

DIGITAL CULTURAL DIPLOMACY: STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND SOFT POWER IN A NETWORKED WORLD

DIPLOMASI BUDAYA DIGITAL: KOMUNIKASI STRATEGIS DAN KEKUATAN LUNAK DALAM DUNIA YANG TERHUBUNG JARINGAN

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ABSTRACT

The digital globalization era has fundamentally transformed cultural diplomacy from conventional state-centric approaches toward network-based digital cultural diplomacy. This transformation redefines how soft power is constructed and distributed within an ecosystem dominated by global platforms and algorithms. This study employs a systematic narrative review of global literature from 2016-2026 indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar to synthesize the paradigm shifts in international communication. The findings reveal a decentralization of narrative authority, where non-state actors, such as diasporas and digital influencers, serve as crucial quasi-diplomatic agents. Diplomatic effectiveness has shifted from one-way dissemination to interactive dialogue and narrative co-creation, prioritizing authenticity and storytelling. However, significant challenges persist, including the digital divide, algorithmic gatekeeping, and a trust crisis driven by disinformation. Successful digital cultural diplomacy requires a strategic integration of technological capacity, authentic audience engagement, and multi-actor collaboration to maintain national narrative resilience in a networked world.

Keywords: Digital Cultural Diplomacy, Strategic Communication, Soft Power, Networked Society, Diaspora

ABSTRAK

Era globalisasi digital telah mengubah praktik diplomasi budaya dari pendekatan konvensional yang berpusat pada negara menjadi diplomasi budaya digital berbasis jaringan. Transformasi ini mendefinisikan ulang konstruksi soft power dalam ekosistem yang didominasi oleh platform global dan algoritma. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan narrative review sistematis terhadap literatur global periode 2016-2026 dari basis data Scopus, Web of Science, dan Google Scholar untuk mensintesis pergeseran paradigma komunikasi internasional. Temuan menunjukkan terjadinya desentralisasi otoritas naratif dimana aktor non-negara, seperti diaspora dan influencer, berperan sebagai agen kuasi-diplomatik yang krusial. Efektivitas diplomasi kini beralih dari diseminasi satu arah menuju dialog interaktif dan co-creation narasi yang mengedepankan autentisitas serta storytelling. Namun, tantangan signifikan muncul berupa digital divide, dominasi algoritma, dan krisis kepercayaan akibat disinformasi. Keberhasilan diplomasi budaya digital memerlukan integrasi strategis antara kapasitas teknologi, keterlibatan audiens yang autentik, dan kolaborasi lintas aktor untuk menjaga resiliensi narasi nasional di dunia yang berjejaring.

Kata Kunci: Diplomasi Budaya Digital, Komunikasi Strategis, Soft Power, Masyarakat Jaringan, Diaspora

1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of digital globalization marked by the acceleration of information and communication technology, the practice of diplomacy is undergoing a fundamental transformation from a conventional approach to a more...digital cultural diplomacynetwork-based (networked-based diplomacy). This transformation not only changes the medium of communication between countries, but also redefines how soft power (soft power) is constructed, distributed, and received by a global audience (Nye, 2008; Castells,

2010). In this context, strategic communication based on digital platforms becomes a key instrument in building a national image and promoting cultural identity at the global level.

Globally, internet penetration has reached approximately 67% of the world's population, but there are still approximately 2.6 billion people who are not digitally connected (International Telecommunication Union [ITU], 2023; World Bank, 2024). This inequality indicates the existence of structural digital divide. This has direct implications for the effectiveness of digital cultural diplomacy. Countries with high digital access have a greater opportunity to dominate the global cultural narrative, while countries with limited access face obstacles in distributing diplomatic messages. In the Indonesian context, despite an internet penetration rate of 78.19%, the significant gap between urban and rural areas indicates that the distribution of cultural messages remains unequal (APJII, 2024). This poses challenges in inclusively reaching domestic audiences, the basis for legitimizing soft power.

