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**Digital Diplomacy and the Transformation of American Foreign
Policy in the Age of Social Media**

**Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
Master's degree in literature and Civilization**

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to:

My dear parents, whose love, sacrifices, prayers, and constant encouragement gave me the strength to complete this journey. Even without fully understanding the details of this dissertation, they always believed in its importance and in my ability to succeed.

My dear siblings: Taouba, Ghoufrane, Djinane, Ratil, Abderrazak, and Zakaria, thank you for being a constant source of motivation, positivity, and strength throughout this experience.

My friends, thank you for your support, encouragement, and for always believing in me and standing by my side throughout this academic journey.

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the transformation of American foreign policy through digital diplomacy in the age of social media, in order to explain how U.S. diplomatic communication has developed between two key conflicts: The Iraq War (2003), which has not witnessed to the broad spread of social media. and the Ukraine War (2022–2024), which took place a fully digitalized communication environment. It also aims to identify transitions in diplomatic norms, performed national identity, and audience construction across these two instances, showing that digital platforms have radically reshaped what is considered as legitimate diplomatic practice. .Three fundamental shifts were revealed as results. First, diplomatic norms transferred from formal, evidence-informed, government -to-government communication to straightforward, confrontational, absolutist moral discourse conveyed through social platforms. Second, U.S. performed national identity to steadfast defender and ethical reformer acting without reluctance, after it was characterized as a hesitant superpower balanced with moral emancipator. Third, the target audience enlarged from citizens of the United States and foreign governments to contain foreign public directly talked via YouTube and social media, bypassing state gatekeepers, this study outcomes verify that digital diplomacy has transformed American foreign policy across norms, identity, and audience.

Keywords: Constructivism, Digital diplomacy, social platforms, Identity, Norms, audience construction

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Introduction

1. Background of the Study

One of the most significant developments in the twenty-first century has been the speed of technological progress, which has influenced the economic and industrial landscape as well as social interaction, communication and the building of knowledge. As societies increasingly rely on digital systems, technology has gained a central role in influencing power dynamics on both domestic and international levels. In the political sphere, the growth of digital platforms and communication technology has significantly changed how global actors interact with audiences around the world, create opinions, and conduct political power.

These developments have created new spaces for political discourse beyond the control of the State institutions, in which information and narratives could be distributed and disseminated more rapidly and widely than ever before. In the American context, technology has also become a tool of foreign policy, rather than a simple communication method, and a digital diplomacy has emerged as a pillar of the diplomatic effort to pursue national interests and international influence. The emergence of digital diplomacy, or e-diplomacy, signifies a substantial transformation in diplomatic practices. It enhances traditional diplomatic methods by integrating digital communication technologies and social media platforms, thereby broadening the diplomatic toolkit available to practitioners . Unlike traditional diplomacy, which was dependent on formal and hierarchical communication lines, digital diplomacy allows governments, foreign ministries and embassies to interact directly with foreign publics, to observe and respond promptly to international developments, and to follow the processes of international communication.

Today, diplomacy has become a highly public and dynamic information world in which states have to manage traditional diplomatic values of discretion and protocol alongside the growing expectations for quick response, media presence and public interaction . This transformation has become particularly evident during global geopolitical conflicts, especially the 2003 Iraq invasion and the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, where evolving media technologies and digital communication strategies presented clear shifts in the performance of American diplomatic identity and foreign policy discourse across different technological and media environments.

2. Statement of the Problem

The study addresses a gap in research on how social media has transformed American diplomatic communication. To identify specific shifts in norms, national identity performance, and audience formation, this dissertation adopts a constructivist framework to compare discourse across the two conflicts and determine whether these changes are fundamental or merely technological.

3. Aims of the Study

This study conducts a comparative analysis of American diplomatic communication during both the Iraq and the Ukraine wars in order to trace shifts in its underlying norms. In order to determine whether the observed transformation reflects a deeper reconfiguration of diplomatic activity or, alternatively, a more limited adaptation to new media technologies, the study looks at how official discourse is constructed and conveyed across these two conflicts. Moreover, it looks at the effectiveness of the American identity in the two settings and highlights both commonalities and differences. Finally, it examines the transformation of audience engagement

from the traditional diplomatic sphere to a wider global audience directly targeted via social media like YouTube.

4. Research Questions

1. What has changed in the norms of American diplomacy between the Iraq War (2003) and the Ukraine War (2022–2024)?
2. How has the U.S. performed national identity changed across these two conflicts?
3. How has the intended audience of American foreign policy communication transformed between these two cases?
4. How has digital diplomacy reshaped American foreign policy in the social media era ?

5. Research Methodology

a. Data Collection

this study applies a qualitative comparative case-based research study, which examining American diplomatic communication during two separate periods: the Iraq War (2003) and the Ukraine War (2022–2024).and the aim of selecting these two distinct cases ,because they reflect phases earlier and during broad adoption of social media as a diplomatic instrument. making possible systematic comparison of communication practices across diverse media environments. In the case of the Iraq War, the data collected focus on official press releases, transcriptions of Secretary of State Colin Powell's speeches and press briefings and televised addresses by President George W. Bush in 2003. For the Ukraine War, the data center is official videos of U.S on YouTube from 2022 to early 2024, as well as press conference transcripts of the press conferences of U.S. President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken in 2022-early 2024.The corpus comprises contains additional material

like Prime Minister Boris Johnson's speech to the Ukrainian parliament, which is provided to allow a comparison of allied diplomatic correspondence.

b. Corpus

The following tables present a comprehensive list of the political speeches analyzed in this study, along with their publication dates and links to their speeches.

Table 1

Iraq War Corpus (2003)

Speaker	Affiliation	Date	Link
George W. Bush	Conservative	19/03/2003	https://youtu.be/Euqsbr_xr38
George W. Bush	Conservative	01/05/2003	https://youtu.be/5yCsmwoMecU
Colin Powell	Conservative	05/02/2003	https://youtu.be/Jf6vUTVL4mI

Table 2**Ukraine War Corpus (2022–2024)**

Speaker	Affiliation	Date	Link
Joe Biden	Press conference	24/02/2022	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyrvIYWsk_E
Antony Blinken	Press conference	26/01/2022	https://www.youtube.com/live/xpVc882jUo8
Antony Blinken	a joint press	15/05/2024	https://youtu.be/r70WEg7p-hA?si=vk6M1AyOfAAXLQYw
Boris Johnson	Conservative	05/04/2022	https://youtu.be/R5egttiMfKo

c. Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeds through a qualitative deductive approach guided by the constructivist theoretical framework. The analysis is structured around three dimensions derived from constructivism: diplomatic norms, performed national identity, and audience construction. Each dimension is operationalized as follows. First, diplomatic norms are examined through the formality or informality of language, the communication channel employed, the emotional register deployed, and the degree of institutional mediation present in each communication. Second, expressed national identity is studied via the way of the United States representing itself: the attributes, values, and roles it claims, and how it represents significant others by means of characterization, attribution of objectives, and moral positioning. Third, audience building explored through identifying the explicit and implied addressees of each communication,

whether foreign governments, international institutions, domestic publics, or foreign citizens communicate directly.

For each corpus item, analysis carries on systematically. The communication is first reviewed for its formal properties, medium, format, length, and delivery context. The verbal content is then coded for lexical choices, metaphors, framing devices, and interpretive language that construct Self and Other. Where applicable, visual and multimodal elements are analyzed for how they bolster or make more complex verbal messaging. The results from each case are then juxtaposed to determine continuities and transformative shifts between the two time periods. This framework of comparison will allow for a systematic identification of the differences in diplomatic practice, identity performance and audience engagement between the pre-social media and the social media eras, which will serve as empirical support in the overall argument of the dissertation about digital diplomacy and change in American foreign policy.

6. Significance of the Study

This research contributes to the study of digital diplomacy and American foreign policy in two main ways. Directly by contrasting American diplomatic discourse before and after the emergence of social media during two different cases, showing not only that it has changed but specifically how formal, institutionally controlled messaging has given way to direct, personalized communication that actively reshapes the relationship between the state and foreign publics. Constructivist theory is also applied to three key areas in the analysis: audience, national identity, and diplomatic norms. Instead of merely describing communication as an impartial exchange of information, this offers a flexible structure that defines communication as something that actively constructs and legitimizes what represents effective diplomacy.

7. Structure of the Dissertation

There are two main chapters in this dissertation. The first chapter is intended to introduce the theoretical background, particularly the development of diplomacy from traditional state-centric concepts to Public Diplomacy and Digital Diplomacy concepts. It sets out the conditions for foreign policy in the digital era, considers the influence that social media has on diplomacy and explores the tension between personalised and institutional communication. A constructivist framework is proposed emphasizing discourse, identity construction, and narrative projection. The second, empirical chapter divides into two parts. The first part sets a pre-digital baseline by analyzing diplomatic norms, national identity, and audience construction during the U.S. wars in Iraq in 2003, using the constructivist approach. The second part examines the Ukraine War, evaluating the personalization of blame, performative transparency and direct communication with foreign audiences in the US diplomatic communication under the Biden administration, which sought moral absolutism. This synthesis illustrates a fundamental transformation in American diplomatic practice shaped by the social media era.

