

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN THE ERA OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE – OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN PROMOTING SECURITY IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS –

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Artificial intelligence represents a major technological challenge that creates concerns both in the academic environment and in that of social practice regarding the manipulative nature that some of its applications can have in public diplomacy, when it is subordinated to security. The paper identifies and highlights the possible risks posed by AI through its use by actors seeking to misinform and manipulate public opinion in democratic societies. In the era of AI, the policies, strategies and practices of public diplomacy inevitably change, and this fact will lead to theoretical and methodological developments. The practice of public diplomacy tends to be contradictory due to the objectives pursued, when the security environment is in crisis or even destroyed by the existence of an armed conflict, as is happening today in Ukraine.

Keywords: artificial intelligence; public diplomacy; security; reputational security; information operations;

INTRODUCTION

When John McCarthy first formally proposed the concept of artificial intelligence (AI) at the Dartmouth Summer Symposium in 1956 (Moor, 2006, pp. 87-91), very few political scientists and theorists in communication or in the field of international relations and geopolitics have sensed how much these disciplines will be influenced in theory and in practical activity. The massive penetration of computers and Internet technology into the research and analysis of the international scene, including in the field of communication, has led them to change their position. Today “*Big data*” is seen as an invaluable resource both in the research and analysis of public diplomacy, and in the activity carried out in this field in different countries (Merkouraki, 2024, p. 41). New technologies have often helped manage the complexity of communication in public diplomacy, both in gathering and sharing information. They have simultaneously increased the speed of public diplomacy activities and made the international environment more unpredictable. Artificial intelligence is considered to be one of the biggest technological challenges creating both excitement and concerns about the manipulative nature of some of its applications in public diplomacy (Bjola, Cassidy, Manor, 2019, pp. 83-101). What kind of challenges will public diplomacy face in this world increasingly dominated by artificial intelligence is a question that has generated heated debates among theorists, analysts and practitioners alike, especially since it is connected to the field of security (Pamment, 2024, pp. 49-83). Starting from the premise that the digital revolution in general and AI in particular have already produced a strong impact on public diplomacy, this study is designed to answer the following questions: *Does artificial intelligence play only a positive role in the organization of public diplomacy activities of states in security processes? Does the use of digital public diplomacy in the processes of securing society mean the same for all states today? Is the use of means and tools generated by artificial intelligence leading to a radical change in the principles and practices of traditional public diplomacy?*

The answers to these questions will highlight the opportunities offered by the use of artificial intelligence to make communication with target audiences more effective in public diplomacy. Using the method of comparative analysis and exploring qualitatively the literature such as official policy documents, journal articles, conference proceedings and press articles, it can be established whether

AI has already improved communication in public diplomacy and, if not, how it can do so in the future. At the same time, answering the stated questions, the study will also highlight the possible risks generated by AI through its use by actors who aim to misinform and manipulate public opinion in democratic societies.

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN SECURING SOCIETY IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Public diplomacy, although seen by theorists and practitioners alike as a special activity within the classical diplomacy of states, is part of international political communication in which non-state actors also participate (Ociepka, 2018, pp. 290-303). From this perspective, the activity of public diplomacy is subordinated to the security processes (Gregory, 2005, p. 8) in contemporary society. They comprise *“transmission tools, which extend well beyond traditional media to include social media and other such emerging tools”* (Debray, 2007). According to Nicholas J. Cull, a prominent public diplomacy scholar, this shift is crucial in the information age because the public diplomacy work done by democratic societies today is about more than messages. It aims to build relationships between different audiences, mutual understanding and collaboration. Through this vision and the results obtained in the field of securing and promoting peace in the world, a different kind of security is aimed at, which Nicholas J. Cull defines as *“reputational security”*, a term that in the academic language of Security Studies is not in circulation (yet) in Romania. In his view, this new form of security manifestation is *“a place at the top of the global imagination. Once established, it means that when a challenge comes – whether it comes from a neighbour challenging sovereignty, internal secession, or a natural threat like sea level rise – the world cares”* (Cull, 2019, pp. 9-10). No doubt, this is not a definition in the academic sense, perhaps that is why Cull felt the need to provide other explanations. This time *reputational security* is no longer a place, but *“a quality of security that comes from having a good reputation. And the way to develop that reputation is to be seen as a good country, not just by having a beautiful culture, being a good place to go on holiday, but also by being a moral country, keeping human rights standards, and being part of collective solutions. So, even a relatively powerless country could, by being part of a larger cooperation, having a more widely seen cultural contribution, be valued above its hard power categories”* (Ib.). All these (re)considerations lead to changes in answers to the traditional question: *What is the purpose of a public activity: to inform or to influence?* The possibility arises that the two may be combined, in different proportions, depending on the nature and characteristics of a target audience,

