The Impact of the Use of Soft Power in Social Media on Public Diplomacy for International Co-existence

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Abstracts: Social media has become a game changer fundamentally in the way that it connects citizens, governments, and their ideas and voices across geographical divides. The policy process today requires decision making, feedback mechanisms, and quality input to be successful. Thus, social media presents itself as a quality instrument for incorporating a multitude of ideas, opinions, and voices for different stages of policy processes. This means that citizen engagement, which is crucial in policy making becomes easier via social media. However, social media also presents new challenges for soft power. The fast-paced nature of social media means that misinformation and fake news can quickly spread, which can undermine efforts to build relationships and promote understanding between countries. In addition, some countries use social media to spread propaganda, fake news, and extremist ideologies, which can also damage their soft power. This study examines the impact of the use of soft power in social media on public diplomacy for international co-existence in the context of the Middle East and Africa. The alternate methods of soft power include information and gathering data. For instance, social media is a great source of data and gathering information. Countries can achieve their objectives by attracting and persuading others to adopt their values and interests, rather than through coercion or force. Soft power is the ability to influence others through attraction and persuasion, rather than through threats or payment. The proliferation of social media such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter present powerful and new communication tools that are capable of influencing policy decisions by channelizing the political opinions of the masses. The upstart of social media and its engagement with the masses have influenced policy as well as politics which can be demonstrated in the Middle East. The Middle East, for instance, has been rife with regimes that have taken advantage of the region's cultural, linguistic, and religious connections to shape the political environment. In addition, social media has also given voice to previously marginalized groups, particularly youth, women, and minorities, who have used these platforms to advocate for their rights and amplify their voices. This has created new opportunities for public diplomacy, as governments and civil society organizations can engage with these groups and build relationships with them. This study aims to look at the relationship between social media and public diplomacy and identify opportunities and challenges social media networks pose for international coexistence in the context of past and present events from the perspective of both policymakers and scholars. Furthermore, the public diplomacy process and the use of social media as a soft power have been analyzed through a framework and discussed further for a better understanding of the variables. involved.

KEYWORD: Social media, Soft power, Public Diplomacy and International Co-Existence.

1. INTRODUCTION

The digital revolution has impacted all spheres of life including International Relations. The practice of public diplomacy is being disrupted because of 90% of UN nations have a presence on social media networks, along with the advent of new technologies making communication global and in real time [1]. Currently, there are 173 countries that incorporate an official Twitter account for foreign ministers and governments, which represents almost 90% of all the UN nations. The active presence of government accounts indicates that public diplomacy is adapting to social media and converging with the new channels of communication. Of course, these new channels of communication are creating waves in terms of international co-existence and soft power.

Conventional instruments for public policy such as market-based instruments, informational/educational instruments, regulations, contracts, resolutions, circulars and voluntary agreements are becoming inadequate for addressing the agile phenomenon occurring online during the digital age [1]. There is a missing part for which the traditional policy process needs to account for when it comes to public policy in the digital age as traditional instruments are not complementing the new system. This is because there has been unparalleled proliferation of social media empowered by the boom in internet which has provided a good platform for virtual connection that allows civic engagements to be done in economic, political, and social life [2].

The new platforms as well as the technological tools provide a better opportunity for strategists and officials to gather real-time insight. Thus, much of the government policy which is often based on traditional outdated

information can now be done with up-to-date information. There is hence a need for real-time instruments such as social media to address economic, political, and social issues in the digital age.

In the Middle East, out of 134 million people on the internet, more than 71 million people use social media for promoting Arab social integration and good governance. Similarly, in China, social media has become instrumental for public diplomacy as well as social transformation because of excessive use of popular social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook which have now been replaced by the locally Chinese developed ones such as Weibo for online engagement [2]. Africa is also a region where technological advancement is growing along with the use of social media. Recent statistics reveal that there are more than 8.6% of the world's internet users present in Africa and the number is growing every month. The numbers of Africans who use social media for obtaining political and economic awareness and news has been increasing dramatically to about 240 million [2].

The theoretical framework for this research has been derived from the following theories:

1.   Soft Power Theory: Soft Power Theory, developed by Joseph Nye, suggests that a country can achieve its objectives by attracting and persuading others to adopt its values and interests, rather than through coercion or force. Soft power in social media can be used to build a positive image of a country and its culture, and persuade others to adopt its values and interests [3]

2.   Public Diplomacy Theory: Public Diplomacy Theory suggests that countries can use public communication to influence the opinions, attitudes, and perceptions of people in other countries. Soft power in social media can be used as a tool of public diplomacy to reach people around the world and shape their opinions and attitudes towards a country [4].

3.   Social Identity Theory: Social Identity Theory suggests that people define themselves in terms of their membership in social groups, and that these group identities shape their attitudes and behaviors. Soft power in social media can be used to appeal to people's social identities and promote a positive image of a country's culture and values.

4.   Network Theory: Network Theory suggests that social networks play a key role in shaping behavior and attitudes. Soft power in social media can be used to leverage social networks to build relationships, promote cooperation, and influence behavior.

5.   Agenda-Setting Theory: Agenda-Setting Theory suggests that media can influence what people think about by shaping the issues and topics that people focus on. Soft power in social media can be used to set the agenda and shape the issues and topics that people focus on, thereby influencing their opinions and attitudes towards a country [5].

Digital diplomacy through the use of social media as soft power has been an emerging field in the discipline of International Relations, however, not many previous studies have explored the impact of social media on public diplomacy for international co-existence. While most studies dwell on social media utilization within diplomatic circles on a global level, very few researchers have explored the impact specifically on the Middle East and Africa's harnessing of social media as soft power. This study attempts to reveal the impact of the use of soft power in social media on public diplomacy for international co-existence while keeping in view recent changes in public diplomacy in the Middle East and Africa.

1.1. Conceptualizing Public Policy And Social Media

According to Oginni, there have been about 1.32 billion people who inculcate social media in their daily lives and also make use of it for economic, political, and social purposes [6]. The development of new social media tools over the previous decade has changed modes of communication between citizens and governments. Mavrodieva states that social media is not just a trend but part of a bigger picture when it comes to the communication landscape which is characterized by environments that are virtually connected [6].