CHAPTER ONE

Chapter One: Digital Diplomacy and American Foreign Policy: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

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Introduction

This chapter describes the conceptual and theoretical structure necessary for investigating digital diplomacy and its important impact on American foreign policy in the era of social media. The rapid growth of digital platforms has fundamentally transformed the ways in which states communicate, formulate identities, and interact with cross-border audiences, needing structured academic emphasis on these arising practices. The chapter also covers the development of diplomacy from traditional state-centered interaction, passing through the public diplomacy appearance of diplomacy as a unique practice. It then addresses foreign policy in the digital age, identifying its main aims and elements while paying attention to the special features of US foreign policy. Furthermore, the chapter focuses on how discourse, identity, and narrative construction form the foreign policy behavior and international reality, by framing it within a constructivist theoretical framework, which is operationalized across three analytical dimensions at the end of the chapter, so as to guide future empirical research. The conceptual terms and analytical framework that this dissertation will apply to analyze American digital diplomatic practice are provided by these sections taken collectively.

1.1 Conceptualizing Diplomacy in International Relations

1.1.1 Traditional Diplomacy V.s Public Diplomacy

Traditional diplomacy remains the basic, state-centric framework for international relations. Wiseman and Sharp (2017) describe it as the institutional representation of national security interests, while Berridge (2015) identifies it as the principle alternative to violent conflict. This approach relies on formalized bureaucratic channels, documented protocols, and its confidential nature (Neumann, 2013; Jönsson & Hall, 2005). However, traditional diplomacy

faces substantial contemporary limitations, such as structural rigidity, or institutional inflexibility (Bjola & Kornprobst, 2018), a lack of ability to engage non-state entities sufficiently well in an interconnected world (Slaughter, 2017; Cooper, 2013), and democratic legitimacy worries (Nye, 2008; Neumann, 2012).

In response, public diplomacy has appeared as a conceptual broadening behind closed-door negotiations, as stated by Melissen (2005) and Cull (2009). It involves intentional interaction with foreign publics to manage the international environment and rally sustain for policy goals. Public diplomacy has evolved from Cold War-era one-way broadcasting into detailed two-way communication interwoven with soft power (Nye, 2004, 2008; Cull, 2008), and includes establishing direct relationship-building through cultural and educational exchanges or interactions (Snow & Taylor, 2009; Pamment, 2013; Signitzer & Coombs, 1992) and strategic image-building or "nation branding" that requires substantive policy coherence to maintain credibility (Anholt, 2007; Van Ham, 2008; Wang, 2006; Szondi, 2008). This transition change, from a strictly hierarchical and confidential model to a more relational communication perspective, inspired by the erosion of state information control and the spread of public opinion, in the final analysis, builds the conceptual framework described as a game changer: digital diplomacy, which uses networked technologies to further accelerate, democratize and transform the practice of international engagement.

1.1.2 Digital Diplomacy

The term "digital diplomacy", also referred to as "e-diplomacy," "cyber diplomacy," or "diplomacy", refers to how diplomatic actors use digital technologies and web-based platforms to conduct foreign policy operations. Bjola and Holmes (2015, p. 4) argue that social media is employed for diplomatic objectives, covering both the practice of diplomacy through digital

tools and the study of its impacts. Manor (2016, p.3) extends this definition to include "the increasing use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and social media platforms within the practice of diplomacy" and notes that digital diplomacy represents both "an extension of public diplomacy" and "a transformation of diplomatic practice" .

Digital diplomacy includes a wide range of varied and multiple diplomatic functions. According to Hanson (2012), there are four major domains: international policy coordination, consular service provision and crisis response, public diplomacy engagement with foreign audiences, and knowledge management within foreign ministries. In contrast to previous technological adoptions in diplomatic practice, which typically reinforced existing communication channels, digital diplomacy alters the nature of diplomatic interaction.

The rise of digital diplomacy is a reflection of transformations in the international communication environment. Castells (2009) argues that the network society, marked by horizontal communication flows and reduced gatekeeping capacity, fundamentally shifts the context within which diplomacy takes place; this means that information no longer travels only from government to the population, but also flows between citizens and organizations directly and rapidly weakening the state's control and oversight capacities (p. 55). As a result, diplomatic players must negotiate communication environments shaped by a variety of conflicting sources and narratives. Seib (2012) calls this phenomenon as "real-time diplomacy," in which "public opinion mobilizes rapidly in response to emerging crises" and "events occur too quickly for careful, behind-the-scenes deliberations to keep pace" (p. 8).

Gilboa (2016) highlights how digital diplomacy evolves core diplomatic conceptions, noting that "digital technologies enable new forms of diplomatic interaction that blur traditional

distinctions between public and private, local and international, and official and unofficial communication" (p. 542). This boundary-blurring represents a significant departure from traditional diplomacy, which emphasized clear institutional hierarchies and tightly controlled communication channels.

1.1.3.1 Digital Diplomacy and Social Media

Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and messaging applications like WhatsApp and Telegram form the foundational technological base for digital diplomacy. These platforms are the primary ones used by diplomatic actors for making interaction with international audience and announcing their political positions. Duncombe (2018) considers that social media has become an essential tool for diplomatic communication, as it enables direct and unmediated access to foreign audiences, while at the same time presenting new complexities concerning authenticity, tone and audience segmentation (p. 337).

Several scholars, including Manor and Segev (2020), document that by 2020, on multiple platforms, all foreign ministers and the vast majority of individual diplomatic missions maintained active social media presences across multiple platforms. Consequently, the adoption of social media by diplomatic instructions has progressed rapidly. According to Khatib, Dutton, and Thelwall (2012), social media plays a significant role in diplomacy due to several unique advantages; accessibility that allows direct communication without media intermediaries; interactivity that permits two-way exchange with foreign publics; virality that facilitates rapid information spread, and networked connectivity that supports relationship creation across geographic and institutional boundaries.

In the diplomatic practice field, the role of social media may extend beyond communication to involve identity construction and narrative projection. Kampf, Manor, and Segev (2015) demonstrates that nations use social media to perform national identity through selected content, showing that platforms function as spaces for "digitally mediated self-presentation" in which nations express and enact their desired international images (p. 337). In a similar vein, Spry (2018) analyzes how diplomatic social media accounts project and create "digital statecraft" through strategic content options regarding what to emphasize, what to leave out, and the art of shaping political positions (p. 111).

Social media also allows new types of diplomatic interaction with non-traditional viewers. Cornelissen and Horstmeier (2020) show that these platforms facilitate networked public diplomacy, allowing diplomatic actors to engage with diaspora communities, civil societies, and individual influencers instead of having to rely solely on the elite interlocutors. This ability broadens the scope of diplomatic action while simultaneously increasing the complexity of audience fragmentation and control of messages.

1.1.3.2 Digital Diplomacy Key Features

There are various characteristics of digital diplomacy that make it different from traditional diplomacy and the previous forms of public diplomacy. First of all, digital diplomacy can be defined by disintermediation, or the ability to reach out to foreign audiences in a direct way without mediators of traditional media. According to Copeland (2013), the concept of disintermediation allows diplomatic actors to avoid editorial interlocutors in foreign media organizations and convey policy posts in their own language. However this approach eliminates the traditional buffer role provided by media intermediaries (p. 61).

Second, instead of using hierarchical communication systems, it uses networked ones. Melissen and Keulenaar (2017) argue that the network logic of digital platforms is fundamentally different from the hierarchical logic of traditional diplomatic institutions that creates tensions between existing organizational cultures and new forms of communication. Diplomats have to operate in an environment where power lies in the network and contact rather than formal positions.

A third distinguishing feature is the unprecedented time compression produced by digital diplomacy . Pamment (2016) describes it as the speeding up of the diplomatic time, where the slow pace of diplomatic communication (deliberate, in-person communication) is replaced by the anticipation of instant replay. Social media encourages immediate response to events, and sustained silence in response to unfolding events is also a form of communication that is open to interpretation.

A fourth aspect concerns the significant transparency implications of digital diplomacy. Bjola (2018) notes that digital diplomacy makes visible aspects of the diplomatic practice, which have so far remained out of view of the public, such as in-house policy arguments, negotiating stances, and institutional interests (p. 86). While such transparency may help in increasing democratic accountability, it may also limit the confidential forums necessary for sensitive diplomatic communication, effectively shifting interactions from private setting to the public sphere.

Fifth, digital diplomacy blurs the lines between internal and international communication. According to Hocking and Melissen (2015), the messages shared to foreign audiences spread instantly in domestic/local settings, and the domestic political messages gain

international audiences, thus complicating the audience segmentation that was part and parcel of the previous practice in public diplomacy (p. 31). This convergence requires diplomats and communicators to communicate to a number of constituencies at the same time.

Additionally, the convergence local and foreign audience in digital diplomacy introduces algorithmic mediation as a crucial element shaping communication results. . Woolley and Howard (2019) record how platforms algorithms organize the appearance of diplomatic content in a way that cannot be entirely controlled by diplomatic agents and establish dependencies on proprietary technological systems in order to effectively push the message across. This algorithmic control of attention is a new limitation on the effectiveness of diplomatic communication.

Finally, what Duncombe (2019) describes to as "affective diplomacy" provoking emotions through visual and narrative content, for instance (humanitarian image, touching story), enhanced for social media distribution (p. 248). Platforms prioritize content that achieves successful digital diplomacy, this emotional dimension affords states opportunities for connection alongside substantive policy communication. However, this affective dimension introduces both opportunities for connection and risks of trivialization that diplomatic institutions continue to navigate.

