

Digital Diplomacy as a Tool for Implementing the Foreign Policy of Central Asian Countries (On the Example of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan)

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Abstract. Many countries pay great attention to the use of digital technologies as a tool for implementing their foreign policy. The popularity of modern information and communication achievements, such as the Internet, social networks, mass media, new communication channels, makes it possible to use them to implement the foreign policy objectives of the state. The purpose of this work is to analyze digital diplomacy, which is considered a new phenomenon in international relations. The article compares the use of digital tools by the diplomatic missions of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Statistical data are presented for each of the countries, which allowed us to get the most complete picture of digital trends in the diplomacy of the above-mentioned countries.

Keywords: Digital diplomacy, foreign policy, soft power, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, information and communication technologies

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Introduction

Over the past ten years, the use of digital technologies in diplomacy has become one of the priorities in foreign policy communications of states. Digital diplomacy has become one of the fastest and most convenient ways for states to express their official attitude to

political processes taking place in the international arena. The Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Uzbekistan did not stand aside. An analysis of the media, the Internet and social networks shows that there is a need to improve the activities of the Foreign Ministries of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan in terms of using the capabilities of modern information and communication technologies and accelerating the implementation of digital diplomacy. The purpose of the article is to analyze the concept of “digital diplomacy”, analyze the implementation of digital technologies in the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Republic of Kazakhstan and the use of digital diplomacy in the foreign policy activities of these countries.

Materials and methods

The author analyzed theoretical approaches to the concept of “digital diplomacy,” which is considered a new phenomenon in international relations. Methods of comparative analysis, content analysis, and factual analysis of data from international organizations were used.

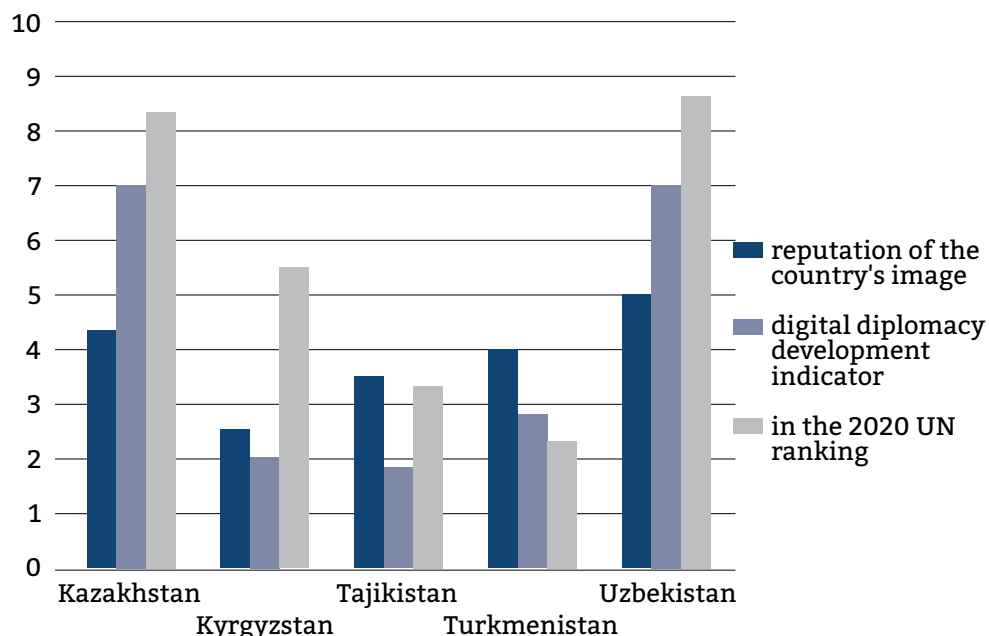
The objectivity of the conclusions is determined by the reliance on reliable material about the activities of international organizations, opinions on the Internet and social networks. The processes of digitalization of the political sphere in modern Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were analyzed. Information was used from the official websites of Facebook*, Instagram* and data from open sources of the Foreign Ministries of the two countries.