It is thus imperative to note that social media is a broad term that extends beyond LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook to e-government. Moreover, some authors believe that social media can be seen as a tool for productivity that relieves the interactions occurring online in the social sphere. Moreover, public policy as a concept was developed in response to the aggravated struggle between the duties of governments and the social struggles of citizens to ensure their welfare [6].

Public policy also happens to be concerned with various stages that inculcate technology which has a crucial role to be played in the digital age. The policy process today requires decision-making, feedback mechanisms, and quality inputs to be successful. Thus, social media presents itself as a quality instrument for incorporating a multitude of ideas, opinions, and voices for different stages of policy processes [6]. This means that citizen engagement which is crucial in policy making becomes easier to view social media. The study conducted by Mavrodieva reveals that developing countries tend to have the highest number of active participants via social media who raise their voices pertaining to political, social, and public policy issues [6].

2. HYPOTHESIS AND POSTULATES

1. The rise of alternative methods of soft power has impacted public diplomacy
2. Public diplomacy is shaped by social media
3. Soft power and public diplomacy shaped international co-existence in the past
4. The impact of soft power on public diplomacy has been directly proportional to citizen engagement and usage of social media
5. The impact of soft power and the future of public diplomacy in Middle East and Africa has been directly proportional to citizen engagement and usage of social media

2.1. The rise of alternative methods of soft power has impacted public diplomacy

During the cold war era, the power that relied upon military resources was classified as "hard power". Josephy Nye, an American political scientist, coined the term soft power to define the ability of a state to persuade others to do what they want without the use of brute force or military coercion [7]. In recent years, many organizations, NGOs, political groups, etc. have displayed this kind of soft power, and in the digital era, this kind of power has amplified to create an alternative method of soft power [7].

The enhanced impact of social media is gradually shifting the dynamics of soft power around the globe as politicians are increasingly engaging in digital diplomacy. The alternate methods of soft power include information and gathering data. For instance, social media is a great source of data and gathering information. According to Nye, soft power is the ability to influence others through attraction and persuasion, rather than through threats or payment [8].

Soft power is often contrasted with hard power, which involves the use of military force or economic sanctions to achieve a country's objectives. Soft power, on the other hand, relies on a country's cultural appeal, political values, and diplomatic skills to achieve its goals.

In the context of public diplomacy and international co-existence, Soft Power Theory suggests that countries can use their cultural appeal, political values, and foreign policy to build a positive image of themselves and their values in the eyes of people around the world. By doing so, they can build trust, promote understanding, and foster cooperation on issues of mutual interest [8]. For example, India is described as a model of soft power because it deploys its rich culture to demonstrate its liberal side and to showcase to the world values of liberation, art, and culture while projecting a positive image in the international sphere. Hence proved that the rise of alternative methods of soft power has impacted public diplomacy by shifting the dynamics.

2.2. Public Diplomacy Is Shaped By Social Media

Public diplomacy, which involves building relationships between countries and their citizens, has been significantly shaped by social media. Social media has created new channels of communication, enabling governments to communicate directly with citizens of other countries and engage in public diplomacy. One significant way that social media has impacted public diplomacy is by providing a platform for governments to share information and perspectives about their country and culture with a global audience [9]. Social media has enabled governments to bypass traditional media outlets and communicate directly with citizens in other countries. This has created new opportunities for countries to promote their culture, values, and policies, and build relationships with people from other countries.

In addition, social media has created new opportunities for citizen diplomacy. Social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have enabled individuals to connect with people from other countries, share experiences, and perspectives, and build cross-cultural relationships. This has created new opportunities for people-to-people diplomacy, where individuals can play an important role in shaping public opinion and building understanding between countries. However, social media has also presented new challenges for public diplomacy [9].

Governments and diplomats must be vigilant in monitoring social media and responding quickly to misinformation and false narratives.

Public Diplomacy Theory is a framework for understanding how countries can use public communication to influence the opinions, attitudes, and perceptions of people in other countries [10]. Public diplomacy involves a range of activities, such as cultural exchanges, media outreach, and educational programs, aimed at promoting a positive image of a country and its values abroad. Public communication can be a powerful tool for shaping the opinions and attitudes of people in other countries toward a country and its values. By engaging in public diplomacy, a country can build relationships, promote mutual understanding, and foster cooperation on issues of mutual interest [10].

In the context of international co-existence, Public Diplomacy Theory suggests that countries can use public diplomacy to promote mutual understanding and cooperation on issues of mutual interest [11]. By engaging in public communication and cultural exchange, countries can build relationships based on shared values and interests, and work together to address global challenges. Overall, social media has had a significant impact on public diplomacy, creating new opportunities for communication and engagement between countries and citizens. While there are challenges to navigating the fast-paced and often unpredictable world of social media, it has become an essential tool for public diplomacy in the 21st century. Hence proved that Public diplomacy is shaped by social media.

2.3. Soft power and public diplomacy shaped international co-existence in the past

Soft power and public diplomacy have played an important role in shaping international co-existence in the past [12]. Public diplomacy is the practice of building relationships between countries and their citizens, often through cultural exchange programs, educational programs, and other forms of engagement.

In the past, soft power and public diplomacy have been used to promote international co-existence in a variety of ways. For example:

1. Cultural exchange programs: Cultural exchange programs, such as international art exhibits, music festivals, and film screenings, have been used to promote understanding and build relationships between countries. These programs allow people from different countries to experience each other's culture and traditions, which can help to break down stereotypes and promote mutual respect [12].

2. Educational exchange programs: Educational exchange programs, such as study abroad programs and teacher exchange programs, have also been used to promote understanding and build relationships between

countries. These programs allow students and educators to learn from each other and gain new perspectives on different cultures and societies [13].

3.   Humanitarian aid and disaster relief: Soft power and public diplomacy have also been used to promote international co-existence through humanitarian aid and disaster relief efforts. When countries provide assistance to other countries in times of need, it can help to build goodwill and strengthen relationships between countries.