Furthermore, the global digital ecosystem is currently dominated by a small number of large technology platforms that control over 70% of global digital traffic (Statista, 2024). This dominance creates a phenomenon of algorithmic gatekeeping, where the distribution of cultural content relies heavily on algorithmic logic controlled by non-state entities (Srnicek, 2017). Indonesia itself has approximately 191 million social media users, dominated by platforms like TikTok and Instagram (DataReportal, 2024). However, this reliance on global platforms has the potential to diminish the sovereignty of national cultural narratives and increase the risk of distorted cultural representations in the global digital space.

From a soft power perspective, there is a significant gap between developed and developing countries in the global soft power index. Countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan consistently dominate the top rankings, while Indonesia remains ranked 45th globally (Brand Finance, 2024). This gap indicates the gap between cultural potential and the effectiveness of digital strategic communication, which indicates that the use of digital technology in Indonesian cultural diplomacy is not yet optimal.

Furthermore, the increasing flow of digital information has also created a serious challenge in the form of a crisis of public trust. As many as 59% of global internet users express concern about misinformation, while trust in digital media is only around 40% (World Economic Forum, 2024; Edelman, 2024). In Indonesia, the spread of hoaxes has exacerbated this situation, diminishing the credibility of cultural diplomacy messages. In this context, the effectiveness of strategic communication is determined not only by message distribution but also by the level of audience trust in the source of the information.

On the other hand, the development of the digital economy has driven the massive commodification of culture. The global creative economy industry is valued at approximately USD 2.25 trillion, making culture a strategic economic asset (UNESCO, 2023). Indonesia itself recorded a creative economic contribution of IDR 1,300 trillion in 2023. However, this commercialization creates a dilemma between cultural authenticity and economic exploitation, which has the potential to shift the function of cultural diplomacy from a soft power instrument to merely a market commodity.

Another equally significant issue is the low level of digital literacy. Globally, only 56% of the population has basic digital skills (United Nations, 2023), while Indonesia's index is 3.65 (moderate category) (Kominfo, 2023). This limited literacy affects the audience's ability to understand, interpret, and respond to cultural messages, thus reducing the effectiveness of diplomatic communication. Furthermore, digital globalization also triggers the phenomenon, fragmentation and hybridization of cultural identities, especially among the younger generation. Around 60% of Gen Z actively consumes cross-cultural content (OECD, 2024), which has implications for shifting national cultural identities. In the Indonesian context, the dominance of global popular culture such as K-pop and Western media presents challenges in maintaining local cultural identities in the digital space. Finally, from a policy perspective, only around 35% of developing countries have a formal digital diplomacy strategy (UNDP, 2023).

Although Indonesia has initiated digital diplomacy, its implementation remains fragmented and not yet systemically integrated. This reflects limitations in orchestrating strategic communications based on the digital ecosystem.

Based on the description, it can be concluded that there is a lack of synchronization between digital infrastructure, strategic communication capacity, and national cultural potential in the context of digital diplomacy. Therefore, this research is crucial to develop a conceptual framework that is able to integrate the dimensions of technology, strategic communication, and soft power in the context of a network society (networked society). This research is expected to provide theoretical contributions through the development of a model. Digital Cultural Diplomacy bases multi-level (state–platform–audience) as well as practical contributions in formulating adaptive, inclusive, and sustainable cultural diplomacy strategies in the digital era.

2. METHODS

This research uses a narrative review systematic approach to synthesizing global literature on the transformation of cultural diplomacy in the digital era. The process of identifying literature sources was carried out through a comprehensive search of three main bibliographic databases, namely Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), and Google Scholar. This database was selected based on its reputation and broad coverage of high-impact journals in the fields of communication science, international relations, and cultural studies. The search strategy was developed using a combination of Boolean operators (AND/OR) with specific keywords: “Digital Cultural Diplomacy”, “Networked Communication”, “Soft Power 2.0”, and “Strategic Communication”. This is done to ensure that the literature collected covers the theoretical and empirical spectrum relevant to the communication structure in the network ecosystem.

