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THE STRUCTURAL ACTOR AS AN ANALYTICAL APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF DIGITAL DIPLOMACY IN FOREIGN POLICY

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the structural actor approach as an analytical framework for understanding digital diplomacy in contemporary foreign policy. Despite the growing prominence of digital transformation in international relations, the structural actor perspective has received limited attention in foreign policy analysis. The paper addresses this gap by examining the agent-structure problem and its application to diplomacy in the digital age. The study first clarifies the ontological and theoretical dimensions of the agent-structure debate in foreign policy literature. It then conceptualizes digital diplomacy, tracing its evolution from an extension of public diplomacy to a distinct, interactive practice that incorporates social media, virtual platforms, and emerging technologies. Particular attention is given to the transformation of the digital diplomatic actor – which now includes not only traditional state diplomats but also technology envoys, cyber ambassadors, non-state actors, celebrities, and AI-assisted tools – and the structure of digital diplomacy, encompassing digital infrastructure, normative patterns, behavioral rules, real-time communication dynamics, and networked environments. The core argument is that the relationship between the digital diplomatic actor and its structural environment is characterized by mutual influence and dynamic interaction: actors shape digital structures while being simultaneously enabled and constrained by them. Through a qualitative analytical approach, the study demonstrates that the structural actor framework offers strong explanatory power for analyzing the complexities of diplomacy in knowledge-based, post-industrial societies.*

KEYWORDS: Foreign Policy, Structural Actor, Digital Diplomacy, Agent-Structure Problem, Public Diplomacy, Technology Envoys.

In general, the structural actor approach refers to the manner in which the actor's influence on its structure, as well as the extent to which that structure is capable of shaping and configuring the actor's behaviour. The diplomatic actor, within the context of digital diplomacy, encompasses all formal and informal actors who possess the capacity to utilise electronic means in order to advance the foreign policy objectives of the state. While electronic diplomacy structure refers to all electronic means and methods—whether domestic or international—that possess the capacity to influence the e-diplomatic actor.

1. INTRODUCTION

At the outset, it is important to emphasize that theorization within the field of foreign policy analysis remains relatively recent. Notwithstanding this relative novelty, the field has experienced significant methodological development and a clear shift in its analytical frameworks and approaches. Among the most prominent of these are the historical, legal, institutional, systemic, national interest, psychological, and decision-making approaches, in addition to the structural actor approach.

Nevertheless, the latter has not received sufficient scholarly attention within the literature on foreign policy analysis, particularly in the context of knowledge societies and the accelerating dynamics of digital transformation.

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to address this gap by advancing the following central research question:

How can the structural actor approach be utilized to analyze diplomacy within an international environment shaped by digital transformation?

This overarching question gives rise to several subsidiary inquiries:

What does the agent-structure problem signify in foreign policy analysis?

What is digital diplomacy, and how has it evolved?

How can the structure of digital diplomacy be conceptualized?

What constitutes a digital diplomatic actor?

What is the nature of the relationship between the digital diplomatic actor and its structural environment?

The study aims to introduce and critically examine the structural actor approach within foreign policy analysis, while clarifying the concept of digital diplomacy and identifying the nature of the digital diplomatic actor and its structural configuration. It further seeks to assess the analytical capacity of the structural actor approach in explaining digital diplomacy.

To achieve these objectives, the study adopts a structured plan that addresses the following themes: the agent-structure problem in foreign policy analysis; the concept and evolution of digital diplomacy; and the digital diplomatic actor and its structural configuration in the age of digitalization. The study concludes by outlining its principal findings and theoretical implications.

2. THE AGENT-STRUCTURE PROBLEM IN FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS

Previous studies suggest that the treatment of the actor-structure approach—as a framework through which foreign policy may be examined as a distinct field of knowledge—has not received sufficient scholarly attention. This relative neglect may be attributed to the novelty of the approach within a relatively recent discipline, as well as to the reluctance of some scholars to resolve a deeply contested dialectical problem whose essence has yet to be definitively established through conclusive and compelling evidence. Probing this problematique necessitates unpacking its underlying dimensions, particularly through clarifying the nature of the relationship that binds its two core pillars: the “actor” and the “structure” (Carlsnaes, 1992, p. 245; see also Hill, 2003, p. 26).