4.   Diplomatic engagement: Diplomatic engagement, including high-level visits, meetings, and negotiations, has also been used to promote international co-existence. When leaders of different countries meet and engage in dialogue, it can help to build trust and understanding and promote cooperation on issues of mutual interest.

Moreover, the use of social media is a game changer in the 21st century for bringing about the development of public policy processes. Oginni argues that internet control mechanisms and platforms are now advancing and governments around the world are deploying sophisticated methods for monitoring websites and web-based content for inducing soft power [16].

Overall, soft power and public diplomacy have played an important role in promoting international co-existence in the past. These tools have helped to build relationships between countries, break down barriers, and promote mutual understanding and respect. While there are challenges to implementing these programs and initiatives, they remain an important tool for promoting international cooperation and peaceful coexistence. Hence proved that soft power and public diplomacy shaped international co-existence in the past.

2.4. The impact of soft power and the future of public diplomacy in the Middle East and Africa has been directly proportional to citizen engagement and usage of social media

Social media practices pertaining to Africa have appeared in extraordinary magnitudes as they have led to revolutions such as in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, monitored and strengthened during elections such as in Zambia, Nigeria, Ghana, and Botswana [17]. During the past decade, the number of Africans who have engaged online has enhanced as social media holds the highest proportion of online engagement in Africa. Lynch examines the impact of social media usage in Africa and found that public opinion has become increasingly Internet-based however its use within the African continent as a tool for policy negotiation still remains untapped [17].

The public policy processes in Africa are quite conservative which means that there is very less contribution or input taken from larger communities who are indirectly or directly the stakeholders of the policy. This tends to pose a serious issue since public policy happens to be a crucial tool for solving and understanding social problems. Recent studies conducted on the public due to inadequate information, weakened feedback mechanisms, and politicization of policy implementation which means that unrealistic policies are being developed [18].

The proliferation of social media such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter presents powerful and new communication tools that are capable of influencing policy decisions by channelizing the political opinions of the masses. Mainstream social media analysts have suggested that the upstart of social media and its engagement with the masses have influenced policy as well as politics which can be demonstrated in the Middle East. The Middle East, for instance, has been rife with regimes that have taken advantage of the region's cultural, linguistic, and religious connections to shape the political environment [19].

Recently, the regimes have switched to the communication technologies as the new resort for controlling the masses. For example, many leaders today are surviving because they deploy communication tools such as social media as the mode of survival: Gamal Abd al-Nasser, an Egyptian leader won the hearts of the masses through the allegiance of Arabs throughout the Middle East with the inspiring radio broadcasts that he conducted.

Moreover, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini aided in initiating a revolution in Iran by distributing cassette tapes of his sermons. However, among all these technological tools, social media platforms helped spread revolutions throughout the Middle East such as the 2010/11 Arab Spring [20]. Thus, it shows that regimes that do not control

the information circulating via social media platforms can risk being destroyed because this information is being used to influence the masses. The Middle East is far from alone in this phenomenon because a lot of countries, notably, China and Russia, also use social media in a covert way in which they deploy social media to influence foreign audiences as Russia is speculated to have done in the United States' 2016 presidential election. Moreover, democracies, not just autocratic regimes, can also influence foreign audiences through social media, television radio etc.

It is imperative to note that the Middle East might be especially prone to foreign influence operations. In addition to intense rivalries on a regional level, distrust in the government by the masses, the lack of free media in countries and conspiracy-prone institutions lead to a region that gets highly influenced by social media propaganda [21]. This tendency is backed by the widespread knowledge of actual propaganda and conspiracies that impacted the Middle East and Africa region's public policy in the past. Impact of social media on public policy can sometimes create transnational bonds as well as foster vulnerabilities among the existing structures as it was demonstrated in the case of the Arab Spring [21].

Social Identity Theory is a framework for understanding how people define themselves and others in terms of group membership. According to this theory, people derive a sense of identity and self-esteem from the groups to which they belong, and they tend to view members of their own group in a more positive light than members of other groups [23].

Social Identity Theory suggests that people form social identities based on a variety of factors, including nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, and occupation. These social identities can have a powerful impact on how people perceive themselves and others, and they can influence social behavior, attitudes, and beliefs.

One of the key ideas behind Social Identity Theory is that people tend to favor their own group over other groups, a phenomenon known as in-group bias. This bias can lead to prejudice and discrimination against members of other groups, as well as a sense of solidarity and loyalty towards members of one's own group.

In the context of public diplomacy and international co-existence, Social Identity Theory suggests that countries can use social identity to build bridges and promote understanding between different groups. By emphasizing shared values and interests, and by promoting positive images of different groups, countries can work to overcome in-group biases and foster cooperation on issues of mutual interest [24].

Countries can use public diplomacy to appeal to the social identities of people in other countries. By highlighting shared values and interests, and by emphasizing commonalities rather than differences, countries can build trust and understanding between different groups and promote cooperation on global issues. Network Theory is a framework for understanding how individuals and groups are connected and how information and resources flow through these connections. This theory suggests that individuals and groups are embedded within social networks and that these networks play a critical role in shaping social behavior, attitudes, and beliefs.

Social networks are made up of nodes (individuals or groups) and the connections between them. These connections can be strong or weak, and they can vary in terms of the amount of information and resources they convey. In addition, social networks can be hierarchical or decentralized, and they can have varying degrees of density and centrality.

One of the key ideas behind Network Theory is that social networks are not simply static structures, but rather dynamic systems that are constantly evolving and adapting to changing circumstances. This means that the flow of information and resources through social networks can have a powerful impact on social behavior, attitudes, and beliefs [25].

In the context of public diplomacy and international co-existence, Network Theory suggests that countries can use social networks to build relationships and promote understanding between different groups. By identifying key

nodes within social networks and establishing connections with them, countries can work to influence the flow of information and resources, and promote positive images of their country and its values.

Countries can use public diplomacy to create new networks and communities based on shared interests and values. By bringing together individuals and groups with similar goals and values, countries can build new connections and strengthen existing ones, and promote cooperation on issues of mutual interest.

3. PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

Public policy is mainly divided into several parts such as inputs process, information feedback mechanisms, conversion decision-making process system [26]. Moreover, at each stage of the public policy process, there are certain factors which this research encompasses such as the social distance between the general public, information asymmetry, policy makers and the weakened feedback mechanism and the deep politicization of the public policy implementation has been identified as a real challenge for implementation of public policy processes [29].

Building on the hypothesis presented in the research a complete framework has been constructed. Different parts of the framework and their relationship with the hypothesis is described below.

Hypothesis 1: The rise of alternative methods of soft power has impacted public diplomacy

Social media, the alternative method of soft power has impacted public diplomacy by enhancing civic engagement and making it more consultative. Figure 1 demonstrates that social media usage is assisting civic engagement and creating a triangular connection between public policy, citizens/society and government/ policymakers. Social media plays a key role in determining which issues are considered important by the public. By providing extensive coverage of certain issues, the media can increase the salience of these issues in the minds of the public, even if the issues are not necessarily the most important or pressing ones. In the context of public diplomacy and international co-existence, countries can use media coverage to shape the public's perception of their country and its values. By carefully crafting messages and providing extensive coverage of positive aspects of their country, countries can work to increase the salience of their image and values in the minds of the public.
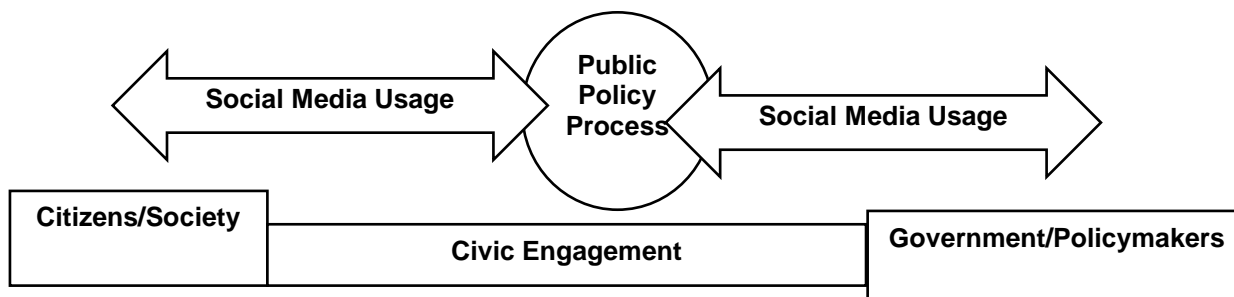

Figure 1: Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 2: Public diplomacy is shaped by social media

Public diplomacy is a holistic process. It is not simply about promoting a country's interests, but also about listening to the concerns and perspectives of people in other countries. By engaging in dialogue and exchange, a country can better understand the perspectives of others and build relationships based on mutual respect and understanding.

In order for public diplomacy to be effective, a country must communicate its values and interests in a genuine and authentic way. This requires a deep understanding of the cultural and political context of the target audience, and a willingness to engage in honest and open dialogue. Figure 2 shows that the conversion process of converting outputs to feedback and then converting it to public diplomacy is shaped by social media.
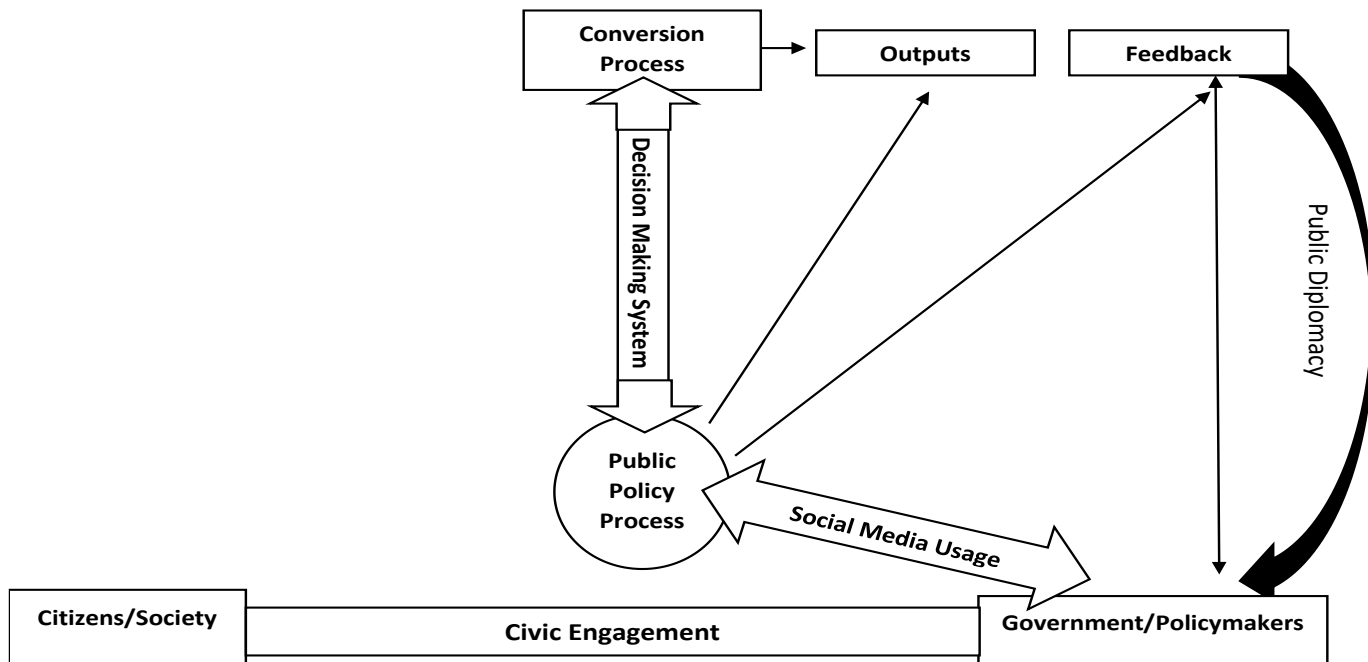
Figure 2: Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 3: Soft power and public diplomacy shaped international co-existence in the past

