a comparative overview of how both former presidents perceived and utilized digital diplomacy in shaping U.S. policy.

Comparison Between the Digital Diplomacy of President Obama (2009–2017) and President Trump (2017–2021)



***Comparison Between the Digital Diplomacy of
President Obama (2009–2017) and President Trump (2017–2021)
Based on case study analysis – (Table compiled by the researcher)***

	Category	President Obama	President Trump
1	Paid attention to digital diplomacy	Yes	Yes
2	Used Twitter/X	Yes	Yes
3	Used other platforms alongside Twitter	Yes	No
4	Succeeded in attracting followers	Yes	Yes
5	Domestic objectives were a priority	Yes	Yes
6	Had international objectives	Yes	Yes
7	Used digital diplomacy in election campaigning	Yes	Yes
8	Faced internal or international criticism	No	Yes
9	Digital diplomacy enhanced public engagement	Yes	Yes
10	Digital diplomacy enhanced the positive image of the American system	Yes	No

***Third. Challenges and Opportunities that
Digital Diplomacy Presents to Decision-Makers***

The U.S. case has demonstrated the central role of digital diplomacy and its tools chiefly social media platforms in enhancing a state's global presence and improving communication between governments and citizens at the domestic level. However, there appear to be no guarantees that digital diplomacy will always yield positive results. While it offers considerable opportunities as a powerful tool for influence, it also brings with it a set of challenges and prerequisites for success, particularly in the context of what is now referred to as the "globalization of information." This environment is characterized by the unregulated or at times, undesirable flow of information, which can drain a state's resources or at the very least divert its attention between addressing cybersecurity threats and more traditional physical threats. Additionally, countries may suffer from a lack of precedent, reference models, or accumulated experience, which increases the risk of missteps that could lead to crises. A single misjudged comment or an ill-advised post from an official government account can have serious diplomatic consequences.

1- Challenges of Using Digital Diplomacy:

A- The challenges associated with states' use of digital diplomacy and its tools can generally be categorized into technical, ethical and cultural, and administrative challenges. For example, in the United States, following the September 11 attacks, U.S. intelligence agencies underwent a radical

overhaul, and American diplomacy shifted toward a comprehensive approach focused on cybersecurity, the digital economy, and online rights⁽³⁹⁾. This direction continued, with digital diplomacy being recognized as a core pillar of national security. As a result, in 2022, the U.S. Department of State established the Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy, with the goal of strengthening the United States' national and economic security by leading and coordinating efforts in cyberspace and digital technologies, while also addressing the growing challenges facing this evolving vision⁽⁴⁰⁾.

B- Another major challenge in the use of digital diplomacy lies in data ownership. This is, in fact, the starting point for states seeking to assert control over data management. A related issue is the widespread presence of the so-called "anonymous user." Digital diplomacy often reflects a state of confrontation, competition, or even conflict between the state and other actors some known, such as telecommunications companies, and others unknown or anonymous. In many cases, data is owned by corporations rather than governments. A key example is when Meta changed how it discloses advertising resources and the extent to which the public can access data. In practice, the company can restructure its data governance rules without consulting the state⁽⁴¹⁾. Another challenge is the state's limited ability to verify declared identities online. For instance, during the Trump crisis, Twitter announced that it would not suspend the White House account, but that it would take

certain measures to limit its use to mitigate harm. This demonstrates how digital diplomacy can shift the responsibility for protecting national security to tech platforms to the extent that they may even act to protect national security from the state itself⁽⁴²⁾.

C- Another key challenge lies in the divergence of preferences among generations of diplomats, which poses an institutional challenge as states expand their reliance on digital diplomacy. This issue underscores the need for regulatory frameworks, a strong organizational culture, and the preparation of different generations within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs particularly encouraging younger diplomats to remain engaged with traditional diplomatic practices. For instance, during national celebrations, traditional diplomats often prefer attending ceremonial receptions, whereas younger diplomats may opt to post a message on social media instead⁽⁴³⁾. However, effective digital diplomacy requires diplomatic personnel to be well-versed in all aspects of digital communication and to continuously stay updated on emerging trends and platforms. This generational gap highlights the need for a balanced, well-integrated approach to diplomacy that merges both traditional and digital methods effectively.

