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## **The Role of Media Diplomacy in Shaping the State's International Image**

### **Rola dyplomacji medialnej w kształtowaniu międzynarodowego wizerunku państwa**

#### **Abstract**

The article attempts to determine the role of media diplomacy in shaping the state's image in the international arena.

Media diplomacy under the conditions of globalization transformed geopolitical relations and changed the hierarchical system of foreign policy decision-making, highlighting the competition among states for the opportunity to influence public opinion. The information policy of the state involves not only the dissemination of positive information about it in the international information space, but also the integration of politicians, state government structures, non-state actors, famous personalities, and opinion leaders into the brand management system of the state's national policy. At the same time, the use of social media platforms in the implementation of diplomatic activities has led to the fact that any user of a social network today is not only a consumer of information, but also a direct supplier and distributor of it, meaning they have the opportunity to influence the adoption of certain decisions at the state level and shape in this way the image of the state. The article analyzes the use of media

diplomacy mechanisms in the formation of Ukraine's image, identifies positive and negative aspects, and discusses prospects for its development.

**Key words:** *diplomacy, media diplomacy, state image, social networks, tools, mechanisms.*

### Abstrakt

W tym artykule podjęto próbę określenia roli dyplomacji medialnej w kształtowaniu wizerunku państwa na arenie międzynarodowej.

Dyplomacja medialna w warunkach globalizacji przekształciła stosunki geopolityczne i zmieniła hierarchiczny system podejmowania decyzji w polityce zagranicznej, zarysowując rywalizację państw o możliwość oddziaływania na opinię publiczną. Polityka informacyjna państwa polega nie tylko na rozpowszechnianiu pozytywnych informacji na jego temat w międzynarodowej przestrzeni informacyjnej, ale także na włączaniu polityków, struktur władzy państwowej, aktorów niepaństwowych, znanych osobistości i liderów opinii w system zarządzania marką przedsiębiorstw, politykę narodową państwa. Jednocześnie wykorzystanie możliwości platform społecznościowych w realizacji działań dyplomatycznych doprowadziło do tego, że każdy użytkownik sieci społecznościowej jest dziś nie tylko konsumentem informacji, ale także jej bezpośrednim dostawcą i dystrybutorem, czyli ma możliwość wpływania na podejmowanie określonych decyzji na szczeblu państwa i kształtowania w ten sposób wizerunku państwa. W artykule na przykładzie Ukrainy dokonano analizy wykorzystania mechanizmów dyplomacji medialnej w kształtowaniu wizerunku państwa, zidentyfikowano jego pozytywne i negatywne strony, a także perspektywy jego rozwoju.

**Słowa kluczowe:** *dyplomacja, dyplomacja medialna, wizerunek państwa, sieci społecznościowe, narzędzia, mechanizmy.*

Foreign policy of any state follows a certain algorithm of actions. It involves interaction with the international community regarding the realization of one's own national interest, as well as the spread of one's influence on a foreign audience. Addressing foreign policy issues requires the use of various potential resources, such as the features of the geographical location; economic, military, social, tourist and cultural-historical opportunities; type of political system and individual characteristics of political leaders. Researcher M. Leonard notes that the implementation of foreign policy is based on the state's reputation markers in the international arena (Leonard, 2002). Effective promotion of national

interests in the international space involves the formation of an image, thanks to which the state is identified. Traditional diplomacy has also undergone a transformation: the latest communication technologies made it possible to solve diplomatic tasks in a different way; the circle of persons who are able to implement foreign policy and carry out international communication, positioning the state on the international stage, has expanded.

## **Methods and materials**

The article utilized media monitoring methods using tools of the Buzzsumo platform, which specializes in the analysis of social channels and content marketing, and SWOT analysis.

