

THE DIGITALIZATION OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND FOREIGN POLICY

LAMAN SURKHAY SULEYMAN-ZADE

PhD student at the Department of
International Relations of Baku State University
33 Akademik Zahid Khalilov Street,
AZ1148, Baku, Azerbaijan
Orcid id: 009-0003-8647-277X
E-mail: lyama13@gmail.com

SUMMARY

In the context of globalization and the intensive development of information and communication technologies, the field of foreign policy is undergoing radical transformation, dictating the need for theoretical understanding of modern models of interstate interaction. The aim of this article is to explore the theoretical aspects of the digitalization of international relations. The purpose of this article is to analyze digital processes as one of the contemporary characteristics of interstate interaction. The relevance of the research lies in a comprehensive political science analysis of the impact of digital technologies on the transformation of international relations and related issues and risks. The methodological basis of the research consisted of general scientific methods (dialectical method, systemic method, structural-functional method), as well as scientific methods of political analysis (institutional method, sociological case study approach). Key findings The diplomatic apparatus of the state and the phenomenon of diplomacy itself must be adapted to the conditions of digital reality, as global processes not only change the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the geopolitical information field, but also challenge the fundamental role of the sovereign state as a system-forming actor in international relations.

Keywords: *digitalization, digital transformation, digital diplomacy, Internet, social networks, big data.*

Introduction

Modern international relations are becoming increasingly digital, and the digitization of foreign policy is not simply a technological upgrade, but a fundamental shift in the paradigm of international interaction. The term “digitalization” was first used in 1971 in Professor Robert Wachal's essay “Humanities and Computers” on the social consequences of the “digitalization of society,” published in the North American Review. International relations themselves have become digital with the inclusion of global po-

litical actors—states, international institutions, civil society, non-profit organizations, etc.—among Internet users. The Internet and Internet-based services have become the architectural framework for digitalization, facilitating the application of digital technologies on a global scale. However, new formats of mass interaction—social networks, forums, chats, blogs, messengers, etc.—have played a key role in the process of digitalization of world politics.

In a world where everything is interconnected, the ability to accumulate, analyze, and share information at unprecedented speeds creates new opportunities for political leaders and government agencies to exchange messages and determine policy agendas outside of traditional channels. Digital innovations are constructing a new social reality that bears little resemblance to previous forms of social organization in terms of its ontological characteristics, but surpasses them in terms of its possibilities. This transformation allows us to understand the current vector of development of digital international relations, including theoretical issues of power, influence, and changes in the balance of power.

Main

Digital power, defined as “new opportunities for the state to mobilize society, influence the political actions of other states using digital technologies, etc.,” is changing the traditional place of states on the map of world politics.

Six main factors influence world in digital international relations:

- ✓ information digitization;
- ✓ transnational networks formation;
- ✓ access to and control over networks;
- ✓ increased speed and mobility of social activity and power structures;
- ✓ remote control;
- ✓ process automation;

The era of globalization is marked by a significant escalation of social, economic, political, and cultural interactions beyond local boundaries. In the emerging digital structure, power is shifting from access to and control over key institutions of the ter-

ritorial state and economy to control over networks, network nodes, operating modes, speed, and access to digital international relations. The expanded capabilities of networks accelerate the coordination of legitimate political processes and public administration, promote mobility, communication, empowerment, and social mobilization; equality in decentralized systems of power and democratized forms of knowledge; and a deeper understanding of the cultural, aesthetic, and normative aspects of society. [8, p.115] This shift has not only increased the efficiency of communication, but has also transformed the nature of diplomatic contacts, allowing both state and non-state actors to influence global discourse in real time.

The main clusters of modern digital international relations are:

- ✓ digital diplomacy,
- ✓ big data and data diplomacy,
- ✓ global Internet governance,
- ✓ digital electoral technologies,
- ✓ cybersecurity. [2, p.55]

Contemporary theoretical models of digital interaction in foreign policy can be divided into several basic types:

- ✓ digital presence model;
- ✓ strategic digital communication model;
- ✓ network diplomacy model;
- ✓ adaptive digital diplomacy model [3, p.407].

Digital presence model involves the use of online platforms, official embassy websites, and social media accounts to officially represent the state and ensure communication with the foreign public.