D- Additional challenges include the tension and competition between physical and digital spaces, as well as the need to balance presence and engagement across both realms. Digital diplomacy faces risks such as exposure to fake news, threats posed by hostile non-state actors, anonymous usage, cyberattacks, and negative regional perceptions. Other challenges involve the digital divide, which limits equal access and participation, along with difficulties in identifying and effectively targeting the right audience, the constant need to keep pace with the rapidly evolving global media landscape, and the critical concern of protecting state secrets from cyber breaches. Together, these issues highlight the complex, high-stakes environment in which digital diplomacy now operates, requiring both strategic foresight and technical resilience.

2- Opportunities Offered by the Use of Digital Diplomacy:

A- The opportunities for states in adopting digital diplomacy are numerous, and the potential returns for governments are significant. These include projecting a spirit of initiative on the international stage, and affirming emotional engagement and global presence. Achieving this requires ongoing efforts to study successful examples such as the Indian Ministry of External

Affairs, which maintains an active presence on social media platforms⁽⁴⁴⁾. The ministry often responds to a wide range of messages, from calls for assistance to suggestions about Indian diplomacy, demonstrating an effective use of digital engagement. In other words, governments must strategically plan their digital outreach, focusing on platforms where their presence will be most meaningful. Importantly, digital diplomacy helps bridge physical gaps between countries, as developing a strong digital presence is often more feasible and faster than expanding through traditional means. This makes it a powerful tool for states looking to enhance visibility and influence in an increasingly connected world.

B- One of the key opportunities or positive aspects of digital diplomacy is that it does not require large budgets. In fact, adopting a lavish or extravagant digital diplomacy strategy is often discouraged. Instead, success hinges on active engagement and timely responses. This also involves avoiding formulaic or copied content, while giving proper attention to aesthetic appeal and creative engagement. An example of a low-cost, high-impact public project is Wikipedia, which offers a model that states can learn from and replicate in ways that support the promotion of their own perspectives and narratives. High budgets can sometimes produce limited impact, while modest budgets can generate significant results. More importantly, money rarely solves the core challenges that digital diplomacy seeks to address. This highlights one of digital diplomacy's strengths: its cost-effectiveness. A successful approach often requires a gradual, targeted expansion, focusing on the most popular platforms. According to 2016 data, Twitter was the most widely used social media platform among foreign ministries, followed by Facebook⁽⁴⁵⁾, though preferences vary from one region to another.

C- Digital diplomacy, through its tools and platforms, plays a key role in shaping the "social imagination" of nations a concept that encompasses the value systems that sustain social cohesion, as well as the structures that guide collective and individual actions and beliefs⁽⁴⁶⁾. By producing engaging and compelling content, states can influence these value systems and gradually bring about changes that align with their national interests. To fully capitalize on the opportunities offered by digital diplomacy, states must ensure they meet the requirements of a comprehensive or successful digital diplomacy model, which can be



broken down into several key elements as follows: (You can continue with the next section to list or elaborate on these elements).

3- Key Elements of Successful Digital Diplomacy:

A- Inclusiveness and Integration of Components: Digital diplomacy is made up of several interconnected elements that governments must consider in order to establish an effective digital diplomacy strategy. These include attention to organizational and administrative structures, security protocols, timely and strategic planning, as well as content quality and contextual relevance⁽⁴⁷⁾. Success requires careful research and analysis before decision-making, along with gradual outreach to avoid appearing artificial or provoking rejection. It also involves learning from the experiences of others, maintaining a cautious approach, and clearly separating formal and informal communications. Additionally, governments must equip diplomatic and governmental personnel with strong communication and writing skills, train them to respond thoughtfully, and instill a deep respect for audiences, avoiding any underestimation of their intelligence. Creating an expert unit within the public diplomacy department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs could serve as a significant value-add. By clearly defining their role, such a team could greatly enhance engagement and effectiveness in the digital space.