To maintain the actuality and relevance of the findings with the very rapid development of communication technology, this study establishes literature period for the last 10 years (2016–2026). This timeframe is considered crucial because it encompasses a significant shift from basic social media use towards the utilization of artificial intelligence (Artificial Intelligence) and algorithms in digital diplomacy practices. Inclusion criteria focused on journal articles that had gone through the peer-review process, peer-reviewed academic textbooks that provide conceptual contributions to the paradigm shift in communication from the one-way model (one-way) to the network model (multi-stakeholder network). Documents that are not in English or do not have direct relevance to the cultural dimensions of digital diplomacy are excluded from the review process.

Data analysis was carried out using thematic approach to organize and synthesize the selected literature. This process involved inductive coding of texts to identify key emerging themes, such as the decentralization of state authority, the role of non-state actors in diplomacy, and the dynamics of digital interactivity. This narrative synthesis not only summarizes previous findings but also critiques them. Research gap existing theories and chart the conceptual evolution of cultural diplomacy. By integrating various theoretical perspectives, this analysis aims to build a new framework capable of explaining how strategic communication operates within fragmented power structures in a networked world.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. Theoretical Evolution: A Paradigm Shift Towards Digital Cultural Diplomacy

The theoretical transformation in public diplomacy represents a fundamental shift from the approach Old Public Diplomacy, which is state-centric and tends to be propagandistic towards the paradigm Digital Cultural Diplomacy more network-based (networked) and rooted in logic soft power in the digital ecosystem. This shift is marked by a transition from traditional physical institutions such as cultural centers and student exchange programs to

cyberspace-based interactions mediated by digital platforms, where cultural values are dynamically negotiated across national borders (Martino, 2021; Aliyeva, 2023; Melissen & Keulenaar, 2017; Sánchez & Smith, 2022). In this context, the concept of soft power is undergoing redefinition, no longer solely based on attraction (attraction), but more emphasis on relations, networks, and participatory involvement between global actors. Culture is positioned as a medium for inclusive dialogue that enables reciprocal influence in digital spaces (Martino, 2021; Aliyeva, 2023; Sánchez & Smith, 2022). Perspectives on digital ecology further emphasized that contemporary cultural diplomacy takes place in a multi-actor ecosystem involving states, digital platforms, influencers, and transnational publics, thus transcending the boundaries of traditional territorial sovereignty and placing the participatory public as a central actor in the production of cultural meaning (Martino, 2021; Melissen & Keulenaar, 2017; Sánchez & Smith, 2022).

However, the literature indicates significant conceptual challenges regarding the differentiation of terminology in digital-based diplomacy. Mesquita and Brito (2024) propose a tripartite classification that distinguishes between cyber diplomacy, digital diplomacy, and tech diplomacy. Cyber diplomacy focuses on aspects of security, defense, and sovereignty in cyberspace; digital diplomacy refers to the practice of public diplomacy through social media and digital channels; whereas tech diplomacy encompasses engagement with the innovation ecosystem and global technology actors. These three categories do not exist in isolation, but rather intersect and evolve within the context of technological change such as artificial intelligence (AI), artificial intelligence), geopolitical competition, and digital platform governance. Within this framework, the four-mode model of digital diplomacy proposed by Bjola and Holmes, namely broadcasting, listening, networking, and mobilizing can be positioned as an operational form of this interaction (Mesquita & Brito, 2024).

In practice, digital diplomacy is increasingly defined by the role of digital platforms as key infrastructure in managing foreign policy narratives and engaging with global publics. Digital platforms enable real-time interactions, two-way dialogue, and more dynamic state reputation management than traditional one-way communication approaches (Aliyeva, 2023; Melissen & Keulenaar, 2017; Sánchez & Smith, 2022). Contemporary literature also emphasizes that the public is no longer a passive recipient, but rather an active participant and co-producer in the construction of diplomatic narratives, thus creating a more decentralized and network-based communication environment in projection of soft power (Melissen & Keulenaar, 2017; Sánchez & Smith, 2022).

