



## *The Impact of Digital Diplomacy on the Performance of French Cultural Diplomacy*

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### **Abstract:**

This study aims to demonstrate the impact of the digital media revolution on French cultural diplomacy practices, and how digital diplomacy can help in promoting cultural communication between countries. This is particularly important, as the success of soft power relies on the promotion of cultural industries, the advancement of knowledge, and the creation of bridges for dialogue between nations. The study also shows the French diplomatic use of modern technology to improve cultural relations with other countries, including the use of social media and other digital applications. The study concludes that French digital diplomacy holds an important position, but it faces many challenges in implementing cultural diplomacy through electronic means.

**Keywords:** *Digital Diplomacy, Cultural Diplomacy, Soft Power, France.*

## INTRODUCTION

Diplomacy has gone through several historical stages; changing in its nature, form, and methods of implementation, in addition to the personalities responsible for its execution. Traditional diplomacy began by employing ambassadors, diplomats, and consuls to perform their duties abroad and strengthen relations between countries. It then evolved into new forms of diplomacy such as parallel diplomacy and track II diplomacy, ultimately leading to public diplomacy. Currently, new types of diplomacy have emerged relying on technology and electronic communication, which are entirely different from traditional diplomacy. It has developed significantly to keep up with the rapid development in the international community and international relations. Diplomacy's role is no longer limited to bilateral dealings between states but extends to cover all aspects of international relations, including cultural, commercial, and humanitarian relations. Thus, modern diplomacy relies on the exchange of views, opinions, experiences among countries, international organizations, private companies, and civil society using multiple and advanced communication methods such as social networks, email and virtual conferences.

Under this concept, many paths of diplomacy have emerged, the first being the official path that covers the means of communication, negotiation, and interaction between governments and states on various levels - bilateral, regional, and multinational. The second path is the informal framework wherein its importance and impact have grown since the beginning of the 1990s. It covers the means of communication and cooperation between non-governmental organizations and civil society. The third path involves businessmen in the private sector and deals with private and multinational companies. As for the fourth path, it is the path of communication and interaction between individuals in cultural, scientific, artistic, and sports fields through exchange programs and various cultural activities and the internet network. The fifth path is represented by the cooperation and interaction between the media through programs that introduce the other, and all these are collectively known as multi-track diplomacy. In the United States, a concept has evolved linking some of these paths, known as public diplomacy.

In recent years, the world has witnessed the emergence of a new concept of diplomacy that heavily relies on the use of modern and electronic technologies. Many governments around the world have recognized the importance of this type of diplomacy and have established specialized departments and offices for it in their foreign ministries, embassies, and presidential offices. For example, the United States has established a digital diplomacy office in its State Department. Moreover, Denmark has launched a "digital diplomacy" initiative. European efforts in digital diplomacy have included such departments in Britain and France.

Many European Union countries, controlled by France, have adopted a cultural diplomacy strategy that focuses on promoting cultural and artistic aspects as a form of soft power. Through this strategy, countries can exert influence on other countries in a non-violent and acceptable manner. This is achieved through the production of films and plays that are marketed through the internet, social media, and digital media, which help spread culture and the arts among people. This type of digital diplomacy is considered one of the most effective tools for achieving the ultimate goal of diplomacy, which is to establish strong and lasting relationships between countries, preserve their interests, and enhance bilateral cooperation in various fields.

Based on the above, this research paper addresses the following problem: To what extent does French digital diplomacy contribute to supporting its cultural policy?

To answer this problem and put it at the analytical level, two axes will be relied upon:

### **1.A conceptual approach to the study**

- 1.1 The nature of digital diplomacy.
- 1.2. The nature of cultural diplomacy.
- 1.3. The importance of the relationship between digital and cultural diplomacy.
- 2. The status of digital diplomacy in enhancing French cultural diplomacy**
  - 2.1. French cultural diplomacy.
  - 2.2. French digital diplomacy.
  - 2.3. Mechanisms and levels of digitalization in the cultural diplomacy field.
  - 2.4. Challenges that French digital diplomacy may face.

## 1. A conceptual approach to the study

Defining concepts is considered one of the most difficult stages in academic studies, where many terms and concepts in the field of international relations face difficulty in defining an accurate definition, due to the renewing and dynamic changes in political phenomena in this knowledge field, and the lack of a clear agreement among experts about their meanings. In this study, we will address the most important definitions related to these concepts.