B- Balancing Governmental and Public Tracks: For a state to formulate a successful digital diplomacy strategy, it must clearly define and balance two parallel tracks: a governmental track and a public (people-to-people) track. On the governmental level, diplomatic negotiations no longer revolve solely around traditional political and economic issues. Instead, new political themes have emerged on the diplomatic agenda such as digital governance, including cybersecurity, data privacy, data management, e-commerce, cybercrime, and the governance of artificial intelligence. Furthermore, governments are increasingly relying on digital tools in the conduct of diplomacy, including online conferences, big data analysis, and artificial intelligence applications. These developments require governments to not only participate in digital diplomacy but also lead in shaping the global rules and standards surrounding it⁽⁴⁸⁾.

C- Data Ownership: An essential component of successful digital diplomacy is the state's ownership or control over data and platforms. A

notable example is China, which bans Facebook effectively denying its owner access to a potential one billion additional users. In response, the Chinese government has developed its own domestic platforms over the years, such as WeChat (China's equivalent of Facebook), Sina Weibo (equivalent to X/Twitter), and Youku (China's version of YouTube). These platforms reflect China's strategy to maintain sovereignty over digital infrastructure and user data⁽⁴⁹⁾.

D- Content Quality: States can maximize national interest by producing effective and strategic official content based on the analysis of successful government media efforts. Notably, as of August 2024, international reports ranked the Turkish government website first globally among government portals, with 146 million total visits, followed by Brazil, Russia, and the UK. However, despite this traffic, the average time spent on government websites was less than four minutes, whereas YouTube saw average session times exceeding 20 minutes. This illustrates the importance of engaging and time-worthy content formats⁽⁵⁰⁾.

On the public level, governments must identify and focus on the most widely accepted and engaging data types among citizens to ensure maximum impact. The most followed content types on social media typically include: Video clips (most engaging), Infographics (visually-presented data analysis), Memes (humorous or satirical visual content), and Lists (digestible and structured content)⁽⁵¹⁾.

E- Simplicity of Content: Digital diplomacy does not require complex or overly elaborate content. A clear example of this is during the events of the Arab world in 2011, when the U.S. Department of State spent over \$600,000 on social media advertisements in an effort to increase foreign viewership of its Facebook pages. However, the impact of this investment was limited. This example underscores an important lesson: the sophistication or extravagance of digital diplomacy efforts is not a guarantee of effectiveness. Rather, simplicity, clarity, and relatability often prove to be far more powerful in connecting with audiences and achieving desired outcomes⁽⁵²⁾.

Conclusion:

Digital diplomacy has brought about major transformations in the very concepts and practices of diplomacy, spanning both traditional and non-traditional forms, including public diplomacy. This shift began when governments started leveraging the power of social media and digital content to advance their national interests and achieve both domestic and foreign policy objectives particularly in shaping public opinion, promoting counter-narratives, and building international goodwill. International models of digital diplomacy show that states can tell compelling stories that transcend geographic boundaries and cultural barriers⁽⁵³⁾. However, successful digital diplomacy demands integration and comprehensiveness, requiring the state to engage across all levels: operational, strategic, and forward-looking. In this sense, digital diplomacy represents a fusion of digitizing diplomacy and operating within digital systems, forming what is often referred to as “hybrid diplomacy.” While this approach does not eliminate traditional diplomacy, which is often based on secrecy and closed-door discussions, it clearly diverges from it in nature and mechanism.

The American case study offers several critical lessons in the evolution of digital diplomacy from its use as a tool for communication, to a tool for policy decision-making, to a platform for ideological confrontation (especially through partisan tweets), and finally to a stage where digital tools seemed to overpower the state itself. This was exemplified by the clash between the U.S. administration and social media platforms, most notably when Twitter permanently suspended President Donald Trump's account. Despite such tensions, these developments do not diminish the importance of digital diplomacy, nor the powerful tools and direct communication channels it provides at both local and global levels. These tools often allow for rapid even immediate influence, which can serve a country's national interests effectively. Ultimately, the U.S. example reveals a crucial insight: the key to maximizing national interest through digital diplomacy does not lie solely in the tools themselves, but in the comprehensiveness of the approach one that combines integration, balance, and quality at every stage of the digital engagement process.