The phenomenon of "State Image" in foreign policy has been known since ancient times, but in today's conditions it acquires strategic importance. Thus, scientists consider the image of the state as a set of ideas, images, symbols, associations about it and its specifics, formed in the individual or collective imagination of the world public. The image refers to the state's reputation or authority on the international stage. (Rudnieva, Malovana, 2022) Thus, the image is a unique way of influencing the formation of public among a foreign audience through the prism of stereotypical ideas about that country (Leonard, 2002), and a purposeful state information policy helps form an associative series of identifiers for the state in the international arena. As the image is a dynamic phenomenon, various information and communication technologies are employed in its creation. The development of digital technologies has led to entirely new models of relationships, not only between different societal groups and between citizens and state authorities but also spurred the evolution of new forms of geopolitical processes. The rise of the Internet has contributed to new methods of diplomatic influence on the international community, such as internet-based radio and television broadcasting, blogger discussions on social platforms, and the appearance of personal pages of government members and diplomatic representatives on social networks.

A variety of diplomacy that uses information to achieve its objectives is referred to by scientists in different ways: "Digital Diplomacy", "eDiplomacy", "Virtual", "Net Diplomacy", "Twitter-Diplomacy". According to the researcher N. Kall, this type of diplomatic activity should be called "Public Diplomacy 2.0", since it has different features from the traditional "Diplomacy 1.0", notably the use of Web 2.0 technologies, which provides not only the opportunity for the audience to view information on official sites, but and evaluate it, comment on it, as well as independently create and publish content on the global Internet network, thereby influencing foreign policy decisions. (Cull, 2013) Researcher F. Hans suggests using the term "eDiplomacy", technologies by which he refers to the implementation of diplomacy using the internet and information and

communication technologies (ICTs) to advance and lobby for a state's foreign policy interests. (*eDiplomacy*, 2010) Scientist A. Grech argues that the new type of diplomacy formed by the information revolution should be called "Virtual Diplomacy", as it is conducted through communication in virtual spaces. The U.S. government, accordingly, interprets this type of diplomacy as "changed" diplomacy, involving the use of social platforms in diplomatic practice to facilitate communication between American diplomats and the global community, based on the principles of openness and transparency. (Friedman, 2005)

Thus, by the term media diplomacy, we understand a type of diplomatic activity that, through modern communication tools, informs a broad global audience about the state's position on international issues, its foreign policy initiatives, and decisions. It also highlights the state's achievements in areas such as culture, science, art, and technology. Additionally, media diplomacy uses information and social networks as platforms for international communication to shape the state's image in the global imagination. Media diplomacy can be seen as a form of specialized PR technology that, on the one hand, gathers and processes information necessary for foreign policy decision-making, and on the other hand, provides informational support for the state's image, both domestically and internationally.

We will analyze the influence of media diplomacy on the formation of the image of the state using the example of Ukraine in three aspects: state media projects aimed at shaping its image in the national and international information space; the state's presence in the information space of European countries, and the role of its political figures in shaping the state's image.

The main mechanism for the implementation of media projects aimed at shaping the image of the state is social networks, due to their unique features. This feature consists in reaching a large number of audiences in real time. Social networks shape the image of the state through the creation and promotion of descriptive informational messages for the international community. These messages are persuasive. They reflect the very value system of the state, including its political, historical, cultural, educational, and technical features of development. They create a stereotype, support it and promote it. For example, the issue of forming the international image of Ukraine became relevant only in 2014, that is, 23 years after the declaration of independence. The annexation of Ukrainian territories by the Russian Federation demonstrated the effectiveness of Russian manipulative influences on the formation of the image of Ukraine and pointed to the low-quality of the Ukrainian communication policy regarding the formation of its own national narratives both within the state and in the international information space. During this period, at the national level, it became clear that the spread of Russian propaganda in the Ukrainian media space was an element of the strategy aimed at destroying Ukrainian independence, and one of the tasks for Ukraine in shaping its image is to oppose the destructive Russian influence. That is why the brand strategy "Ukraine now"

was developed at the state level. This marketing program envisaged the positioning of Ukraine on the international stage as a European state with its national heritage, which shares the values of a civilized society, and is not a "brotherly people" nor a "tool" of Russia to achieve its geopolitical goals. It is also aimed at counteracting Russian information campaigns that exerted negative information and psychological pressure on the consciousness of society in general and citizens of Ukraine in particular, spreading fakes and distorted information about the situation in Donbas. For example, during the analysis of 950,000 messages on the Twitter social network after the downing of the Malaysian Boeing 777 flight MH17 by the Russian military, many cases of information manipulation were found, which made the work of experts difficult. Through social networks, the Ukrainian authorities managed to implement image projects in support of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU; unite Ukrainians for protest rallies, draw the attention of the community (both internal and external) to the territorial independence of Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea and Russian aggression in Eastern Ukraine (#RussiaInvadedUkraine, #StopFake, #LetMyPeopleGo, #CrimeaIsUkraine); and hold actions in support of Ukrainian political prisoners illegally detained in Russia.