Along with the increasing role of cyberspace in international relations, the practice of cyber diplomacy as a specialized domain focused on the formation of norms, regulations, and responses to cyber threats. A study by Zwarts et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of strengthening practical capacity, including cyber awareness training for diplomats, especially in developing countries, to operationalize cyber diplomacy effectively. In addition, the literature also identifies the existence of a cyber-governance void, namely the gap between the speed of technological development and the diplomatic ability to manage it, so that efforts are needed to increase institutional capacity and digital literacy in diplomatic practice (Zwarts et al., 2022; Hartati & Muhammad, 2023; Li & Zhilun, 2023).

At the regional and national levels, the dynamics of digital diplomacy exhibit contextual variations. A case study in South Korea demonstrates how digital diplomacy can be rooted in local cultural practices while supporting strategic initiatives such as nation branding based on popular culture, while research in Indonesia highlights the importance of a balance between managing cyber threats and utilizing soft power through digital diplomacy (Melissen & Keulenaar, 2017; Hartati & Muhammad, 2023; Iswardhana, 2021). This demonstrates that digital diplomacy is not only concerned with external communications but is also integrated with national security policy and cyber governance.

From a future development perspective, several studies emphasize the need for greater conceptual clarity and integration between public diplomacy, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence-based technologies. Mesquita and Brito (2024) propose a further research agenda regarding hybrid categories in digital diplomacy and the impact of AI on diplomatic practice, while Dinu (2023) highlights AI's potential in threat detection, automated monitoring, and the risk of state abuse in information and surveillance operations.

However, there is an unresolved academic debate regarding the conceptual position of digital diplomacy. Some literature views it as a new, autonomous domain with its own logic and instruments, while others view it as an evolution of public diplomacy influenced by developments in digital technology (Melissen & Keulenaar, 2017; Seceleanu et al., 2025; Matchuk, 2020). Furthermore, the boundaries between cyber diplomacy and digital diplomacy is also still a matter of debate, with some researchers emphasizing the distinction between a cybersecurity and governance focus and a public communication orientation, while others see them as part of the same spectrum in digital-era diplomacy (Zwarts et al., 2022; Li & Zhilun, 2023; Dinu, 2023). Variations in regional experiences further reinforce this complexity, with some countries emphasizing prestige-based strategies and others emphasizing national branding, while other countries focus more on capacity building, cybersecurity, and strengthening digital governance norms (Zwarts et al., 2022; Iswardhana, 2021; Matchuk, 2020).

3.2. Actors and Network Structure: Decentralization of Cultural Authority

Recent developments in the digital cultural diplomacy literature indicate the emergence of non-state actors as quasi-diplomatic agents which plays a significant role in shaping cultural narratives and global public diplomacy spaces. Studies of diaspora and digital diplomacy demonstrate a strong trend toward decentralized power structures, where non-state actors such as diasporas, online communities, and digital content creators are able to compete substantively with official state diplomatic channels in framing national cultural identities and values (Golan et al., 2015; Johnson & Sink, 2013; Tan et al., 2021; Jindal et al., 2022). These actors include diaspora organizations, international students, digital influencers, and civil society networks that operate across borders, leveraging their social credibility and cultural proximity to publics in host countries (Hassani & Laalou, 2024; Darmastuti et al., 2021; Warner et al., 2022; Liu, 2021; Mehani, 2024; Tran & Mo, 2025).