### 1.1. The nature of digital diplomacy

The roots of diplomacy date back to ancient times where it was used for negotiations between kingdoms and ancient empires. Diplomacy has evolved throughout history, becoming a primary means for achieving a country's political, economic, cultural, and religious goals. In the 15th century, embassies emerged as a primary means of diplomacy. In the 17th century, the concept of international conferences arose, which brought together nations to resolve conflicts and establish international borders. In the 19th century, diplomacy became more complex due to political, social, and technological changes in the world, and diplomatic institutions, missions, and embassies were developed. In the second half of the 20th century, diplomacy became more specialized and complex due to the growth and diversification of international relations. The development of technology led to the emergence of electronic and digital diplomacy, which became a primary means of achieving diplomatic goals in the modern era.

The beginnings of using technology in diplomacy date back to the 1980s, when countries began using email to communicate with each other. Since then, digital diplomacy has evolved significantly, witnessing enormous transformations over the past decades. In the 1990s, email was first introduced in diplomacy, and the first embassies and diplomatic institutions used this technology to communicate with each other. In the new millennium, social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn became important tools for communicating with the public and directing diplomatic messages. In the mid-2000s, there was a significant development in digital technologies such as machine learning and virtual reality, and these technologies became available for use in diplomacy through the organization of digital events and virtual conferences.

In recent years, there has been an intensive use of modern technologies such as blockchain, artificial intelligence, and cloud computing, which are used to secure communications and direct diplomatic messages more effectively. These technologies are used in general, economics, and digital diplomacy. Therefore, digital diplomacy is a relatively new concept that did not emerge until the beginning of the new millennium. The term was widely used for the first time in 2001 when the US Department of State issued a report on the new public diplomacy, which included digital diplomacy.

#### 1.1.1. Definition of digital diplomacy

The term "digital diplomacy" consists of two terms: Diplomacy, which is defined as "the art of managing international relations and the process of managing transactions between states through dialogue and negotiation, as it is the language of dialogue, discussion, persuasion, and the art of dealing between international organizations and solving their problems, and it is the language of calm reason, not war and conflict, and it works to achieve what war fails to achieve and intervenes in economic, political, media, and cultural fields". (Snow, 2009) As for digitization, it is "the process of converting symbolic or informational signals in any form into a digital format that can be understood by computer systems or electronic devices. The term is used when converting information such as text, images, and sounds into binary code, and digital information is easier to store, access, and transmit. "Digitalization is used by a number of consumer electronic devices". (Shahin, 2019)

According to James Reisman, "digital diplomacy" is "the use of digital technology in the practice of diplomacy and international relations, including the use of the internet, social networks, email, video, audio, and image technologies to improve communication and

interaction between diplomats, citizens, civil society, government institutions, and businesses around the world." "Digital diplomacy also involves the use of big data analytics to collect and analyze digital data and information to improve decision-making and strategic planning in the diplomatic field".( Reismann, 2012)

Cornelio Gola and Marcus Holmes define digital diplomacy as "a form of public diplomacy that involves the use of digital technologies and social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc. by states to communicate with foreign audiences in a cost-effective way".(Corneliu & Marcus, 2015) This was confirmed by researcher Olubukola Adesina, who considered digital diplomacy to be "the diplomacy of websites and the services provided through them, using social media networks to communicate diplomatically with the external audience".(Abdelal, 2018).

Therefore, it can be said that digital diplomacy is the use of modern technology and electronic communication methods in the process of interaction and communication between states, diplomatic institutions, and individuals in a world of increasing digital integration. Digital diplomacy aims to enhance international relations and facilitate communication and cooperation at diplomatic, political, economic, and cultural levels. Digital diplomacy includes the use of email, social media, online forums, instant messaging, virtual conferences, and other modern technological tools to improve and enhance diplomatic communications.

### 1.1.2.Goals of digital diplomacy

The goals of digital diplomacy are numerous, including:( Reismann, 2012)

- Facilitating communication and interaction between countries and diplomatic institutions and reducing the time and effort expended in diplomatic communications.
- Providing more information and data on policies, economics, culture, and others, as well as providing statistical data and important reports to diplomats.
- Engaging with the public and citizens and improving the level of communication and transparency between the state and citizens.
- Providing a platform for e-learning and training for diplomats and employees in the diplomatic sector.
- Improving international cooperation in various fields such as trade, security, health, the environment, energy, and education.
- Developing and improving the reputation of the state in the international community and the virtual world and promoting a positive image of the state.
- Improving diplomatic relations between countries, reducing political friction, and facilitating dialogue between countries.
- Assisting diplomats in managing various diplomatic crises and challenges, such as humanitarian crises, wars, and economic and social crises.