As we can see, the communicative feature of social platforms began to be used as a kind of training field for the deployment and conduct of information wars, the spread of propaganda, the implementation of informational and psychological pressure on the audience with the aim of destroying the image of the state. The full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war (from February 2022) became the first cyber war on the international stage: social platforms in real time publicized local tragedies for an international audience (occupation of the city of Mariupol; Russian crimes against humanity in Ukrainian cities, in particular Bucha and Irpin; explosion of the Kakhovka hydroelectric station). At the same time, social networks demonstrated in this way the courage of the Ukrainian people in the struggle for their own independence with the support of the international community and changed the image of Ukraine on the international stage.

The (war.ukraine.ua) information project contains profiles on social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) for the distribution of official up-to-date, and verified information about the course of military events. Its implementation contributed to attracting the attention of the international community to the events in Ukraine. More than 4 million users subscribed to this project, which contributed to the recognition of the "Ukraine" brand in the international arena.

In order to form a new image of Ukraine, messages were created and distributed on social platforms using specialized hashtags:

- #StandwithUkraine – aimed at attracting the attention of the international audience to Ukrainian culture in order to oppose Russian annexation

through the imposition of international economic and cultural sanctions on the Russian Federation.

- #Slava Ukraini – this hashtag took the leading position in global Twitter trends in 2023, with 74,400 messages. It demonstrates to the international community the crimes of the Russian army against the civilian population and draws attention to the need to support Ukraine in the international arena, to provide economic, humanitarian, and military aid.
- #Bucha; #BuchaMassacre; #Russiaisaterroriststate – information messages aimed at debunking "fakes" and exposing the crimes of the Russian army.
- #BRAVEUKRAINE – with the use of this hashtag, an image policy is implemented on social platforms by the state leadership, political and public figures, public figures and ordinary citizens, regarding the formation of the image of Ukrainians as a nation that did not lose its courage in the first days of the war and stood up for European values against the "second army of the world" and shares its courage with the whole world.
- #WhatWeAreFightingFor is an international communication campaign, the purpose of which is to explain to the world audience that on the battlefield Ukraine defends not only its territorial integrity, but also global peace, freedom and the future of the whole world. Within the framework of this program, every citizen of Ukraine has the opportunity to share their reasons and motivation for this struggle.

Having analyzed the state image media projects, we can assert that the internal image policy is a component of the formation of the international image of the state. It is implemented through social networks with the involvement of not only official representatives of the state, but also ordinary citizens who, through their own posts, influence their foreign followers and shape their ideas about this or that country.

The formation of the image of the state is carried out not only by internal image campaigns, but also by presenting information about this or that state in the information space of other countries. Using the example of Ukraine, we will analyze its presence in the information space of European countries during 2022 and the peculiarities of the formation of its image in the imagination of a foreign audience. Within the framework of this study, media monitoring of the mass media of such countries as Germany, Great Britain, and France was carried out.

## Germany

Since 1991, a rather significant part of the German information space (97.1%) has been in an information vacuum in relation to Ukraine. The Germans' perception of Ukraine had a negative stereotypical character: a country