Furthermore, the diaspora is no longer positioned as a passive recipient of state diplomatic policies, but rather as active producers and distributors of cultural narratives which plays a role in reshaping national identities in the global public sphere. Through the use of digital media and social platforms, diasporas are able to create a wide-scale impact in influencing international public perceptions (Moise, 2022; Warner et al., 2022; Lacerda et al., 2023; Ho & McConnell, 2017). This strengthens the concept diaspora diplomacy or diasporic public diplomacy as a form of civil society-based diplomacy that runs parallel to or even complements state initiatives (Liu, 2022; Ozturk & Hoyo, 2020; Golan et al., 2015; Johnson & Sink, 2013; Ayhan, 2018; Jin, 2024).

In the context of operational mechanisms, non-state actors build cultural influence through digital content production, the formation of online communities, and the development of diaspora media ecosystems that enable the rapid diffusion of narratives and emotional resonance with target audiences. This affective dimension is a key factor in the success of cultural diplomacy in an increasingly networked digital space (networked space) (Moise, 2022; Darmastuti et al., 2021; Liu, 2021; Johnson & Sink, 2013; Lam, 2021; Jin, 2024). Furthermore, the emergence of "informal cultural ambassadors" such as international students, academic communities, scientific clubs, and grassroots diaspora networks demonstrates that the mobilization of cultural assets no longer relies on formal diplomatic channels, but can instead occur organically through cross-border social interactions (Hassani & Laalou, 2024; Ozturk &

Hoyo, 2020; Warner et al., 2022; Avendaño-Urbe et al., 2022; Merkouraki, 2024; Jindal et al., 2022; Jin, 2024; Figueira, 2020).

Interaction between initiatives bottom-up from diaspora and strategy top-down the state is increasingly understood as a process-construction in digital cultural diplomacy. Effectively designed community-based initiatives are able to reach audience segments that are difficult for states to access, particularly in a fragmented and dynamic digital environment (Lacerda et al., 2023; Johnson & Sink, 2013; Merkouraki, 2024; Ayhan, 2018; Tran & Mo, 2025). Thus, the success of contemporary cultural diplomacy depends not only on state capacity, but also on their ability to orchestrate cross-actor collaboration in the digital ecosystem.

Theoretically, public diplomacy literature has long recognized the contribution of non-state actors to the diplomatic process and national branding. However, recent developments emphasize the importance of understanding the concept-activeness beyond national borders, especially in the context of network societies where diasporas and civic groups have significant agency in shaping global discourse (Golan et al., 2015; Johnson & Sink, 2013; Ayhan, 2018; Jindal et al., 2022; Ho & McConnell, 2017; Tran & Mo, 2025). Furthermore, the literature on diaspora governance indicates that countries of origin are increasingly actively mobilizing diasporas as political and cultural actors through the development of institutions, networks, and policies that support transnational engagement (Ozturk & Hoyo, 2020; Golan et al., 2015; Lacerda et al., 2023; Ayhan, 2018; Ho & McConnell, 2017; Figueira, 2020).

From a practical perspective, indicators of cultural diplomacy success have shifted significantly from a state-centric approach to network-based metrics, such as digital audience reach, emotional resonance, trust-building, and the dynamics of community-based content ecosystems. Activities such as cross-border collaboration, diaspora involvement in cultural content production, and the scale of participation in digital cultural activities have become key indicators in measuring the effectiveness of contemporary diplomacy (Darmastuti et al., 2021; Mehani, 2024; Johnson & Sink, 2013; Merkouraki, 2024; Lam, 2021; Jin, 2024). However, there are practical challenges that need to be addressed, including governance issues, the legitimacy of non-state actors, and the potential misuse of digital space for the spread of misinformation or extreme ideologies, which require the design of more adaptive and controlled diplomatic strategies (Darmastuti et al., 2021; Mehani, 2024; Lam, 2021).