### 1.1.3. Digital Diplomacy Forms:

Digital Diplomacy includes the following forms:( Reismann, 2012)

- **Online communication:** where modern means of communication such as email, chat, and video are used as a means of communication between diplomatic representatives and relevant parties.
- **Use of social media:** where social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn are used as a means to expand communication networks and improve communication between countries, international organizations, and individuals.
- **Virtual meetings:** where modern communication technologies such as video conferencing, voice chat, and others are used to hold virtual diplomatic meetings between diplomatic representatives.
- **Digital content:** where digital content such as videos, blogs, and websites are created to promote digital diplomacy and raise public awareness of important international issues.

Therefore, it can be said that digital diplomacy is an evolution of traditional diplomacy, which refers to the use of modern technology and digital media in carrying out diplomatic activities. This includes the use of electronic communications, online communication, and social media to achieve diplomatic goals. It can be used in various fields, such as communication between governments, diplomats, and international organizations, conducting negotiations and agreements online, organizing official visits and virtual international conferences, communicating with audiences and citizens in different countries, and enhancing a country's image in the digital world. It also provides new opportunities for enhancing international cooperation, exchanging information and expertise between countries and international organizations, and helping to resolve international disputes peacefully, promoting international security and stability in the digital age.

## **1.2. The nature of cultural diplomacy:**

The cultural dimension is considered one of the most important dimensions in the foreign policy of countries, and the concept of diplomacy has been associated with this dimension since the 1990s. This does not mean that talking about this dimension in international relations did not begin until this stage, but rather that the focus on this dimension in the analysis of international relations and diplomacy began to emerge specifically after the Cold War and the emergence of formation theories that focused on this aspect, most notably the social critical theory and the constructivist theory. The events of September 11, 2001, also opened up a wide field for a new type of conflict called cultural and civilizational conflict.

As for the concept of cultural diplomacy, it is a part of the foreign policy of countries and aims to enhance international relations through cultural interaction, artistic, educational, social, and sports exchanges between countries. Cultural diplomacy is based on the idea that culture, art, music, literature, and cultural heritage can be a source of communication, understanding, and cooperation between countries. It also includes language teaching, student and teacher exchanges, and the exchange of artists, historians, scientists, and intellectuals between countries. Cultural diplomacy also aims to enhance the image of the state in the world and increase understanding of different cultures, customs, and traditions among different peoples by showing the cultural diversity and multiplicity of cultures in the country. As is known, cultural diplomacy is a part of public diplomacy, which refers to the use of cultural elements as a means to improve diplomatic relations between countries and peoples. It includes various cultural elements such as arts, literature, music, dance, theater, film, sports, heritage, cuisine, entertainment, media, and education. (Kiefer, 2013)

As you know, cultural diplomacy is a part of public diplomacy, which refers to the use of cultural elements as a means to enhance diplomatic relations between countries and peoples. It includes various cultural elements such as arts, literature, music, dance, theater, film, sports, heritage, cuisine, entertainment, media, and education. (Kiefer, 2013)

The objectives of cultural diplomacy are achieved through various activities aimed at promoting understanding and rapprochement between different cultures. These activities include the exchange of artists, intellectuals, athletes, students, academics, and experts in various fields, as well as the organization of cultural, artistic, musical, and literary exhibitions and festivals, seminars, lectures, workshops, and conferences.

Cultural diplomacy helps to promote a positive image of the country in the international community and strengthen diplomatic relations between countries. It also helps to achieve stability and international peace. Cultural diplomacy is considered an important means of introducing the culture and heritage of a country and promoting understanding and rapprochement between different countries and cultures.