The ontological content of “structure” varies according to the theoretical perspectives and analytical approaches adopted by scholars of foreign policy. For instance, structural realists reduce the structure of foreign policy to the architecture of the international system and its attendant implications. In contrast, proponents of the decision-making approach adopt a broader conception of structure, encompassing not only systemic variables but also political factors, sociological and geopolitical dimensions, regional dynamics, technological developments, and the psychological characteristics of decision-makers. Moreover, this approach operates across multiple levels of analysis, ranging from the individual and sub-state units to the overarching systemic level. Accordingly, within this framework, the components of structure include all internal and external variables influencing foreign policy decision-makers (Northedge, 1968, p. 21; see also Tayfur, 1994, p. 131; Carlsnaes, 2012, p. 114).

From the perspective of the bureaucratic politics approach, the structure of foreign policy-making consists of the organizational configuration of bureaucratic institutions, as well as the procedural rules governing interactions among officials responsible for managing these institutions (Rady and Kegley, 1977, pp. 33–40).

Meanwhile, advocates of psychological and cognitive approaches confine the structure of decision-making to the psychological determinants shaping foreign policy actors. In other words, within this perspective, structure encompasses individual patterns, personal experiences, perceptions, ideologies, belief systems, and the degree of their rigidity or flexibility (Carlsnaes, 2012, p. 114). Similarly, proponents of the rational choice approach conceptualise the structure of foreign policy in terms of constraints imposed by societal forces and

behavioural limitations arising from human practice—most notably institutional constraints, bounded rationality, and the relativity of human knowledge and experience (Carlsnaes, 1992, p. 351).

A review of the foreign policy literature indicates the lack of a universally agreed-upon definition of the “actor.” There is no one concept has achieved consensus among either classical theorists or contemporary scholars. Whereas classical realists consider the nation-state to be the primary and exclusive actor in foreign policy, others contend that the real locus of agency lies within domestic groups that operate on behalf of the state and represent it externally. In this context, Hudson argues that “states are not agents,” maintaining that the state is an abstract construct which, by its very nature, cannot act independently as an agent representing an entire population. Consequently, the “actor-specific” approach proposed by Hudson does not refer to generic or undifferentiated entities, but rather to a clearly defined set of individuals. (Carlsnaes, 1992, p. 351). In a similar vein, adherents of the decision-making approach identify actors as those who hold political authority, with variations depending on the type of political system in question (Carlsnaes, 2012, p. 114).

The actor-structure problematique in foreign policy thus generates significant debate and sharp contention among competing theoretical perspectives, all of which seek to address a central question: which shapes the other? Does structure determine the actor, or does the actor possess the capacity to construct its own structure and influence its environment? Unsurprisingly, no single answer prevails; rather, responses vary according to differing theoretical orientations, sometimes converging and at other times diverging. Among the most prominent perspectives in this regard is pluralism, whose proponents advance the notion of a reciprocal or co-determinative relationship between actor and structure (Carlsnaes, 1992, pp. 260–266). They further argue that the actor is not a rigid entity, nor is structure a static framework; instead, both exhibit a degree of fluidity and adaptability that enables them to accommodate the increasing diversity of actors and the evolving transformations in the structure of foreign policy driven by international and technological developments.

3. DEFINING, EVOLUTION, AND PROCESSES OF DIGITAL DIPLOMACY

First: Conceptualising Digital Diplomacy

A review of the foreign policy and international relations literature reveals that there is no single,

universally accepted definition of digital diplomacy. Scholars variously conceptualise it as cyber diplomacy, Internet diplomacy, or Twitter diplomacy. A number of researchers, including Hayde, Melissen, and Manor, conceptualise digital diplomacy as an updated form of public diplomacy, essentially constituting its digitised extension (Manor, 2019). From this perspective, digital diplomacy is understood as the technological reconfiguration of traditional public diplomacy practices rather than a fundamentally new diplomatic paradigm.