Results

The term “Digital Diplomacy” first appeared in the book “Digital Diplomacy: American Foreign Policy in the Information Age” by American journalist W.Dizard. Its author analyzes the use of information technology in US foreign policy and military relations and proposes a program he developed for the country's government. In his opinion, in a situation of increasing influence of non-governmental and transnational organizations, “digital diplomacy” is a complex but successful means of communication [1:232]. The concept of “digital diplomacy” is considered a new term and in many aspects correlates with such terms as: “cyber diplomacy” [Barston, 2014], “social diplomacy”, “virtual diplomacy”, “electronic diplomacy” [Hocking, Melissen, Riordan and Sharp, 2012], “diplomacy 2.0” [Harris, 2013].

Although digital diplomacy began to be used in the political sphere from the beginning of the 21st century, until now researchers and political scientists have not given a uniform definition of this term. Representatives of the Anglo-Saxon school M.Holmes, E.Segev, I.Manor, A.Ross, D.Lewis, K.Biola define digital diplomacy as a tool of “soft power” and believe that it should be used in international politics and diplomacy based on mutual trust and values [2:89–108].

Figure 1. Indicators of the digital tools development in Central Asian countries and indicators of their country's image



Source: Goals of the development of digital diplomacy and actions-results in this regard in Central Asian countries. International Scientific Journal. 2023; May 10 (100), Part 2 "News of education: Research in the XXI century"

Russian scientists characterize digital diplomacy as a tool for shaping public opinion and as a factor influencing the process of making foreign policy and political-economic decisions. A.V.Krikunov interprets digital diplomacy as the sphere of application of modern information and communication technologies to solve foreign policy problems, and Doctor of Political Sciences E.S.Zinovieva - as the sphere of use of information and communication technologies, including new media tools, social networks, blogs and similar media platforms of the global network, to implement the current tasks of the foreign policy agenda of government bodies [3:92].

The processes of globalization, the development of information and communication technologies in developed countries, the Internet and the strengthening of the role of non-governmental organizations in countries in international relations encourage the active use of advanced technologies. As a new form of using "soft power" in the foreign policy of states, "digital diplomacy" is often used in the foreign policy of the leading countries of the world: the USA, Canada, Russia, Japan, France, Iran and others. The countries of Central Asia are no exception.

The introduction of digital tools depends on the existing infrastructure in the country, Internet coverage and the speed of Internet connections. The state's national

strategy in the field of digitalization, organization of public services and e-government is reflected in the country's digital diplomacy. In particular, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are among the countries that are more successful in this direction than other Central Asian countries. According to the results of the UN e-Government Knowledge Base study, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are among the leaders in the countries of Central Asia in terms of the "E-Government Development Indicator" and "E-Participation Indicator". According to the E-Government Development Index, Kazakhstan ranks 28th among 193 countries with an indicator of 0.8628%¹.

In accordance with the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated March 7, 2002 "On the Diplomatic Service of the Republic of Kazakhstan," the Ministry of Foreign Affairs must develop the main directions of foreign policy and implement the country's international initiatives. According to the official statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Republic of Kazakhstan informs the international community about its position on international problems and foreign policy initiatives aimed at the political, socio-economic, cultural and humanitarian development of the country, using modern capabilities of information and communication technologies and traditional diplomacy².

The "Digital Kazakhstan for 2018-2022" program was presented by the Government of Kazakhstan on January 31, 2017 and created the first legislative framework for digitalization in the country. The goal of this program was to accelerate the economic development of the Republic of Kazakhstan and improve the quality of life of citizens through the use of digital technologies in the short and medium term. The Digital Kazakhstan program defines five key areas:

1. Digitalization of economic sectors;
2. Transition to a digital state;
3. Implementation of the digital Silk Road;
4. Development of human capital;
5. Creating an innovation ecosystem³.

In 2023, 90.9% of the total population used the Internet in Kazakhstan. The number of active users of social networks is 11.85 million people, that is, 60.8% of the total population. The most popular social network among Kazakhstanis is Facebook*, with 2.30 million users, followed by Instagram*, LinkedIn*, Twitter*⁴.