1.2 Understanding Foreign Policy in the Digital Age

1.2.1 Defining Foreign Policy

Briefly, it is the plan developed by the state to organize its relationship with the rest of the world (the international arena) to achieve its interests through strategies and actions. It is concisely defined by Smith, Hadfield, and Dunne (2016) as the totality of official foreign

relations conducted by an independent actor (i.e., the state) in international relations. The main goals of foreign policy are national security, as interpreted by Morgenthau and Thompson (1985) as defending the integrity of the national territory and its institutions, as well as the economic prosperity and the state of national values. Hill (2016) emphasizes that foreign policy is always about tension management by striking a balance between competing priorities, which necessitates decisions consistently between various conceptions of national interest and short-term necessities and long-term ambitions.

1.2.2. Determinants of Foreign Policy

1.2.2.1. Leadership

Leaders' ways of thinking and personality are important determinants of foreign policy orientation. Mintz and Wayne (2016) argue that leaders' beliefs, personalities, and decision-making styles influence foreign policy decisions in a way that cannot be explained by structural constraints. Decision-making is filtered through operational codes and cognitive frameworks, with leaders frequently prioritizing domestic political survival over strategic consequences, thereby maintaining their position and authority within the nation. Moreover, as shown by Walker and Schafer (2021), particular leadership qualities, including complex conceptualization and mistrust, are systematically related to particular foreign policy actions and risk response.

1.2.2.2 National Interest

National interest is considered as the core cause for foreign policy action. However, as Burchill (2005) points out, it is an indispensable but irredeemably indefinite concept. Whereas realist theories consider national interest as objective in terms of power and survival, constructivist scholars believe that national interests are a social construct that is constructed

through identity and discourse. According to Weldes (1999), there is no existence of national interests, but instead national interests are constructed when their principles conflict with the identity formation and normative contestation processes of what a state believes is right and required.

1.2.2.3 Media and Public Opinion

Foreign policy is highly restricted by public opinion and media framing, especially in a democratic setting. The media not only reports the news but also contextualize information in ways that guides people's thinking. Robinson (2002) further develops the CNN effect thesis by theorizing that media have the greatest impact when policy is ambiguous, and media framing is such that it highlights human suffering and moral responsibility. At the same time, Baum and Potter (2015) show that public attitudes toward foreign policy are systematically shaped by events, elite cues from political statements, and media framing. Consequently, the governments must balance the maintenance of the sustainable base of public support with policy visibility.

1.2.3 American Foreign Policy: Key Features

1.2.3.1 Global Role

The American foreign policy is characterized by a special international orientation and adherence to the liberal international order that existed after World War II (WWII). According to Ikenberry (2011), United States (US) strategy revolves around maintaining an open, rule-based system that was created under the leadership of Americans. Nye (2015) also adds that American power is based on an unprecedented balance of military dominance, economic strength, and soft power resources, which has given the US a special ability to influence the international environment in the face of increasing challenges.

1.2.3.2 Presidential Influence

The United States functions not only as a conventional state but also as a global leader committed to maintaining the post-WWII liberal international order through its comprehensive power. Within this context, the president of the U.S. possesses a constitutionally guaranteed and historically broad power in foreign affairs. The now-famous two-presidencies thesis, expressed by Wildavsky (1966), is that the president exercises significantly greater autonomy and initiative in foreign and defense policy, as compared to domestic policy, where Congress holds stronger constraints. In spite of the later literature of legislative aggression in trade and war powers, Canes-Wrone, Howell, and Lewis (2008) confirm that executive dominance (president) in diplomatic initiative and responding to crises is an institutional characteristic.

1.2.3.3 Communication Dimension

Melissen (2005) claims that communication has an essential role in the implementation of American foreign policy, which demonstrates that the political approach in American government building focuses on the content and the way of presenting its public articulation (p.16). This highlights the role of policymakers in managing framing strategies simultaneously. This challenge is conceptualized by Entman (2008) as "mediated public diplomacy," in which credibility and narrative coherence are very important, considering the use of social media platforms (p. 94).

1.2.4 Foreign Policy in the Age of Social Media

1.2.4.1 Digital Communication as Policy Tool

Duncombe (2019) articulates that the integration of digital technology has increased over time, especially in political activities. In simple terms, the impact of using social media platforms

within the political landscape is significant as these tools facilitate decision-making process, reshape foreign policy, connect efficiently with a global audience, and address adversarial narratives. In addition, Manor (2019) documents the institutionalization of this shift through creating dedicated digital diplomacy units within foreign policy ministries and standardizing social media strategies.

1.2.4.2 Visibility and Immediacy

The temporal and visibility dimensions have been significantly compressed through the integration of digital tools into the decision-making process. “Real-time diplomacy,” as conceptualized by Seib (2012), explains contemporary politics, where audiences receive information even before it is formally articulated by governments. This increased visibility and demand for immediacy tend to narrow the scope of diplomatic interaction. Additionally, several challenges have emerged in the age of social media, including the prioritization of reactivity over strategic communication, the dominance of emotion over deliberative engagement, and the emphasis on performance over substantive policy action.

1.3 Social Media and the Transformation of Diplomatic Practices

At the beginning of the 21st century, social media platforms fundamentally restructured political activities. By 2017, an official Twitter presence had been established by a large number of United Nations actors, emphasizing the widespread institutional adoption of digital tools for political purposes (Manor, 2017).

Despite the traditional use of social media by governments as an extension of public diplomacy to establish direct connections with foreign audiences (Manor, 2019), this process has evolved beyond its initial objectives. The current approach reflects a shift toward real-time

diplomacy, based on direct engagement with content creators and an increasing emphasis on immediacy in decision-making (Bjola & Manor, 2024). In this context, Hocking and Melissen (2015) highlight the necessity of adopting comprehensive digital strategies due to the growing dominance of digital instruments in foreign policy.

1.3.1 Personalized vs. Institutional Diplomacy

Manor (2017) described the irregular relationship between institutional diplomatic coherence and tailored strategies of interaction through digital platforms as "personalized diplomacy," which focuses on global public opinion. Moreover, publishing unfiltered policy pronouncements to the international community has become an effective technique to bypass the institutional protocol (Mahapatra, 2025, p.19). Duncombe (2017) argues that foreign ministries need to carefully manage their communication while also using direct and personal messaging to engage quickly and authentically with the public. This reflects the growing importance of personalized diplomacy shaped by governments' digital presence.

1.3.2 Impact on Diplomatic Norms

Foundational diplomatic norms have been disrupted by the use of digital platforms, especially at the level of secrecy. Hanhimäki (2025) observes that diplomatic expectations and red lines are now frequently articulated and contested on public platforms rather than through discreet backchannel communication (p. 7). Practitioners face ongoing tensions between confidentiality and transparency, exclusivity and inclusiveness, and national interests and broader public goods (Huang & Arceneaux, 2024). Digitalization, as noted by Hocking and Melissen (2015), is not limited to providing new tools for achieving established goals; it also challenges the fundamental principles that have traditionally shaped diplomatic practice.

1.4 Theoretical Framework of Analysis: Constructivism

Materialist theories have been challenged by constructivism, which focuses on shared ideas, norms, and identities over material capabilities. Wendt (1999) argues that “anarchy is what states make of it,” highlighting the importance of intersubjective understandings within the international system (p. 20). Based on this shift, constructivism emphasizes the significant role of ideational factors in shaping the political positions of states. This is further supported by Onuf’s idea (1989) that “rules make agents and agents make rules” in ongoing processes of mutual interdependence (as cited in Moe, 2022, p. 113).

1.4.1 Discourse and the Construction of Meaning

Constructivism gives language an essential position in global politics. Discourse can be defined as organized frameworks of meaning that determine what may be expressed, who is authorized to speak, and the level of authority behind it. Lene Hansen (2006) contends that foreign policy discourse has shaped a specific interpretation of reality by identifying key issues, significant actors, and acceptable solutions, while neglecting alternative perspectives.

The relationship between language and power is central, as discourses reinforce existing power structures through meaning-making practices, including articulation, framing, and narrative construction (Debrix, 2015).

1.4.2 Identity and Foreign Policy

Wendt (1999) argues that identifying the states' identities is more crucial than determine their political objectives, emphasizing its central role in foreign policy analysis. Research demonstrates that the representation of Self and Other in the case of the US and Iran was constructed in strongly opposing terms, as the US adapted contrasting meanings based on its

perceptions and interpretations. This example highlights the importance of state self-representation through communicative practices and the differentiated use of language (Bilkent University, 2025). Identity shapes behavior through logics of suitability, threat perception, role commitments, and narrative integrity. BISA (2022) contends that identities are constituted relationally through multiple narratives produced over time by diverse actors, based on their generating interactions rather than through a basic two-sided comparison.

1.4.3 Digital Diplomacy as Discursive Practice

A comprehensive understanding of digital diplomacy within constructivism characterises it as a discursive practice through which identities are constructed and narratives are articulated by states on social media platforms. According to Bjola and Holmes (2015), digital diplomacy emphasizes both the purpose and the impact of digital technologies in political practice. Social media platforms create distinctive discourse spaces with specific affordances, such as brevity, interactivity, multimodality, and algorithmic curation, which shape the production of diplomatic sense. States' ability to construct and publish persuasive narratives plays a crucial role in shaping international perceptions. In this regard, Yadav (2025) argues that power is not merely exercised through material capabilities, but increasingly through narrative construction and symbolic diplomacy. Effective digital diplomacy relies strongly on authenticity, emotional resonance, and platform-specific formats, as confirmed by comparative research studies.

