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TRENDS OF UKRAINE'S DIGITAL DIPLOMACY

The practice of Ukraine's digital diplomacy is based on the preservation of the sovereignty and independence, the establishment of strategic relationships with leading world actors, the maintenance of the state international authority in the existing international conditions. Also, it is suggested the author's vision of the effective use of social media in the field of Ukraine's foreign policy as an innovative state activity tool and developed the recommendations for Ukraine's diplomatic missions. In the paper, we will study the difference between the interactions of Ukraine's political actors from 2010 to 2016 (from the time the beginning of government activity on the Internet) with audience.

Key words: digital diplomacy, social media, foreign policy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ukraine.

Introduction

The age of rapid development of information and communication technology made efficiency and intensity of relations between international actors an information advantage within global environment, so that they develop their own foreign policy strategies that are based on ensuring political and information power, dominance in global and regional information flows, influence on international institutions that support the balance of the international system.

The structure of the paper is organised in this way. We will conceptualise the theoretical aspect of digital diplomacy in the first part of the paper. The comparative analysis will be presented in the second part. The modern communication practice of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine will be presented and discussed in the third part. We use the method of comparative analysis in order to find out the communication differences between Ukraine's political actors. Our comparative analysis is based on the investigation of official accounts of the President of Ukraine, the Prime Minister of Ukraine, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Definition of the digital diplomacy and its impact on the system of international relations

The use of media space to position a state in international relations is predetermined by a variety of communications, namely exchange of different types of information at international and national levels. In terms of international interplay modern media can contribute into settlement of internal and external crises; improvement of socio-economic relations in a country and between countries; promotion and advancement of new ideas for international cooperation, formation of a state's image in public opinion. Media influence mass consciousness, international, political and social relations, financial and economic cooperation, state's promotion on international scene; so in today's globalized society information has become a resource that enables state's promotion in any sphere of international relations. Experts point out that the more effective information policy of a state is, the more a state will have opportunities to fill up global information space with information positive for its reputation, will be able to withstand informational war and intervention and, at the same time, to independently, without external influences, shape own information image and prevent any negative impact.

The term 'digital diplomacy' was introduced in the US in the mid 90's of the twentieth century and is associated with introduction of the concept of 'soft' power, proposed by Joseph Nye-Jr.¹ for development and implementation of a new concept in US diplomacy of the twenty first century. In his view, the use of global information and communication network promotes a new model of diplomatic activity aimed to convince an international community of correctness and effectiveness of foreign policy decisions taken by leading actors in international relations. The idea of digital diplomacy was considered in the strategy and practice of the US foreign policy which priorities is network development as a means of communication between the United States and international community.

¹ Nye, J.S., Owens, W.A. (1996). America's Information Edge. *Foreign Affairs*, March/April, 49-67.

The universal approach to understanding digital diplomacy was developed in the US Institute of Peace¹ under which ‘digital diplomacy’ refers to a form of foreign policy which is associated with the use of global information and communication networks in international relations and covers the practice of interstate relations, the system of foreign policy decision-making, communication of diplomatic missions carried out by means of information and communication technologies.

Digital diplomacy is one of the elements of modern security policy². In this context, security policy extends its classical definition and includes, in addition to military, also social, cultural and communication aspects. New factors, among which we should name revolutionary changes in media and growing political weight of public opinion, allowed modifying functions and levels related to identification and interpretation of security policy. Modern communication and information tools became an important part of national security as well as political, military and economic power.

The use of digital diplomacy helps to prevent crises, solve social problems, strengthen confidence in a country, create alliances to overcome antagonism and promoting national interests in the international arena. Digital diplomacy may be used as ‘offensive weapons’ for information neutralization of ‘malevolent groups of countries’ and, on the contrary, as a warning or preventive tool against hostile pressure on domestic audience.

Another purpose of digital diplomacy in international relations³ is promotion and strengthening of international norms and principles which formalize and help to control obligations of states for maintaining established international regimes, in particular, regarding nonproliferation of dual-use high technology.