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American Expertise in Utilizing Digital Diplomacy to Achieve National Interests

Dr. Nelly Kamal Al-Amir

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American Expertise in Utilizing Digital Diplomacy to Achieve National Interests

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Abstract:

Diplomacy remains the central tool of states to achieve their national interests. In a world of escalating interdependence the use of force to achieve interests became an undesirable option. With extensive reliance on diplomacy to fulfill states' needs, non-traditional diplomacy appeared, of which digital diplomacy is one example. Digital diplomacy expresses the state of convergence of technologies and communications applications with international relations. It has led to a state of "digital" interdependence, which may sometimes be linked to the sovereignty of states and their ability to control data. It has also created with a new research environment and a new type of analysis, namely digital discourse analysis. New concepts have also emerged, e.g. "Twitter diplomacy," the diplomatic activities aim to expand engagement with foreign audiences by increasing the number of "virtual opportunities" provided by cyberspace. The USA is a case of reliance on digital diplomacy as a pivotal tool, and a case of diversifying digital diplomacy goals and trends, which was evident through the administrations of former president Obama (2009-2017) and Trump (2017-2021). They saw digital diplomacy as a primary means of achieving various goals based on social media platforms as a basis for addressing the masses and maximizing national interests.

Keywords: Diplomacy, digital, United States, National interests.

الخبرات الأمريكية في استخدام الدبلوماسية الرقمية لتحقيق المصالح القومية

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المستخلص:

تظل الدبلوماسية الأداة المركزية للدول لتحقيق مصالحها القومية. وفي عالم يتزايد فيه الاعتماد المتبادل أصبح استخدام القوة لتحقيق المصالح خياراً غير مرغوب فيه. ومع الاعتماد الكبير على الدبلوماسية لتلبية احتياجات الدول، ظهرت «الدبلوماسية غير التقليدية»، التي تعد الدبلوماسية الرقمية أحد أبرز أمثلتها. تعبر الدبلوماسية الرقمية عن حالة من الدمج بين التقنيات وتطبيقات الاتصالات والعلاقات الدولية. وقد أدت بدورها إلى حالة من الاعتماد المتبادل «الرقمي»، الذي قد يرتبط في بعض الأحيان بسيادة الدول وقدرتها على التحكم في البيانات. خلقت الدبلوماسية الرقمية كذلك بيئة بحثية جديدة ونوعاً جديداً من التحليل، ألا وهو تحليل الخطاب الرقمي. كما اقترنت بظهور مفاهيم جديدة، مثل «دبلوماسية تويتر». وتهدف أنشطة الدبلوماسية الرقمية إلى توسيع المشاركة مع الجماهير الأجنبية من خلال زيادة عدد «الفرص الافتراضية» التي يوفرها الفضاء الإلكتروني. من ناحية أخرى، تشكل الولايات المتحدة حالة للاعتماد على الدبلوماسية الرقمية كأداة محورية في تحقيق المصالح القومية. داخلياً وخارجياً، وحالة من التنوع أيضاً في أهداف واتجاهات استخدام الدبلوماسية الرقمية، وهو ما كان واضحاً من خلال إدارات الرئيس السابق باراك أوباما (٢٠٠٩-٢٠١٧م) والرئيس دونالد ترامب خلال فترته الرئاسية (٢٠١٧-٢٠٢١م)، حيث رأوا في الدبلوماسية الرقمية وسيلة أساسية لتحقيق أهداف مختلفة بالاعتماد على منصات التواصل الاجتماعي كأساس لمخاطبة الجماهير وتعزيز المصالح الوطنية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الدبلوماسية، الرقمية، الولايات المتحدة، المصالح القومية.