1.4.4 Operationalization of the Framework

This dissertation applies constructivism at the level of three analytical dimensions. The first dimension analyzes language and tone, focusing on lexical choices, narrative strategies, normative language, metaphors, and affective registers used in American foreign policy. The second dimension analyses the representation of US state identity through claimed attributes,

values, roles, and historical narratives across different platforms and perspectives. The third dimension considers the representation of the Other, emphasizing how narratives explain their behavior and how binary oppositions or relational positioning structure Self-Other relationships. Together, these dimensions enable a systematic analysis of how American digital diplomacy discursively constructs identities, meanings, and narratives within the contemporary international system.

1.5 Digital Diplomacy and the Transformation of American Foreign Policy

1.5.1 Communication Shift

Digital diplomacy has been described as "change management in international politics," transforming practices of information management and public diplomacy (Bjola & Holmes, 2015, p. 4). This transformation emphasizes immediacy and interactivity within the U.S. foreign communication system through the integration of digital platforms. These technologies offer direct and real-time engagement with foreign publics without traditional gatekeepers. Jungblut (2025) contends that diplomatic strategy is calibrated by U.S. embassy Twitter accounts based on contextual variables, including the political and cultural proximity of foreign audiences.

Despite the progressive adaptation of strategies by foreign ministries to platform affordances and constraints (Manor, 2019), Manor and Segev (2015) show that the U.S. State Department maintains consistent messaging but does not enable genuine two-way interaction, indicating that authentic engagement remains limited and asymmetrical.

1.5.2 Personalization of Diplomacy

Most political actors in the social media age function as content creators rather than merely institutional representatives. Martin (2025) maintains that the development of social media

platforms progressively affects political formulation, in which American ambassadors engage in Instagram reels, trending memes, and live-streamed events as new expected forms of communication policy. According to this, personalization extends to leadership-driven digital diplomacy, respecting institutional protocols in the political landscape considered traditional behavior. Bjola and Manor (2022) assert that genuine adoption of digital instruments should require appropriate dealing with the new rise of actors, practices, and norms.

1.5.3 Impact on Global Perception

The disruptive approach to foreign policy has recently described the American government as an untrustworthy and erratic actor based on CFR analysis, reflecting the complex effects of digital diplomacy on global audiences. The total dependence on U.S.-controlled digital systems, such as cloud services and social media platforms, causes complex perception problems and puts many countries in a vulnerable position. As a result, they increasingly seek to reduce this reliance. Manor and Segev (2015) demonstrate that the State Department emphasizes principles and global authority by constructing a particular national brand. Therefore, credibility between the projected image and perceived policy behavior is essential for the success of political activities. When digital diplomacy promotes values that do not match U.S. actions-such as sanctions, leaving international agreements, or sudden policy changes, it can lead to more distrust instead of stronger influence. In light of this shift, new communication capacities have emerged alongside new obstacles.

Conclusion

This chapter identifies digital diplomacy and the transformation of American foreign policy within a structured conceptual and theoretical framework. Traditional diplomacy remains the foundational state-focused framework characterized by formal bureaucratic channels and

confidentiality. However, it faces significant contemporary limitations regarding non-governmental actors and democratic legitimacy. Public diplomacy emerged as an expansion beyond closed-door exchanges, emphasizing direct engagement with foreign publics and strategic image-building through cultural and educational programming. Digital diplomacy, which is defined by a lack of mediation, interconnected communication, and unequalled temporal compression, is the incorporation of social media platforms into fundamental diplomatic practice. The attention and immediacy that social media brings to decision-making processes have radically changed foreign policy, which is driven by leadership cognition, opposing national interests, and media dynamics. American foreign policy remains characterized by its global role in maintaining the liberal global order, the remarkable independence of presidential authority, and the indivisibility of policy content from strategic communication.

Ongoing tension between personalized, leader-centered diplomacy and institutional consistency has been produced by social media, while fundamental norms of secrecy and discussion have been undermined by it.

The conceptual framework presented in this dissertation highlights that identities and interests are socially formed through discourse. This framework is implemented in this dissertation through a structured analysis of language, self-representation, and other depiction in American digital diplomatic communication.

The analytical framework necessary for examining how meaning is formed and identity is expressed in the modern international system by American digital diplomacy is provided by these conceptual and theoretical foundations.

CHAPTER TWO

A Constructivist Analysis of U.S. Diplomacy from the 2003 Iraq War to the Ukraine War

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Introduction

This chapter examines the evolution of United States (U.S.) diplomatic communication by comparing two war periods : the 2003 Iraq War and the 2022 Ukraine War. The analysis employs a constructivist framework, which posits that language as actively shapes international realities, identities, and political boundaries. The pre-digital era exemplified by the Iraq War, was characterized by classified information, legalistic protocols, formal government-to-government channels, and speeches delivered from institutional settings like the Oval Office to limited audiences. In contrast, the Ukraine War reveals a digital landscape defined by social media, emotional transparency, ethical absolutism, and the strategic public release of declassified intelligence. U.S. diplomacy now directly addresses foreign populations by passing traditional government intermediaries. Overall, diplomacy has become increasingly performative, with visits, handshakes, and joint statements crafted as content for instantaneous global consumption.

2.1 U.S. Diplomatic Communication During the 2003 Iraq War

2.1.1 Diplomatic Norms: Formality, Evidence, and Institutional Legitimacy

In the constructivism field, the emphasis is placed on diplomatic norms as joint expectations regarding appropriate behavior among countries (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). In the 2003 Iraq War case, strict observance of formal protocols, legal argument, and the submission of classified evidence through official governmental channels was the hegemonic norm that prescribed U.S. diplomatic communication. The appropriateness was measured by the demonstration of procedural rigor, international coordination, and extreme precision , not through emotional impact or widespread.

President Bush's March 19 address is considered an example of this norm through its context and structural formality. The speech was delivered from the Oval Office, which refers to a strategically chosen location for projecting the constitutional power and measured solemnity. Bush commences with a formal address that confirms both the constitutional system and the gravity of the moment: "My fellow citizens, at this hour, American and coalition forces are in the early stages of military operations to disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger." (Bush, 2003a, para. 1)

The language was thoughtful and restrained. Bush invokes the authority of the presidency while simultaneously emphasizing international legitimacy, an essential condition of the diplomatic norm: "On my orders, coalition forces have begun striking selected targets of military importance... More than 35 countries are giving crucial support -- from the use of naval and air bases, to help with intelligence and logistics, to the deployment of combat units. Every nation in this coalition has chosen to bear the duty and share the honor of serving in our common defense." (Bush, 2003a, para. 2)

This norm requires that even a superpower present its actions in terms of a collective endeavor. The norm is particularly evident in Secretary Powell's address to the United Nations Security Council, which functions less as a political speech than a highly crafted legal brief. Meanwhile, the site of the announcement (Security Council) is institutional. The first words of Powell's address signal the government-to-government standard: "Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President and Mr. Secretary General, distinguished colleagues, I would like to begin by expressing my thanks for the special effort that each of you made to be here today." (Powell, 2003, para. 1)

Every part of the speech is geared to show homage to the institution and its procedures. The substance of the norm is reflected in the emphasis on evidence-based reasoning. Powell explicitly assures his audience that his arguments are based on solid intelligence, rather than rhetoric: "My colleagues, every statement I make today is backed up by sources, solid sources. These are not assertions. What we are giving you are facts and conclusions based on solid intelligence." (Powell, 2003, para. 34)

Powell subsequently presents a complex argument using audio intercepts. In one recording, an Iraqi officer instructs a subordinate to: "clean out all the areas, the scrap areas, the abandoned areas. Make sure there is nothing there. Remember the first message: evacuate it" (Powell, 2003, para. 27-28). In another, an officer is told: "After you have carried out what is contained in this message, destroy the message because I don't want anyone to see this message" (Powell, 2003, para. 30). These intercepts are provided as verifiable evidence of a purposeful deception operation. This standard of evidence is reinforced by satellite images, as Powell exhibits a series of photos of a chemical munitions facility at Taji, saying:

"Here you see 15 munitions bunkers in yellow and red outlines. The four that are in red squares represent active chemical munitions bunkers." (Powell, 2003, para. 48)

He then compares with a subsequent photo taken immediately before UN inspectors showed up: "Now look at the picture on the right. You are now looking at two of those sanitized bunkers. The signature vehicles are gone, the tents are gone. It's been cleaned up... The bunkers are clean when the inspectors get there. They found nothing" (Powell, 2003, para. 51-52). The established norm dictates that persuasion be expressed in the language of certainty, so that

persuasion does not appear as merely a person's or emotional opinion, but rather as almost scientific proof.

Even the more celebratory "Mission Accomplished" speech remains committed to the state's formal norm. Although delivered from the deck of a warship, the address maintains structured and official tone. Bush refrains from boasting, instead announcing the successful performance of an institutional function, more precisely, the completion of an institutional mission : "Major combat operations in Iraq have ended. In the battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed" (Bush, 2003b, para. 1).