While there is broad consensus on the importance of the role of non-state actors, the literature also reveals debate regarding the limits and legitimacy of such roles. Several studies emphasize that state-based approaches retain strategic relevance, particularly in maintaining the consistency of national narratives and diplomatic legitimacy, and given the potential for conflict between state strategies and the autonomy of grassroots actors, particularly in certain political contexts (Ozturk & Hoyo, 2020; Merkouraki, 2024; Tran & Mo, 2025). Furthermore, the effectiveness of digital diplomacy by non-state actors depends heavily on the quality of coordination with the state and the availability of supporting infrastructure. Numerous studies emphasize that optimal results can only be achieved through integrated, cross-sectoral collaboration, rather than through separate, independently operating initiatives (Lacerda et al., 2023; Johnson & Sink, 2013; Ayhan, 2018; Tran & Mo, 2025).

3.3. Strategic Communication Mechanisms: From Dissemination to Interactive Dialogue

Recent developments in digital cultural diplomacy indicate a fundamental transformation in strategic communication practices, from a one-way dissemination model to a multi-way one-to-two-way engagement in the context of a network society (networked world). Digital diplomacy literature consistently emphasizes that communication effectiveness is no longer determined solely by the breadth of message reach, but rather by the level of audience interaction, participation, and engagement in the communication process (Golan et al., 2015; Zhang & Ong'ong'a, 2021; Sheludiakova et al., 2021; Cotton & Boulanger, 2023; Bjola et al.,

2019). This reflects a paradigm shift from a top-down communication approach to a more dialogic and responsive model to global public dynamics.

Within the framework of contemporary public diplomacy, the concepts of real-time communication and response to public sentiment are key elements in designing an effective communication strategy. Social media serves as a key infrastructure that enables countries to not only convey messages but also monitor public opinion, interpret audience responses, and dynamically adjust communication strategies (Golan et al., 2015; Zhang & Ong'ong'a, 2021; Thunø et al., 2025; Bjola et al., 2019). Thus, digital diplomacy is no longer static but rather an adaptive, feedback-based process (feedback-driven communication), where the success of the strategy depends heavily on the ability of diplomatic actors to read and respond to the dynamics of global public opinion quickly and appropriately.

Furthermore, the emergence of the concept "conversational diplomacy" marks a significant shift in the relationship between states and the international public. In this paradigm, states no longer hold full control over the narratives conveyed, but instead act as facilitators of discussion, enabling open and collaborative dialogue with global audiences (Bjola et al., 2019; Zhang & Ong'ong'a, 2021; Sheludiakova et al., 2021). This approach aligns with the concept of public diplomacy 2.0, which emphasizes the importance of active engagement, narrative co-creation, and community-based interactions in building cultural influence. In other words, the legitimacy of diplomatic communication no longer stems solely from state authority, but from an inclusive and participatory interaction process.

The interactivity facilitated by digital platforms also contributes to the process of co-creation of cultural narratives, where global audiences play a role in shaping the meaning and representation of a country's culture. Several studies have shown that audience participation in this process can enhance a country's legitimacy, credibility, and international appeal, thereby strengthening its soft power (Indraswari & Joo, 2022; Greco, 2025; Zhang & Ong'ong'a, 2021; Szücs, 2023; Bjola et al., 2019). Thus, digital cultural diplomacy functions not only as a means of conveying messages but also as a collaborative space for building cultural identities together between countries and the global public.

Empirical findings from various regional and institutional case studies further reinforce this shift. Analysis of digital diplomacy practices across various contexts, such as the use of social media by the European Union, the United States, and the GCC countries, as well as Palestinian digital diplomacy practices, shows that communication strategies are increasingly focusing on interaction, dialogue, and audience engagement compared to traditional broadcast approaches (broadcasting) (Greco, 2025; Sobolieva, 2021; Cotton & Boulanger, 2023; Abunahel, 2025; Strauß et al., 2015; Gregory, 2011). This shows that the transformation towards two-way communication is not just a theoretical phenomenon, but has been implemented in real life in the practice of global diplomacy.