for a set of public diplomacy activities. It aims to inform the public, because public diplomacy activity involves informing about a security aspect/fact, as it happens, in our case, in the *“public affairs”* of government agencies, or even commercial media (Lord, 2009, p. 43). In addition, it must persuade the audience to adopt an attitude and behaviour corresponding to a security process. It means that public diplomacy must not rely on the distortion and manipulation of inconvenient facts to achieve its strategic effect. This truth was validated by the public diplomacy activities carried out by the USA during the Cold War (Hlihor, Hlihor, 2020, pp. 101-121). Much of the power of contemporary public diplomacy in the West can be traced precisely to its well-known commitment to conveying the truth of world events even when promoting a truth through public diplomacy also entails a certain cost. Thus, of central importance to practitioners of American public diplomacy during the Cold War was *“maintaining the <credibility> of their programs – and the success they generally enjoyed in the face of occasional interference from political officials. On the other hand, Soviet information efforts were critically hampered not only by a filter generated by an ideological language increasingly distant from the real world, but also by the routine recourse to classic propaganda techniques, loaded with what the Russian nomenklatura called <disinformation>”* (Lord, p. 48).

Soviet specialists in the field did not understand the difference between propaganda and counter-propaganda, which had as their objective information and disinformation, and public diplomacy, which was engaged in a war of ideas. This is all the more true today, and it is therefore vital that public diplomacy should be correctly used, as modern wars are most often manifestations of wars of ideas. The final victory is not only on the battlefield, but also in the human mind (Reilly, 2009, p. 120).

From this point of view, the representatives of the Copenhagen School are right when they state that security is a socially constructed phenomenon, in other words security is activated, produced, reproduced and maintained through discourse. *“The process of creating security begins with a speech act that must use the rhetoric of an existential threat to emphasize that society is at risk”* (Mijalković, Mančević, 2018, p. 40). It means that the invocation that a referent object (state, society, organization etc.) is threatened is a linguistic construction enunciated by a securitization agent (the representative of a state, of a public institution with security duties, of a commercial company etc.). It becomes a successful securitization process only if a significant public accepts the existence of the threat (Buzan, de Wilde, Waever, 2011, p. 27), thus legitimizing the introduction of exceptional measures

that bypass (pre)established processes to eliminate the perceived threat. In this cycle of perceiving and launching into public opinion threats in numerous fields, such as the study of migration, global environment, critical infrastructure, cyber security and data flows etc., public diplomacy activities can be subsumed under the creation of a desirable security environment. The communication of a security act is no longer done in traditional mass media alone. New media channels are used, including those used by public diplomacy in the age of artificial intelligence.

Today, anyone can access information from any country on the globe if they have a device equipped with a translation engine, but it is not the only facility offered by the digital revolution. AI tools streamline processes and bring operational improvements for public diplomacy practitioners. They are effective for generating media summaries, for example. A chatbot, powered by AI, can function as a virtual assistant to a press officer, interacting with the public, addressing questions, and providing accurate details on government policies and international affairs (Wang, Dubbins, 2024). We will illustrate, by way of example, only one of the opportunities offered by the use of artificial intelligence in public diplomacy activities carried out with the aim of promoting security and cooperation between nations. It refers to the ability of artificial intelligence tools to provide a quick, precise analysis of data regarding the social, cultural, economic, political context, historical psycho-fixations, prejudices in the society where a public diplomacy campaign is to be carried out in favour of security and to make predictions about the evolution trends based on information from the online press and public data about that society. I asked ChatGPT: “What do the Russians think about Western public diplomacy?” In less than two seconds, an essential picture of how Russians view Western public diplomacy was drawn:

“Russian opinions on Western public diplomacy are quite varied and often influenced by the broader geopolitical context. Here are some key perspectives:

1. Scepticism and Distrust: Many Russians view Western public diplomacy with scepticism, seeing it as a tool for promoting Western interests and values at the expense of Russian sovereignty and cultural identity. This sentiment has been reinforced by historical events and current geopolitical tensions.