Political strategies for soft power have been changing drastically in the past decade and according to Oginni are being based on social media principles: participation and dialogue [14]. For instance, Barrack Obama used social media for driving public opinion and for gaining the support of electorates by simply creating a platform where he was approachable. This kind of political campaign strategy has been deemed to be the most successful in driving public opinion. The successful campaign strategies deployed by Obama have now made social media a tool for political campaigns in countries around the world [15]. Hence it is proved that soft power and public diplomacy have been shaped by international co-existence in the past.
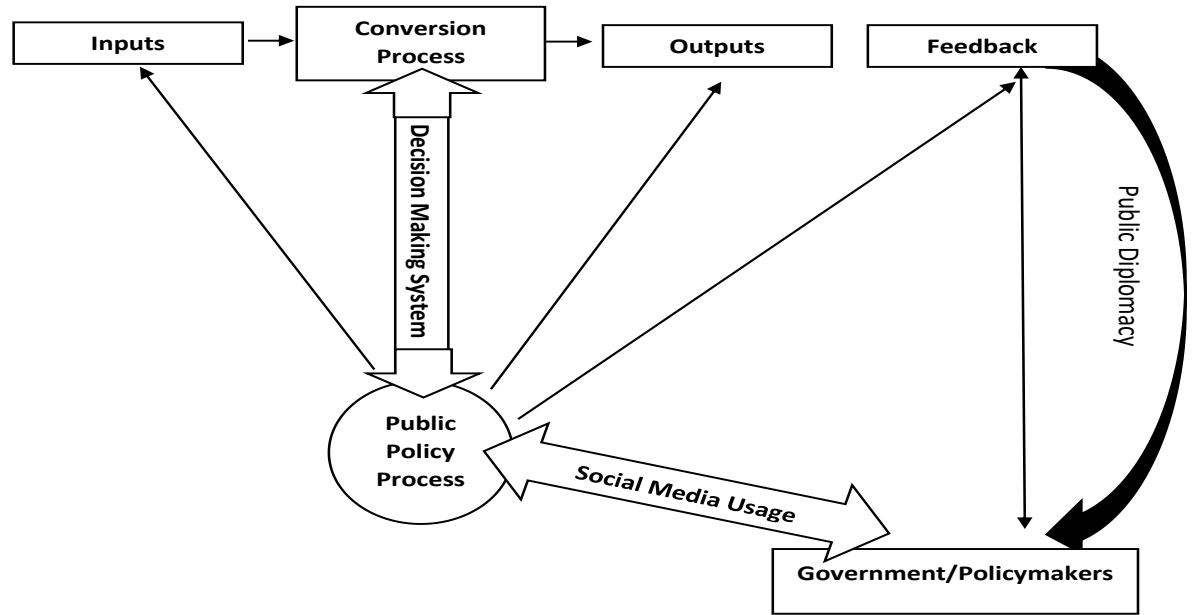
Figure :3 Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 4: The impact of soft power on public diplomacy has been directly proportional to citizen engagement and usage of social media.

Social media has had a significant impact on the public diplomacy of Africa and the Middle East, particularly as it relates to the concept of soft power. Soft power refers to a country's ability to influence others through the appeal of its culture, values, and policies, rather than through military or economic means.

For many countries in Africa and the Middle East, social media has become an important tool for promoting their soft power and building relationships with people from other countries. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have enabled governments and individuals to share information, stories, and images that showcase their culture, traditions, and values. This has created new opportunities for countries in these regions to promote their cultural heritage, tourism, and investment opportunities to a global audience. Hence the impact of soft power on public diplomacy has been directly proportional to citizen engagement and usage of social media. Figure 4 demonstrates that the impact of soft power on public diplomacy has been directly proportional to citizen engagement and usage of social media.
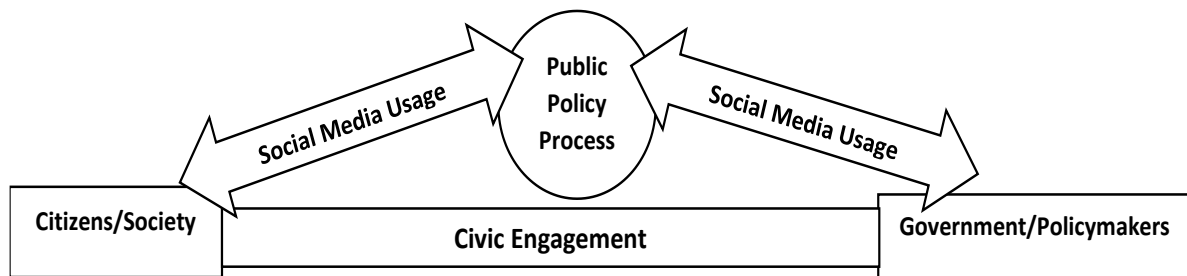

Figure 4: Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 5: The impact of soft power and the future of public diplomacy in the Middle East and Africa has been directly proportional to citizen engagement and usage of social media.

Social media has also given voice to previously marginalized groups, particularly youth, women, and minorities, who have used these platforms to advocate for their rights and amplify their voices [22]. This has created new opportunities for public diplomacy, as governments and civil society organizations can engage with these groups and build relationships with them.

However, the impact of social media on the public diplomacy of Africa and the Middle East is not entirely positive. Social media platforms have been used to spread propaganda, fake news, and extremist ideologies, which can undermine efforts to promote understanding and build relationships between countries. In addition, some countries in the region have used social media to crack down on dissent and limit freedom of expression, which can also damage their soft power.