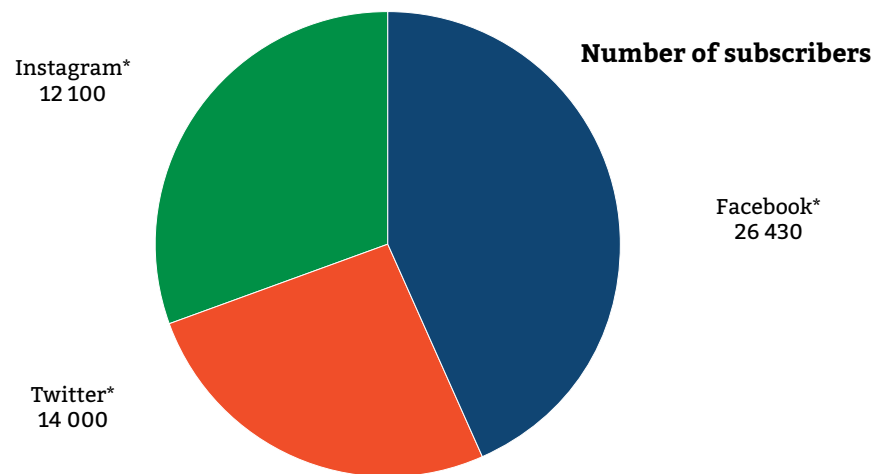
Government institutions of Kazakhstan are expanding their presence on the global Internet. Nursultan Nazarbayev, the first President of Kazakhstan, created his official

1 Statista. Internet penetration rate in Kazakhstan from 2011 to 2021. Murojat:17.10.2023. Available from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/769863/internet-penetration-rate-kazakhstan/#statisticContainer>

2 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan. To the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated March 3, 2021 "On Amendments and Additions to the Law "On the Diplomatic Service of the Republic of Kazakhstan"". Available from: <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/mfa/press/article/details/45980?lang=ru>.

3 Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated December 12, 2017, № 827. On approval of the State Program "Digital Kazakhstan". Available from: <https://adilet.zan.kz/rus/archive/docs/P1700000827/12.12.2017>

4 DataReportal. Digital in Kazakhstan. Available from: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-kazakhstan#:~:text=Kazakhstan%20was%20home%20to%2011.85,percent%20of%20the%20total%20population.>

Figure 2. The most popular social networks in Kazakhstan (2023)

Source: Based on Datareportl data. Available from: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-kazakhstan#:~:text=Kazakhstan%20was%20home%20to%2011.85,percent%20of%20the%20total%20population.>

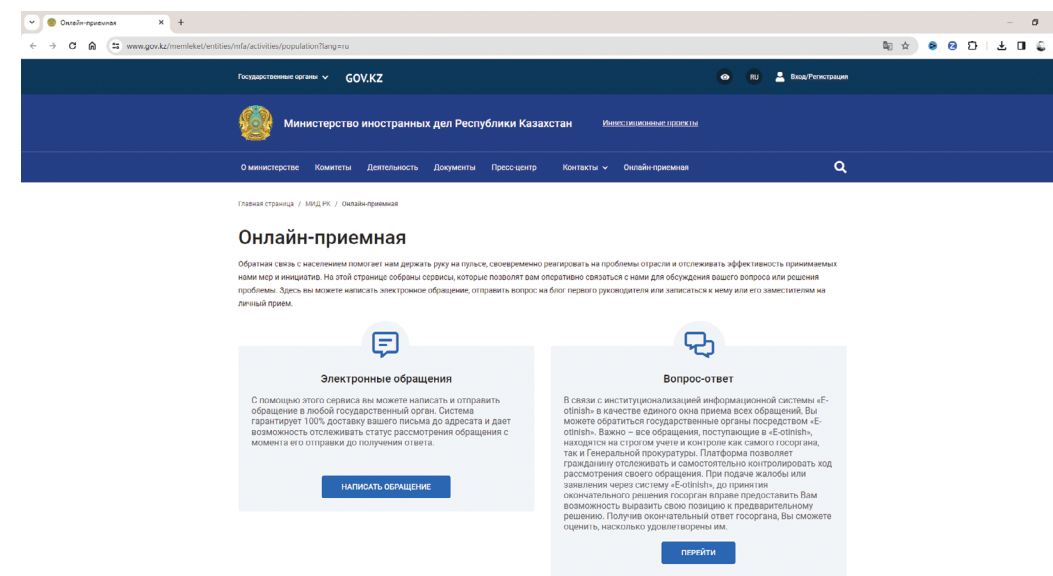
pages on Facebook*, Twitter*, and in 2014 on Instagram*. Today, almost all ministries and departments, as well as other government bodies, have registered and maintain their own official websites. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan coordinates the posting of information about current events in foreign policy on social networks and, in particular, on the information resources Facebook* and Twitter*.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan is developing digitalization, not only using social networks, but also creating a number of mobile applications. Thus, in 2017, a special application “SmartTravelKZ” was launched, aimed at citizens of Kazakhstan traveling to foreign countries. The application contains up-to-date information about countries, useful recommendations for travelers⁵.