2. Perception of Bias: There is a common perception that Western public diplomacy is biased and often portrays Russia in a negative light. This includes media coverage and diplomatic statements that are seen as unfairly critical of Russian policies and actions.

3. Impact of Sanctions and Diplomatic Strains: The imposition of sanctions and the deterioration of diplomatic relations, especially following events like the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Ukraine, have further strained perceptions. Many Russians feel that Western public diplomacy efforts are part of a broader strategy to isolate and weaken Russia.

4. Alternative Narratives: In response to Western public diplomacy, Russia has developed its own narratives and public diplomacy efforts, focusing on promoting a multipolar world order and countering what it sees as Western unilateralism. This includes engaging with countries in Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America to build alliances and present alternative viewpoints”. (Co-pilot)

This picture can be an excellent starting point for drawing up a working plan of a public diplomacy campaign in contemporary Russian society, if the Russian state were not in the position of aggressor in Ukraine. To the question “What are some recent examples of tensions between Russia and the West in terms of public diplomacy?” the co-pilot identified the factors that could hinder a public diplomacy campaign of an institution in a democratic Western country.

“Recent tensions between Russia and the West in terms of public diplomacy have been marked by several significant events:

1. Ukraine Conflict: The ongoing conflict in Ukraine remains a major point of contention. Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its support for separatists in Eastern Ukraine have led to severe diplomatic tensions. The West, particularly the United States and the European Union, has imposed sanctions on Russia, which Moscow views as an attempt to undermine its sovereignty.

2. Sanctions and Economic Measures: In response to various actions by Russia, including alleged election interference and cyberattacks, the West has implemented a series of economic sanctions. These measures have targeted Russian individuals, companies, and sectors, leading to retaliatory actions from Russia.

3. Diplomatic Expulsions: There have been multiple instances of diplomatic expulsions between Russia and Western countries. For example, following the poisoning of former Russian spy Sergei Skripal in the UK in 2018, numerous Western countries expelled Russian diplomats, and Russia responded in kind.

4. Media and Information Warfare: Both sides accuse each other of spreading disinformation and propaganda. Russia has criticized Western media for biased reporting, while Western countries have accused Russian state media of spreading false narratives.

5. Military Posturing: NATO's military exercises near Russia's borders and Russia's military activities in regions like the Arctic and the Black Sea have heightened tensions. Both sides view these actions as provocative and a threat to regional stability.

These examples illustrate the complex and often adversarial nature of public diplomacy between Russia and the West. Is there a particular event or aspect you'd like to explore further?" (Co-pilot)

How much time and effort must have been invested by a documentary crew to make this image? The answer seems to be a truism, but it cannot be avoided in the age of the digital revolution. Analysing the role of artificial intelligence in the efficiency of public diplomacy activities in the field of security, specialists and analysts from Israel believe that the efficiency of public diplomacy activities through the use of tools offered by artificial intelligence could be manifested on three levels (Barel, 2024). At a strategic level, the use of AI can allow Israel to gain a better perspective on possible future global changes that could influence the balance of world power and affect how Jerusalem will manage its foreign relations, especially with the great powers. At an intermediate level, AI could provide an answer to the existing bureaucratic maze of the public diplomacy system, which often prevents Israeli influence campaigns from working effectively. At the tactical level, AI enables intelligence operatives to respond faster and better to anti-Israel social media attempts to influence disinformation and delegitimization campaigns, including actions that themselves rely on artificial intelligence. The study concludes with a series of recommendations on how the process of absorbing AI in an influence campaign could begin (Ib.).