The strategic digital communication model is based on the active use of big data analytics, targeted content, and multimedia tools to achieve specific foreign policy goals. In this context, particular attention is paid to the algorithmic management of information flows, the formation of favorable images, and the prevention of crises through constant monitoring of digital discourse.

Network diplomacy model is based on the interaction of diplomatic institutions with non-state actors—transnational corporations, international organizations, and influential individuals who have their own digital platforms.

Adaptive digital diplomacy model involves a flexible combination of traditional forms of diplomatic interaction with digital innovations, taking into account the national context, the level of IT development, and the characteristics of the target audience [4, p.319].

Diplomacy in the context of globalization is undergoing a period of transformation comparable in scale to such epoch-making milestones in political history as the invention of printing or the development of technical means of communication (telegraph, telephone). Classical diplomacy in the era of globalization undoubtedly retains its basic functions and institutions designed to protect the foreign policy interests of the state by peaceful means. At the same time, due to the influence of global socio-political, economic, and technological processes, the forms and methods of modern diplomacy are undergoing such serious transformation that, in the future, we may have to talk about qualitative shifts in the content and purpose of the phenomenon itself.

Digital diplomacy, proclaimed by former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton as the state art of the 21st century, is a fundamental dimension of modern international politics, in which a wide variety of actors are currently involved: states, ethno-nationalist associations, multinational corporations, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, various transnational movements, networks, and even individuals [1, p.34].

The authors of the idea of “digital diplomacy,” taking into account the development of modern technologies and means of communication, have rethought the principles of public diplomacy, relying on the capabilities of the Internet, satellite television, and mobile communications, thereby significantly expanding its scope.

Digital diplomacy has become a method of engaging with a global audience, sharing political narratives, and responding quickly to international crises, overcoming the limitations of traditional diplomacy and ensuring constant interaction with a broad and diverse global audience. The key difference between digital diplomacy and earlier forms, such as radio or television diplomacy, is the interactive, two-way communication enabled by social media platforms.

Given that the direct agents of digital diplomacy online are non-governmental actors—non-profit organizations (such as human rights organizations), foundations, socio-political associations of bloggers, etc.—the question arises of external interference in foreign policy, which is a priori the exclusive domain of the state. Another feature of “digital diplomacy” is the possibility of direct interference in the internal politics of the recipient country through the transfer of new technologies and software related to communication issues to opposition forces. However, it should be mentioned that influencing the audience,

shaping public opinion using the latest communication technologies and providing information technology resources or direct methodological support in the field of “electronic warfare” to politically interested groups in other countries are fundamentally different from each other, just as traditional processes of official and secret diplomacy are different.

If digital diplomacy in the 2010s was a linear spread of information on social media and part of public diplomacy, then data diplomacy in the 2020s is the use of algorithms to filter audiences, build information campaigns, and search for sources of unfriendly information. The rapid and uncontrolled access of a wide variety of actors to artificial intelligence technologies has facilitated the rapid influence of target audiences through effective information campaigns, filtering, the creation of synthetic media, and deepfakes. Without the use of big data analytics, it is no longer possible to build a digital information campaign or influence target audiences. Diplomacy is forced to respond to all information challenges in conditions of uncertainty and constant information flash mobs against state leaders or states as a whole.

The issue of access to artificial intelligence data and algorithms is key to studying the phenomenon of digital diplomacy, as they provide a complete picture of the political balance of power. If, for some reason, data becomes inaccessible (stolen or unlawfully disclosed), the consequences of potential digital problems are instantly transferred to the real world.

International relations have entered an era in which interaction between countries, proxy groups, and users in cyberspace must be regulated by digital rules, either in the spirit of the Yalta-Potsdam agreements and the establishment of red lines on the internet, or in the style of Woodrow Wilson's peace treaty program “Fourteen Points” on open diplomacy and real-time politics. The logic of proactive digitalization is linked to the need for diplomats to constantly study digital innovations, assessing which innovations may generate friction and competition between states, and which may create problems requiring international cooperation. In a world driven by complex digital technologies, diplomats are increasingly having to deal with the consequences of these technologies, from international agreements on the ethical development of AI to ensuring data sovereignty or determining the legal status of autonomous weapons [5, p.155].