There are other applications for mobile devices. In particular, the application “Kazakhstan Land of the Great Steppe” provides information about the history of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the features of its geography, economy and modern politics of Kazakhstan. This application can be useful for tourists and for people interested in and studying Kazakhstan. Through such digital initiatives, Kazakhstan is realizing opportunities to develop its public diplomacy⁶. Although programs promoting the country’s brand have been created, their full integration with the official website of the country’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not yet exist.

⁵ The official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2017). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs presented a mobile application for citizens. Available from: <http://mfa.gov.kz/ru/content-view/mid-prezentoval-mobilnoe-prilozhenie-dla-grazdan>

⁶ The app in the App Store “Kazakhstan Land of the Great Steppe”. Available from: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/kazakhstan-land-of-the-great-steppe-s/id1117366063?mt=8&sign-mpt=uo%3D4>

Figure 3. Official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2023)

Source: Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Available from: <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/mfa?lang=kk>

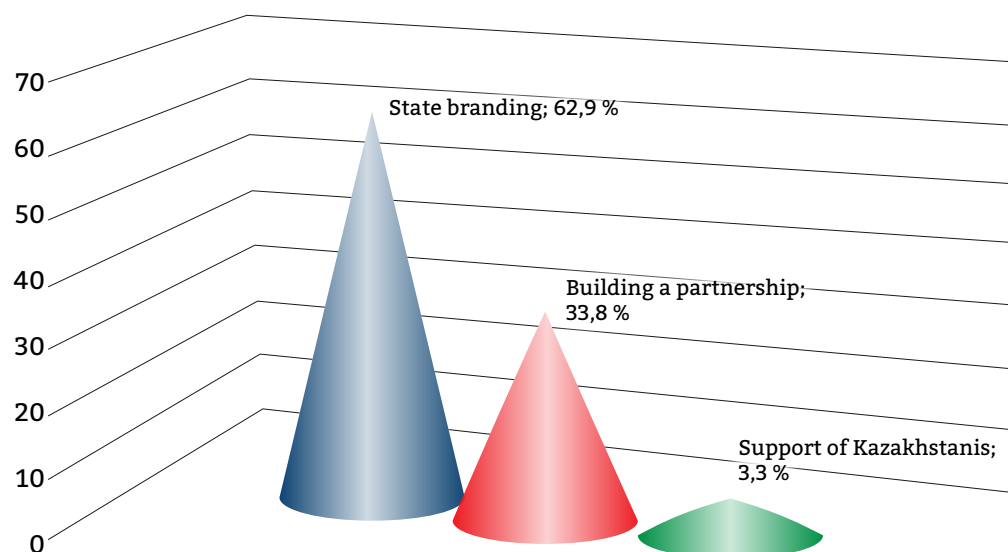
Mostly, the MFA pages are practical; government organizations do not engage in branding or create special websites.

Based on the analysis of the official pages of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, two directions can be distinguished:

1. Information on the activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the republic.
2. Providing services to citizens. Complaints and claims and other services, including issuing visas for citizens and foreigners, obtaining citizenship, conducting investigative measures [4:92].

According to the statistics above, the social network with the largest number of users in the Republic of Kazakhstan is Facebook*.

According to a content analysis of Facebook pages* provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, information is mainly used to promote the country and its culture, history, tourist destinations, as well as strengthen its political position at the international level. Most of the materials are presented in the form of reposts of official messages from the pages of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Administration of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the media. The “Cooperation and Cooperation Development” department provides a lot of materials about bilateral meetings (not only at the level of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and embassies, but also at the level of presidents and representatives of countries). When analyzing the block “Support for citizens and diaspora of Kazakhstan”, it was found that the least number of posts are

Figure 4. Topics on the pages of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Facebook*.

Source: Botakoz K. and Almash A. Facebook* as a Digital Diplomacy Tool: Case of Kazakhstan. Proceedings of the 6th European Conference on Social Media. University of Brighton UK, 2019, June 13-14:156.