Overall, social media has had a significant impact on the public diplomacy of Africa and the Middle East, providing new opportunities for engagement and communication, but also creating new challenges and risks. Governments and civil society organizations must be vigilant in monitoring social media and responding to misinformation and false narratives, while also leveraging these platforms to promote their soft power and build relationships with people from other countries. Figure 6 shows that the impact of soft power, and the future of public diplomacy in the Middle East and Africa has been directly proportional to citizen engagement and usage of social media.
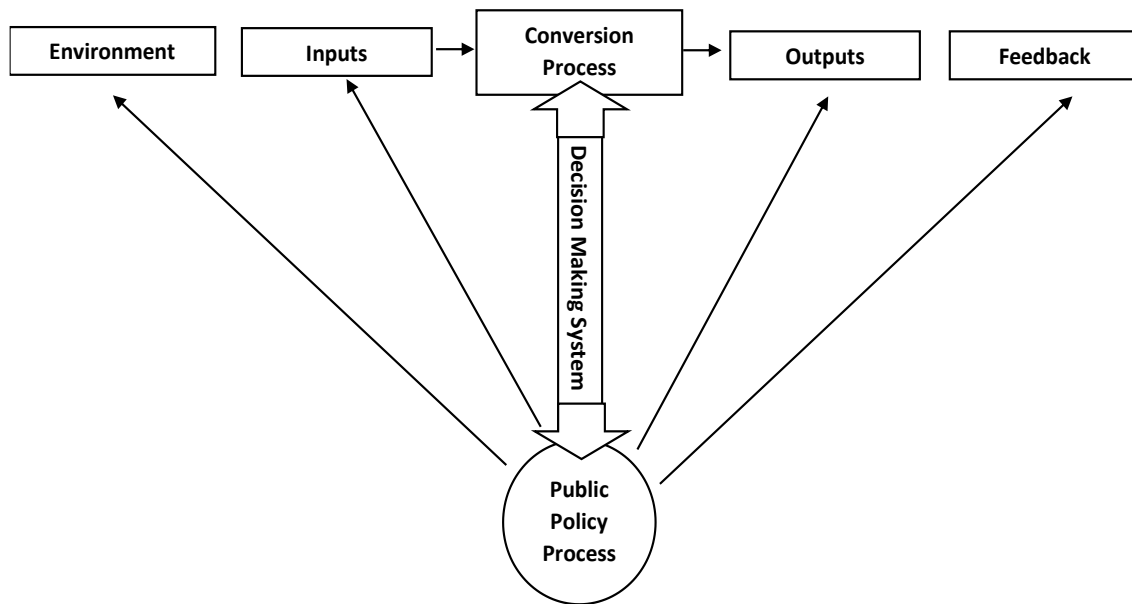

Figure 5: Hypothesis 5

To embark on a successful public policy decision specifically concerning international coexistence, state actors or governmental organizations need to influence the citizens through useful social media tools to actualize the gains [30]. This form of psychological and emotional influence is called "soft power" which can be used by states to influence national and international co-existence. Social media can be an immensely powerful tool for obtaining soft power and this method has been adopted by countries like China. On the basis of Agenda Theory, we can assert

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that the media has the power to shape the public's agenda by determining which issues and events are covered and how they are presented [31].

On the basis of the above hypothesis and associated results, a framework has been developed that indicates the impact of the use of soft power in social media on public diplomacy for international co-existence.
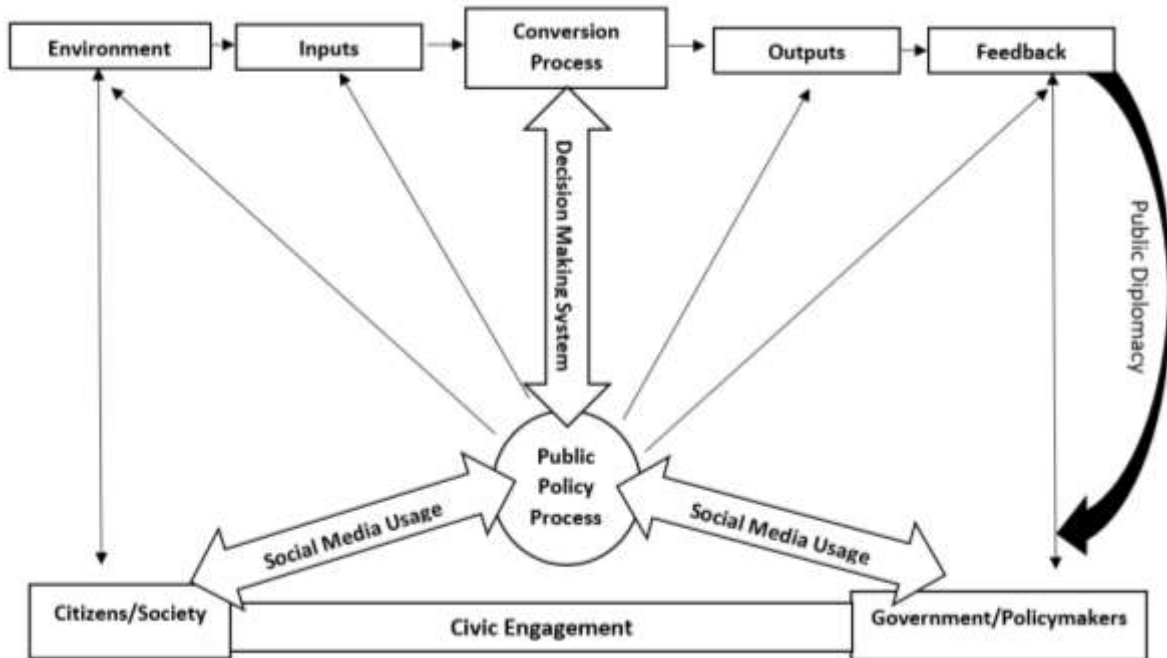
Figure 6: Proposed Framework

The framework shows that at each stage of the public policy process, factors such as the environment, social media usage, civic engagement, and inputs of information from various sources impact the public policy process. Figure 6 explains the policy process in the context of the digital community. Civic engagement or civic participation is any individual or group activity addressing issues of public concern. In the framework, civic engagement denotes the interconnected relationship between citizens/society and government/policymakers. For instance, in a country where there is more civic engagement, the public policy process is consultative and democratic. The more a public policy process is consultative, the more it will have inputs, a better conversion process through active decision-making, and better outputs as well as feedback mechanisms. Social media promotes a highly consultative policy process. In Figure 6, the policy process commences from a preliminary discussion of the situation or problem through civic engagement of citizens which is done online and offline. The triangle between social media, public policy, and civic engagement connects governments to citizens through social media in terms of online engagement. The framework denotes that the citizens are engaged right from the environment to the feedback stage. The framework shows how each stage is logically interlinked with the other. When citizens engage through social media they participate in the public policy process and their inputs are then taken into account during the decision-making stage which then moves on to the conversion process of converting the inputs to outputs and to feedback.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. The Future of International Co-existence

Social media has become an important new source of soft power, providing new opportunities for engagement and communication, but also creating new challenges and risks. Governments and civil society organizations must be vigilant in monitoring social media and responding to misinformation and false narratives, while also leveraging these platforms to promote their soft power and build relationships with people from other countries.