Another opportunity relates to enhancing the credibility of a public diplomacy activity through the use of AI, especially when it targets an audience in a society that is in a conflict relationship with the country in which the public diplomacy institution is located. AI can provide means of remote interaction, because in such a situation the military and intelligence structures of the target state use all means to prevent such activities. On the other hand, AI uses both overt and covert forms of influence that rely on deception, black and grey forms of propaganda, which affects the ability of public diplomacy professionals to achieve their goals (Gass, Seiter, 2020, pp. 154-165). Some public diplomacy practitioners often wonder how meaningful public diplomacy activities can be created and sustained if the environments they typically rely on become less trustworthy, compromised by artificial intelligence used for deception and disinformation. One possible answer to this challenge is given

by Elizabeth M. Allen, a specialist in strategic communication and public relations in the Obama and Biden Administrations. According to her, artificial intelligence does not fundamentally change the nature and characteristics of public diplomacy: *"We build trust and credibility by doing what we have always done, but better: providing direct, truthful and credible messages, more strategic in our communications. The voice of the United States from the podium and visual branding continues to be effective carriers of information. Investing in audience analytics, focusing on human-centric storytelling, and unifying branding took our messaging even further. Our insightful and creative practitioners in the field add local cultural insight to make our voice even more relevant to our audience. And we are not alone. The smart realignment of our resources around strategic communication has positioned the US government as a key strategic communication partner, creating expertise that government counterparts are eager to learn from and collaborate with. We have built coalitions around trust, coordinating joint statements and strategic messages with partners around the world, from the G7 to the Indo-Pacific Quad and beyond. However, the flag and voice of the US have limits in their reach, especially within closed communication platforms, which is why we also invest in reaching people through credible third parties, stakeholders and influential voices"* (Allen, 2023). None of the public diplomacy theorists are very concerned about the possibility that public diplomacy organizations and institutions in unfriendly countries could undermine the credibility of public diplomacy work by using artificial intelligence. According to Nicholas J. Cull, *"As we move forward to negotiate this digital world, my point is that we shouldn't throw away the lessons of the analog past, and there are some pretty good takeaways from earlier eras of public diplomacy that are recognized as best practices and what has worked in the past will work in the present and in the future because it is based on consistent human beings"* (Cull, pp. 9-10). It does not mean that public diplomacy theorists and practitioners should not research and analyse possible manipulative ways and means of using artificial intelligence. There are still many states on the international stage for whom sowing mistrust is a key objective of their foreign policy. As specialists in the US Department of Defense state, *"information has been turned into weapons, and disinformation has become an incisive tool of state policy"* (British Council, 2022, p. 42). The rapid development of information technologies has created new possibilities for the malicious use of artificial intelligence through strategic deception and psychological warfare operations that pose multiple threats to organizational safety and national security. An extremely large number of fake videos used in such campaigns can be created with the help of artificial intelligence.

THE RISKS GENERATED BY THE ABUSIVE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE ACTIVITY OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Social media and other tools using AI can present a real challenge for public diplomacy practitioners today. Society is increasingly interconnected and there is no to avoid social platforms when you aim to engage in dialogue with a target audience. The first challenge for the “target” would be to answer the question of whether the message is built on the basis of information from concrete-factual reality or is generated with the help of artificial intelligence. In other words – to trust or not to trust the sender of a public diplomacy message? The answer is not so simple. Even for a specialist it is difficult to identify who is behind the dissemination of messages, especially in times of crisis and war. In such situations the trail/digital fingerprint of the “emitter” can even be blurred to accuse its enemies of deception and disinformation operations, as Russia has often done in the conflict in Ukraine (Kryvenko, 2024). However, not only public diplomacy institutions and organizations in Russia do so. In the case of Russia, it is most obvious, because the specific tools of artificial intelligence are being misused in military-specific operations, which creates great challenges for public diplomacy. Paradoxically, Russian specialists are exploiting precisely the feeling, cultivated in Western public opinion, of trust in the tools and means that use AI for purposes beneficial to society. An edifying example, but not the only one, is ChatGPT which has been widely used in recent years. Professor and public diplomacy specialist Ilan Manor observed that *“The media has portrayed ChatGPT as incredibly smart and sophisticated, so sophisticated that it can pass the bar exam or pass medical licensing exams or pass Ivy League Universities entrance exams. It may cause the public to have <trust> in the information generated by ChatGPT”* (Manor, 2023). He points out that many times *“the answers generated by artificial intelligence can be wrong or misleading”* (Ib.). He illustrates this statement with the answer to the question asked to ChatGPT: *Why did Russia invade Ukraine in 2014?* It offered a short and manipulative answer: *“The invasion was determined by the establishment of a pro-Western government in Kiev, which threatened the interests of Russia”* (Ib.). It failed to mention that hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians have taken to the streets over several years demanding closer ties with the West, failed to mention that riot police shot and killed protesters, or that Russia’s use of digital disinformation and of the armed forces led to the worsening of the internal situation. This fact shows us that trust in such search and analysis engines must contain a dose of caution, because the answers to questions that assume a large analytical load and ethical, political, moral and ideological interpretations