The idea of cultural diplomacy first emerged in the early 20th century, specifically in 1919 after World War I, when the idea of cultural work as a means of promoting understanding between nations and reducing diplomatic tensions was introduced. The first cultural diplomacy

institution was established in Paris in 1920, called the International Institute of Cultural Exchange (L'Institut international d'échanges culturels), followed by Germany and then Britain, which established the British Council in 1934. The United States established its official cultural program in 1938, and many countries around the world followed suit, making it a tradition to choose prominent figures in the arts and culture as ambassadors for their countries and create cultural relations departments within the framework of foreign ministries. (Naama, 2011). The concept of collective or international cultural diplomacy emerged in the early 21st century, when the League of Nations established the Center for Intellectual Cooperation in Paris, and in 1945, the United Nations established UNESCO, which still coordinates international cultural activities to this day.

### **1.3. The importance of the relationship between digital and cultural diplomacy**

Digital and cultural diplomacy are important elements in international relations and in achieving the external political objectives of countries. Digital diplomacy is linked to the effective use of information and communication technology in the decision-making process and the exchange of information between states and international organizations, while cultural diplomacy is linked to promoting understanding and dialogue between different cultures, including the dissemination of culture, heritage, language, art, music, literature, and sports to improve relations between countries.

The intersection of digital and cultural diplomacy can be found in certain aspects, where modern technology can be utilized to improve the dissemination of a nation's culture, art, and heritage, and promote its understanding abroad. Additionally, digital diplomacy can play a role in enhancing cultural relations between countries by facilitating communication and exchanging cultural information in a faster and more efficient manner. Since cultural diplomacy relies on communication and dialogue between different cultures, the use of modern technology and digital communication can aid in promoting this process and deepening the understanding of different cultures.

The intersection of digital and cultural diplomacy lies in the potential for modern technology to enhance the dissemination of a country's culture, art, and national heritage, and promote their understanding abroad. Furthermore, digital diplomacy can play a role in strengthening cultural relations between countries by facilitating communication between cultures and exchanging cultural information more quickly and efficiently. As cultural diplomacy relies on communication and dialogue between different cultures, the use of modern technology and digital communication can help enhance this process and deepen the understanding of some cultures for others.

The importance of linking these two types of diplomacy lies in what countries can gain from transmitting their culture to the public and increasing their soft power by using their human resources to interact with external audiences through social media. This linkage creates new ways to pass on a country's culture through easier, faster, and less expensive means by introducing citizens who participate in transmitting a country's culture online to audiences in other countries, contributing to the country's economic strength and securing its presence in the digital knowledge economy. Additionally, this linkage provides opportunities for interactive communication between different parties to create a collaborative environment across borders and allows for the flow of cultural products in both directions, not just in one direction as it used to be.

Therefore, the relationship between digital and cultural diplomacy is an integrated one, considering that cultural diplomacy sees digital diplomacy as one of its most effective, timely, and cost-efficient tools, and digital diplomacy cannot evolve without value-based interaction.

## **2. The status of digital diplomacy in enhancing French cultural diplomacy**

### **2.1. French cultural diplomacy**

Diplomatic relations and international influence have always been of special importance in the thinking of French leaders and political elites throughout history. The recognition of the importance of enhancing the French diplomatic presence in a world that is increasingly multipolar. Despite its economic, social, and cultural crises, France seeks to continue its policies on the global level, whether through war or by using its soft power and extensive global network of relationships.

Cultural diplomacy in France has been considered a vital and organized sector of the country's public policy, where the French government has given special attention to its cultural influence abroad since the end of the 19th century. Joseph Nye noted in his 2004 study "The American Soft Power" that France is one of the top spenders on foreign cultural relations, in terms of expenditure per capita. France has acquired extensive experience in cultural investment in historical and cultural references and shared it with many countries. This diplomacy is considered duplicative, as it is linked to a strong financial, political, and administrative framework from the center. (Nye, 2004)

France is considered one of the leading countries in the field of cultural diplomacy, with a rich and diverse cultural history that provides opportunities for great success in this field. Paris, the capital of France, is also one of the most important cultural cities in the world, attracting millions of tourists and visitors from all over the world thanks to the presence of many museums, exhibitions, theaters, and prestigious libraries. In 2019, French cultural diplomacy achieved a strong presence on the scene, with 191 circles of cultural cooperation and work, 111 cultural institutes, 450 French associations, 60,000 cultural events, 10,000 artists and intellectuals visiting 150 countries, and 9,000 books translated into foreign languages. In addition, 215 million homes watch the Francophone channel TV5, and 384,600 foreign students study in France, with 15,380 foreign students benefiting from the French government scholarship. France has 163 embassies and 89 consulates in countries around the world, making it the third most powerful diplomatic presence globally, after China and the United States. (Khalid, 2016).