However, the literature also identifies the existence of normative debates regarding the issue of authenticity, ethics, and effectiveness in digital engagement practices. Several studies have criticized the approach as instrumental and persuasion-oriented, without considering the authentic and ethical dialogical aspects of public interactions (Comor & Bean, 2012; Gregory, 2011). In this context, there is a tension between the state's strategic goal of influencing public opinion and the need to build relationships based on trust and transparency. Therefore, although two-way engagement is recognized as the dominant paradigm in digital diplomacy, its implementation still requires a balance between communication effectiveness and ethical integrity in contemporary public diplomacy practices.

3.4. The Network Paradox: The Challenge of Authenticity and the Loss of State Control

The development of digital cultural diplomacy in the network era shows the occurrence of a phenomenon of disintermediation, namely the lack of exclusive state control over

the production and distribution of cultural narratives. Public diplomacy literature emphasizes that current diplomatic practices are no longer state-centric, but rather involve the active participation of non-state actors in shaping and disseminating narratives to global audiences. This situation creates complexity in managing official state messages, as narratives are no longer monopolized by government institutions but are instead produced collectively by citizens, communities, and other digital actors within a fragmented media ecosystem (Sánchez et al., 2022; Saliu, 2023; Greco, 2025). In this context, the dynamics of digital platforms play a crucial role, where cultural narratives are conveyed not only through institutional channels but also through popular formats such as memes, visual storytelling, and viral content that have the potential to distort or even change the meaning of official state messages (Sánchez et al., 2022; Saliu, 2023). In fact, the practice of content production by cultural actors such as athletes and influencers shows how narrative power is shifting towards platform-mediated empowerment, where individuals can access a global audience without going through traditional gatekeepers, while remaining within the corporate control structures of digital platforms (Westerbeek, 2025).

In responding to these conditions, narrative strategies in digital diplomacy have undergone a transformation towards an approach that places greater emphasis on authenticity, dramaturgy, and cultural resonance. Public diplomacy literature, particularly in the context of the European Union, emphasizes the importance of storytelling as a strategic instrument for building legitimacy, identity, and emotional connection with both domestic and international audiences (Hedling, 2019). Storytelling serves not only as a communication tool but also as a meaning-making mechanism that enables audiences to understand and experience the values espoused by a country. Furthermore, in practice, nation branding in influencer-based media, authenticity is a key factor in determining communication effectiveness, where interactive, value-based content perceived as "authentic" by audiences has a higher influence in shaping global perceptions (Li & Feng, 2022; Alim et al., 2025). However, the literature also cautions that the use of personal storytelling, such as in gender-based or feminist digital diplomacy, can broaden the reach of messages but risks simplifying or obscuring more complex structural issues if not balanced with critical analysis (Rosamond & Hedling, 2022).

On the other hand, today's global information environment is increasingly influenced by the phenomenon of post-truth and disinformation, which significantly impacts the effectiveness of digital cultural diplomacy. In this context, diplomatic narratives compete not only with other messages but also with information deliberately manipulated for specific political purposes. Disinformation is often associated with the use of emotions, security framing, and the construction of "friend-foe" relations that reinforce polarization and reduce public trust in official narratives (Sánchez et al., 2022). Saliu's (2023) study shows that the environment of post-truth challenges the effectiveness of soft power, as audiences become more skeptical of state messages, especially in cross-cultural contexts. This emphasizes that diplomatic communication strategies can no longer simply focus on message production but must also consider the increasingly complex dynamics of information contestation and public perception.

In the context of governance, technological developments such as artificial intelligence (artificial intelligence) and the power of digital platforms gives rise to new challenges related to governance, ethics, and narrative orchestration. AI-driven content production and visibility determined by platform algorithms create the need for a governance framework capable of regulating the ownership, distribution, and legitimacy of digital narratives (Westerbeek, 2025). In public diplomacy literature, this relates to fundamental questions regarding who controls the narrative and how to ensure the ethical use of technology in international public communication. Furthermore, methodological approaches to analyzing digital diplomacy are also evolving, with the combination of big data analysis (big data analytics) and qualitative

approaches such as small stories analysis. It is crucial to understand the reach of narratives and their interpretations by audiences in digital ecosystems (Spry & Lockyer, 2021). Meanwhile, studies on storytelling in public diplomacy also emphasize the need for a balance between strategically curated narratives by states and more organic storytelling practices that align with the logic of digital platforms (Hedling, 2019).