are limited by the information resource stored in such artificial intelligence tools. It depends on who has the interest and ability to “clutter” such tools with desirable and interested information. Russia has been doing it for the past 20 years, although initially the reach of its government apparatus for public diplomacy was extended mainly through the mass media (Tsvetkova, Rushchin, 2021, p. 5). In 2005, the TV channel Russia Today was created, followed by the revision of broadcasting agencies, in particular. *“Voice of Russia”* was transformed into *“Radio Sputnik”*. Over time, *“Rossiyskaya Gazeta”* (*“Russian Gazette”*) cooperated with *“The Washington Post”*, *“The Daily Telegraph”*, *“Figaro”* and leading newspapers in Argentina, Bulgaria, Brazil, India, Spain and Italy to publish its articles. Some digital cultural projects also appeared, including Russia Profile, Meeting Russia, and even a social network for graduates of overseas exchange programs. Among the measures aimed at promoting Russian brands abroad were also projects between the Russian government and the American public relations agency Ketchum, which promoted Russian interests within US political institutions (Tsvetkova, Rushchin, ib.). After the Russian aggression on Ukraine, the effectiveness of these public diplomacy activities is practically nil, because *“cross-cultural ties between Russia and the United States are practically frozen. Even Russian specialists admit that Western states have managed to drastically limit the social space in which the Russian Federation could carry out public diplomacy activities and impose its own narratives in relation to the war in Ukraine”* (Burlinova, 2023). They consider 2022 to be a crucial year in reorienting public diplomacy to other regions of the world. According to this approach, public diplomacy must be understood as the sphere of activity of state or non-state actors, whose main task is to establish a dialogue with the target audience of foreign societies, as a rule, in order to achieve national foreign policy objectives (Burlinova, Tabak, 2022). In this situation, Russian officials directed *“all efforts to develop our presence in those countries that perceive Russian public diplomacy as an opportunity to strengthen bilateral dialogue”* (Burlinova, 2023). This aspect shows us that, under the conditions in which Russia was excluded from relations with the West, the essence and character of public diplomacy did not change, but only changed its direction, towards Latin American countries, the Middle East and Africa (Antwi-Boasiako, 2022, pp. 463-482).

Another element that constitutes a great challenge for public diplomacy in the era of artificial intelligence is that of the phenomenon of *fake news* and *deep fake*, especially during wartime (Hlihor, 2024), when the military personnel can also use public diplomacy tools to influence public opinion in the society in which

they act. This is what happened in the war on terror in Iraq and Afghanistan (Wallin, 2015). The war in Ukraine confirmed some of the studies and opinions of specialists who analysed the role of public diplomacy in war situations. Western and Eastern European political elites now widely accept that Russia uses information as a weapon, and that this type of information threatens national security just as much as conventional weapons. The US National Security Strategy, for example, states that *“America’s adversaries are weaponizing information to attack the values and institutions that underpin free societies”* (Szostek, 2020, pp. 2728-2748). Moreover, Ukrainians also openly admit that *“public diplomacy is used as a weapon in the war with Russia”* (Kuleba, 2015). Dmitro Kuleba states that *“Where official diplomacy is forced to speak behind closed doors, public diplomacy speaks openly – in conference rooms, galleries, apartments, concert halls, squares and streets. Where the door will not open to official diplomacy, public diplomacy will be hospitably invited to enter. This diplomacy will allow you to keep important foreign policy topics afloat in the sea of hundreds of other topics. Finally, it allows you to reach those who are not interested in public policy, but are interested in open discussion, science, art, texts, music, fashion, food, people and everything called lifestyle. When iron weapons fall silent, soft weapons become even more necessary for Ukraine. The world already knows that Russia is an aggressor state that has destroyed European and international security. The time has come to tell the world, through the tools of public diplomacy, who Ukraine is – a European state with positive changes, freedom and talented people”* (Kuleba, ib.).