On the cultural front, France has a vast network of organizations dedicated to teaching the French language and transmitting French knowledge and expertise around the world. One of the most important of these institutions is the Francophonie organization, which has 84 member countries. For decades, France has also pursued a policy of building, expanding, and modernizing its French schools on all four corners of the globe, and today the number of these schools has reached 459, with an increasing number of students. France has an excellent reputation as a place to educate the national elite. (Khalid, 2016)

French cultural values and standards are considered foundational and organic constants that have defined its foreign policy philosophy over the years and decades. This is based on its belief in the need to preserve its distinct cultural and linguistic position on a global level, particularly within its historical sphere of influence. Since the French Revolution, this idea has been established that France is the living embodiment of universal values and that it is its responsibility to spread these values throughout the world. What is noteworthy is that despite the diversity of fields, different systems, and governing majorities, the discourse continues to be that France considers itself authorized to accomplish a task that it believes is for the benefit of all humanity, namely the mission of spreading its unique social and cultural project throughout the world. This mission has made France a global force with a humanitarian dimension.

France presents a model of a soft power state that relies on traditional cultural and linguistic diplomacy. France has benefited from its leadership in literary and intellectual history since the Enlightenment and has dedicated itself to this legacy since the French Revolution. In this context, France is considered the first to introduce the term "cultural policy" into the language and make it common. The kings, especially François I (1547-1515) and Louis XIV (1643-1715), were the first protectors and defenders of literature and the arts in France. This policy emerged as a result of the constant pursuit by royal and republican dynasties to nurture spiritual, artistic, and literary creativity, considering it their true national wealth. Gradually, the idea of France's political responsibility, and then legal, financial, and administrative responsibility

towards the arts and creativity in general, crystallized from these positions. The establishment of Cardinal Richelieu's "French Language Academy" in 1653 can be considered the first institutional appearance of French cultural policy to promote French ideas throughout Europe.(Loic, 2013)

Diplomacy has been viewed as a vitally organized sector of public policy in France, which has shown particular interest in its cultural influence abroad since the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, when France was among the pioneers in this field. France tried to organize its cultural spread worldwide by establishing standardized rules for teaching the French language abroad, which was accomplished by creating the "French League" in 1883.(Loic, 2013)In 1909, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs established the Office of Schools and Services Abroad, which organizes agreements between France and other countries to determine the conditions for teaching the French language.After the two world wars, French cultural institutions spread, centered around the Mediterranean basin, and then expanded to South America and the rest of Europe before spreading to Asia. Some of these institutions include the Florence Institute in 1908, the London Institute in 1910, the Lisbon Institute in 1928, the Stockholm Institute in 1937, and so on.(Loic, 2013)

However, new global phenomena brought about by globalization have made societies more threatened than states. States now see their roles changing without reviewing their sovereignty, which has posed a great challenge to French cultural diplomacy. France has come to realize that the decline of great powers begins with their exit from the circle of soft power in the flow of intellectual discourse, as well as their weakness in formulating or modeling humanity from their perspective.

In light of these transformations and the challenges they pose to French privacy and its civilizational role, French efforts are focused on reviving its cultural diplomacy through digital diplomacy.

## **2.2 French digital diplomacy**

The Internet revolution has affected all aspects of life, including international relations. This revolution has also turned diplomacy into a tool of foreign policy, as it focuses on the use of digital media in diplomacy. Today, it has evolved on two levels: the first stems from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and from embassies around the world, and the second is through the interaction of organizations and individuals working on these two levels.

According to a study by the global public relations company Burson-Marsteller, Facebook ranks second after Twitter in terms of usage by diplomats and government institutions on a global scale. The study, which monitored the activity and effectiveness of heads of state, government officials, and foreign ministers based on Twitter data, coined the term "Diplomacy" for this digital diplomacy. The study followed 951 active Twitter accounts, including 372 personal accounts and 579 institutional accounts from 187 countries. Statistical results showed that Twitter is the main communication channel for digital diplomacy for about 131 foreign ministers and 107 foreign ministries worldwide, according to the Anadolu Agency. France is among the top countries with the highest number of tweets on Twitter, and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs tweets in five languages other than French: Arabic, English, Russian, and Spanish.(Al-Sweidan, 2018)