States may use digital diplomacy to protect their own economic interests and to create a favorable macro-economic infrastructure, particularly through its impact on political and economic leaders in decision-making about the rules and methods for regulation of domestic or global economic space. Information and culture programs supported by means of digital diplomacy are able to ensure interests of national economy at international level by stabilizing world population growth, implementation of measures aimed at informing and educating, promotion of mass culture. The use of digital diplomacy in this area contributes to intensity of communication with business communities of countries and external audiences as a whole, increasing public awareness, providing access to modern sources of information and education, overcoming social and economic inequality.

Digital diplomacy is also a means to minimize the risk to national security in terms of implementation of new political ambitions by any state. It has the ability to combine risk and caution in promotion national interests while avoiding direct pressure on other states, and even, conversely, facilitating development of friendly and harmonious relations between them. Digital diplomacy with a relatively small investment allows creating conditions for political stability and economic growth, as well as resolving crisis situations that are difficult to resolve by other means.

The advantage of digital diplomacy as a modern form of diplomatic activity, which in a global network of international relations brings together different actors (NGOs, media, etc.), is overcoming of political, economic, cultural and social barriers between countries and nations, even in terms of asymmetric technological development of the world. Thus, digital diplomacy promotes integration of political values and peaceful dialogue between different countries and formation of world public opinion by interaction between context and content of Internet-messages. Nowadays, the main tool of state’s foreign policy activity on Internet is the use of social media for impact on external audience and creation of positive international state’s image.

Practice of Ukrainian political actors in the field of digital diplomacy

The use of such instrument of digital diplomacy as social media has become a common practice of Ukrainian public authorities in order to improve efficiency of information and communication support for state’s foreign policy and its promotion in the EU. Definition and implementation of basic principles of foreign policy is carried out in close cooperation and coordination between the President of Ukraine,

¹ Solomon, R.H., Wriston, W.B., Shultz, G.P. (1997). Keynote addresses from the Virtual Diplomacy Conference. *Peaceworks*, 18, 21.

² U.S. State Department (2000). *U.S. Department of State’s Strategic Plan*. The Office of Management Policy and Planning. <http://www.state.gov/www/global/general_foreign_policy/2000_dos_stratplan_index.html> (2017, April, 24).

³ U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy (2002). *Building America’s Public Diplomacy Through a Reformed Structure and Additional Resources*. Report. <<http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/state/13622.pdf>> (2017, April, 24).

the Prime Minister of Ukraine together with the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs together with the diplomatic missions of Ukraine; so official social media accounts of corresponding political actors were chosen for analysis, in order to establish efficiency of interaction with European audiences regarding interpretation of the Ukrainian foreign policy initiatives.

Functioning of the official accounts of political actors in social media showed that Ukrainian authorities, in particular, the President of Ukraine, the Prime Minister of Ukraine, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, since 2010–2013 are represented in Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and since 2014 – in Google+ and VK (Vkontakte). Currently, the use of social media as an important diplomatic tool to inform European audience about Ukraine and its foreign policy is implemented through active information and communication activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Facebook, Twitter, Google+, VK, YouTube, Storify, Medium, WordPress, Blogger, Instagram and Vine.

It should be noted that since 2014 interaction of government institutions of Ukraine with global and domestic public was updated. In particular, during 2010–2013 state institutions used Twitter accounts as an additional information channel and duplicated news from own official web portals, so interaction with the audience was either completely absent (account of the Parliament¹), or only one-way communication took place (accounts of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine² and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). According to the thematic focus, the most popular posts were related to participation of Ukrainian officials³ in public events. But in 2014 efficiency from use of digital tools to support diplomacy and protect national interests of Ukraine was realized. In particular, Twitter is widely used by Ukrainian government institutions to make dialogue with external and internal audiences.

As a result, during 2010–2013 interaction of government institutions with audience via Facebook was almost absent, although the account of the Prime Minister of Ukraine⁴ posted responses to user queries on various issues while accounts of the other public institutions contained thematic debates only between users. State institutions^{5,6} used Facebook accounts also as an additional information channel and they duplicated news from official web sites; again interaction with the audience was either completely absent or had one-way character. According to the thematic focus, discussions between users often occurred on messages related to participation of Ukrainian officials in public events or on topical political processes. But since 2014 activities of Ukrainian government institutions in Facebook has been reconsidered which made it possible to change international political discourse on Ukraine-Russia relations, intensify informational campaign and renovate the tools of foreign policy activity.