Bush portrayed the victory as a collective achievement, expressing gratitude to "the Armed Forces of the United Kingdom, Australia, and Poland, who shared in the hardships of war" (Bush, 2003b, para. 4). The common thread running through the three speeches is a diplomatic mode of communication that is formal, institutionalized, and tediously fixated on evidence and multilateralism as markers of suitability.

2.1.2 Performed National Identity

According to constructivist theory, states do not have fixed identities; rather, they actively perform them through discourse and action, creating a sense of correlation with an Other (Wendt, 1999). The United States presents a skillfully crafted dual identity in its communications during the 2003 Iraq War. On one hand, it is the reluctant superpower, a nation that has overwhelming military power but only uses it when absolutely necessary, with a certain degree of reluctance and no desire for material gain. On the other hand, it is the moral liberator, a unique nation that acts not out of its own interests but out of a universal, almost religious, obligation to free

oppressed peoples. These two identities are combined to portray the United States as a virtuous hegemon.

The strategic display of reluctance is essential to justifying war. The United States seeks to be perceived as acting out of necessity rather than choice. Bush makes articulates this stance: "Our nation enters this conflict reluctantly -- yet, our purpose is sure" (Bush, 2003a, para. 9). This statement represents a dual performance: lament for the act, but certainty in the cause. The reluctance is further justified by the visceral idea of bringing the war to America and military intervention as a tragic measure. War is presented as a painful but necessary response to forestall an impending tragedy on American soil:

"We will meet that threat now, with our Army, Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard and Marines, so that we do not have to meet it later with armies of fire fighters and police and doctors on the streets of our cities." (Bush, 2003a, para. 10). This rhetoric constructs the US not as an aggressor, but as a protector who needs to attack first.

Most importantly, this hesitation is accompanied by an utter refusal of any material ambition, directly opposing the historical identity of imperial forces. The United State expresses an identity of radical selflessness: "We have no ambition in Iraq, except to remove a threat and restore control of that country to its own people." (Bush, 2003a, para. 8)

The term "restore" is significant, as it implies a temporary guardianship rather than a lifelong occupation. Powell supports this unwilling identity by putting the whole process into an angle of painful exercise of patience being drained. He reminds the Security Council of the long history of defiance by Iraq, by noting that: "In this battle, we have fought for the cause of liberty, and for the peace of the world... Because of you, the tyrant has fallen, and Iraq is free" (Bush,

2003b, para. 2). The language employed is absolute and transformative, casting the adversary as a "tyrant" and the outcome as "liberty". This liberator identity is constructed in explicit contrast to the historical record of other powerful nations. The United States performs a unique, almost innocent, identity on the world stage: "Other nations in history have fought in foreign lands and remained to occupy and exploit. Americans, following a battle, want nothing more than to return home." (Bush, 2003b, para. 13)

This rhetorical performance revolves around this juxtaposition, which is the key element of the play. It denies any connection with European colonialism and instead portrays the American military intervention as a radically different, virtuous act. Then, by appealing to divine authority, the liberator identity is sanctified. Bush quotes the prophet Isaiah to place the mission as part of a religious narrative of redemption: "In the words of the prophet Isaiah, 'To the captives, 'come out,' -- and to those in darkness, 'be free'" (Bush, 2003b, para. 27).

The discourse transitions from a political to a theological context, showing the United States as a tool of a mightier will.

Performative cataloging of the inhumanity of the enemy also helps to reinforce the liberator identity. Saddam Hussein's Iraq is portrayed in Powell's UN talk as the ultimate Other that defines American moral virtue. He tells about the history of the atrocities of the regime: He points out that: "Saddam Hussein's police state ruthlessly eliminates anyone who dares to dissent." (Powell, 2003, para. 131)

The U.S paints the other side of the conflict in the darkest possible colors; it presents its identity as a moral liberator, not as a single option among many, but as a necessity and rightful reaction. The US is portrayed as a powerful state that does not seek the war, but, when required,

engages in conflict under the banner of the highest ideals of humanity. The intentional tension between the roles of reluctant actor and liberator serves to legitimize its actions..

2.1.3 Audience Construction

From a Constructivist perspective, the selection of the audience is a political act that determines the borders of the political community involved, rather than a neutral technical decision (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, p. 897). The audiences created in the 2003 Iraq War communications were strictly bound to two groups: the American domestic audience and the foreign governments, and they were the only audience. These groups were addressed through traditional broadcast media and formal diplomatic institution. The foreign individual was not acknowledged as a direct, authorized addressee, regardless of whether they were French, Russian, Iraqi, or any other nationality. A state-centric society in which governments have exclusive authority to represent their citizens is reflected in this audience construction.

The first words of President Bush's March 19 war declaration establish its primary audience. The speech begins with: "My fellow citizens," (Bush, 2003a, para. 1), establishing a direct and exclusive relationship between the American people and the president. This is positioned as a national dialogue when the nation is in crisis. The secondary addresses are certain subgroups of this national family. Bush addresses the military, saying: "To all the men and women of the United States Armed Forces now in the Middle East, the peace of a troubled world and the hopes of an oppressed people now depend on you. That trust is well placed." (Bush, 2003a, para. 4). He also mentions "the families of our military" (Bush, 2003a, para. 9), expanding the national conversation to those on the home front.

External actors are discussed in the third person inside this domestic framing; they are the topics of the conversation rather than its participants. The "oppressed people" referred to in the speech to the troops are not addressees but rather recipients of action. Bush makes it apparent that a worldwide audience is indirectly hearing this message through the main program when he gestures to them. He declares: "I want Americans and all the world to know that coalition forces will make every effort to spare innocent civilians from harm." (Bush, 2003a, para. 7). Here, the expression "all the world" serves as a passive, abstract entity that receives messages, which is essentially addressed to the American citizen. The call to the people of Iraq is not made directly; there is no appeal over the head of the government of Iraq. It is assumed that legitimate international communications are made through states.

The presentation made by Secretary Powell to the UN Security Council creates a still more overtly elite and institutional audience. His remarks are directed toward the representatives of states, assembled in their official capacities. He makes this construction instantly: "Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President and Mr. Secretary General, distinguished colleagues" (Powell, 2003, para. 1). The room is the world, and the only individuals who matter in this game of diplomacy are the decision-makers around the table. The speech of Powell is filled with collective pronouns that unite him and this audience as co-responsible participants. He asserts that:

"Last November 8, this Council passed Resolution 1441 by a unanimous vote." (Powell, 2003, para. 2) He further states: "No Council member present and voting on that day had any illusions about the nature and intent of the resolution." (Powell, 2003, para. 4)

The governments themselves are placed by this arrangement as the rightful representatives of their constituents. Powell does not appeal directly to the people of France, Russia, and China above the heads of their leaders. He speaks to the leaders directly, holding them accountable for their inactivity. This construction is most evident in his concluding remarks, where he frames the Security Council's authorship of Resolution 1441 as a group credibility test, saying: "We wrote 1441 not in order to go to war. We wrote 1441 to try to preserve the peace. We wrote 1441 to give Iraq one last chance." (Powell, 2003, para. 140).

He then gives an explicit warning to his fellow diplomats: "We must not shrink from whatever is ahead of us. We must not fail in our duty and our responsibility to the citizens of the countries that are represented by this body." (Powell, 2003, para. 141). In this perspective, governments fulfill their obligation by acting appropriately in the diplomatic forums, where citizens are represented rather than directly addressed. Even after the invasion, the Iraqi people remain subjects of discussion rather than an audience when the story turns to freedom. From the carrier deck, Bush says: "We thank all the citizens of Iraq who welcomed our troops and joined in the liberation of their own country." (Bush, 2003b, para. 4).

The expression of gratitude is directed toward the American audience, not as a message of thanks to Iraqis. He continues by outlining the work ahead, stating: "We're helping to rebuild Iraq, where the dictator built palaces for himself, instead of hospitals and schools. And we will stand with the new leaders of Iraq as they establish a government of, by, and for the Iraqi people." (Bush, 2003b, para. 8).

The Iraqi people serves as the targets of policy, the justification to act, and the ultimate beneficiaries of liberation, but they are never created as an active audience to be convinced,

recruited, or engaged in dialogue. The circle of legitimate addressees is closed: the American people in front of their television sets at home, and foreign governments, sitting at their official desks. This is the most obvious example of audience construction's pre-digital, state-centric architecture.

2.2.1 Diplomatic Norms: Direct Public Address, Emotional Discourse, and Performative

Transparency

The situation of the Ukraine War demonstrates how diplomatic communication standards have fundamentally changed. The Ukraine situation illustrates emerging norms of direct public speech, emotional discourse, and strategic rejection of official intermediaries, compared to the Iraq War baseline, when communication was formal, measured, and carried out exclusively through government-to-government channels. Currently, interaction in diplomacy extends beyond official platforms to include social media and YouTube, contributing to a new understanding of diplomacy as a public moral performance aimed at a global audience rather than as private discussions between state representatives.

Despite being delivered in an official context, President Biden's speech on February 24, 2022, immediately employs aggressive language that would have been deemed unacceptable during the Iraq War. He proceeds by using pure morality to describe the attack: "The Russian military has begun a brutal assault on the people of Ukraine without provocation, without justification, without necessity. This is a premeditated attack." (Biden, 2022, para. 1-2). By declaring that Russia acted "without provocation, without justification, without necessity," Biden adopts a stance of comprehensive moral condemnation rather than cautious diplomacy. Instead of presenting himself as a restrained superpower adhering to institutional norms, he assumes the role of a prosecutor issuing a clear verdict, explicitly identifying Vladimir Putin as the aggressor:

"Putin is the aggressor. Putin chose this war. And now he and his country will bear the consequences." (Biden, 2022, para. 17).

