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with Nation-branding**

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**Abstract:** Perceptions of attractiveness and trustworthiness impact the prosperity and influence of countries. A country's soft power is not guaranteed. Countries have their brands, an image shaped by the behaviour of governments, by what they do and say, whom they associate with, and how they conduct themselves on the global stage. Increasingly, digital diplomacy plays a crucial role in the creation and application of soft power. This paper argues that digital diplomacy is increasingly vital in the articulation of soft power. Digital diplomacy is a new way of conducting public diplomacy, offering new and unparalleled ways of building trust with previously disengaged audiences. Soft power is now the driving force behind reputation and influence on the global stage, where increasingly digital diplomacy plays an essential role.

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*Persuasion is indeed at the heart of diplomacy.*

- Ambassador Kishan Rana, Former Indian ambassador

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## Soft Power, Nation-Branding and Diplomacy

Within international relations, power has traditionally been understood, defined and assessed in 'hard' terms, often in cases of economic or military interventions. In the case of hard power, it has typically been extended in the form of coercion, either by using force, the threat of force, economic sanctions, or stimuli of payments.<sup>1</sup> Compared to the coercive nature of hard power, soft power seeks to instead use the power of attraction or persuasion. Soft power is a nation-state's ability to influence various actors' preferences within the international space, through either attraction or persuasion rather than coercion.<sup>2</sup> It should be remembered that soft power, as a term, is ultimately the result of this binary relationship with hard power.

Soft power has a significant impact on the decisions people, businesses and governments make. It is, in part, because soft power is all the things that make people love a country rather than fear it, for example, products of people, institutions and brands rather than governments.<sup>3</sup> Joseph Nye, the academic who coined the term, argues that soft power is “a means to success in world politics” for those who know how to use it.<sup>4</sup> Yet, soft power has been heavily criticised by international relations scholars. Some of the widespread scepticism directed towards the concept is that it is ‘elusive,’<sup>5</sup> ‘fuzzy,’<sup>6</sup> and ‘maddeningly inconsistent.’<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Portland, “What Is Soft Power?” accessed May 2, 2021, <https://softpower30.com/what-is-soft-power/>.

<sup>2</sup> Steve Thomson, “Soft Power: Why It Matters to Governments, People, and Brands,” Brand Finance, April 20, 2021, <https://brandfinance.com/insights/soft-power-why-it-matters>.

<sup>3</sup> John Dubber, “How Soft Power Can Help Meet International Challenges,” British Council, accessed May 2, 2021, <https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/insight-articles/how-soft-power-can-help-meet-international-challenges>

<sup>4</sup> John G. Ikenberry and Joseph S. Nye, “Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics,” *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 3 (2004), <https://doi.org/10.2307/20033985>, 136.

<sup>5</sup> Valentina Feklyunina, “Soft Power and Identity: Russia, Ukraine and the ‘Russian World(s),”” *European Journal of International Relations* 22, no. 4 (2016): pp. 773-796, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066115601200>, 774.

<sup>6</sup> William A. Callahan, “Identity and Security in China: The Negative Soft Power of the China Dream,” *Politics* 35, no. 3-4 (2015): pp. 216–29, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.12088>, 217.

<sup>7</sup> Inderjeet Parmar, Michael Cox, and Christopher Layne, “The Unbearable Lightness of Soft Power,” in *Soft Power and US Foreign Policy: Theoretical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2010).

Soft power seeks to achieve influence by building networks that are magnified in the digital age. Networks can be both positive and negative, where a network of “bad web actors” have the potential to threaten global security and well-being daily.<sup>8</sup> Anne-Marie Slaughter notes that the best way to combat this threat is to ensure the creation of integrated networks which include “good web actors” - such as corporate, civic, and public bodies. Soft power can communicate compelling narratives, establish international rules, and draw on the resources that make a country naturally attractive to the world.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, however, the role of nation-branding must not be forgotten. A nation-brand is one of the most important assets of any state: ensuring inward investment, attracting tourists and adding value to exports.<sup>10</sup> At present, national governments are engaged in two types of policies: nation branding at the macro level and individual product branding at the micro level.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, both terms are deeply intertwined. As Steve Thomson notes, “soft power perceptions form a key component in the overall measurement of a nation’s brand strength.”<sup>12</sup>

Soft power is the ability to influence actors, while a nation-brand puts that ability into practice through the mechanism of diplomacy. Diplomacy is an established method by which nation-states express their foreign policy objectives whilst harmonising their efforts to influence other governments’ decisions and conduct through dialogue, negotiations and other such measures.<sup>13</sup> To some, diplomacy has been considered the “engine room” within international relations which has changed over the last several decades with the advent of digital technologies.<sup>14</sup> Technological innovation is a major change in defining soft power. The

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<sup>8</sup> Anne-Marie Slaughter, “How to Succeed in the Networked World: A Grand Strategy for the Digital Age,” *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 6 (2016): pp. 76–89.