Investigation of the official social media accounts of the President of Ukraine, the Prime Minister of Ukraine, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs showed a low level of cooperation of state institutions with external audiences over the 2010–2013 and revitalization of activity in the global network in 2014. The corresponding structural subdivisions of state institutions took into account requests of the target audience for information about Ukrainian crisis and began to actively participate in topical discussions but placed information was mainly in Ukrainian.

The activity of the Ministry and Diplomatic Missions of Ukraine

During 2010–2013 the diplomatic missions of Ukraine insufficiently used possibilities of digital diplomacy to implement two-way communication, as far as created accounts performed only limited information function without attracting audiences to dialogue. Also, information was mostly posted

¹ Верховна Рада України. *Офіційний акаунт Верховної Ради України в Twitter*. <https://twitter.com/verkhovna_rada> (2017, April, 24).

² Кабінет Міністрів України. *Офіційний акаунт Кабінету Міністрів України в Twitter*. <<https://twitter.com/Kabmin-UA>> (2017, April, 24).

³ Адміністрація Президента України. *Офіційний акаунт Адміністрації Президента України в Twitter*. <<https://twitter.com/PresidentUA> and <https://twitter.com/APUkraine>> (2017, April, 24).

⁴ Кабінет Міністрів України. *Офіційний акаунт Кабінету Міністрів України в Facebook*. <<https://www.facebook.com/KabminUA>> (2017, April, 24).

⁵ Адміністрація Президента України. *Офіційний акаунт Адміністрації Президента України в Facebook*. <<https://www.facebook.com/president.gov.ua/>> (2017, April, 24).

⁶ Верховна Рада України. *Офіційний акаунт Верховної Ради України в Facebook*. <<https://www.facebook.com/pages/%D0%92%D0%B5%D1%80%D1%85%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%8F-%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B0/527553917352715?fref=ts>> (2017, April, 24).

in Ukrainian and occasionally in a language of a host country; that impeded reading of the required data by foreign users who do not speak Ukrainian.

In this context, we'll recall that in a host country the attitude of the public, political and business elites to our country and its steps in the international arena depends on the activities of diplomatic missions in media environment of a host country that should be carried out carefully, in order to minimize negative impacts and provide maximum results of information and explanatory activities. The features of such work are consideration of heterogeneity of media environment, as it is influenced by various factors, including mass media of a host country, domestic and international media; periodic and special protocol events on which information exchange and expression of the state's position is actively carried; unofficial contacts in order to obtain specific information; working with government agencies of the host country, etc.

Thus, since 2014 due to aggravation of Ukrainian–Russian relations the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has revised the tools to support initiatives and foreign policy interests of Ukraine and intensified the work of Ukrainian diplomatic missions. Currently, all diplomatic missions of Ukraine are represented in social media. In order to effectively use digital tools of diplomacy the foreign ministry plans to improve informational content in accounts of diplomatic missions, introduce cutting theme on foreign policy initiatives, rebrand the Ministry in social media and intensify multilingual dialogue with the public.

The first positive results of the foreign ministry's activity in social media in 2014¹ were the campaign #RussiaInvadedUkraine regarding Ukrainian–Russian border crossing by Russian heavy weaponry, and the project #SelfieWithFlag dedicated to the Day of the National Flag of Ukraine with suggestion to make photos with Ukrainian flag in famous foreign tourist places.

In 2015 among online image campaigns of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the most remarkable are initiation of Twitter-interview of diplomatic staff with hashtags #AskConsul, #AskMFA, #EmbInterview; creation of hashtags #UkraineNewsAlert, #StopFake and #Reforms4Ukraine for information about important events in Ukraine and to counteract Russian propaganda; campaigns in social media #LetMyPeopleGo in support of Ukrainian citizens illegally detained in Russia; and campaigns #TellWorldAboutUA and #AwesomeUkraine to tell interesting facts about Ukraine; implementation of #MyUkraineIs project, aimed to promote Ukraine abroad and creation of the online platform www.myukraineis.org supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Information Policy and StratCom.UA; initiation of the project 'Crimea on the world map' through the hashtag #CrimeaIsUkraine, to correctly indicate Crimea's territorial affiliation on maps.