When discussing the advantages of the digitalization of international relations, it is important to mention the risks, which are becoming increasingly

sophisticated, and the groups interested in exploiting cyber vulnerabilities have expanded to include covert hackers in well-organized criminal and terrorist groups, state security services, and defense forces.

Hacking. Hacking is traditionally considered the main risk of digital diplomacy. State and non-state actors who are diplomatic rivals attack government systems to extract and use confidential information for specific purposes. Many heads of state, governments, and diplomats around the world have already fallen victim to hacking.

Disinformation. Digital disinformation and efforts to counter it are now considered practices of digital diplomacy. Deepfakes, trolls, and bots spread false information across the global network.

Bots. Recent studies have shown that up to 30-50% of accounts (with a noticeable upward trend) on X (Twitter) are actually bots. At the moment when artificial intelligence objects outnumber humans in the digital user population, the ability of foreign ministries to develop meaningful campaigns with online audiences is sharply reduced [7, p.24].

Culture of communication. The level of communication culture on social media is very low, with many political leaders and diplomats facing insults and openly provocative and threatening messages.

Commenting on the challenges that digital reality has posed for the diplomatic corps, former US Secretary of State John Kerry noted that “the term ‘digital diplomacy’ is practically redundant—it's just diplomacy, period” [6, p.45]. According to Kerry, digital technologies help achieve the foreign policy goals of states, overcome differences between people around the world, and interact with them, fulfilling the main diplomatic function, namely: establishing dialogue and finding common ground among the widest possible audience.

Conclusion

On October 27, 2025, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Azerbaijan approved the “Rules for Diagnosing the Level of Digitalization of Information Infrastructure at the National Level,” prepared by the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport as part of the implementation of the “Concept of Digital Development in the Republic of Azerbaijan” dated January 16, 2025, approved by the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev. All state bodies will undergo an annual assessment of their level of digitalization in order to develop a plan for further development. The document lays the foundation for regulating digital transformation, the efficient use of resources, and

the sustainable digital development of the country. In this regard, the author of the article provides a number of recommendations directly related to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan.

In particular, it is necessary to optimize the nature of the digital environment in order to strengthen Azerbaijan's diplomatic influence on the world stage. Diplomatic services must transform into flexible digital organizations capable of responding quickly to changes in the information environment and interacting with a wide range of stakeholders. This transformation should be supported by the development and adoptions of a comprehensive set of unified international standards for digital diplomacy, taking into account both security and ethical issues.

Technological infrastructure, while necessary, is insufficient for effective digital diplomacy. It is important to note that diplomats must possess digital communication skills, data analysis skills, and the ability to strategically model interactions in a dynamic environment.

Rapidly introducing digital tools without a comprehensive strategy for how they should be used to support specific foreign policy goals can create coordination and policy implementation problems. The risk for foreign ministries in this case is that they will consume valuable resources on several mini-digital campaigns without a clear direction or strategic compass.

REFERENCES:

1. Кузнецов Н. М., Цветкова Н. А. *Дипломатия данных России: цели, тенденции, прогнозы* // Вестник РГГУ. Серия: Политология. История. Международные отношения. – 2022. – №. 1. – С. 26-40.
2. Bjola C. *Trends and counter-trends in digital diplomacy* // *New Realities in Foreign Affairs*. – Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG, 2019. – С. 51-62.
3. Bjola C., Cassidy J. A., Manor I. *Digital Public Diplomacy: Business as Usual or a Paradigm Shift?* // *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*. – Routledge, 2020. – С. 405-412.
4. Cercel M., Saftescu R. *Digital Diplomacy-perspectives and impact on traditional diplomatic practices-case study: Digitization Impact on Romanian and Belgian national diplomatic systems* // *International Journal of Social Sciences and Education Research*. – 2015. – T. 1. – №. 2. – С. 318-328.
5. Erpul O. *Digital Diplomacy and International Society in the Age of Populism* // *The Palgrave Hand-*

book of Diplomatic Reform and Innovation. – Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023. – С. 143-166.

6. Göksu O., Özkan A. *Digital Diplomacy: An Evaluation of the Means and Opportunities That Digitalization Brings to Diplomacy* // *DIGITAL SIEGE*. – 2021. – С. 45.