of corruption, Chernobyl, and a country ruled by the dictator Yanukovych. From the positive aspects, we can single out the following thesis: Ukraine is something incomprehensible, something strange, but not Russia. Thomas Achelis, president of the Munich PR agency Achelis & Partner Public Relations noted: "The image of Ukraine in the West is much worse than it is in reality. Germans, especially the older generation, are afraid to go to Ukraine because they associate it with the Cold War, Russia and the Soviet Union. For many, it is not clear that Ukraine is a separate state." (Deutsche Welle, 2013). The annexation of Ukrainian lands by the Russian Federation in 2014 attracted the attention of the German audience to Ukraine (23.8%), and the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war in 2022 became the real discovery of Ukraine (37.7% of information messages are devoted to events in Ukraine). Ukraine is mentioned the most in German information space on the issue of providing weapons (39.8%). Increasing the recognition of Ukraine, forming its image is realized through cultural projects, even if they are isolated: the translation of books about the history and culture of Ukraine into German, and the presentation of art projects. Accordingly, in order to improve the image of Ukraine in the information space of Germany, it is worth focusing attention on the development of media projects that would present Ukraine not only in the format of military operations, but would also contribute to the establishment of interstate political contacts, in particular, within the framework of Ukraine's post-war economic recovery.

## France

Relations between Ukraine and France at the diplomatic level played an important role in shaping the image of Ukraine in French society, which was carried out mainly through the popularization of Ukrainian culture and art. Before the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, the image of Ukraine throughout France was formed not by Ukrainians, but by Russians, who actively spread misinformation about Ukraine and participated in the formation of negative aspects of the perception of the Ukrainian state in the world. This is what Philippe de Lara, a professor at the Pantheon-Assas University, says, noting that Ukraine did not exist for the French until 2014. The ideas of the French audience are formed on the basis of myths, which were reinforced by Russian manipulative propaganda. On the one hand, for the French, Ukraine is a European nation, and the changes that are taking place correspond to the spirit of Europe, but, on the other hand, the events in Ukraine correspond to the worst examples of nationalist movements. Changes in the perception of the image of Ukraine among the French audience are manifested in the active coverage of the military events of 2022 (43.2%) and sympathy for the Ukrainian people (39.9%). That is, the French media play an important role in the formation of a positive image of Ukraine in society, through promotion of Ukrainian culture, history, and



construction. It is the projects within the framework of cultural diplomacy and the coverage of military events in the French media that contribute to the formation of the image of Ukraine in French society as a new image of an independent and original state fighting for its national identification.

### **Great Britain**

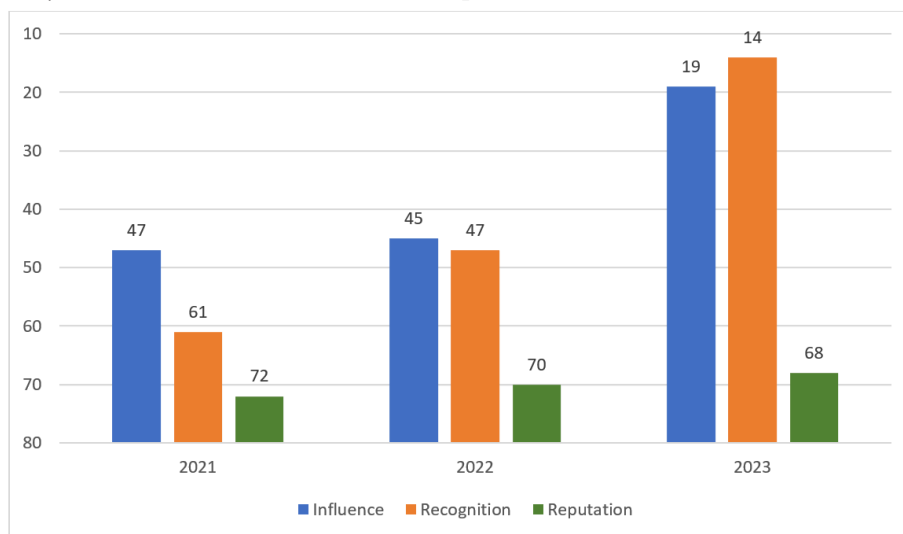
For a long time, Ukrainian-British relations were quite cold and unpromising due to Britain's mistrust of post-Soviet countries: 30% of citizens considered Ukraine to be a region of the Russian Federation, and 10% were convinced that Ukraine should return to Russia. Diplomatic activity in the positioning of the pro-Western orientation of the foreign policy course of the Ukrainian authorities created the prerequisites for overcoming the alienation in the diplomatic relations of the two countries. The events of 2014 demonstrated a clear pro-Ukrainian position of Great Britain in the issue of resolving the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (20% of the British population supported Ukraine). After 2022, 94% of the population in Great Britain came to know about Ukraine, 83.6% plan to visit it after the end of the war, almost 72% of the audience is interested in Ukrainian culture and culinary traditions. About 84.7% of the country's population admires the courage of Ukrainians in resisting Russian aggression, while 64.8% are concerned about corruption in public authorities and see no prospects in overcoming this problem. Representatives of the British government, in particular Boris Johnson, had close connections with the Ukrainian political leadership, and Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak support Ukraine in the struggle for independence, in particular in matters of financial and military assistance. As it was eight years ago, Britain remains a powerful partner of Ukraine, even though the image of the country is quite ambiguous and is symbolized by such concepts as: "war", "borscht", "courage", "corruption".