In a related line of thought, Joseph Nye situates digital diplomacy within the broader framework of soft power, arguing that states utilise digital platforms to influence foreign publics by promoting attractive cultural symbols, political values, and national narratives in line with their foreign policy objectives (Nye, 2004). Digital diplomacy, in this sense, operates as a strategic communication tool that enables states to shape perceptions and preferences in the international system.

Building upon this foundation, Standfield argues that digital diplomacy has become increasingly central to the pursuit of national interests, particularly in the context of Generation Z audiences. She further contends that digital diplomacy is not merely a mechanism of persuasion but also a tool of behavioural influence and audience reconfiguration, thereby enhancing its transformative capacity in global politics (Standfield, 2020). This perspective reflects a shift from horizontal forms of diplomatic communication towards more vertically influential modes of engagement. For example, although the United States possesses approximately 181 embassies worldwide, enabling horizontal communication with the governments of these states, it has in recent periods sought to engage vertically with broader publics across countries through official U.S. government digital platforms as well as the personal accounts of its officials.

The conceptual development of digital diplomacy is also closely associated with American diplomatic practice, particularly during the tenure of Hillary Clinton, who strongly advocated the integration of social media into foreign policy implementation. Under this approach, digital platforms were not merely communication channels but instruments of statecraft designed to directly engage global publics, thereby transcending traditional state-to-state diplomatic interaction (Bjola & Holmes, 2015).

In the contemporary digital era, diplomacy has become increasingly interactive and audience-centred. For instance, the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta has

attracted millions of followers, while Western embassies in China have utilised platforms such as Sina Weibo to engage Chinese citizens. Similarly, European states employ multiple platforms to project policy narratives and human rights agendas. The Netherlands, for example, uses digital diplomacy to promote unconventional human rights discourses, while the United Kingdom employs it to highlight humanitarian concerns (Hocking & Melissen, 2015, p. 11). Moreover, diplomatic practices now include the use of Skype for academic engagement, Facebook for political messaging, WhatsApp for coordination among diplomats, and Twitter for consular assistance and crisis communication (Manor, 2018).

Second: The Evolution of Digital Diplomacy

The evolution of digital diplomacy reflects broader transformations in the international system and foreign policy environment. Its initial phase was associated with structural changes in diplomacy, including the emergence of knowledge leadership and societal actors. The second phase corresponds to developments in cyber governance, internet freedom, and cybersecurity. The third phase focuses on the integration of digital technologies into foreign policy management, particularly following the institutional adoption of digital and virtual diplomacy within foreign ministries. The fourth phase is characterised by democratisation of diplomacy and increased interactivity between states and global publics (Hocking & Melissen, 2015, p. 19).

Public diplomacy itself is defined as the process through which governments communicate with foreign publics in order to advance national interests and promote their values, ideology, and cultural identity (Tuch, 1990, p. 3). It also involves engagement with embassies, consulates, non-governmental organisations, educational institutions, media outlets, and other influential actors in the international environment. In contemporary practice, public diplomacy relies heavily on social media platforms, which facilitate direct interaction between governments and global audiences (Zytoon & Husain, 2023).

Digital diplomacy thus emerges as an advanced extension of public diplomacy, characterised by enhanced transparency, real-time communication, and increased interaction between states and individuals. It also serves as a strategic instrument for shaping international reputation and improving national image through digital platforms (Adesina, 2017). For instance, many political leaders and policymakers have established accounts on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter,

Telegram, and others, through which they seek to influence both foreign publics and, simultaneously, the governments of those states. For example, President Donald Trump seeks to utilise his personal social media accounts—followed by more than 10 million users worldwide in 2025—as a means of enhancing the image of his foreign policy.