<sup>9</sup> See note 1.

<sup>10</sup> “Nation Brand Value: Insights, Benchmarking, Evaluation,” The Place Brand Observer TPBO, July 17, 2020. <https://placebrandobserver.com/nation-brand-value-explained/>.

<sup>11</sup> “David Haigh on the Meaning of Nation Brand Value and Soft Power,” TPBO | The Place Brand Observer, March 24, 2021, <https://placebrandobserver.com/david-haigh-interview/>.

<sup>12</sup> See note 2.

<sup>13</sup> Olubukola S. Adesina, “Foreign Policy in an Era of Digital Diplomacy,” *Cogent Social Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2017): 1297175, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2017.1297175>.

<sup>14</sup> Raymond Cohen, “Putting Diplomatic Studies on the Map,” *Diplomatic Studies Programme Newsletter*, 1998.

direction of soft power messages has shifted significantly so that ordinary citizens, not government experts, can have greater influence on soft power conversations.<sup>15</sup> In this capacity, a greater focus on user-generated content compared to more traditional diplomatic sources can be seen.<sup>16</sup> Essentially, for soft power to be successful in the modern age, it needs to fuse traditional tools of diplomacy and negotiation with the power of new and emerging technologies.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Fourth Industrial Revolution**

The industrial age has changed the way people live, work and learn. Some of these accomplishments include widespread literacy, unprecedented interconnectivity, highest income per capita to date, railroads, electricity, modern mobility and air travel. The term, the Fourth Industrial Revolution (or 4IR) has gotten a lot of traction, yet it is not commonly connected to diplomacy or soft power. Nevertheless, it has had significant impacts on how governments communicate and engage.

4IR builds on the Third Industrial Revolution that has been more commonly used since the middle of the twentieth century.<sup>18</sup> The World Economic Forum notes that the 4IR is characterised by a range of new technologies which are impacting all disciplines, economies and industries.<sup>19</sup> Ultimately it is the blurring of the lines between the physical, digital, and

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<sup>15</sup> Nikolay Anguelov, "How the New Digital World Is Changing How We Conceive of Soft Power," LSE Blogs, 2017. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2017/04/11/how-the-new-digital-world-is-changing-how-we-conceive-of-soft-power/>.

<sup>16</sup> For example, the rise in engagement with content on platforms like Twitter or Instagram.

<sup>17</sup> Ellen Hallams, "Digital Diplomacy: the Internet, the Battle for Ideas & US Foreign Policy," *CEU Political Science Journal*, no. 4 (2010): 541.

<sup>18</sup> Bernard Marr, "The 4th Industrial Revolution Is Here - Are You Ready?," *Forbes* (Forbes Magazine, August 14, 2018), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bernardmarr/2018/08/13/the-4th-industrial-revolution-is-here-are-you-ready/?sh=62228cb5628b>.

<sup>19</sup> Klaus Schwab, "The Fourth Industrial Revolution, by Klaus Schwab," World Economic Forum, 2021, <https://www.weforum.org/about/the-fourth-industrial-revolution-by-klaus-schwab/>.

biological spheres.<sup>20</sup> The impact is especially felt with the invention of the internet as it has allowed anyone, anywhere, to have access to the same information.<sup>21</sup>

4IR is permeating every industry globally by creating massive transformations in non-linear ways at unprecedented speed, especially within international relations. For Jason Mackenzie, countries that maintain close alignment with technological developments will continue to be key players.<sup>22</sup> The shift in the application of technology has meant methods of diplomatic communication have pivoted. Diplomatic missions have shifted their communication mechanisms from more formal methods, like hard-copy invitations or television announcements, to Facebook events and YouTube channels.<sup>23</sup> In this case, the rise of social media platforms, particularly Twitter and Facebook, have meant that diplomatic missions are more engaged than ever.<sup>24</sup> Combined with the growth in expertise, strong nation-branding messaging, and stakeholder relationships, countries that utilise 4IR will dominate the markets of global influence. Conclusively, the combination of technological and conventional approaches to diplomacy offers an unequalled source of advantages that ambitious countries should seek to employ.

