



Designing a Conceptual Model of Public Diplomacy Management of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Social Networks in line with National Security

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Introduction

In today's world, where information and communication technology is transforming at an extraordinary pace, public diplomacy has become one of the most central and influential tools of countries' foreign policy. What was exclusively in the hands of governments and official institutions two decades ago has now reached millions of ordinary users worldwide through the emergence and expansion of social networks and digital platforms. This fundamental and revolutionary transformation has fundamentally changed the rules of diplomacy and created unprecedented challenges and opportunities for countries.

The concept of soft power that Joseph Nye introduced in the 1990s has found new and deeper dimensions in the era of social networks and cyberspace. Countries no longer need to rely solely on their military or economic power; they can capture the hearts and minds of people worldwide through their cultural attractiveness, moral and human values. The internet and social networks have provided this extraordinary possibility for messages to reach any corner of the world in a fraction of a second and play a decisive role in shaping public opinion.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, relying on its rich and ancient history, as well as the Islamic Revolution that was accompanied by universal slogans and justice-seeking messages, has exceptional and unique capacities for effective public diplomacy. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran also emphasizes direct communication with nations, supporting the oppressed of the world, and spreading the values of the Islamic Revolution, providing an appropriate theoretical and practical framework for such activities. However, it is observed that Iran has not yet been able to systematically and optimally utilize these enormous potential capacities. In contrast, Iran's competitors and enemies use social networks with precise planning and extensive investment to damage the country's image, spread rumors, and create division.

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Methodology

To achieve the main objective of this research, the qualitative Grounded Theory method was used. This method was chosen because comprehensive studies and adequate modeling had not been conducted in the field of Iran's public diplomacy on social networks, and there was an urgent need to discover new patterns, relationships, and structures. This method enables theory construction from within data and allows the researcher to explore the subject deeply without prior theoretical assumptions.

The data collection process was designed and implemented in two main and complementary stages. In the first stage, extensive and deep library studies were conducted, including careful and analytical examination of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, upstream documents of the system, announced general policies, and decrees and guidelines issued by the Supreme Leader regarding cyberspace and social networks. This stage was necessary and vital for deep understanding of the theoretical, value-based, and political framework governing the system and determining the intellectual foundations of Iran's public diplomacy.

In the second stage, deep and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 people who had rich practical, scientific, and executive experience in this field. These individuals comprised a diverse and comprehensive spectrum of former and current officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, officials in the country's cyberspace domain, prominent university professors, researchers from research centers, and civil activists and social activists. The interviews began with open and flexible questions to provide appropriate atmosphere and complete freedom for expressing personal views and experiences. After conducting sixteen interviews, it was observed that no new and meaningful data was obtained, but for complete certainty, four other interviews were also conducted to achieve complete theoretical saturation.

Data analysis was performed based on three basic stages of open, axial, and selective coding. In the open coding stage, all interview content and documents were carefully examined and initial concepts were extracted. In the axial coding stage, these concepts were categorized based on similarities and differences. Finally, in the selective coding stage, the main category was selected and the relationship of other categories with it was determined.

Result and discussion

Comprehensive and precise analysis of collected data led to the extraction of a unique model formed around the new concept of "Mixed Networks Public Diplomacy on Social Networks." This concept, which is introduced and explained for the first time in this

research, demonstrates the urgent necessity of integrating and merging different approaches in contemporary public diplomacy.

Central Category: What emerged from deep data analysis and extensive examination of interviewees' experiences clearly shows that effective and efficient diplomacy on social networks cannot and should not operate solely based on traditional and classical governmental patterns. Rather, it should be an intelligent and coherent combination of formal and informal, governmental and popular, centralized and decentralized activities. This mixed and multi-layered approach enables simultaneous use of diverse capabilities and capacities.

Causal Conditions: Interviewees emphasized extensively that sustainable success in this sensitive field requires deep and comprehensive understanding of the complex nature of public diplomacy and special characteristics of social networks. Also, maximum utilization of enormous capacities of social activists and popular activists who often have more credibility and influence than official authorities in cyberspace is considered essential.

Contextual Conditions: The Islamic Republic of Iran is in a unique and exceptional position from historical, cultural, and political perspectives. On one hand, it has rich and deep civilizational heritage and the Islamic Revolution with attractive values and messages. On the other hand, technological developments of the contemporary world have provided unprecedented opportunities for direct communication with nations. However, serious challenges of technology gap and structural limitations also exist.

Intervening Factors: The undeniable reality is that the Islamic Republic of Iran faces serious resistance and obstacles in the international arena. Powerful Western governments, using their enormous capabilities in technology and media fields, make extensive efforts to prevent the expansion of Iran's soft power. Opposition groups residing abroad also conduct coordinated activities against Iran with support from these countries.

Strategies: Based on valuable experiences of interviewees, success in this complex arena requires complete coordination and constructive cooperation of all related institutions. Currently, lack of effective coordination has caused various efforts to sometimes neutralize each other. Identifying and training talented individuals, facilitating civil society activities, and organizing the situation of Iranians residing abroad who can play the role of cultural ambassadors of the country are among the main priorities.

Consequences: Precise and effective implementation of this comprehensive model can create positive and tangible transformations in Iran's image and position in global public

opinion and provide favorable conditions for achieving the country's national interests. It will also bring the possibility of creating supportive networks at the international level and the ability to intelligently counter enemy propaganda.

Conclusion

This comprehensive and innovative research clearly showed that the Islamic Republic of Iran, to achieve sustainable success in the vital field of social networks public diplomacy, needs fundamental change of approach from traditional methods to the advanced "Mixed Networks" model. This model, presented for the first time in this study, has the capability to analyze the current situation, design appropriate strategies, and predict results. Research findings indicate that achieving this goal requires creating a coordinating mechanism that can mobilize all the country's capacities. The suggestion of "assigning public diplomacy policymaking mission on social networks to the Supreme Council of Cyberspace" and "assigning public diplomacy operational management on social networks to the National Center of Cyberspace" has been proposed in this regard. In a world where soft power has gained increasing importance, Iran can regain its deserved position in the international arena by implementing this model.

Keywords: Public Diplomacy; Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran; National Security; Grounded Theory

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