Over recent decades, the use of digital technologies in diplomacy has expanded significantly. Initially limited to experimental initiatives by a small number of foreign ministries, digital diplomacy has now become a standard practice in global diplomatic institutions. Notable early examples include Sweden's virtual embassy in 2007, which allowed users to explore Swedish culture in a digital environment, and the United States' virtual embassy in Tehran in 2011, designed to facilitate communication with Iranian society. Similarly, Israel launched a Twitter-based virtual embassy in 2013 to engage audiences in regions without formal diplomatic relations.

The global diffusion of digital diplomacy accelerated following its adoption in the United States, where interactive embassy websites and official social media accounts became institutional norms. Countries such as the United Kingdom established dedicated digital diplomacy units, while France and Poland increasingly invested in digital foreign policy tools. Germany employed ICT platforms to consult public opinion during its 2014 foreign policy review, while India became an early adopter of Twitter-based diplomacy from 2010 onwards (Verrekia, 2017).

The COVID-19 pandemic further reinforced the importance of digital diplomatic tools, particularly through platforms such as Zoom, which facilitated remote diplomatic negotiations. Although virtual diplomacy is not entirely new—given that the International Telecommunication Union organised online diplomatic meetings as early as 1963—it has become significantly more widespread in recent years, enhancing inclusivity and transparency in international negotiations.

In practice, digital diplomacy refers to the use of online platforms and communication technologies to advance diplomatic objectives. States increasingly rely on these tools to influence international opinion, mobilise support for foreign policy issues, and strengthen their global positioning. For example, former U.S. President Barack Obama's 2008 electoral campaign demonstrated the effectiveness of digital media as a primary communication tool over traditional media channel (Zytoon & Husain, 2023).

Among the most prominent forms of digital

diplomacy is Twitter diplomacy, now increasingly referred to as X diplomacy. It refers to the use of digital platforms by states, organisations, corporations, or individuals to influence target audiences, shape opinions, and communicate policy positions (Su & Xu, 2015, pp. 16–20). Twitter/X diplomacy has become the most widely used form of digital diplomacy, with studies indicating that more than two-thirds of world leaders maintain active accounts on the platform (Zytoon & Husain, 2023). These actors perceive the platform not only as a communication tool but also as a space for interaction, agenda-setting, and real-time monitoring of international responses.

Third: Digital Diplomatic Operations

Digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped diplomatic practice, producing hybrid operational structures that combine traditional diplomatic procedures with digitally mediated interactions. This shift has led scholars such as Van Langenhove (2010) to describe contemporary diplomacy as a transition from closed institutional systems to open governance networks capable of accommodating diverse actors and increasingly complex interaction patterns.

Network diplomacy has thus emerged as a defining feature of contemporary international relations. According to Hanson (2012), it has become a global norm rather than an exception, including in previously closed systems such as China and Vietnam. In the United States, network diplomacy has facilitated a more collaborative and decentralised model of information exchange among embassies, replacing hierarchical bureaucratic structures with more integrated and interactive systems.

Digital diplomacy is particularly suited to the twenty-first-century international environment, characterised by multiple actors, increasing demands for transparency, and the growing influence of knowledge-based power. Digital networks have enabled non-state actors and stakeholders to participate in foreign policy processes, thereby challenging the exclusivity of traditional state-centric diplomacy.

In this context, Harold Nicolson's classical observation remains relevant, as technological innovation does not necessarily create new diplomatic functions, but rather transforms the methods through which existing functions are performed. This includes negotiation, economic diplomacy, and trade diplomacy, all of which have been significantly reshaped by digital technologies (Hocking & Melissen, 2015, pp. 28–29).

4. DIGITAL DIPLOMACY BETWEEN THE DIGITAL DIPLOMATIC ACTOR AND ITS STRUCTURE

This section will address the topic through two main axes: the diplomatic actor in the digital age and the structure of digital diplomacy in the era of digitisation.