7. Ovali A. Ş. *Türkiye-ABD ilişkilerinde Twitter diplomasisi* // *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*. – 2020. – T. 17. – №. 65. – С. 23-45.

8. Tsvetkova N. *Russian digital diplomacy: A rising cyber soft power?* // *Russia's Public Diplomacy: Evolution and Practice*. – 2020. – С. 103-117.

Beynəlxalq münasibətlərin və xarici siyasətin rəqəmsallaşdırılması

Ləman Surxay qızı Süleyman-zadə
Bakı Dövlət Universitetinin Beynəlxalq
münasibətlər kafedrasının doktorantı
lyama13@gmail.com

XÜLASƏ

Qloballaşma və informasiya-kommunikasiya texnologiyalarının intensiv inkişafı kontekstində xarici siyasət sahəsi köklü transformasiyaya məruz qalır və bu da dövlətlərarası qarşılıqlı əlaqələrin müasir modellərinin nəzəri anlaşılmaya ehtiyac yaradır. Bu tədqiqatın məqsədi beynəlxalq münasibətlərin rəqəmsallaşmasının nəzəri aspektlərini araşdırmaqdır. Bu tədqiqatın vəzifəsi dövlətlərarası qarşılıqlı əlaqələrin müasir xüsusiyyətlərindən biri kimi rəqəmsal prosesləri təhlil etməkdir. Tədqiqatın aktuallığı rəqəmsal texnologiyaların beynəlxalq münasibətlərin transformasiyasına və əlaqəli məsələlərə və risklərə təsirinin hərtərəfli politoloji təhlilindədir. Tədqiqatın metodoloji əsası ümumi elmi metodlardan (dialektik metod, sistemli metod, struktur-funksional metod), eləcə də siyasi təhlilin elmi metodlarından (institusional metod, sosioloji hal araşdırması) ibarət idi. Əldə edilən nəticələr dövlətin diplomatik aparatı və diplomatiya fenomeni özü rəqəmsal reallığın şərtlərinə uyğunlaşdırılmalıdır, çünki qlobal proseslər yalnız geosiyasi informasiya sahəsinin kəmiyyət və keyfiyyət xüsusiyyətlərini dəyişdirmir, həm də suveren dövlətin beynəlxalq münasibətlərdə sistem yaradan aktor kimi fundamental roluna meydan oxuyur.

Açar sözlər: rəqəmsallaşma, rəqəmsal transformasiya, rəqəmsal diplomatiya, internet, sosial şəbəkələr, big data.

Цифровизация международных отношений и внешней политики

Ляман Сурхай Сулейман-заде

Докторант кафедры

«Международные отношения»

Бакинского Государственного Университета

lyama13@gmail.com

РЕЗЮМЕ

В условиях глобализации и интенсивного развития информационно-коммуникационных технологий сфера внешней политики претерпевает радикальную трансформацию, диктуя необходимость теоретического осмысления современных моделей межгосударственного взаимодействия. Цель статьи исследовать теоретические аспекты цифровизации международных отношений. Задача статьи проанализировать цифровые процессы, как одну из современных характеристик межгосударственного взаимодействия. Научная новизна исследования заключается в комплексном политологическом анализе влияния цифровых технологий на процессы трансформации международных отношений и связанных с ними проблем и рисков. Методологическую основу исследования составили общенаучные методы (диалектический метод, системный метод, структурно-функциональный метод, а также научные методы политологического анализа (институциональный метод, социологический подход «кейс-стади»). Результат Дипломатический аппарат государства и сам феномен дипломатии должен быть адаптирован к условиям цифровой реальности, так как глобальные процессы не только меняют количественные и качественные характеристики геополитического информационного поля, но и бросают вызов фундаментальной роли суверенного государства в качестве системообразующего актора международных отношений.

Ключевые слова: цифровизация, цифровая трансформация, цифровая дипломатия, интернет, социальные сети, большие данные.

Rəyçi: Siyasi elmlər üzrə fəlsəfə doktoru, dosent

Məmməd-zadə N.S.

Məqalə redaksiyaya daxil olub: 08. 01. 2026

Çapa qəbul olunub: 12.02.2026

The date of the admission of the article to the editorial office: 08. 01. 2026

Accepted for publication: 12.02.2026