The results of the media monitoring of the mass media of European states regarding the formation of the image of Ukraine demonstrate problematic aspects in the implementation of the image policy of Ukraine in the foreign information space: the influence of Russian propaganda and disinformation, which attempt to distort the image of Ukraine and create negative stereotypes; insufficient communication with a foreign audience regarding the popularization of Ukraine; and lack of an informational image policy aimed at the audience of a certain state, taking into account its historical, cultural and political features. But at the same time, we are observing a positive transformation of the image of Ukraine in the international information space during 2022-2023. Thus, the results of the study on the perception of national brands in 2023 demonstrate the positive dynamics of the national brand "Ukraine" in terms of such indicators as influence, recognition and reputation, which overall guaranteed Ukraine the 37th place out



of 120 in the international ranking of the Global Soft Power Index. (Nation Brands, 2023)

This became possible thanks to the activities of Ukrainian diplomats, cultural figures and citizens of Ukraine, who tried to satisfy the informational demand for the image of "Ukraine" that arose in the international space. In particular, the official representatives of the state actively used the possibilities of social media platforms in their diplomatic activities, in particular Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, in order to implement a communication policy and establish a connection with a potential audience.



**Chart 1. Transformation of Ukraine's image in the international arena in 2021-2023**

The chart is based on the indicators of the international rating (Nation Brands)

The use of the Twitter social network in the implementation of the state's foreign policy in scientific discourse has been called "Twitter-diplomacy". Twitter is a social platform that was created in 2006. It is the largest online microblogging service that provides the ability to create short text messages called "tweets". Twitter is used by state representatives to implement communication activities in three directions: direct communication between the state representatives themselves and diplomatic agencies, communication with the mass media, and communication with social network users. The popularity of Twitter among politicians is due to the speed of information transmission and the impossibility of manipulating information: journalists cannot distort or otherwise interpret the words of politicians, since any user can independently check the accuracy of citations. In addition, followers of political leaders, with the help of retweets, themselves spread the content published by politicians, increasing their presence in the information space. According to World of Statistics, among politicians, the first place in the number of followers (61 million) on Twitter is Indian Prime

Minister Narendra Modi, Joe Biden, the president of the United States, has two accounts: presidential and political with the number of followers in 32 and 37.3 million respectively. Indonesian President Joko Widodo's Twitter account is read by 19.9 million users.

Creating their own blogs by diplomats, representatives of ministries and agencies is an opportunity to publicize their own opinions and positions on certain international events and to shape the image of the state through their own political image. For example, the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, has 7.3 million followers in 2023. By February 24, 2022, his Twitter account had just over 390,000 followers. With the beginning of the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war, the number of his subscribers increased to 7 million. Eighty-eight percent of V. Zelensky's posts on Twitter are aimed at a foreign audience, in particular, regarding the support of Ukraine in the international arena and the provision of international aid (financial, military, humanitarian). Daily video messages of the President of Ukraine are mainly posted on Facebook and Instagram. In his behavior, the president demonstrates the image of a restrained statesman – balanced, and composed like the entire people of Ukraine, who rose to defend their statehood. Communication is clear, understandable, accessible in style, and emphasizes the priority of European values for Ukraine, the right to freely determine one's own path. In this way, through the political image of the representatives of the state, the image of the state as a free and independent one, which stands guard over the security of the entire international society, is formed. During the Russian-Ukrainian war, the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine formed support for Ukraine in the international arena with the help of social networks. For example, Minister of Digital Transformation M. Fedorov appealed to the heads of numerous technology companies through Twitter: to the Chinese company DJI Global, which produces drones, with a request to block their software for use by Russians; to the Apple company to limit Russians' access to its products; to Elon Musk for high-precision technologies produced by SpaceX.