These important statistics indicate the significance of this qualitative shift in communication patterns, which has prompted France and other governments to maximize the benefits of this radical development. France is considered one of the leading countries in the field of digital diplomacy, which it calls "diplomacy of influence". It ranked second in the 2016 Digital Diplomacy Report. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs established its own website in 1995, and the French Diplomacy website receives about 1.7 million visitors per month.(Al-Sweidan, 2018)

France is one of the leading countries in adopting digital technologies in diplomacy. It has adopted a digital diplomatic strategy called "la diplomatie numérique" that focuses on using



digital technologies and social media to enhance interaction between countries, institutions, and citizens and to improve the country's global image. This strategy aims to expand the scope of diplomatic relations to include a larger number of people and achieve a greater impact in different communities.

France's digital diplomacy tools and practices include a diverse range of methods such as official websites, social media accounts for embassies and ministries, digital training courses for diplomats, and digital platforms for interacting with the public and citizens. It can be said that French digital diplomacy seeks to achieve classic diplomatic objectives through modern and innovative methods, reflecting the digital and technological transformations that have taken place in the modern era.

The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs considers digital diplomacy to be an extension of traditional diplomacy, based on innovations and the use of information and communication technologies. However, digital tools are only a means of information transmission and contribute to changing the face of diplomatic activity. Since 2008-2009, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has adopted a policy of duplicity regarding communication via social networks. For example, it was the first French ministry to open a Twitter account in the spring of 2009: @francediplo. (Zemmam, 2001)

Since 2012, the monthly Q&A session on Twitter has been launched, which allows for exchanging opinions with officials at the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs through QRdiplo. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also opened accounts under the name "French Diplomacy" on several platforms in different languages, including the Ministry's channel (FrancediploTV) on YouTube, on Dailymotion, on Facebook in French and English, on Twitter in French, English (@francediplo-EN), Arabic (@francediplo-AR), Spanish (@francediplo-ES), and travel advice on Twitter (@ConseilsVoyages). Private sector organizations, civil society, and friendship associations may also undertake the same task while coordinating with diplomatic entities. (Zemmam, 2001)

Therefore, it can be said that the concept of social media diplomacy is no longer limited to the relationship between one state and another, but it has also become a connection between the state and civil society. These means provide the ministry with the possibility of listening to the public and exchanging opinions with them directly.

### **2.2.1. French digital diplomacy objectives**

The main objectives of French digital diplomacy can be summarized as follows: (Al-Sweidan, 2018)

- Coordinating efforts among all state agencies to manage relevant resources and harness human resources in order to use them optimally to achieve national interests abroad and increase soft power.
- Maintaining communication with the public in the virtual world and leveraging new communication tools to listen to, communicate with, and influence them using the state's main messages online.
- Capitalizing on the massive flow of information and using it to improve French policy-making and help anticipate emerging social and political movements and respond to them.
- Strengthening consular communications with the public and creating direct personal communication channels with citizens so that they can be reached in times of crisis.
- Promoting freedom of expression and democracy, as well as undermining dictatorial systems, as this technology allows everyone to use it and express their opinion.
- Creating digital mechanisms to benefit from external experiences and resources and harness them to promote French national goals.

Therefore, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs considers digital diplomacy as a solution to the problems of foreign policy on the Internet, as it allows for listening, publishing, sharing, and evaluating in new and interesting ways. Moreover, it can expand the scope of access and direct communication with civil society, as well as governments and influential individuals.

### 2.2.2. The French Digital Strategy

Also known as "La Stratégie Numérique Française," is a comprehensive framework launched by the French government in 2013 to promote France's transformation into a strong, diverse, and innovative digital economy. This strategy includes numerous initiatives and measures aimed at developing digital infrastructure, enhancing digital technology and innovation, promoting cybersecurity and privacy, improving access to digital services and education, promoting creative industries, and advocating for digital technology and innovation. This comprehensive framework aims to improve France's economic growth and strengthen its position as a leading country in digital technology.

On December 15, 2017, the French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Jean-Yves Le Drian, presented the French International Digital Strategy ("La Stratégie Internationale de la France pour le Numérique"), which aims to enhance France's role in the international arena as a leading force in the digital economy and technological innovation. This strategy includes several initiatives and goals, such as:(Al-Mousawi, 2018)

- Enhancing international cooperation in digital technology and innovation and promoting partnerships between the public and private sectors in different countries.
- Advocating for the concept of comprehensive cybersecurity and promoting international cooperation in this field.
- Improving access to digital services and biotechnology in developing and poor countries.
- Supporting the development of creative and cultural industries in different countries by enhancing digital rights and cultural exchange.
- Promoting French values in the digital realm, such as strengthening the French language online and enhancing cultural exchange between France and different countries.