In information operations, deception occurs through, among other means, fake news and deep fake. It is difficult to say whether all actors engaged in a conflict use such means in public diplomacy, but the phenomenon cannot be disputed. Professor Corneliu Bjola states that the use of fake news and deep fake constitutes the *“dark side”* of digital diplomacy, because they are disinformation and propaganda tools used by governments and non-state actors in pursuit of strategic interests (Bjola, 2019, pp. 1-2). Easy access to online content creation and editing tools, integration of AI technology in smartphones have paved the way for fraudulent activities such as: creating fake videos, disseminating fake news, disseminating them through social networks. Unfortunately, it has led to blurring the line between subjective comments and verifiable facts. Users often take content with a significant number of likes or reshares on social media as fact without verifying its accuracy. Artificial intelligence has given rise to trolls that can *“mask”* themselves as humans and artificially increase their number of followers, likes and re-shares. Users are more

likely to be attracted to topics that have attracted high engagement, viewing them as valid and trustworthy, thus re-sharing them as real information. Users are constantly bombarded with information and have moved from TV and radio to websites and social media to read news and communicate. Therefore, in an era where *“the news media can be used strategically to take advantage of or increase the uncertainty of the target audience”* it is important to recognize that public diplomacy efforts *“cannot always depend on the construction of stable and positive images of a state or its ambitions”* (Miles, 2021, p. 158).

In order to avoid the negative effects of malicious public diplomacy campaigns, practitioners in the field must find other platforms, different from those that accept such methods to reach the intended audience, while taking into account the challenges and threats of each platform. These are just a few of the challenges and risks posed by AI in public diplomacy work. They are red flags generated by the digital revolution for both practitioners and *“consumers”* of public diplomacy. Society will adapt to all these challenges and exploit everything that is beneficial to it. We do not live in a fundamentally different society compared to previous generations. The perception may be more intense from one age to another. Each generation tends to believe that their own generation is different than the previous generation. This is an ancient human concern and should be seen today as a strategic narrative (Sharma, 2019, pp. 1-6).

CONCLUSIONS

The digital revolution, in general, and artificial intelligence, in particular, have changed especially the practice of public diplomacy when it is subordinated to security, at all levels and of all kinds. Different interests and perceptions of threats, risks and vulnerabilities have made the landscape of public diplomacy activities to shape the attitude and behaviour of a target audience, different from one society to another or from one region to another. The biased mind of communities or individuals accentuates this tendency. An ordinary citizen who is *“caught up”* in a public diplomacy campaign will consume those *“elements”* that suit his/her own beliefs and perceptions from the security environment, and there is a good chance that the particular individual will oppose any content that would have him/her question previous beliefs about a country.

This fact shows us that neither the advantages of using AI in public diplomacy nor the possible risks should be exaggerated. We believe that a comprehensive understanding of public diplomacy policies, strategies and practices – which have

inevitably changed – in the age of AI needs a new theoretical framework to explain their mechanisms and dynamics. The practice of public diplomacy tends to be contradictory especially considering the pursued objectives when the security environment is in crisis or even destroyed by the existence of an armed conflict, as it is happening today in Ukraine. But this fact will not lead to the abandonment of such activities because someone with malicious intent will use one of the AI tools (e.g. ChatGPT) to create and spread fake information online. New technical possibilities to detect them will be identified or, through better education in the digital field, people will reject them as such. Another solution would be to establish rules for the use of AI by both public and non-state institutions. It will not be an easy step to take, because in the commercial/advertising field it is not primarily about ethics and morals, but profit. It could be less difficult to establish norms for the use of AI in the field of security.

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