Such appeals are also a tool to form the image of the state as a developed, educated nation capable of using the latest technical developments, including to ensure global security. That is, the possibilities of social networks are successfully used by politicians and diplomats not only to spread their own political beliefs, but also to shape the image of the state, taking into account the international aspect (Intentional Aspect) of social networks. After all, political discourse on Twitter often has manipulative characteristics, since the purpose of communication is to capture, preserve and exercise influence aimed at shaping public opinion. A meaningful Twitter message is a cultural product and, at the same time, a unit that presents and spreads a certain culture, this or that state. The social network acts as a convenient and comfortable platform, providing a democratic style of communication (trusting atmosphere, pluralism

of opinions, etc.) and "openness" for online communication for all users of the Twitter account.

## Conclusions

Having analyzed the implementation of image policy through the creation of its own media projects, positioning in the foreign info space, and the use of social platforms by official representatives of the state, we can determine the prospects of using media diplomacy in shaping the image of the state.

The positive points include: online technologies that are used by representatives of the political elite, in particular social platforms for the implementation of constant two-way communication with the public with maximum coverage in real time. Such communication contributes to the growth of the presence of one or another state in the global media space; demonstrates the activity of state officials on certain foreign policy issues; creates an opportunity for the distribution of national messengers in the global information space; contributes to the recognition of the state's brand in the international arena.

The implementation of media diplomacy in Ukraine has the following weaknesses: the lack of institutional support for the functioning of such a type of diplomacy as media diplomacy, i.e. lack of regulatory and legal support; the cyber protection system of personal data of users of social networks is at a low level; an insufficient number of professional personnel to maintain official accounts in social networks in accordance with the state image policy; and positioning the image of the country only through the prism of military actions, which may eventually tire the world audience.

Determining the strengths and weaknesses of Ukraine's media diplomacy, identifying key challenges makes it possible to form priority directions for the implementation of Ukraine's media diplomacy. First of all, this is the development by the diplomatic corps of Ukraine with the involvement of the leading mass communication media of a national strategy for the implementation of media diplomacy and a strategy for the development of the national brand, which will involve opposing the destructive influence on the formation of the state's image by other countries. Additionally, activation of image projects in the field of education, science, and culture, and development of an algorithm for grant support for the implementation of such projects by non-state actors is essential. Involvement of specialists with relevant knowledge and skills in the implementation of the state branding policy and increasing the level of cyber protection of users of social networks are also necessary. All this will contribute to the development of structured, systematic and proactive

communication with an international audience for the promotion of the national interests of the state.

The development of modern information technologies has led to the transformation of diplomatic activity, making it accessible to a wide audience and involving transnational actors in its implementation (intergovernmental and international non-governmental organizations, transnational companies, and mass communication media). A feature of modern diplomacy is Internet activity, which prompted the formation of another tool of public diplomacy - media diplomacy.

Media diplomacy is a unique resource that allows not only the analysis of large volumes of information and the formation of political forecasts but also to position national interests in the international arena. That is, the implementation of image policy involves the use of social media tools for public opinion research and strategic planning of foreign policy. The openness and accessibility of social networks has a two-way nature. Due to the increase in the number of politically active citizens, the destruction of stereotypes and diplomatic "taboos" is observed, the growth of proposed alternative solutions in solving foreign policy issues is increasing. At the same time, social media are actively used to propagate hatred and xenophobia, as well as to criticize expressed opinions and intimidate opponents, which contributes to discrediting the image of the state of a particular country. Various manipulative technologies are used in the form of analytical and historical publications, news publications, claiming to present factual evidence. Thus, media tools in the hands of diplomats can influence the audience's perception of a certain state's image, enhancing or devaluing it.

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