In contrast to the Iraq War, when Saddam Hussein was portrayed as a member of a "regime," the second case argues that holding a single leader personally accountable for a conflict is a recent development. This change is attributed to social media diplomacy, which reduces complicated situations into moral dramas with defined personalities and villains. Rather than an attempt to determine an agreement between different state interests, the resulting framework portrays the conflict as a struggle between a rule-breaker and those protecting the international order. The norm of transparency is further constructed through the strategic use of intelligence. Declassification increases by President Biden from a technical process to a performative diplomatic strategy intended to influence how the world views reality. He states: "We've been transparent with the world. We've shared declassified evidence about Russia's plans and cyber-attacks and false pretexts so that there can be no confusion or cover-up about what Putin was doing." (Biden, 2022, para. 15). From a constructivist perspective, this represents a clear confrontation over the justified interpretation of events. Through the strategic early disclosure of alleged Russian plans, the United States attempts to undermine rival Russian narratives before they gain credibility. This establishes a norm in which intelligence is no longer confined to secret state practices but becomes a public performance aimed at fostering a shared understanding among allies that the adversary's identity is inherently deceptive. Here, the act of transparency becomes more important than the specific content disclosed; the act of "showing" constructs the United States as the bearer of truth and Russia as the agent of cover-up.

Secretary Blinken's January 2022 video message both illustrates transparency's emergence as a diplomatic norm and exposes the internal tensions it generates. He explicitly describes the

content of diplomatic communications that would previously have remained confidential: "The document we've delivered includes the concerns of the United States and our allies and partners about Russia's actions that undermine security, a principled and pragmatic evaluation of the concerns that Russia has raised, and our own proposals for areas where we may be able to find common ground." (Blinken, 2022, para. 3).

At the same time, he commits to secretly keeping the original document: "We are not releasing the document publicly because we believe diplomacy has the best chance to succeed if we provide space for confidential talks" (Blinken, 2022, para. 16). This tension between transparency and confidentiality highlights a norm in which diplomatic engagement is publicized, yet its content remains private. Such an approach invites the audience into the diplomatic process, fostering expectations of visibility while maintaining closed-door negotiations. The speech acts function by signaling reasonableness to a global audience while preserving traditional statecraft mechanisms.

Furthermore, Blinken's 2022 declaration conveys a narrative of steadfast and powerful solidarity among allies, which is crucial to the norm's development. "There is no daylight between the United States and our allies and partners on these matters" (Blinken, 2022, para. 12). The phrase "no daylight" constructs a shared reality of complete unity. During the Iraq War, the concept of a "coalition of the willing" implicitly acknowledged that some states were unwilling; in the present case, however, the emerging norm is one of full transatlantic consensus, presented as a social fact that itself functions as a form of pressure on Moscow. This statement is not merely descriptive but constitutive, actively producing the unity it claims to describe.

The changing interactions across official actors provide further evidence of the formation of diplomatic identity. Secretary Blinken meeting with Ukrainian authorities in 2024 illustrates how emotionally coded demonstrations of personal support are complemented by formal alliance negotiations. The Ukrainian official constructs this relationship as a continuous moral commitment rather than a transactional arrangement, stating that the secretary has been "standing with Ukraine... since the very beginning of the all-out war... Since then, the state secretary has provided every possible support to Ukraine" (Blinken, 2024a).

Blinken responds by recalling a shared memory of adversity: "I think back to that I think about the road that's been traveled since then" (Blinken, 2024a). This exchange constructs a narrative of collective struggle that encodes the bilateral relationship with values of unwavering loyalty. In this context, diplomatic visits become symbolic declarations of a shared moral purpose rather than merely routine consultations.

Diplomatic communication now consistently emphasizes the direct link between policy decisions and their immediate effects on real-world conditions. In coverage of Blinken's 2024 visit, journalist Julia Chapman reports that the Secretary's message explicitly links legislative action in Washington to tangible battlefield outcomes, noting that "he says they are already making a difference on the battlefield and will continue to do so" (Chapman, as cited in CBC News, 2024). This rhetorical approach creates a highly visible sequence of cause and effect, framing military aid as delivering immediate battlefield results. It contrasts sharply with the Iraq War period, when leaders typically refrained from making direct pledges about near-term tactical outcomes.

The most significant normative departure is the direct governmental address to foreign populations, bypassing state intermediaries. Prime Minister Boris Johnson's video message to the Russian people represents a full-scale normative breach of the government-to-government communication paradigm. He uses the atrocities documented in Bucha to construct a binary moral identity, deliberately separating Russian citizens from their leadership. Johnson declares: "your president knows that if you could see what was happening you would not support his War he knows that these crimes betray the trust of every Russian mother who proudly waves goodbye to her son as he heads off to join the military" (Johnson, as cited in Sky News, 2022) .This is a direct attempt to socially construct a counter-identity within Russia, driving a discursive wedge between the state apparatus and society by invoking the sacred construct of the mother-soldier bond. The emotional appeal is personal and visceral, designed to circumvent state-controlled media and create cognitive dissonance among Russian citizens. Johnson does not address the Russian government; he addresses Russian mothers.

The accompanying media analysis by Sky News political correspondent Jon Craig explicitly identifies this as a novel instrument of conflict, observing that it is "clearly trying to get around these restrictions on what the Russian people are being told" and categorizing it explicitly as part of a "propaganda war " (Craig, as cited in Sky News, 2022). This securitization of information flow, where a foreign leader seeks to fracture social cohesion within an adversary state, rewrites the foundational norm of non-interference in domestic audiences. Under this emergent framework, the provision of contested information to foreign nationals is reframed not as interference but as a moral imperative to reveal the objective truth. The state is no longer the exclusive intermediary entitled to communicate with its citizens; the international community claims a direct line of moral address.

CBC News coverage of Blinken's 2024 visit further demonstrates how diplomatic norms now incorporate media visibility as an essential component. The news anchor frames the visit as a symbolic performance: "US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken is today in Kyiv on an unannounced visit to show solidarity with Ukraine" (CBC News, 2024). The visit itself is communicative act-"a signal of support to our defenders, " as the Ukrainian official states (Blinken, 2024a). Diplomacy has become inherently performative, with each meeting, handshake, and joint press conference functioning not merely as a record of consultation but as content produced for immediate global media consumption. The norm being constructed is one in which the symbolic expression of solidarity holds equal weight to any substantive agreement reached; the image of the visit is a diplomatic product.

The Ukraine case thus establishes a distinct normative architecture. While Iraq War diplomacy measured legitimacy through procedural rigor and institutional mediation, the Ukraine case constructs legitimacy through direct moral address, performative transparency, and the mobilization of global audiences. This is not just a stylistic shift but a reconstitution of diplomacy's fundamental purpose: from negotiating between state interests to enacting ethical positions before a transnational public.

2.2.2 Performed National Identity: The Unwavering Defender and Moral Crusader

In constructivist thought, identities of states are articulated through their practices and patterns of communication (Wendt, 1999, p. 224). In the Ukraine War, a significant transformation is demonstrated where the tension between reluctance and crusading that characterized Bush's rhetoric has been decisively resolved in favor of moral clarity and unambiguous commitment. By contrast, during the Iraq War, the United States performed a dual

identity: a reluctant superpower acting only when necessary and a moral liberator bringing freedom to the oppressed.

The United States now presents a unified identity as both an unwavering defender and a moral crusader, presenting resolute action and normative criticism as expressions of a single ethical position. This transformation is evident from the very opening of Biden's February 2022 address. While Bush had presented American military action as a last resort undertaken reluctantly, Biden instead frames aggression as an immediate and undeniable threat requiring a response grounded in national identity. This highlights a shift in political discourse from cautious justification of war to a direct, identity-based justification for responding to threats." This aggression cannot go unanswered. If it did, the consequences for America would be much worse. America stands up to bullies. We stand up for freedom. This is who we are." (Biden, 2022, para. 57)

Biden's presentation of action as an identity claim-"this is who we are." reduces a complex geopolitical conflict to a moral confrontation between aggressor and defender, with the United States expressing the latter by definition. This approach presents a more specific picture of a superpower in which power is a reflection of national identity rather than just policy. Biden builds on this approach by portraying the conflict as a central challenge to the principles supporting the global order, positioning the United States as their primary defender.

"Putin has a-has committed an assault on the very principles that uphold global peace... But it is a vision that the United States and freedom-loving nations everywhere will oppose with every tool of our considerable power." (Biden, 2022, para. 69-71). The identity of the United States is shaped interactively, defined in direct opposition to Putin's "sinister vision." The phrase

"freedom-loving nations" creates a value-based community centered on the United States, while the invocation of "every tool of our considerable power" performs confidence rather than reluctance. The concept of the superpower is no longer constrained or softened; it is now portrayed as both strength and virtue. Blinken more directly embodies the role of a moral defender, transforming material support into a form of moral communication. CBC News coverage of his 2024 visit to Kyiv summarizes both strategy and morality in one sentence: "A strong Ukraine is the best rebuke to President Vladimir Putin." (Blinken, as cited in CBC News, 2024).