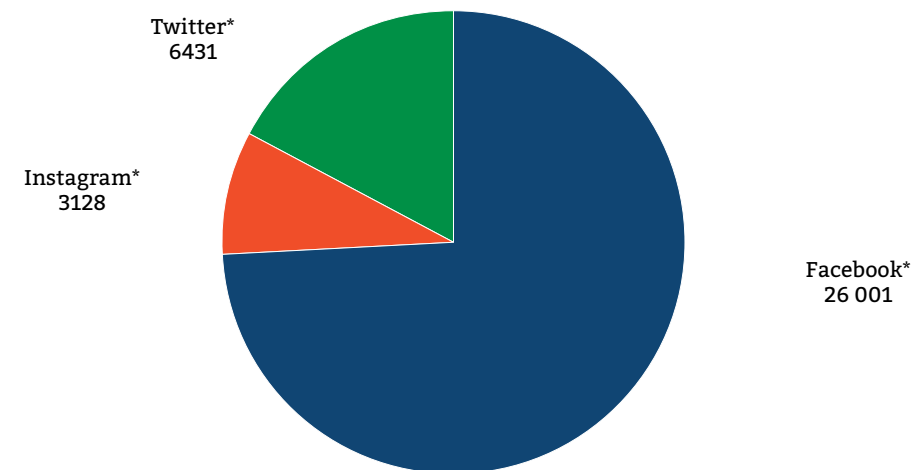
devoted to it. This block consists mainly of materials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and embassies; it contains information about various events with the participation of citizens of Kazakhstan, students of host countries and representatives of the Kazakh diaspora [5:156]. Most embassy and foreign ministry posts on Facebook* are aimed at creating state branding.

In the Republic of Uzbekistan, the use of digital diplomacy began in 2016. Development of digital diplomacy in the country, radical transformation and improvement of the system of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, creation of an Action Strategy for the period 2017–2021. in five priority areas of development, the Concept of Administrative Reform defines the tasks necessary for the implementation of digital diplomacy⁷.

According to Twiplomacy, the most popular digital resources in Uzbekistan are the press services of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and Prime Minister Abdulla Oripov, as well as the gov.uz portal and the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan [6:58–61].

The press service of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev actively uses the capabilities of social networks. The digital resource of the presidential press service has more than 39,000

⁷ Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On measures to radically improve the system of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan and strengthen its responsibility in implementing priority areas of foreign policy and foreign economic activity". Available from:

Figure 5. The most used social networks in Kazakhstan (2023)

Source: Based on DataReportal data. Available from: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-uzbekistan>

subscribers on Twitter*, more than 3 million subscribers on Instagram*, and more than 242,000 users on the Facebook page*. The press service of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan is characterized by the following parameters:

- 1) According to the parameter of the most popular world leaders – 3 million users, 16th place in the world ranking.
- 2) According to the parameter of the most famous leaders with the largest number of interactions: 22nd place with 9 million users.
- 3) According to the parameter of the most successful in the world – 39th place.

As of 2023, there are 26.74 million Internet users in Uzbekistan (an increase of 8.84 million compared to 2020), that is, 76.6% of the country's population. Today, the number of users of the social network is 5.35 million (increased by 1.94 million compared to 2020). This corresponds to 15.3% of the total population.

At the beginning of 2023, 31.84 million cellular mobile connections were activated in Uzbekistan, corresponding to 91.2% of the total population.

According to information on the advertising resources "Meta"*, at the beginning of 2023, Facebook* has 1.65 million users in Uzbekistan. The number of Instagram users in Uzbekistan is 4.20 million. Twitter* has 148,700 users in Uzbekistan.

To strengthen the role of government agencies in social networks, it is necessary to use a systematic approach. According to researchers [Hocking B., Melissen J., 2015], there are a number of factors that are important for the successful digitalization of foreign policy activities of foreign ministries:

Firstly, the foreign policy department needs internal structural support, which requires the creation of a special unit including digitalization experts.

Secondly, an effective digital moderator is required, that is, a person who actively supports and develops digitalization processes.

Thirdly, professional staff is needed, this requires a special program to train diplomats in the field of network management and dissemination of information among various groups and categories of users. In addition, it is necessary to take into account the features associated with the direct activities of foreign policy departments [7:49–50].

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Contribution of the author

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