Some case studies can present how social media has presented itself as the new form of soft power for international co-existence. The countries can use public diplomacy to influence the media's agenda and coverage of international issues [32]. By providing access to key sources and experts, and by framing issues in a way that is favorable to their country's interests, countries can work to shape the media's coverage of international events and issues, and influence public opinion in their favor [33].

The use of soft power in social media has played a significant role in shaping Qatar's public diplomacy efforts for the 2022 FIFA World Cup, which is being hosted by Qatar. Qatar has faced significant criticism and controversy over the decision to host the World Cup, with concerns raised about labor rights, human rights, and environmental sustainability.

To address these concerns and shape public opinion about the World Cup, Qatar has employed a range of soft power tactics in social media. One key approach has been to highlight the cultural and historical significance of the World Cup for the Middle East region, emphasizing the role of football in bringing people together and promoting cross-cultural understanding.

Qatar has also used social media to showcase its investments in infrastructure and technology, highlighting the country's commitment to hosting a world-class event that will benefit both locals and visitors. This has included extensive coverage of stadium construction, transportation upgrades, and other related initiatives [34].

In addition, Qatar has worked to engage with stakeholders and opinion leaders through social media, including sports journalists, influencers, and celebrities. This has included hosting events, providing behind-the-scenes access, and offering exclusive content to key figures in the sports and entertainment industries.

Overall, the use of soft power in social media has played an important role in shaping public opinion about the Qatar World Cup, and in promoting the country's image as a modern, forward-thinking nation that is committed to promoting international cooperation and understanding. However, the impact of these efforts remains to be seen, and Qatar will continue to face significant challenges as it prepares to host the world's largest sporting event.

China adopted soft power via its foreign policy to gain better access to developing countries such as South Asia and Africa. In its early stages, there was immense resistance from the African leaders locally who opposed the vested interests of China in Africa. However, tactfully, China penetrated Africa through keeping interactions and hospitality [35]. Today, China has been successful in establishing bilateral relations with almost most of the African countries. These cordial relations which were influenced by massively successful social media campaigns on China's part led to the development of infrastructure such as airport constructions, hydroelectric plants, superhighways, etc. in the Republic of Congo as well as other parts of the African countries.

Moreover, in Middle Eastern countries, it is imperative to keep the citizens engaged to understand their situations and the problems that they go through. For instance, in the case of the Arab Spring uprising, which for context is the wave of pro-democracy protests and uprisings that took place in the Middle East and North Africa beginning in 2010 and 201, the authorities, policymakers, and the governments ignored the problems faced by the citizens by dodging their concerns and not involving them in the policy-making process. However, the citizens during the Arab Uprising took matters into their own hands and inculcated social media as their tool for influencing the public policy process [36].

It is possible that the policymakers at that time did have some ounce of knowledge of the phenomena which prompted the initiation of the policy process. Thus, in this example, the citizens became the "material evidence" for transforming the gap between knowledge and citizen engagement. Figure 1 explains the policy process within a digital community in countries such as Africa and Middle Eastern countries where there is little to no civic engagement (both offline and online), a rather conservative policy process is mostly adopted as only selected cliques are involved in the public policy process [37].

4.2. Iran and Saudi Arab

There have been successful efforts that aided in resolving issues between Saudi Arabia and Iran over the years. Soft power in this scenario was used to impact public diplomacy in terms of influencing the thought process of citizens in a positive way. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram provide an opportunity for governments to communicate directly with their citizens and with people in other countries. Through these platforms, countries can promote their values, culture, and beliefs. Furthermore, soft power was used to further reconciliation relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia by facilitating more cultural exchange programs that can be deployed to build mutual understanding between the two countries. Social media when deployed to create hype regarding these cultural programs can create cordial relations among the citizens. Moreover, social media platforms can be used to promote these educational programs and encourage people to participate in them. In addition, social media can be used to promote dialogue between the two countries. Platforms such as Twitter and Facebook provide an opportunity for people to engage in conversations and exchange ideas. This strategy aligns with our proposition that social media is the new source of soft power for international co-existence and that using social media has impacted public perception while managing public diplomacy.

4.3. Saudi Arab and Yemen

Social media as soft power can also be used in the case of Saudi Arabia and Yemen because the two countries have been having strained relationship for many years with Saudi Arabia leading a coalition to fight against the Houthi rebels in Yemen. The relationship between the two countries can be rekindled once education and cultural initiatives are incorporated. For instance, Saudi Arabia can provide educational opportunities to Yemeni students by building the human capital of the country and promoting goodwill meanwhile deploying social media to facilitate dialogue between both countries through Facebook and Twitter.

In conclusion, the use of soft power in social media can have a significant impact on public diplomacy and reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Yemen. By promoting cultural exchange, education, dialogue, and humanitarian aid efforts, both countries can work towards building positive relationships and finding common ground. Hence it proves that social media as soft power can have a positive impact on public diplomacy for international co-existence.

4.4. Middle East and Syria

The conflict in the Middle East and Syria can be mitigated by exercising public diplomacy with the aid of social media as soft power. This can be done through the promotion of cultural exchange programs which can build mutual understanding between religious and ethnic groups in Syria. Social media platforms can thus be used for the promotion of these programs while encouraging individuals to participate in them.