### **Digital Diplomacy**

International relations and the conduct of diplomacy have been heavily affected by recent technological transformations. Against this backdrop, the conventional idea of power as the sum of military might and economic strength has lost relative weight. As digital tools become more common and are adopted by more and more state and non-state actors, the

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<sup>20</sup> Klaus Schwab, "The Fourth Industrial Revolution: What It Means and How to Respond," World Economic Forum, 2016, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/the-fourth-industrial-revolution-what-it-means-and-how-to-respond/>.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat: a Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (Bridgewater, NJ: Distributed by Paw Prints/Baker & Taylor, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Jason Mackenzie, "Soft Power, Public Diplomacy and the Digital-First Era," nudgfactory, August 11, 2020. <https://nudgefactory.co.uk/soft-power-public-diplomacy-and-the-digital-first-era/>.

<sup>23</sup> Abbas Abbasov, "Digital Diplomacy: Embedding Information and Communication Technologies in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade," *The Australian Institute of International Affairs*, 2007.

<sup>24</sup> Brian Hocking and Jan Melissen, *Diplomacy in the Digital Age* (The Hague: Clingendael, Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2015).

strategies and tactics for using them more effectively are evolving rapidly.<sup>25</sup> As such, the digital component of soft power grows increasingly in terms of relevance and importance. In the field of diplomacy, its importance and potential are undeniable for disseminating messages and reaching audiences.<sup>26</sup>

Digital diplomacy is the use of digital tools of communication by diplomats to communicate with both other diplomats and the public.<sup>27</sup> This communication can be conducted via digital and networked technologies, including the internet, mobile devices, and social media channels.<sup>28</sup> Ultimately, it is a strategy to manage change through the utilisation of digital mechanisms and virtual collaborations.<sup>29</sup> As a term, it has been used interchangeably with terms like “e-diplomacy,”<sup>30</sup> or even “diplomacy 2.0.”<sup>31</sup> At the same time, however, it is understood differently by governments across the world, with the United States of America calling it “21st Century Statecraft,”<sup>32</sup> the United Kingdom defining it as “digital diplomacy,” and Canada noting it to be “Open Policy.”<sup>33</sup>

The current debates over public diplomacy and soft power suffer from failures to address the role that digital diplomacy can truly play in building trust within the global ecosystem. As a mechanism, digital diplomacy should not be seen as something to replace traditional notions of diplomacy. Rather it should seek to co-exist and complement traditional diplomacy mechanisms. Digital diplomacy has been interpreted in a variety of ways by

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<sup>25</sup> Jovan Kurbalija and Katharina Höne, “2021: The Emergence of Digital Foreign Policy,” Diplo and Geneva Internet Platform, March 2021, [https://www.diplomacy.edu/sites/default/files/2021-03/2021\\_The\\_emergence\\_of\\_digital\\_foreign\\_policy.pdf](https://www.diplomacy.edu/sites/default/files/2021-03/2021_The_emergence_of_digital_foreign_policy.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> “Volatility in International Relations - Thinking Heads Articles,” Thinking Heads, March 30, 2021, <https://www.thinkingheads.com/en/global-trend/soft-power-digital-diplomacy/>.

<sup>27</sup> Dev Lewis, “Digital Diplomacy,” Gateway House: Indian Council on Global Relations, December 21, 2017. <https://www.gatewayhouse.in/digital-diplomacy-2/>.

<sup>28</sup> Evan H. Potter, *Cyber-Diplomacy Managing Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002).

<sup>29</sup> Corneliu Bjola and Marcus Holmes, “The Future of Digital Diplomacy,” in *Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>30</sup> See note 22.

<sup>31</sup> Britney Harris, “Diplomacy 2.0: The Future of Social Media in Nation Branding.” *Exchange: The Journal of Public Diplomacy* 4, no. 1 (2013).

<sup>32</sup> Alexandre Bohas, “The Paradox of Anti-Americanism: Reflection on the Shallow Concept of Soft Power,” *Global Society* 20, no. 4 (2006): pp. 395–414. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600820600929721>.

