

Chapter 6

The Role of Digital Platforms in Public Diplomacy and Netflix

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ABSTRACT

With the digitalization of television broadcasting, an audience-oriented, modular, interactive, thematic, and mobilized broadcasting approach has become established. This new broadcasting approach attracts the attention of consumers with its advantages such as low subscription fees, language and subtitle support, ease of access and use, downloading and recording. Naturally, the number of platforms operating in the field of digital broadcasting is increasing and the content on these platforms is diversifying. On the other hand, these platforms serve as a kind of bridge for public diplomacy practices, and in this respect, they attract the attention of public diplomacy actors. Because these platforms—even if the user/viewer is not aware of it—are the means and mediators of the universal circulation of (national) culture, they are a component of public diplomacy.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of public diplomacy due to the inadequacy of traditional diplomacy methods in international relations is being redefined in parallel with the development of information and communication technologies. In the digital age, a number of social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter have opened new doors for individuals/audiences to align with agendas beyond their borders. It has also enabled states and nonstate actors to present their diplomacy activities to large audiences and develop new public diplomacy strategies (Connolly-Ahern & Ma, 2015). This has paved the way for the emergence of the concept of digital diplomacy, which is defined as any diplomatic activity conducted by states and non-state actors on the internet and especially on social media. Digital diplomacy, which means the visibility and activity of foreign ministries and offices, foreign missions, non-governmental organizations operating on behalf of the state, national aid organizations, development and cooperation agencies in online environments, is predominantly carried out on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

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Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that the internet is a universe that opens up unlimited space for action and enables the establishment of unlimited platform(s) to meet different consumption preferences. It is possible to access a wide range of content in this universe such as various forms of e-commerce, e-books, e-encyclopedias, blogs, movies, music videos, thousands of different kinds of videos, social media networks, digital animations, 3D movie models (Çakır, 2014). Digital television broadcasting platforms are also an element of the internet universe and it should not be disregarded that they play a role in public diplomacy processes as well as media that fulfill the need for entertainment/consumption.

Diplomacy: Concepts, Transformations, Histories

The concept of ‘diplomacy’, which is used in conjunction with foreign policy practices, refers to the processes of negotiations between states and the instruments through which these processes are carried out. This concept, which means “the arrangement and management of international relations through negotiation”, has a long history dating back to the written history as it refers to the process of orderly conduct of relations between a group of people and a group of foreign people (Nicolson, 1939). In institutional terms, it is defined as “the means by which the international community conducts its business through negotiation, communication and representation” (Clinton, 2016).

Although the history of diplomacy is rather old, the concept has been used in international relations since the 18th century. The Irish politician Edmund Burke was the first to use the concept of diplomacy and described it as the skills and tactics necessary for the conduct of interstate relations and negotiations etmiştir (Tuncer, 1995). The establishment of the idea of modern diplomacy (continuous diplomacy) in the field of international relations became possible with the emergence of the embassy institution in the 15th century. In the course of time, the method of continuous diplomacy became practiced throughout Europe (Tuncer, 2009). With the method of permanent diplomacy, which is defined as “the presence of diplomatic representatives in another country for a considerable period of time in order to carry out diplomatic activities on behalf of their country and to obtain information about the country and report back to their country” (Anderson, 1993), diplomatic relations became institutionalized and gained a continuous character. Thus, the ad hoc diplomacy was replaced by embassies free of time and subject matter restrictions, and diplomatic representation became more important than the diplomatic representative (Watson, 1982). In the 19th century, Britain, taking the advantages of the Industrial Revolution, became the new imperial power and dominated international relations with its naval power, economic size and commercial skills (Kennedy, 2001).

The World War I was the decisive event that separated the old and new diplomacy ideas with sharp boundaries. After the end of the war, the old diplomacy methods fell off the agenda and a new understanding of diplomacy was adopted under the leadership of the United States. As a result of the principles known as Wilson’s Principles and announced by US President Woodrow Wilson, international politics was shaped around a brand new idea of diplomacy şekillenmiştir (Gönlübol, 1993). The Cold War, which started after World War II, led countries to prioritize structuring and operations over diplomacy and diplomatic action in their foreign policies. This situation resulted from the positioning of countries as one of the parties of the Cold War or the other and therefore diplomacy displayed a static outlook in this period (Huntington, 2004). States that wanted to consolidate their sovereignty in the Cold War, on the one hand, put diplomacy on the back stage, and on the other hand, brought international organizations and non-governmental organizations on the stage as new diplomatic actors. These new actors of diplomacy, together with the developing communication technologies, have played an active role in the

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