

Chapter 3

Image and Popular Culture in Digital Public Diplomacy

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ABSTRACT

Virtually everything in the modern society we currently live in has become digitalized. The digitalization in communication technologies, especially in the last 30 years, has digitized the field of public diplomacy as in every field, and the concept of digital public diplomacy has emerged. Individuals and institutions are evaluated according to their image, and those with a good image are appreciated, admired, and followed. Those who do not have a good image fall into the opposite situation. For this reason, in digital public diplomacy, states are now pursuing to present their own images according to the conditions of the day. Today, with the rapidly developing new media tools, the value of image in the digital environment has increased, and public diplomacy has frequently used this field. At this level, public diplomacy nowadays utilizes opportunities in popular areas and converts the digital space into an image creation area. In this study, the image-building processes of public diplomacy in the digital field were examined.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Since the first periods when human beings started to live collectively, they have not been satisfied with what they have and have constantly wanted more. This situation arising from human nature has been a feature that affects social life as the urge to continually pursue more and more. The human being who desires more and more has created an order for himself in which he is in competition with other people and in which he is dependent on competition. In this order, there is no place to stand still, and people and institutions are constantly seeking to get ahead of their competitors. With the emergence of social life, attempts by state governments and societies to influence other states and societies in line with their own ideology and values have also begun. In the early days, this was done through wars, invasions and other military options, but over time it became clear that this could be done more effectively and with fewer or no casualties than wars.

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People and societies have realized that they can influence other societies through diplomacy by talking and explaining themselves to them. In this context, societies have started to prioritize public diplomacy in the light of such an opportunity. Through public diplomacy, states have started to influence both their own domestic public opinion and different states and publics by spreading their own ideology and values. In this way, image is one of the main reasons for individuals and institutions that carry out diplomacy against different societies or their own society. Because in fact, trying to influence different societies can also be seen as an effort to create an image in their eyes. Since every effort to influence is fundamentally concerned with leaving an impression, this can also be considered as an image work.

Mass media is one of the most important elements of public diplomacy. What is important for public diplomacy is the dissemination of information to as many people as possible, and this is best accomplished by mass media such as radio and television. However, in recent years, rapid developments and innovations in communication technologies and increasing digitalization have affected public diplomacy as in every field. A new media environment in which public diplomacy can operate has emerged with digitalization. Developments in communication technologies and the ability to circulate information much more quickly have led to the emergence of a new media environment. With this digitalization, which has led to the formation of a global network society, and the spread of this digitalization all over the world has created networks that connect people and a new global media ecology that allows information to flow continuously within these networks (Budak, 2022: 321). In this new field, the flow of information cannot be restricted by time, space or national borders. These developments have obliged public diplomacy to undergo a digital transformation. Individual or public figures of public diplomacy have started to interact directly with other people within the multiple structure of the digital environment, and individuals or institutions have started to create their image through new digital channels. By doing this through popular culture, they have gained the power to influence the segments they can reach more easily. One of the extreme examples of the recent period is the former President of the United States of America Donald Trump, who not only introduced his image to the whole world by using popular culture through numerous posts on Twitter, a social media platform, but also conducted his public diplomacy through digital media by making numerous posts about different countries and politicians as an American President. As can be understood from this example, with digital public diplomacy, country leaders have started to share decisions about other countries and influence them in this way. In addition, they have also started to engage in image-building efforts by making use of popular culture.

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND IMAGE

Although public diplomacy is generally seen as a process in which a society tries to influence other societies in the international arena in line with its own political and ideological ideas, it is seen in the literature that public diplomacy is defined in different ways by different researchers. For example, according to Joseph Nye, one of the first researchers to use the concept of public diplomacy, public diplomacy is the ability of states to penetrate and influence other actors with instruments beyond their military instruments (Nye, 2005: 14). According to Gregory, public diplomacy has a broader definition. States use public diplomacy to understand the cultures, attitudes and behaviors of other states, non-state actors and state entities, to build and manage relationships, and to advance their interests and values by influencing opinions (Gregory, 2011: 353).

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