<sup>33</sup> See note 12.



researchers and practitioners alike,<sup>34</sup> and as such, there is no widely accepted definition or framework.<sup>35</sup> It remains a conventional way of conducting diplomacy through a multitude of mechanisms and mediums. Through the utilisation of digital diplomacy, states can engage in new and innovative ways with civil society. Nicholas Westcott notes it has allowed some countries to become more democratised, where technology has enabled more people to participate.<sup>36</sup>

Digital diplomacy is not immune from criticism. Richard Grant argues that the exponential increase in engagement by civil society has changed the rules of engagement.<sup>37</sup> The wider use of digital technology within diplomatic spaces has brought several challenges, including anonymity of Internet users and information leakage. There has been a push in the rise of anonymity online, where anyone can assume any persona,<sup>38</sup> such is the case on Twitter, Instagram or LinkedIn. At the same time, there remain challenges with digital channels and whistleblowing. The 2010 leak by Wikileaks remains one of the most highly profiled cases in recent history. Wikileaks published 250,000 diplomatic cables from US missions around the world and the State Department in Washington. Ilan Manor noted that it caused “pandemonium spread among foreign ministries throughout the world.”<sup>39</sup> The cables included unbecoming assessments of other world leaders, foreign governments and even the embassy’s host country. In turn, this had an impact on the US’s nation-brand.

Digital diplomacy includes the use of digital technologies and social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn by nation-states to enter into communication with

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<sup>34</sup> Corneliu Bjola, Marcus Holmes, and Sabrina Sotiriu, “Digital Diplomacy: Between Promises and Reality,” in *Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>35</sup> See note 12.

<sup>36</sup> Nicholas Westcott, “Digital Diplomacy: The Impact of the Internet on International Relations,” Oxford Internet Institute, July 2008, <https://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/archive/downloads/publications/RR16.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Grant, “The Democratisation of Diplomacy: Negotiating with the Internet,” *Oxford Internet Institute*, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1325241>.

<sup>38</sup> Alexander Yakovenko, “Russian Digital Diplomacy: Clicking Through.” *Russia Beyond*, August 10, 2016. [http://rbth.com/articles/2012/09/06/russian\\_digital\\_diplomacy\\_clicking\\_through\\_18005.html](http://rbth.com/articles/2012/09/06/russian_digital_diplomacy_clicking_through_18005.html).

<sup>39</sup> Ilan Manor, “WikiLeaks Revisited,” *Exploring Digital Diplomacy*, November 13, 2015, <http://digdipblog.com/2015/11/09/wikileaks-revisited/>.

foreign counterparts. Digital skills are some of the most sought after skills within the fields of international and diplomatic relations.<sup>40</sup> The question remains, however, how can states build trust via the mechanism of digital tools? World leaders and diplomats use social media to speak and engage directly with the public they seek to influence. An example of this is how former US President Donald Trump utilised Twitter as a core part of his engagement strategy. Diplomatic activities have also been increasingly supported by Internet tools. Nikos Christodoulides observes that a lot of governments consider the internet and social media challenges unique diplomatic instruments.<sup>41</sup> In this sense, nation-states can advertise themselves in different capacities, which also allows them to have greater control over how their values are being presented to the public at large. Ultimately, the use of social media within diplomacy has created the opportunity to have a real-time measurement of engagement. It empowers nation-states to exchange ideas, opinions and values in a fast way, at the touch of a button.

### **Why Does Building Trust Matter?**

Successful approaches to soft power, nation-branding and public diplomacy rely on trust. In the digital space, it is easier than ever to both gain and destroy trust. Ilan Manor and Elad Segev argue that digital diplomacy exists on two primary levels, the first in the foreign ministry and the other, in embassies located around the world.<sup>42</sup> Due to this divide, states can alter their messaging to meet the needs of local audiences, which is vital to building trust. Missions need to employ communication tactics which meet the needs of local audiences, especially in terms of history, culture, values and traditions that can bolster their reputation

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<sup>40</sup> “Digital Skills Critical for Jobs and Social Inclusion,” UNESCO, March 16, 2018, <https://en.unesco.org/news/digital-skills-critical-jobs-and-social-inclusion>.

<sup>41</sup> Nikos Christodoulides, “Internet and Diplomacy,” *American Diplomacy* Est 1996, 2005, <https://americandiplomacy.web.unc.edu/2005/03/internet-and-diplomacy/>.

