

# Book Review

## The Oxford Handbook of Digital Diplomacy

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*The Oxford Handbook of Digital Diplomacy*, edited by Corneliu Bjola and Ilan Manor, is a seminal work that offers a comprehensive and insightful exploration of the transformative impact of digital technologies on diplomatic practices, institutions, and relations. Published in 2024, this handbook delves into the evolving landscape of diplomacy in the digital age, drawing on contributions from leading experts in the field. It stands out for its multidisciplinary approach, covering a wide range of topics from theoretical foundations to practical applications.

The handbook investigates digital diplomacy as a practice, a process, and a form of disruption. It explores how digital technologies are reshaping the norms, practices, and logic of diplomats, states, and international organizations. The editors, Bjola and Manor, provide a strong conceptual and theoretical foundation for understanding digital diplomacy, setting the stage for subsequent chapters that delve into specific aspects of the field.

The initial portion, titled “Concepts and Theories,” establishes the groundwork by analysing the theoretical foundations and conceptual frameworks that form the basis of this developing discipline. The introductory chapter by Bjola and Manor outlines the “grammar rules and patterns of digital disruption,” establishing a framework for analyzing the multifaceted ways in which digital tools and platforms are reshaping the norms, logic, and processes of diplomacy.

Building on this foundational work, the handbook delves deeper into the conceptual underpinnings of digital diplomacy. Holmes explores how digital diplomacy involves the strategic projection and retrieval of national images and identities, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a consistent and carefully curated digital presence. This chapter underscores the evolving role of diplomats as “digital curators,” tasked with managing their country’s online reputation and influence.

Furthering the conceptual analysis, Manor and Pamment examine the dynamics of micro and macro digital disruptions, discussing how these disruptions can significantly alter diplomatic practices and international relations. Their work highlights the need for diplomats to develop a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between technological, social, and political forces that shape the digital landscape.

Rawnsley’s chapter on the application of soft power in the digital space provides valuable insights into how nations can leverage digital platforms to enhance their global influence and cultural appeal. This conceptual exploration illuminates the strategic opportunities and challenges inherent in the digitalization of public diplomacy.

Complementing these conceptual discussions, Briant delves into the emerging field of researching influence operations, focusing on the role of “dark arts” mercenaries and the digital influence industry. This chapter underscores the ethical concerns and security implications posed by the growing sophistication of digital influence campaigns, which pose significant challenges for contemporary diplomacy.

Collectively, these chapters establish a robust conceptual and theoretical foundation for understanding the multifaceted nature of digital diplomacy. By exploring key concepts such as digital disruption, image projection, soft power, and influence operations, the handbook equips readers with the analytical tools necessary to navigate the evolving landscape of diplomacy in the digital age.

The second portion, titled “Diplomatic Practices,” provides an in-depth exploration of the tangible uses and implementations of digital diplomacy. This section of the handbook offers a comprehensive exploration of how digital tools and platforms are reshaping how diplomats engage with their counterparts, communicate with the global publics, and navigate emerging security challenges.

Eggeling and Adler-Nissen examine the impact of digital technologies on diplomatic negotiations, highlighting how new forms of interaction and engagement between states are emerging. Their analysis underscores the need for diplomats to develop specialized skills in navigating the complexities of virtual negotiations, from virtual meeting etiquette to the strategic use of digital tools to enhance transparency and build trust.

Kello’s chapter on the intersection of digital diplomacy and cyber defence further emphasizes the critical role that digital technologies play in the modern diplomatic landscape. Diplomats must now grapple with the intricacies of cybersecurity, developing strategies to protect their nations’ digital infrastructure while also leveraging digital tools to enhance their diplomatic capabilities.

Crilley’s exploration of digital nuclear diplomacy provides a compelling case study of how digital platforms can be utilized to manage and communicate about sensitive security issues. This chapter underscores the potential for digital technologies to facilitate more transparent and inclusive dialogues around nuclear policy, while also highlighting the need for careful consideration of the ethical and security implications of such practices.

Cassidy’s work on digital feminist foreign policy offers a novel perspective, advocating for the integration of feminist principles into the digital diplomatic toolkit. By examining how digital tools can be leveraged to amplify marginalized voices and promote gender equality in international affairs, this chapter challenges traditional notions of diplomacy and calls for a more inclusive and equitable approach to digital diplomacy.

Cull’s analysis of the use of digital tools for global public engagement emphasizes the importance of effective communication strategies in public diplomacy. This chapter explores how diplomats can harness the power of digital platforms to engage with diverse global audiences, build international goodwill, and shape national narratives on the global stage.

Grincheva’s examination of digital cultural diplomacy showcases the potential for digital technologies to facilitate cross-cultural exchange and understanding. By highlighting innovative case studies, this chapter demonstrates how diplomats can

leverage digital platforms to promote their nations' cultural heritage and foster meaningful intercultural dialogue.

Complementing these practical explorations, Huang and Arceneaux's chapter on the ethical challenges in the digitalization of public diplomacy raises critical questions about privacy, security, and the responsible use of digital technologies. This work underscores the need for diplomats to navigate the ethical minefield of the digital age, balancing the strategic benefits of digital tools with the imperative to protect individual rights and uphold democratic principles.

Collectively, these chapters provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how digital technologies are transforming the everyday practices of diplomacy. By examining a diverse range of diplomatic activities, from negotiations to public engagement, the handbook equips readers with a deep appreciation for the practical implications of the digital revolution in international affairs.