This strategy aims to enhance France's role in the international arena and achieve sustainable development worldwide by investing in digital technology and promoting international cooperation in this field.

## 2.3. Mechanisms and levels of digitalization in the cultural diplomacy field

### 2.3.1. Mechanisms of Digitization in French Cultural Diplomacy

France adopts many digital mechanisms and tools in cultural diplomacy to enhance interaction and cultural communication with other countries. Some of these mechanisms include:(Naama, 2011)

- **Websites:** France provides specialized websites to support cultural diplomacy, such as the "France Abroad" website, which provides information about French culture, and academic and cultural opportunities available to students, academics, and artists from all over the world.
- **Digital Applications:** France provides digital applications that aim to promote French culture and enhance cultural interaction, such as the "France" application that allows users to access cultural events, museums, exhibitions, theaters, and French restaurants.
- **Social Media:** France uses social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to communicate with a global audience and promote French culture. These platforms are also used to announce cultural events and participate in cultural dialogue and exchange.
- **Distance Learning:** France provides many distance learning programs for students, academics, and artists from all over the world. These programs include academic courses,

artistic workshops, and cultural courses that help promote friendship and understanding among people.

### 2.3.2 Digital levels in French cultural diplomacy

The digital field in France is a significant influencing force in both the essence of national policy and the process by which it is formulated, particularly in the field of foreign policy. This is through the way these media devices operate internationally, which was most prominent in the relationship between social media and the French system and the relationship between both national governments around the world.

All of this has led to the Internet being closely linked to the French political system, allowing the media to informally influence French decision-making. This has made it a supporting party in the field of foreign policy and international relations, where the media has become the intermediary link between nations, and France relies on it to interpret the nature of its relationships with other countries through direct communication with the public. This is done using the media as a mechanism for spreading and promoting its culture, language, and orientation in support of its international role and for further linking and fostering dependency between it and other countries, (Serfaty, 2001) especially African ones. For the purpose of spreading its cultural diplomacy, which it considers a fundamental condition for its survival, particularly in Africa, France has used digital diplomacy, which it considers its best servant, at both the international and individual levels, as well as the European Union level.

#### A. Government Level: "Impact Diplomacy" in French Cultural Diplomacy

Impact Diplomacy is a modern tool used by diplomats in various fields, including French cultural diplomacy, aimed at enhancing a state's influence in other societies and finding solutions to international problems. This tool includes the use of social media and modern technology to spread cultural messages and promote a positive image of the state. France is working on developing strategies for Impact Diplomacy in its cultural diplomacy, where various ministries dealing with cultures, such as the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, use modern tools to improve France's cultural image abroad.

The social network has become an essential element in this diplomacy, where more than 280 French diplomatic missions have a website, with around fifteen languages used on these sites. There are about one hundred embassies and consulates present on social networks. Although embassies and consulates primarily use Twitter and Facebook, they are capable of adapting to the types of use and most commonly used platforms in the relevant country. For example, the French Embassy in China uses Weibo. (Khalid, 2016)

The digital influence diplomatic strategy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs includes the diplomatic network in various key development areas in this field, through the following: (Khalid, 2016)

- Support in the field of editing and providing a model website for the embassy or consulate, providing solutions regarding website hosting, providing assistance over the phone or online, and providing guidance for self-learning. This support is related to communication through the official website and social networks.
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has developed a social media training program since 2011, aimed at all diplomats leaving to work in one of the diplomatic missions abroad. It also offers training courses mid-career, within the Diplomatic and Consular Institute (IDC)

#### B. The Role of the Individual in Digital Cultural Diplomacy

As the role of citizens increases through social media and their impact on political and foreign policy, France has sought to leverage this factor to better promote its cultural policies through the digital realm. While official institutions have tried to use social media to promote their cultural policies, this remains limited, especially in the realm of cultural influence. Therefore, the growing role of the individual in popular diplomacy is utilized, meaning connecting individuals from different countries and undertaking individual efforts to serve their country's

interests. This includes a wide range of activities that individuals can do to strengthen ties between people and spread values and cultures. Therefore, the British Council sees cultural diplomacy as building trust and engagement among peoples through the exchange of knowledge and ideas, which is known as citizen diplomacy. (Al-Amoud, 2018)