<sup>42</sup> Corneliu Bjola et al., “America’s Selfie: How the US Portrays Itself on Its Social Media Accounts,” in *Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015); Corneliu Bjola, “Introduction: Making Sense of Digital Diplomacy,” in *Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015).

abroad.<sup>43</sup> Digital diplomacy plays a significant role in how actors (state and non-state) build trust. The utilisation of digital tools is vital, as more actors compete in an increasingly small space to stand out.

Diplomacy has continually needed to adapt and alter depending on its environment. Within the digital context, it is no different. In a world that is more connected than ever before, digital engagement plays an increasingly more important role as states can engage with a greater number of people at a dramatically lower cost. At the same time, it creates unique opportunities within such networks for both leaders and governments to share messages and set political agendas in non-traditional channels. Nevertheless, these digital networks have created new power plays. Within this space, state-civil society relations have greater influence within international affairs.<sup>44</sup> As a tool, digital diplomacy has the power to increase global engagement and impact people who might never have the opportunity to step into the embassy in question.<sup>45</sup> The utilisation of social media furthers both interaction and engagement, which in turn, furthers the desires of players within international relations.

The present global ‘state of digital’ is powerful. The number of global internet users totals 4.66 billion people, and worldwide social media users total 4.14 billion people, out of a total global population of 7.81 billion people. Research shows that more than 450 million people started using social media between October 2020 and October 2021, equating to annual growth of more than 12 percent.<sup>46</sup> In terms of building trust, there are ever more opportunities for nation-states to engage with more people than ever before via the mechanism of digital. It thereby allows them to promote a carefully tailored image to the local audience. Nevertheless, the heart of any diplomatic engagement remains persuasion,

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<sup>43</sup> See note 12.

<sup>44</sup> See note 8.

<sup>45</sup> Danielle Cave, “Does Australia Do Digital Diplomacy?,” *The Interpreter* (The Interpreter, February 27, 2017), <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/does-australia-do-digital-diplomacy>.

<sup>46</sup> Simon Kemp, “Digital 2020: October Global Statshot - DataReportal – Global Digital Insights,” *DataReportal* (DataReportal – Global Digital Insights, February 11, 2021), <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-october-global-statshot>.

even if it is employed via digital means.<sup>47</sup> Persuasion is a vital part of any diplomatic engagement, especially in the case of digital diplomacy.

In France, digital technology is central to policy on disseminating the French language and culture. The country has found opportunities to promote itself via the mechanism of digital diplomacy, especially against the backdrop of increasingly stronger power plays between countries and regional blocs as emerging powers assert themselves. At the same time, the Institut Français has accelerated its capability to expand virtual systems to subvert or acquire assets for a given theme (Culturethèque, IFcinéma), and provide communicate equipment for entities and events (IFmapp, IFmobile, Webtv). These capabilities support the dissemination of values, including the freedom of expression.

Globally a clear need for digital diplomacy can be seen, yet tension remains. Often a binary between control and creativity is evident, with governments wanting to control information pathways, yet digital networks needing a sense of innovation. For global digital networks to truly thrive, diplomatic missions need to find a middle ground. Engaging with dynamic audiences creates both some risks, but also new opportunities. People want to see more human figures as their government officials because personal and professional lines have blurred. Engaging online also poses a challenge for diplomats, as the risks run high with either getting information wrong or causing embarrassment for their country with a misjudged post. For Sian MacLeod, the current UK Ambassador to Serbia, social media favours the short, temporary and superficial where there needs to be a careful balance between being entertaining and serious.<sup>48</sup> Within this, there is a real challenge regarding how one can be effective when the majority of your diplomacy is conducted online.

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<sup>47</sup> Kishan Rana, "Persuasion, Trust, and Personal Credibility," Diplo, 2012, <https://www.diplomacy.edu/resources/general/persuasion-trust-and-personal-credibility>.

<sup>48</sup> Sian MacLeod, "The Online Diplomat," Foreign Office Blogs, September 21, 2020, <https://blogs.fcdo.gov.uk/sianmacleod/2020/09/21/the-online-diplomat/>; Hugh Elliott, "Digital Diplomacy: Are We the Champions?," Foreign Office Blogs, April 2, 2017, <https://blogs.fcdo.gov.uk/guestpost/2017/03/30/digital-diplomacy-are-we-the-champions/>.