An exceptional characteristic of this manual is its extensive and comprehensive coverage. The third portion, titled "Diplomatic Institutions," explores the convergence of digital diplomacy with wider concerns of global governance, including cybersecurity, human rights, and the governance of digital technology. This section of the handbook offers a comprehensive analysis of how the digitalization of diplomacy is reshaping the structures, practices, and roles of key diplomatic entities.

Bjola and Kiaviðð explore the digital hybridization of ministries of foreign affairs, highlighting how these core diplomatic institutions are adapting to the digital age. Their work underscores the challenges and opportunities that ministries face as they seek to integrate digital tools and practices into their traditional operations, from modernizing communication strategies to fostering digital innovation.

Building on this institutional perspective, Bouchard discusses the digitalization of permanent missions to international organizations. This chapter examines how diplomatic representations at multilateral forums are leveraging digital technologies to enhance their engagement, information-sharing, and influence within these complex institutional settings.

Ecker-Ehrhardt's analysis of the digital adaptation of international bureaucracies provides further insights into the institutional transformations underway. By exploring how international organizations are incorporating digital tools and practices into their day-to-day operations, this chapter sheds light on the evolving role of digital diplomacy within the broader ecosystem of global governance.

Hedling's work on the digitalization of diplomatic summitry offers a fascinating case study of how digital technologies are reshaping the conduct of high-level diplomatic events. From virtual meetings to social media engagement, this chapter highlights how digital innovations are altering the dynamics and outcomes of diplomatic summitry.

Complementing these institutional perspectives, McConnell and Manby examine the role of non-governmental and transnational organizations in digital diplomacy. Their analysis underscores the growing influence of these non-state actors, who are leveraging digital platforms to engage directly with governments, shape policy agendas, and amplify their diplomatic voices.

Sevin's chapter on the implications of the digitalization of diplomacy for cities provides a novel angle, showcasing how urban centres are becoming increasingly

important players in the diplomatic landscape. As cities harness digital tools to enhance their global connectivity and influence, this work illuminates the evolving power dynamics between national governments and subnational entities in the digital age.

Meldgaard and Fletcher's exploration of the rise of tech ambassadors further demonstrates the institutional adaptations underway. By examining how states are appointing specialized representatives to engage with the technology sector, this chapter highlights the growing importance of digital diplomacy as a distinct area of diplomatic practice.

Collectively, these chapters offer a comprehensive understanding of how digital technologies are reshaping the structures, functions, and roles of diplomatic institutions. From ministries of foreign affairs to international organizations and cities, the handbook illustrates the profound transformations underway as diplomacy navigates the digital frontier.

The concluding segment, titled "Diplomatic Relations," provides a glimpse into the developing realm of digital diplomacy, examining emerging patterns, obstacles, and potential future paths. This proactive approach provides readers with a more profound comprehension of the dynamic and swiftly evolving nature of this sector, enabling them to foresee and adjust to the forthcoming changes. Bjola and Kīaviðð examine the European Union's digital diplomacy, exploring how the EU is leveraging digital tools to enhance its diplomatic efforts. Bjola and Manor analyze the digital diplomacy of China and the United States, comparing and contrasting the digital strategies of these two major powers. They also explore the digital diplomacy of the Middle East, highlighting the unique challenges and opportunities this region faces in the digital age. These chapters provide valuable insights into how different regions and countries are utilizing digital technologies to conduct their diplomatic relations and navigate the complexities of the international system.

Bjola and Kīaviðð's chapter on the European Union's digital diplomacy offers a comprehensive analysis of how the EU is leveraging digital tools to enhance its diplomatic efforts. The EU has been at the forefront of digital diplomacy, utilizing platforms such as social media, online engagement, and digital communication to promote its policies and engage with the global publics. This chapter highlights the strategic use of digital tools to build international goodwill, foster cooperation, and influence global narratives. The EU's digital diplomacy is particularly notable for its emphasis on transparency, inclusivity, and the promotion of democratic values.

Bjola and Manor's comparative analysis of the digital diplomacy of China and the United States provides a nuanced understanding of the strategic approaches adopted by these two major powers. The chapter examines how China and the United States are using digital technologies to project their national images, engage with the global publics, and exert influence on the international stage. The analysis underscores the distinct approaches and priorities of each country, from China's focus on digital propaganda and cyber influence to the United States' emphasis on cybersecurity, digital infrastructure, and the protection of human rights. This chapter offers a critical assessment of the digital diplomacy strategies of these two superpowers, highlighting the implications for global diplomacy and international relations.

The exploration of digital diplomacy in the Middle East by Bjola and Manor highlights the unique challenges and opportunities this region faces in the digital

age. The chapter examines how countries in the Middle East are adapting to the digital landscape, from the use of social media for public diplomacy to the challenges of cybersecurity and digital governance. The analysis underscores the importance of digital technologies in addressing regional issues such as conflict resolution, economic development, and cultural exchange. This chapter provides a detailed understanding of the complexities and opportunities inherent in the digital diplomacy of the Middle East.

### **Conclusion**

The final part of the handbook offers a comprehensive exploration of the impact of digital technologies on diplomatic relations. By examining the digital diplomacy of the European Union, China, the United States, and the Middle East, the handbook provides a nuanced understanding of the strategic use of digital tools in international relations. The chapters highlight the evolving nature of diplomacy in the digital age, emphasizing the importance of adaptability, innovation, and strategic engagement in the global digital landscape.

Overall, *The Oxford Handbook of Digital Diplomacy* is an authoritative and essential resource for anyone interested in understanding the intersection of technology and international relations. Its multidisciplinary approach and comprehensive coverage make it a seminal work in the field of digital diplomacy. The handbook's ability to capture the complexity of digital diplomacy, coupled with its in-depth analysis and case studies, offers valuable insights for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners alike.