The term "rebuke" holds analytical importance. Artillery, air defence interceptors, and long-range ballistic missiles are no longer framed as strategic calculations but as moral condemnation, reframing both military and financial assistance entirely. By providing such military assistance, the United States enacts its identity as a moral arbiter, issuing judgments through its actions. In his January 2022 video message, Blinken makes the normative foundation of this identity explicit by grounding American action in fundamental principles.

"We make clear that there are core principles that we are committed to uphold and defend, including Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the right of states to choose their own security arrangements and alliances." (Blinken, January 2022). This statement works on two levels. On the surface, it describes the rules-based order America claims to uphold. On a deeper level, it performs the very act of casting the U.S. as the protector of those rules—rendering its commitments fundamental to its identity, not optional.

Biden strengthens this image by presenting the U.S. as the evident leader of a broad global alliance, turning international cooperation into a show of American power.

"The United States is not doing this alone. For months, we've been building a coalition of partners representing well more than half of the global economy... The sanctions we imposed have generated two thirds of the world joining us. They are profound sanctions." (Biden, 2022, para. 17 & 81)

The repetition of "we" and "us" constructs a collective identity, yet the grammatical structure leaves no ambiguity about who leads this Partnership. The U.S. creates the framework, enforces it, and the rest of the world falls in line. American leadership and moral authority are not just diplomatically achieved; they are performed through unity. Blinken's video message with a Ukrainian official, published on YouTube under the title "You Are Not Alone," brings this expression of firm commitment to its argumentative culmination. "for anyone tempted to bet against Ukraine don't it would be a big mistake we've been through difficult times together and we will get through this together" (Blinken, "You Are Not Alone" video)

The informal phrasing "don't," "a big mistake", contrasts with the formal controlled tone of Powell's 2003 UN presentation. However, the message is no less intentional. Blinken argues that if you bet against Ukraine, you are also betting against the U.S. He believes this is a losing bet. Because of this position, American resolve shifts from being just a policy choice to becoming a permanent, predictable part of how the U.S. acts globally.

The Ukraine case resolves the identity tension that characterized the Iraq War baseline. While Bush's rhetoric carefully balanced reluctance with moral crusading, Biden's discourse eliminates reluctance entirely. This creates a self-reinforcing dynamic: the United States acts resolutely because it is moral, and it is moral because it acts resolutely. Strategic confidence and

normative certainty become inseparable, marking a decisive departure from the pre-digital era's more ambivalent self-presentation

2.2.3 Audience Construction

From a constructivist perspective, the choice of audience is a political strategy that redefines who matters in international relations (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, p. 897). In the first case analysis of the Iraq War, the primary audiences were the American public (addressed through televised Oval Office speeches) and foreign governments (addressed through diplomatic venues such as the UN Security Council). Foreign citizens were not addressed directly; instead, they received American messages only through their own governments or traditional news media.

On the other hand, the Ukraine War case reveals a fundamental expansion of audience strategy. Digital platforms, particularly YouTube, now enable direct address to foreign publics, bypassing government and traditional media. As a result, communication becomes transnational, and the distinction between domestic and foreign audiences progressively collapses.

Even as the audience expands, Biden's February 2022 speech, with its formal trappings of a traditional presidential address, remains within a familiar format. He makes explicit that the world has been watching, not reported by the media, but through firsthand access to declassified American intelligence: "We've been transparent with the world. We've shared declassified evidence about Russia's plans and cyber-attacks and false pretexts so that there can be no confusion or cover-up about what Putin was doing." (Biden, 2022, para. 15).

The phrase "transparent with the world" positions the global public as the primary receiver of American communication. Disclosed evidence is not merely shared with partner governments

or credentialed journalists; it is released into a digital information ecosystem where any internet user can access, interpret, and share it. This transforms "the world" from a rhetorical abstraction into an active audience. In the same speech, Biden issues what amounts to a direct warning to Russia that is simultaneously heard by its citizens:

"Let me also repeat the warning I made last week: If Russia pursues cyberattacks against our companies, our critical infrastructure, we are prepared to respond." (Biden, 2022, para. 58)

The statement is directed at the Russian state in formal terms, but its appearance in a global broadcast enables it to reach Russian citizens too. The digital circulation of presidential rhetoric softens the line between government-to-government and government-to-people address communication.

Blinken's video message employs a different approach. By publicly acknowledging both the existence of a diplomatic document and the decision to withhold it—"We are not releasing the document publicly because we believe diplomacy has the best chance to succeed if we provide space for confidential talks" (Blinken, January 2022)—he constructs two distinct audiences simultaneously: the Russian government, invited to confidential negotiations, and the global public, which is given symbolic access to the diplomatic process without substantive details. This dual construction reflects the broader pattern of the Ukraine case, where communication strategies acknowledge global audiences as legitimate observers while preserving certain state-to-state mechanisms.

The emergence of direct, linguistically tailored appeals to foreign populations represents a significant shift from the traditional approach seen in the Iraq War. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's video message, delivered in Russian and disseminated through social media, constructs

Russian citizens not as subjects of their government's information policy but as independent agents capable of ethically autonomous judgment. Johnson instructs them on circumventing state censorship: "All you need is a VPN connection to access independent information from anywhere in the world, and when you find the truth, share it." (Johnson, as cited in Sky News, 2022)

The verb "share" transforms the audience from inactive receivers into active participants in the dissemination of information. The Sky News commentary explicitly identifies this strategic intent, noting it is "a move to try and influence public opinion in Russia" (Sky News, 2022). Johnson's message culminates in a direct moral appeal: "those responsible will be held to account and history will remember who looked the other way" (Johnson, as cited in Sky News, 2022). The phrase "history will remember" asserts that both speaker and listener are equally responsible to a transcendent audience outside the control of any state. The contrast between "those responsible" and "who looked the other way" eliminates the observer's passive category, directly interpellating the individual Russian citizen as a moral agent faced with a fundamental decision.

Secretary Blinken's address in Kyiv, documented in the "You Are Not Alone" video, expands the idea of a transnational public sphere by positing a universal subject engaged in moral judgment : " For anyone tempted to bet against Ukraine, don't; it would be a big mistake" (Blinken, "You Are Not Alone" video) . The word "anyone" carries crucial significance, as it constructs a universal audience: allies, adversaries, governments, and citizens alike are all listening, and all are warned.

The conversational framing of a "bet" transforms geopolitical alignment from a matter of sovereign state interest into a speculative commitment to historical determinism, one that any individual, anywhere, can be persuaded to make.

Blinken further constructs the Ukrainian people not as passive recipients of support but as an active, generative force in their own defense: "all of this in particular as we're thinking about the defense industrial base Builds on an incredible Spirit of innovation of Ingenuity of Entrepreneurship that we see here in Ukraine" (Blinken, "You Are Not Alone" video). The acknowledgment of Ukrainian "innovation" and "entrepreneurship" stands in stark contrast to the Kremlin's picture of Ukraine as a failed state. It constructs the Ukrainians as representatives of liberal-democratic values—creativity, self-reliance, adaptability—that resonate universally.

The CBC News report on Blinken's 2024 visit itself becomes a layered example of audience construction. The anchor's framing—"US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is today in Kyiv on an unannounced visit to show solidarity with Ukraine amid an increasingly intense new Russian offensive. it is the first visit by a senior US official since Congress passed its finally approved \$61 million military aid package back in April" (CBC News, 2024)—constructs both an external audience to be assured and an internal American audience to be persuaded of the administration's resolve. The report's global accessibility on YouTube ensures that such messages reach global public and Russian audiences, providing evidence of Western commitment.

Finally, Biden's February 2022 speech constructs a specific, multi-layered audience for the material consequences of restrictions, carefully distinguishing between the Russian people, the Russian elite, and the international coalition: "As promised, we're also adding names to the list of

Russian elites and their family members that we're sanctioning as well. As I said on Tuesday, these are people who personally gain from the Kremlin's policies and they should share in the pain" (Biden, 2022, para. 46) .

This remark creates three different audiences: international coalition allies, who see determination and effectiveness; the Russian elite, portrayed as a distinct category whose personal wealth makes them strategically sensitive and morally responsible; and ordinary Russian citizens, to whom it subtly suggests that the West's quarrel is not with them but with their predatory ruling class.

The legitimate audiences for US diplomatic communications have significantly increased beyond the Iraq War baseline in the case of the Ukraine War. Videos published on YouTube, speeches delivered globally, and messages presented in the target audience's native tongue are being used to directly reach foreign nationals, especially the Russian people. Traditional media intermediaries are not eliminated, but they are supplemented and, at times, avoided by direct digital address. This reflects an emerging norm of transnational digital diplomacy, in which the distinction between domestic and foreign audiences disappears, and states increasingly speak past governments to reach the people directly

2.3 Discussion and Results

2.3.1 Comparative Analysis

A systematic comparison of the 2003 Iraq War and the 2022 Ukraine War reveals a radical restructuring of American diplomatic communication across three constructivist aspects: norms, identity, and audience. Regarding diplomatic norms, the Iraq war was considered by a strict conformity to formality, institutional mediation, and evidence-based reasoning, where procedural

rigor was used to gauge legitimacy, as an example, Secretary Powell's speech to the UN served as a legal brief, referencing institutional authority and presenting audio intercepts and photographs to persuade with an appearance of scientific certainty. In contrast, the Ukraine War points to emergent norms of direct address to the public, symbolic transparency. Legitimacy is no longer created behind the scenes, but it is created in the global digital space. The strategic release of intelligence and President Biden's swift, broad moral denunciation of Russia signify a new normative architecture, are not just a stylistic variation. Here, the public display of "showing" intelligence builds the United States as the bearer of truth and the adversary as essentially deceptive, rather than the usual caution for the pre-digital era that marked the process of "showing" intelligence.