First: The Diplomatic Actor in the Digital Age

The digital transformation witnessed by most countries of the world in recent decades has become an undeniable reality. It has left no field untouched and no sphere of knowledge unaffected. Diplomatic practice has not been exempting from these waves of transformation. It is no longer possible to marginalise or downplay the digital role of diplomacy. As Berridge argues, diplomatic practices are no longer confined to traditional diplomatic tasks nor restricted to the roles performed by official diplomats; rather, this transformation has necessitated the creation of unconventional tasks and the selection of actors from outside the traditional institutional framework (Berridge, 2010).

Traditional ambassadors, who represent the cornerstone of diplomatic work, are responsible for representing their states, articulating their positions, and carefully monitoring events in the host country that may have direct or indirect implications for their states. Amid global technological development and digital transformation across multiple fields, including diplomacy, a key question arises: Are embassy social media accounts solely representative of their states' positions, or are ambassadors' personal digital accounts an additional component of diplomatic representation?

This question is addressed by Michael Aron, an ambassador to the United States, who argues that although ambassadors' personal accounts differ in identity and scope from official embassy accounts (which often operate through one-way communication mechanisms), the former surpass the latter in interactive capacity due to their flexibility and ability to engage directly with foreign publics. Consequently, many scholars, including Aron, do not exclude ambassadors' tweets and statements on digital platforms from the diplomatic process within the virtual space that now envelops much of the world (Manor, 2017).

In a related context, empirical studies on ambassadors in London have found that the larger the number of followers ambassadors attract, the greater the number of followers of the institutions they represent. This provides ambassadors with an opportunity to disseminate the values, ideologies,

and governmental messages of their states to target foreign publics (Manor, 2017, p. 295).

The study by Zytoon and Hussein – which relied on a representative sample – examined the impact of Palestinian ambassadors' tweets on European audiences using indicators such as number of tweets, retweets, likes, hashtags, and audience responses. The study demonstrated that these accounts contributed to clarifying several issues related to the Palestinian cause, particularly the issue of settlements (Zytoon & Husain, 2023).

To keep pace with the rapid evolution of digital diplomacy practices, several states have introduced new actors capable of performing diplomatic functions. Denmark was among the pioneers in this field, appointing a technology envoy across multiple global locations (including Beijing and Copenhagen). The Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that this position was created to develop diplomatic practice in line with rapid technological advancement in the twenty-first century (Jacobsen, 2017).

Other states, notably France and Australia, followed suit by launching initiatives involving so-called cyber ambassadors or technology ambassadors, whose role is to enhance the integration of technology into diplomatic practice (Hopf, 2018). Cornut, on the other hand, expands the scope of diplomatic actors to include non-state actors, arguing that companies – particularly technological and cyber firms – may perform diplomatic roles, especially during diplomatic crises (Cornut, 2018).

Digital diplomacy has also been employed in addressing climate change issues under what is known as climate diplomacy. Greta Thunberg used social media to transform the "Fridays for Future" school strike movement, launched in 2018 in front of the Swedish Parliament, into a global movement that gained international support. This culminated in the global climate strike in September 2019, lasting a full week prior to the UN Climate Summit (Kampf, Manor & Segev, 2015).

The diplomatic actor has also become capable of using artificial intelligence in international negotiations, particularly in trade (so-called negotiation technology). IBM developed a tool known as the Cognitive Trade Advisor (CTA), which analyses and classifies thousands of clauses in international trade agreements. This contributes not only to facilitating trade agreements but also to predicting future trade strategies. Chinese diplomats reportedly used this tool to gain competitive advantages in contracts related to the Belt and Road Initiative.

Some scholars, such as Bergman Rosamond (2016), introduced the concept of "celebrity diplomacy," which involves the use of media platforms by prominent figures in arts, sports, and intellectual life to influence foreign publics in ways that serve national interests.

It is important to note that these developments in diplomatic actors are not substitutes for traditional diplomacy but rather complementary mechanisms. Hopf stresses that technology envoys and cyber ambassadors are not alternatives to traditional diplomats but rather supporting actors. Accordingly, digital diplomacy should be understood as a supplementary tool and an evolutionary extension of diplomatic practice rather than a parallel system.