The digital sphere is often not fully appreciated in the role it can play in building and maintaining a reputation of trustworthiness. Now, overseas ministries (MFAs) and embassies are a part of various global networks, where all records are scattered, managed and examined.<sup>49</sup> The use of social media by diplomats has opened communication among policymakers and citizens. Many embassies now have interactive websites, Facebook accounts and a number of ambassadors have an energetic Twitter presence; though, a few social media accounts are trending higher than others. A wide variety of embassies have piloted small exercises. According to the 2020 edition of Twiplomacy, the governments and leaders of 189 international locations had a legitimate presence on Twitter, representing ninety-eight percent of the 193 UN Member States. The governments of only four countries do not have a Twitter presence, namely Laos, North Korea, Sao Tome and Principe, and Turkmenistan.<sup>50</sup>

Within the digital space, the most significant challenges nation-states face are remaining relevant and building trust. Digital trends change rapidly, and due to this fast-paced nature of digital communication, nation-states need to ensure that they and their messaging remain agile and adaptable. Now more than ever before reciprocity takes place over digital channels. In turn, building trust globally can be increasingly challenging. The coronavirus has been a key catalyst for the digitalisation of diplomacy, where there has been a fundamental shift in remote engagement. Leaders who only half-heartedly embraced digital platforms are now actively engaging in online mechanisms via Google Meet, Skype and Zoom. Nevertheless, for a number of diplomatic missions it proved challenging at times due to ongoing challenges such as slow internet connections or the lack of digital skills.

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<sup>49</sup> Ilan Manor, "The Social Network of G20 Leaders," G20 LIVE, 2015, <http://g20live.com/the-social-network-of-g20-leaders.php>.

<sup>50</sup> "Twiplomacy Study 2020," Twiplomacy, July 21, 2020, <https://twiplomacy.com/blog/twiplomacy-study-2020/>.

In this reality, the soft power conversation is changing from its traditional diplomacy legacy shaped by careful government actions in promoting the best of national cultural attributes to mass-consumer passionate exchange devoid of oversight. Traditionally, this oversight came from media outlets that commercialised limited print or screen space. Today screen space is a small fraction of the digital world where soft power exchange is driven by non-traditional channels which are constantly evolving and increasingly being shaped by individuals, not governments.<sup>51</sup> This has only been exacerbated in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic, with more organisations than ever before conducting summits, events and cultural exchanges online, such as the G7 Youth Summit 2021.

### **Final Considerations**

Soft power, nation-branding and public diplomacy are ongoing challenges for any nation-state. One of the biggest hurdles all countries face is the role of digital within international affairs. Digital diplomacy is a core part of any engagement by states, especially in the quest to foster meaningful reciprocity and trust. Persuasion remains the cornerstone of diplomacy, especially within a digital context. In the present day, no one is able to control how information and its trends flow across the globe. Governments have limited control in this way, and foreign missions need to be nimble and knowledgeable in order to be able to adapt accordingly.

The use of social media by diplomats has opened communication among policymakers and citizens. These tools, mainly Facebook and Twitter, offer diplomatic missions with direct access to citizens, both outside and inside their state. This communication mechanism regularly bypasses states and media filters, doubtlessly permitting nations to more successfully impact overseas audiences and achieve diplomatic objectives. Essentially, digital diplomacy has produced a metamorphosis of the behaviour of

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<sup>51</sup> See note 14.

conventional international relations. It defines modifications in systems and procedures of diplomatic missions abroad. Thus, digital diplomacy brings with it both possibilities and challenges. Social media can provide more effective tools to remedy societal problems. In this case, in conflict-ridden regions people can embrace social media to gain support in spaces where media is regularly subjected to blackouts and censorship. There are, however, some dangers related to developing a reliance on social media as a means of international relations. Regardless of the challenges with digital diplomacy, the opportunities seem to overshadow them.

With more people using the internet than ever before, it offers a huge opportunity for countries to foster their soft power perception and nation-branding efforts. Within this, if states combine both digital and traditional forms of diplomacy, they will be able to be more successful. By fostering mechanisms of digital diplomacy, nation-states can align their nation-branding messages to meet the needs of local audiences. The rise of the COVID-19 pandemic has clearly demonstrated how digital messaging is a vital part of any diplomatic effort. Diplomacy is experiencing an increased pivot to the importance of digital, successful approaches to soft power, while nation-branding is becoming more reliant on digital diplomacy than ever before.

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