The transformation of current political norms signifies a profound restructuring of national identity. During the Iraq War, the U.S. carefully calibrated structural tension between two roles: the reluctant world power, merely acting out necessity, and the moral liberator, motivated by global obligation to break the chains of the oppressed. This dual performance, which established a juxtaposition between the rejection of imperial intention with divinely sanctioned mission, has totally collapsed in the Ukraine case. The identity tension has been resolved clearly in favor of a unified, self-reinforcing identity as a staunch defender and values-based actor. Biden's declaration that "America stands up to bullies... This is who we are" removes the hesitation and defines strategic action as a representation of ontological necessity. Decisive power projection and value-based authority turn into indistinguishable, signaling a no longer superpower lamenting the use of force, but a superpower that incorporates it in a morally distinct way.

The audience's construction, which disassembles Westphalian state-centric architecture, is the most drastic change. The Iraq War baseline created a limited universe that allowed only the

American people and foreign governments to be the legitimate addressees; the Iraqis were the subject of discussion, never actively involved. This model, in Ukraine, digital technology has ruined this model, which states that governments were the sole representatives of their constituents. Communication has become to avoid state intermediaries completely, but directly addresses the foreign populations as morally independent subjects. The video address to Russian citizens by the Prime Minister of the UK in Russian is a performative act that constructs an alternative to the Russian identity and places Russians on the judgment of history. This is a transnational address mode, in which states talk not to governments, but directly to a world public, and is the ultimate culmination of the fundamental shift from a diplomatic world of institutional elites to a world of global ethical mobilisation.

2.3.2 Results

The comparative analysis shows that the influence of digital diplomacy on American foreign policy in the social media era is more than just the adoption of new communication methods; instead, it represents a restructuring of the basic objectives and practices of diplomacy. Through the use of online resources, diplomacy has developed from a process of negotiating state interests within a universal institutional framework to an ongoing performative act that aims to mobilize an international community within a well-defined moral cosmology. Intelligence is no longer a secret state function but rather a public performance that predicts adversarial narratives when exposed knowledge is strategically utilized as public speech. Furthermore, the digital public sphere dissolves the rigid distinction between domestic and foreign audiences, enabling a direct transnational address that reframes foreign individuals as moral agents capable of autonomous judgment and action, as seen in direct appeals to Russian citizens to bypass their own government's information controls. As a consequence, while state-to-state negotiations

persist, they are complemented by a dynamic public theater where symbolic acts of solidarity- such as a handshake, a visit, or a joint video statement- hold the same value as any substantive agreement. This reframes material support as a "moral rebuke" and turns US foreign policy into a continuous form of ethical identity performance in front of an endless online audience.

Conclusion

The chapter is built on three constructivist themes. First, it reviews diplomatic norms relating to formality, evidence, and institutional legitimacy. Second, it differs from the portrayal of the U.S. during the Iraq War as a t superpower and liberator, with a description in the Ukraine era as a defender and crusader. Third, the chapter covers shifts in the notion of legitimate addressee from “state” and “people” to “transnational publics” and “individual moral agents”. By systematically comparing the two, the chapter argues for a fundamental redefinition of diplomacy, in terms of how it is done and who it is for, in the process of moving from the Iraq War to the Ukraine War. It ends with a summary of these differences and what they mean for today's U.S. foreign policy in the digital era.

Conclusion

The present research sought out to investigate the transformation of American foreign policy through digital diplomacy in the age of social media. This dissertation is composed of two primary elements: The first chapter that addressed attention on setting up a conceptual and analytical framework grounded in constructivist theory, and an empirical chapter that implemented this framework through a systematic comparative case study analysis of Iraq War (2003) and the Ukraine War (2022–2024).

The study covered four research questions. First, in what ways have the American diplomatic communication norms changed between the Iraq War and the Ukraine War? Second, what has been the U.S. performance of national identity in these two conflicts? Third, how did the target audience of communication on American foreign policy change between the two cases? Finally, how has digital diplomacy reshaped American foreign policy in the social media era?. In answering these questions, the dissertation has embraced constructivism as the only theoretical framework in answering the questions because constructivism conceptualizes the act of diplomacy as a discursive practice wherein identities, norms, and meanings are socially constructed through communication. The research design was a qualitative comparative study of official diplomatic messages of both eras, including presidential speeches, speeches by the UN Security Council, and, in the case of the Ukrainian War, YouTube videos through diplomatic channels of the U.S.

The results indicate that American diplomatic communication has been undergoing a fundamental change in all three analytical dimensions. In relation to diplomatic norms, the Iraq War has demonstrated formal, measured, and legalistic communication that was delivered through official channels, such as the Oval Office and the UN podium, where persuasion was based on intelligence evidence, satellite images, and audio intercepts relayed within a government-to-government context. Conversely, the Ukraine War has demonstrated new standards of direct popular address, confrontational moral rhetoric, and strategic transparency, in which declassified intelligence is performatively leaked to influence global discourse, and where diplomatic communication is carried out through a YouTube video, which circumvent through any traditional gatekeepers at all.

About enacted national identity, the Iraq War was revealed by a kind of precisely balanced dual identity that was, at last, balanced: the unwilling superpower that was only acting as a last resort and had no material ambition, at the same time playing the role of moral liberator bringing divinely approved freedom to subjugated peoples. The Ukrainian War, however, saw the dissolution of this tension into a single identity of unswerving defender and moral crusader, where the United States performs resolute action as an expression of national essence-- America stands up to bullies. This is who we are--with not the slightest trace of reluctance and where military assistance is refiled as moral rebuke as to be strategic.

Concerning audience construction, the Iraq War continued to be purely state-centric, which directing toward recognized audience; American national public via television broadcast and foreign governments through official diplomatic channels. Foreign citizens were marginalized as recipients of policy more than direct addressees. This explains their representation in the third person. On the other hand, the Ukrainian war has shown an extreme expansion of audience logic, where digital platforms achieved to explicitly addressing the external public, particularly through British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Russian-language video message urging the Russian people to bypass state-controlled media. and foreign nationals are now described as legitimate, independent agents enable of autonomous judgment. or in another word ,the distinction between national and international audiences has gradually collapsed.

According to these outcomes, there are three promising avenues that future researchers should explore. First, the comparative analysis of the digital practice of diplomacy of other states would ascertain whether changes in foreign policy that can be observed in the USA are a global phenomenon or a specifically American reaction to social media. Second, longitudinal studies investigating diplomatic communication before, during and after selected conflicts would help

to define whether the norms attested during the Ukrainian War are a permanent change or a temporary adaptation to the crisis. Third it is necessary for researchers to study how the algorithms of various platforms affordances build diplomatic message response across different cultural and political contexts. as audience is still incomplete without empirical research on how target publics interpret and respond to direct digital diplomatic communication .

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الملخص

تعالج هذه الدراسة تحول السياسة الخارجية الأمريكية من خلال الدبلوماسية الرقمية في عصر وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، بهدف شرح كيفية تطوّر الاتصال الدبلوماسي الأمريكي بين صراعين أساسيين: حرب العراق (2003)، التي سبقت الانتشار الكبير لوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، وحرب أوكرانيا (2022-2024)، التي وقعت في بيئة تواصل رقمي كليّ. كما تهدف أيضًا إلى تحديد التحولات في المعايير الدبلوماسية، التعبير عن الهوية الوطنية، وبناء الجمهور عبر كلتا الحالتين، مبينةً كيف أعادت المنصات الرقمية تشكيل ما يُعتبر ممارسة دبلوماسية مشروعة بشكل جذري. تم الكشف عن ثلاثة تحولات أساسية كنتائج. أولاً، انتقلت المعايير الدبلوماسية من التواصل الرسمي المعزّز بالأدلة ومن الحكومة-إلى-حكومة، إلى خطاب مباشر، مباشر، مواجه وأخلاقي حاسم، يُنقلّ عبر منصات التواصل الاجتماعي. ثانياً، تحول

الهوية الوطنية للولايات المتحدة من قوة عظمى مترددة مُتوازنة مع تحررها الأخلاقي، إلى مدافع ثابت ومصلح أخلاقي يتصرف دون تردد. ثالثاً، تم توسيع نطاق الجمهور المستهدف من مواطني الولايات المتحدة والحكومات الأجنبية ليشمل الجمهور الأجنبي الذي تتم مخاطبته مباشرة عبر يوتيوب ووسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، متجاوزاً حراس بوابات الحكومة، وتؤكد نتائج هذه الدراسة أن الدبلوماسية الرقمية قد غيرت السياسة الخارجية الأمريكية عبر المعايير والهوية والجمهور.

الكلمات المفتاحية: البنائية، الدبلوماسية الرقمية، المنصات الاجتماعية، الهوية، المعايير، بناء الجمهور.