Additionally, the use of soft power in social media can help to promote humanitarian aid and relief efforts in Syria. Countries in the region can use social media to showcase their efforts in providing aid to Syrian citizens affected by the conflict. This can help to build trust and goodwill between the different parties involved in the conflict while demonstrating their commitment to the well-being of Syrian citizens. Thus, it is proved that social media is an immensely useful tool for promoting international co-existence and impacting public diplomacy.

4.5. Qatar and the Middle East

Qatar has deployed the power of social media as soft power to reconcile the ongoing diplomatic crisis that emerged from the boycott declared by the neighboring Gulf countries. Back in 2017 Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE, and Egypt collectively imposed a boycott on Qatar accusing its support to terrorist groups in the region. However, all these conflicts have been mitigated between Qatar and the five countries and collaborated in the form of cultural programs and sponsorships for art and sports. This shows that public diplomacy is shaped by social media.

4.6. Internationalization Programs Articulation And Curriculum Articulation

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Many countries such as Saudi Arabia and China engage in transnational higher education by developing articulation programs with other countries. The transnational higher education programs aid in enhanced intercultural learning and adjustment experiences for countries that want to enhance bilateral ties and improve their relations with each other. Through the promotion of this kind of program through social media, countries can improve international co-existence. For example, Chinese students that participated in the China-Australia articulation programs gave good insights and shared their positive experiences on social media which further enhanced the relationship between the countries. This indicated that the internationalization of such programs can contribute to the enhanced relationship between the countries in the international sphere.

5. Future Road Map

In the era of digital diplomacy, countries should adopt a foreign policy that prioritizes international cooperation, engagement, and mutual understanding. Here are some key elements that could be part of such a policy:

1. Emphasize digital engagement: Countries should prioritize digital engagement as a key component of their foreign policy. This could include using social media, online forums, and other digital platforms to engage with citizens of other countries and promote dialogue and understanding.

2. Support digital infrastructure: Countries should invest in digital infrastructure, such as high-speed internet and advanced telecommunications systems, to support digital diplomacy efforts. This can help to ensure that people around the world have access to information and can engage in online dialogue [41].

3. Promote cultural exchange: Cultural exchange programs should continue to be a key component of foreign policy in the digital era [42]. These programs can help to promote mutual understanding and respect between countries and their citizens and can also support economic development and tourism.

4. Address cybersecurity concerns: As countries engage more in digital diplomacy, they should also address cybersecurity concerns. This includes investing in cybersecurity measures to protect sensitive information and prevent cyber-attacks.

5. Support digital human rights: Countries should also support digital human rights, such as freedom of expression and privacy, both domestically and internationally. This can help to ensure that people around the world have access to information and can engage in online dialogue without fear of persecution [43].

Overall, the foreign policy of countries for international co-existence in the era of digital diplomacy should prioritize engagement, mutual understanding, and support for digital infrastructure and human rights. By embracing the opportunities of digital diplomacy and addressing its challenges, countries can work together to promote peace, stability, and prosperity around the world.

5.1. Middle East and Africa

Soft power will have a significant impact on the Middle East and Africa. Here are some potential impacts:

1. Building relationships: Soft power and public diplomacy can be used to build relationships between countries and their citizens. This can help to promote understanding, mutual respect, and cooperation on issues of mutual interest. In the Middle East and Africa, where conflict and political instability have often created barriers to communication and cooperation, soft power and public diplomacy can play an important role in bridging divides and promoting dialogue.

2. Promoting cultural understanding: Soft power and public diplomacy can also be used to promote cultural understanding and appreciation. By showcasing the rich cultural heritage of the Middle East and Africa, these tools can help to break down stereotypes and promote mutual respect between different cultures and societies [39]. This can also help to promote tourism and economic development in the region.

3. Addressing extremism: Soft power and public diplomacy can also be used to address extremism and promote tolerance. By promoting moderate and inclusive messages, these tools can help to counter extremist ideologies and prevent radicalization. This is particularly important in the Middle East and Africa, where extremist groups have gained significant influence in some areas.

4. Engaging youth: Soft power and public diplomacy can also be used to engage youth and promote their participation in civic life. By providing opportunities for youth to learn about different cultures and societies, and to engage in meaningful dialogue with their peers from other countries, these tools can help to build the next generation of leaders who are committed to promoting peace and cooperation.

Overall, soft power and the future of public diplomacy have the potential to have a significant impact on the Middle East and Africa [40]. By promoting understanding, mutual respect, and cooperation, these tools can help to address the challenges facing the region and build a brighter future for all.

CONCLUSIONS

Conventional instruments for public policy such as market-based instruments, informational/educational instruments, regulations, contracts, resolutions, and voluntary agreements are becoming inadequate for addressing the agile phenomenon occurring online during the digital age. There is a missing part for which the traditional policy process needs to account for when it comes to public policy in the digital age as traditional instruments are not complementing the new system. This research emphasizes the importance of credibility and authenticity in public communication. By developing the framework in this research, we conclude that the impact of social media as soft power for international; co-existence has been crucial. The framework shows that public policy is mainly divided into several parts such as inputs process, information feedback mechanisms, and conversion decision-making process system. In order for public diplomacy to be effective, a country must communicate its values and interests in a genuine and authentic way. This requires a deep understanding of the cultural and political context of the target audience, and a willingness to engage in honest and open dialogue. In the context of public diplomacy and international co-existence, the countries can use their cultural appeal, political values, and foreign policy to build a positive image of themselves and their values in the eyes of people around the world. By doing so, they can build trust, promote understanding, and foster cooperation on issues of mutual interest. Middle East is described as a model of soft power because it deploys it rich culture to demonstrate its liberal side and to showcase to the world values of art and culture while projecting a positive image in the international sphere. Hence proved that the rise of alternative methods of soft power has impacted public diplomacy by shifting the dynamics. Overall, the foreign policy of countries for international co-existence in the era of digital diplomacy should prioritize engagement, mutual understanding, and support for digital infrastructure and human rights. By embracing the opportunities of digital diplomacy and addressing its challenges, countries can work together to promote peace, stability, and prosperity around the world.

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