In 2016 among online image campaigns of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs we may highlight the project #BeEuropean, supported by the EU Delegation in Ukraine, the European truth edition and the EU radio. The project was aimed to spread interesting information about the life of Europeans and told Ukrainian stories about how to be a European. The other remarkable campaign in 2016 is joining the UN campaign #StandUp4HumanRights, in order to testify Ukraine's support to fundamental rights and freedoms.

It worth of noting, that promising areas for the Ministry's activity in the field of image in 2017 will be development of digital diplomacy through creation of image cultural portal in English and its integration into diplomatic and international cultural networks.

Results

Nowadays, in social media remains a high percentage of breaking news about current political and economic events in Ukraine that may attract the attention of the public opinion but authors don't write about other aspects of Ukraine's life. As a result, we should provide the positive information about Ukraine for creating the positive reputation of the state abroad.

We believe that implementing the tools of digital diplomacy in foreign policy will allow Ukraine to establish fast communication and collaboration between government agencies regarding any foreign, economic or social problem; to perform online consultations; to transmit, disseminate and store information from various international issues; to effectively carry out information campaign via subscriptions and placement of data in RSS-feeds, coordination of information on various social media accounts and so on. Effective foreign policy depends on existence of a single node web resource to place information of the foreign ministry regarding work in social media and lists of social media, popular in different countries; consulting diplomats on using social platforms; technical support of accounts; holding interactive seminars on foreign policy issues and development of applied applications and tools.

¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine in social media*. <<http://mfa.gov.ua/en/page/open/id/4601>> (2017, April, 24).

In addition, development of recommendations of the foreign ministry of Ukraine concerning effective work in the field of digital diplomacy determines studying of the target audience, clarification of a visiting purpose and application by users of various web resources and technologies which give access to information. Thus, it is possible to offer a number of sections to be placed on a single web resource for the MFA of Ukraine: blog as an access to the latest official government news; ‘meeting room’ where visitors may learn about important statements of the President; photos as an access to formal and informal photographs; video performances with major officials of the country; ‘live’ as online access to events occurring in government; search the database saving useful data and simultaneous publication of information in multiple social media accounts. Awareness about the benefits of using digital diplomacy in the foreign policy of Ukraine will give opportunity to apply effective methods of foreign policy and adequate countermeasures.

The results show that there is a gap between the intentions and outcomes of governmental communication with the foreign audience. The findings from the comparative analysis suggest that Ukraine uses social media for effective explanation its European initiatives and government programs to the global and domestic public.

Discussion and conclusions

The impact of information policy within Ukraine is significant for conditions, nature and level of attitude from our European partners and their readiness to promote Ukraine’s integration into continental information space. In terms of Ukraine’s desire, officially declared on the highest level, to actively participate in the process of European integration, to join advanced samples of European experience in the key areas of political, social, economic and cultural life of society at the stage of deepening relations between Ukraine and the European Union the role of public information is particularly important to ensure broad public support for Ukraine’s European integration policy which effectiveness depends on the success and use of digital tools of diplomacy.

We believe that further discussion on the use of social media for support of Ukraine’s European integration policy is connected with the practice of the presence of Ukraine’s diplomatic missions in social media that includes not only the open of accounts, the thematic professional debates in blogs but also attraction of the famous foreign/European bloggers and experts as the opinion leaders to clarify the situation about the Ukraine crisis; the conceptual approaches at the level of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine to changing national legislation in the field of foreign policy; working out a multilingual system for monitoring and analysis of open online information that permits to make a forecast of the political situation and to present concrete proposals for the Ukraine’s political leadership; creation of mobile applications to communicate with the Ukraine’s diplomatic missions; updating the information and communication infrastructure the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine in accordance with the standards in the field of international security.

It should be emphasized that development of information technology will help to address the key challenges of Ukraine’s foreign policy and maintain a sufficient level of defense capability through creation of modern means for response and prevention of global information threats. The use of digital diplomacy as an instrument of foreign policy activity will increase the awareness of international community about the country, intensify all-round cooperation with international organizations and foreign countries; therefore current goals and tasks facing Ukraine require coordinated actions of the executives to strengthen position of the state in the global information space, countering the spread of negative perceptions of Ukraine in public mind of foreign countries and ensuring proper information support of Ukraine’s international initiatives. In this paper, we compared communication practice of Ukraine’s main political actors from 2010 to 2016 and introduced the recommendations for Ukraine’s diplomatic missions.

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