While there is consensus on the importance of adapting to the digital ecosystem, the literature shows nuanced differences in views regarding the degree of change in public diplomacy. Some studies emphasize that digital diplomacy is a process-construction which involves active interaction between the state and the global public, thus demanding a community-based approach, dialogue and participation (Greco, 2025). However, other studies show that the state still plays a significant role through formal and semi-formal strategies, although it must adapt to platform dynamics that democratize narrative authority (Greco, 2025). In addition, the effectiveness of diplomatic narratives is also contextual, where value-based messages do not always produce a uniform impact on different audience groups, depending on cultural, social, and demographic factors (Saliu, 2023).

Overall, the policy implications of these findings suggest that digital cultural diplomacy in the digital age must focus on narrative resilience rather than information dominance. Effective strategies need to prioritize culturally relevant storytelling, authentic engagement, and the transparent and ethical use of technology to maintain public trust (Sánchez et al., 2022; Li & Feng, 2022; Hedling, 2019). Furthermore, public diplomacy frameworks need to adapt to the realities of distributed narrative sovereignty, by integrating platform dynamics, practices, audience listening, as well as collaboration with non-state actors in the narrative production process (Greco, 2025; Li & Feng, 2022; Hedling, 2019). From a methodological perspective, the approach of combining quantitative and qualitative analysis is crucial for capturing the complexity of narrative production and consumption in the digital ecosystem, given that contemporary diplomatic narratives are the result of multidimensional interactions between states, platforms, and society (Spry & Lockyer, 2021).

4. CONCLUSION

This research shows that the digital era has triggered a fundamental transformation in cultural diplomacy, shifting from the traditional state-centered model (state-centric) towards the paradigm of network-based cultural diplomacy (networked cultural diplomacy). This network structure has redefined power in international communication through the decentralization of narrative authority. Soft power (soft power) is no longer solely determined by the static appeal of a nation, but rather by the ability of both state and non-state actors such as diaspora and influencers to build relationships, two-way interactions, and participatory engagement in a complex digital ecosystem. This is causing the state to lose its complete monopoly over cultural narratives, where authenticity and emotionally resonant content becomes a key currency in winning global public trust amidst the challenges of misinformation and algorithmic polarization.

Based on this analysis, cultural diplomacy practitioners, particularly in Indonesia, need to adopt more adaptive and collaborative strategies. First, the government must shift from its role as a single message producer to a facilitator or orchestrator capable of synergizing initiatives, moving from top-down to bottom-up from non-state actors. Second, strengthening digital literacy and institutional capacity to carry out audience listening in a real-time way is crucial that diplomatic messages remain relevant and responsive to the dynamics of global public opinion. Third, cultural diplomacy must integrate the dimensions of cybersecurity and platform governance to protect the sovereignty of national narratives from algorithmic distortion and disinformation operations.

Although this study has mapped the conceptual evolution of digital cultural diplomacy, there are several limitations that require attention in future research. The focus of this study is still dominated by the synthesis of secondary literature; therefore, further empirical studies with a digital cultural diplomacy approach are needed. mixed-methods is needed to measure the real impact of digital engagement on changing audience perceptions across geographic regions. In addition, the role of Artificial Intelligence The use of AI in cultural diplomacy, both as a threat detection tool and as an automated content producer, represents a significant research gap. Future research is recommended to explore the ethical and governance dimensions of AI use in maintaining cultural authenticity in cyberspace, which is increasingly mediated by advanced technology.

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