This is especially important given the current challenge facing digital diplomacy, as identified by the Malta Conference on Innovation in Diplomacy held on November 19–20, 2012. This challenge requires distinctive cultural insights, an understanding of global variables, and the need for diplomats to adapt to the new international environment, known as innovative diplomatic culture. This talent can be found in non-diplomats, as emphasized by the Stockholm seminar organized by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which highlighted the importance of diplomats recognizing that the new diplomatic culture is not confined to traditionally trained professionals. (Saleh, 2015)

The challenge for France at this level is how to build networks of trained influencers and actors who can effectively use the data and information revolution to influence the public and shape the image of the country abroad. Those who have built networks of followers on platforms such as Twitter and others can play an important role in promoting French cultural diplomacy, and therefore France is working to attract more of them.

This link between digital and cultural diplomacy, and expanding the role of citizens in using social media to convey cultural products, opens up opportunities for Arab-Islamic culture to increase its soft power globally and increase its presence in the Arab world. This link opens up opportunities to develop both types of diplomacy together, as well as to develop public diplomacy and build long-term relationships between peoples. Therefore, the relationship between them is complementary, considering that cultural diplomacy is considered one of the most effective, time-saving, and cost-effective digital diplomacy tools. Also, digital diplomacy cannot be developed without meaningful interaction

#### 2.4. Challenges that French digital diplomacy may face

The French digital diplomacy faces many challenges in implementing French cultural diplomacy, including:

- **Language challenges:** It may be difficult to understand and translate the diverse language and cultural expressions in different countries, leading to difficulty in effective communication and understanding important cultural details.
- **Technology challenges:** Digital diplomacy requires the use of advanced technology, but diplomats may face difficulties in using these technologies or understanding how to use them effectively.
- **Privacy and cybersecurity issues:** Diplomats may face challenges related to protecting personal data and cybersecurity, especially when using social media and email to communicate with other individuals and organizations.
- **Cultural restrictions:** Diplomats may need to respect cultural and social restrictions in other countries, which can hinder their ability to effectively promote French cultural diplomacy.
- **Financial challenges:** Digital diplomacy may require additional financial and human resources, but obtaining these resources may be a challenge for the French government amid current economic challenges.

#### Conclusion:

This virtual world and its digital platforms have become a reality in our world, interfering in our daily lives and affecting the political and commercial relationships of countries. The global e-commerce trade, which reached 23 trillion dollars in 2016, is the most prominent evidence of this. The observer of the international scene finds that countries have become forced to

influence this digital world, which has become one of the indicators of the strength of countries. Countries that cannot defend their interests in the digital field or even protect themselves from the consequences of electronic warfare are weak countries.

All of the above reflects the extent of the influence of the digital world on the reality of international relations and how it contributed to changing communication mechanisms and making countries, especially the strong ones, obliged to defend their interests within this world and for the important companies in it. Digital diplomacy has created its own channels that differ from traditional diplomatic channels. It is a diplomacy in itself that has its own special style that differs from traditional diplomacy. One of the advantages of this new diplomacy is that it is transparent and fast, and its impact is evident. It is not limited to countries but can also be practiced by individuals, groups, and organizations.

As for the most prominent negatives, there is a lack of international law regulating it and the dangers of piracy and electronic warfare. Today, no one denies that cyberattacks have become more dangerous than any military attack, and electronic espionage is considered the most dangerous type of espionage in history.

### Recommendations:

The following recommendations can be made to control the negatives of digitalization and benefit from its positives in the cultural field:

- The necessity of achieving integrated diplomacy and building a national diplomatic system. In fact, it cannot be imagined that digital diplomacy will replace traditional diplomacy or that citizens will replace virtual diplomats. In the diplomatic domain, there are tasks that virtual diplomats cannot perform, and there are tasks that citizens cannot perform.
- The necessity of regulating the digital world through international law, which sets out clear and comprehensive rules to protect countries and their citizens from piracy and cyberattacks,
- Encouraging cultural exchange between countries that contributes to enhancing understanding, respect, and tolerance among nations, as well as promoting peace, coexistence, and cooperation.
- Supporting scientific research in the field of digital technology to provide a solid foundation for the development of this technology and its positive and effective use in various fields.

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