It is worth noting that the COVID-19 pandemic reshaped the traditional concept of actors in foreign policy. It blurred the boundaries between the physical and virtual spheres, leading some diplomats, notably Josep Borrell (EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs), to question the effectiveness of digital diplomacy – especially videoconferencing diplomacy – in producing binding agreements (Hedling & Bremberg, 2021, p. 1598).

For digital diplomacy to be effective, actors must possess strong communication skills. This places significant burdens on diplomats, who must not only implement state policy but also produce content and master communication strategies. This is not a universal skill among diplomats (Adler & Pouliot, 2011). Diplomats often face strategic choices between truth-telling and persuasion, between visual and emotional rhetoric, and between system-preserving and system-transforming communication strategies (Adler-Nissen, 2016).

Non-state actors also practice digital diplomacy. For example, the OECD Development Assistance Committee uses media environments to promote programs such as the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation to combat extreme poverty (Hocking & Melissen, 2015, p. 11). The technological revolution has also demonstrated the capacity of ISIS to influence international audiences, as noted by cyber-realists in contrast to cyber-idealists.

The effectiveness of digital diplomacy depends on dense digital connectivity and networked communication systems that reduce barriers to political and administrative interaction. Estonia provides a prominent example, allowing individuals worldwide to interact with its e-government system, effectively making anyone a "digital citizen" of Estonia (Hocking & Melissen, 2015, p. 17).

Bjola and Jiang argue that social media can assist decision-makers in setting foreign policy agendas and expanding diplomatic dialogue. For instance, Japanese and American diplomats used the Chinese platform Weibo to communicate with Chinese audiences and authorities, aiming to influence foreign policy priorities and create new communication channels. Digital diplomacy also contributes to nation branding and international image-building (Bjola & Holmes, 2015, pp. 6–7).

The U.S. State Department used SMS donation campaigns to raise over \$35 million for earthquake relief in Haiti (2010). By 2021, U.S. digital diplomacy had entered a new era, with the President's Twitter account alone producing over 34,000 tweets on international issues (Stolee & Caton, 2018; U.S. Department of State, 2021).

Second: The Structure of Digital Diplomacy in the Digital Age

Digital diplomacy is shaped by structural frameworks that influence its effectiveness in achieving national interests. The digital space (or digital environment) represents one of the structural contexts surrounding diplomatic actors. It consists of strategic interactions between participants in digital diplomacy, forming the core of this environment and the foundation of its structure (Riordan, 2019).

Digital practices generate normative patterns which, once stabilised, become behavioural rules functioning as a regulatory mechanism that structures interactions among actors and shapes their overall orientation.

The digital environment is expansive, fluid, and multidimensional, encompassing infrastructural, cognitive, and cultural dimensions. Digital infrastructure both enables and constrains diplomatic activity. In addition, mental frameworks, digital readiness, gender dynamics, and social media habits among target audiences form a complex structural layer of this environment (Hedling & Bremberg, 2021, p. 1608).

The core of the digital diplomatic actor's structure lies in a regulatory mechanism derived from stable behavioural norms produced through interactions on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (X), hashtags, and microblogs. A well-known account such as @GOVsites is followed by government representatives worldwide (Waters & Williams, 2011, p. 354).

Some argue that social media statements are no longer informal or playful expressions but legally binding announcements. For instance, former White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer asserted that

tweets on X (formerly Twitter) constitute official statements by political leaders. Donald Trump faced multiple legal cases related to tweets restricting freedom of expression and access to information.

However, this regulatory mechanism cannot be understood outside long-term two-way interactions between actors and audiences. Communication models on social media include: press agency, public information, two-way asymmetrical communication, and two-way symmetrical communication (Waters & Williams, 2011, pp. 356–357).

The media environment itself acts as a structural constraint on diplomatic actors by influencing foreign policy agendas. Bjola argues that communicative functions can guide policymakers toward appropriate actors and issues aligned with national interests (Bjola & Jiang, 2015). Today, media environments significantly influence foreign policy priorities in the EU and the United States, particularly on climate change.

Diplomatic levels ('levels of diplomacy') also impose structural constraints, requiring decision-makers to consider their relative positioning vis-à-vis target audiences (Hibbeln, 2021). Additionally, the eco-biological environment—highlighted during COVID-19—has increased reliance on digital diplomacy and intensified online diplomatic activity, particularly in Africa and among Chinese diplomats in Europe.

The structure of the digital diplomatic actor can be divided into several dimensions:

Value dimension: based on knowledge-society norms, including constant communication with the public and the transformation of foreign ministries into service providers.

-*Behavioural dimension*: reflects the ability of institutions and publics to manage social media accounts and engage interactively.

-*Procedural dimension*: reflects information-sharing, collective participation, and rejection of information monopolies.

-*Conceptual dimension*: based on "real-time diplomacy," which treats the digital environment as an extension of reality rather than separate from it (Manor, 2017).

A distinction must be made between diplomatic domains (structural components shaped by internal and external pressures) and diplomatic sites (platforms such as Facebook, X, and LinkedIn used as tools of digital diplomacy) (Bjola, Corneliu & Holmes, 2015, pp. 4–5).

One of the most prominent forms is hacktivist diplomacy (DiploHack), used in initiatives addressing sexual violence in conflict (PSVI). These

initiatives bring together diplomats, technologists, journalists, and civil society actors to develop digital solutions (A. Daniels & R. Childs, 2014).

The insecurity of digital environments has led scholars such as Alexei Vichowsky to describe them as “hacked environments,” vulnerable to leaks such as WikiLeaks, which raises concerns about national security and reinforces uncertainty in international politics (Bjola & Holmes, 2015).

Finally, the relationship between the digital diplomatic actor and its structure is characterised by mutual influence: the actor shapes the structure while the structure constrains and enables the actor. This interaction is evident in initiatives such as DiploHack (2013), the Stockholm Digital Diplomacy Initiative, and Geneva Engage (2016), all of which demonstrate how digital tools reshape diplomatic practice while being shaped by it.

5. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to employ the agent-structure approach in analysing diplomacy in the era of digitisation, or what is known as digital diplomacy. It did so by defining the nature of the structural agent in the field of foreign policy, clarifying the concept of digital diplomacy, examining the nature of the digital diplomatic actor and its structure, and assessing the suitability of the agent-structure approach for analysing and interpreting contemporary transformations in diplomatic practice. The study reached a set of key findings, which can be summarised as follows:

First: The agent/structure dilemma in foreign policy remains one of the most contested theoretical

issues. A foreign policy actor can influence the structure of foreign policy, while at the same time the structure can enable or constrain the actor's behaviour. In other words, their relationship is characterised by mutual influence and continuous dynamic interaction.

Second: One strand of theorists views digital diplomacy as an extension of public diplomacy, while another considers it a new form of diplomatic practice that has emerged as a result of the transformations imposed by the digital environment on traditional diplomatic functions. This latter perspective employs various labels, including digital diplomacy, electronic diplomacy, and “diplotube”.

Third: The study found that the concept of the diplomatic actor has become more inclusive, no longer limited to the traditional diplomat, but also encompassing both official and unofficial actors inside and outside the state. Similarly, the concept of diplomatic structure has expanded to include, alongside traditional formal structures, virtual and digital contexts that increasingly influence foreign policy-making and, in some cases, are no less influential than traditional structures.

Fourth: The study demonstrates that the agent-structure approach is an appropriate theoretical framework for analysing diplomacy in the digital age or within knowledge-based and post-industrial societies. This is due to its strong explanatory capacity in capturing the rapid changes affecting both the diplomatic actor and its structural environment, reflecting the interactive and complex nature of contemporary digital diplomacy.

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