

THE USE OF DIGITAL DIPLOMACY BY INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS: THE CASE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Dr. Viona Rashica
South East European University
Faculty of Contemporary Social Sciences
Ilindenksa n. 335
1200 Tetovo
North Macedonia
vionarashica@hotmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0002-8046-8353

Abstract: Digital diplomacy plays a very important role in realising the diplomatic objectives of the subjects of international law, in which case it is understood that, in addition to states, it has also been adopted by intergovernmental organisations (IGOs). However, when the digital diplomacy of IGOs is discussed, the focus is undoubtedly on the United Nations (UN) as the most powerful political organisation in the world, as well as its agencies. Therefore, this research article aims to specify the main characteristics of IGOs' digital diplomacy, thus taking the UN as a case study. For the realisation of the article, qualitative methodology was applied, namely methods such as case study and documents analysis. The research results show that digital diplomacy has extraordinary importance to the UN because it enables increased public support through rapid and broad engagement with global audiences, thus strengthening its position in the international arena for solving global challenges. The conclusions of the article contribute to increasing information about the digital diplomacy of the UN and its agencies, specifying both its benefits and challenges.

Key words: *Digital Diplomacy; Intergovernmental Organisations; United Nations; UN Agencies; Benefits; Challenges*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Digital diplomacy represents a great support in fulfilling diplomatic goals not only of states, but also of intergovernmental organisations (IGOs). The role of the latter, especially in the twenty-first century, has seen a significant growth as a result of numerous challenges and problems that transcend national borders and impose international cooperation. Although it is the main global forum for diplomacy and cooperation, as well as the most powerful universal IGO, through digital diplomacy the importance of the United Nations (UN) and its agencies in addressing global issues has increased even further.

The main purpose of this research article is to highlight the key features of digital diplomacy of IGOs, taking the UN and its agencies as a case study. The research question of this article is: *Has digital diplomacy strengthened the role of IGOs towards states that are primary subjects of international law?* Meanwhile, the main hypothesis is: *Through the adoption of digital diplomacy, the role of IGOs, especially the UN and its agencies, as new bearers of global events and issues has been strengthened, although not to the point of contesting the position of states as the primary subjects of international law.*

Therefore, in order to answer the research question as accurately as possible and to verify the raised hypothesis, in addition to the abstract, introduction, conclusion and references, this article also consists of four separate sections. The first section explores the importance of digital diplomacy for IGOs. The second section highlights the

main characteristics of the digital diplomacy of the UN and its agencies. Whereas, the other two sections of the article are quite special because the main benefits of digital diplomacy for the UN are elaborated in the third section, and its key challenges are analysed in the fourth section.

This article has descriptive, explanatory, comparative and analytical nature, and *qualitative methodology* was used to conduct the research. The *case study* method was applied, exploring in depth the main characteristics of the digital diplomacy of the UN and its agencies. While *documents analysis* includes important official and public documents, published on the websites of the UN and its agencies, as well as media and digital content taken from these IGOs' social media accounts within the time period October-November 2025. Important data has also been collected from books, scientific articles, as well as communities and important research organisations related to digital diplomacy, IGOs and technological issues.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF DIGITAL DIPLOMACY FOR INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

Diplomacy has constantly been exposed to major changes, which have resulted from the changing structure of the international community and its dynamics (Sandre, 2015, p. 4). After the end of the Cold War, public diplomacy was directly affected by the forces of globalisation and the information and communications technology (ICT) revolution, which brought an end to classical public diplomacy and opened the door to new public diplomacy, that is one of the most important instruments of soft power¹ (Cull, 2019, p. 4). As a product of globalisation and as a fruit of new public diplomacy, digital diplomacy is considered one of the major trends of the 21st century in diplomatic communication (Rashica, 2018, p. 75). Digital diplomacy is defined as a form of new public diplomacy, which enables the realisation of diplomatic objectives of the subjects of international law² through the use of ICT, the internet and social media (Rashica, 2024, p. 7). From this definition, it can be understood that digital diplomacy is not only adopted by states, but also by IGOs.

ICT has a profound impact on diplomatic functions, which can be seen from the way the role of diplomacy is changing in the digital age due to geopolitical and societal changes in the international environment. The usage of websites by ministries of foreign affairs, embassies and IGOs is now considered a standard practice. Whereas, social media has become diplomacy's significant tool, which provides a platform for unconditional communication, and has become a communicator's most powerful tool (Rashica, 2019a, p. 25). It is not only able to break the hierarchical chains of diplomatic communication, but by bringing ordinary people into the spotlight of political life and making their voices heard, social media also enables diplomats to directly engage foreign public in a sustained dialogue (Bjola and Holmes, 2015, p. 71).

IGOs are institutions established by states and whose members are the governments of states, and they are widespread in the international system today (Mingst and McKibben, 2022, p. 651). When analysing in-depth the IGO and its states, the existence of many bureaucratic constraints is noted that can result in natural tensions between them. Not infrequently, a part of a state's national interests may be in conflict

¹ The term "soft power" was coined by American political scientist Joseph Nye in 1990 and involves the ability to shape the preferences of others through appeal and attraction, rather than coerce.

² Subjects of international law, in addition to states, also include international governmental and non-governmental organisations, political movements of an international character, multinational corporations, religious movements, various professional organisations, nations, groups of people, but also individuals.

with some principles, actions, and decisions of the organisation of which it is a member. Then, when a member state creates an information campaign against the organisation, the latter has less opportunity to confront the state itself and may face consequences that come from other member states. However, membership in IGOs has become very necessary for sovereign states, as in some cases they are powerless to respond to problems and challenges that do not recognise territorial boundaries and require multilateral cooperation to solve them (Rashica, 2019b, p. 74). IGOs can be assumed to have mandates that do not necessarily require public support because their work is government-to-government and will continue as long as the mandating agreement is in effect. However, public support turns out to be very necessary to communicate the organisation's mission. The sharing of accurate and timely information by an IGO contributes to increasing its support and cooperation with other subjects of international law.

In general, IGOs have their own websites, and in some cases even their bodies have separate websites. Like states, IGOs use them to publicise their activities and inform the public in more detail about their mission. Within their websites, IGOs also have their statutes, and by publishing various documents on a range of issues, they demonstrate their transparency. Regarding social media, IGOs began their presence on social media in 2009/2010, but the peak of their greater presence began in 2015. In a very short time, social media have transformed into broadcasting tools and communication channels for them, with the aim of distributing their messages to a global audience. There are a large number of social media platforms, but the most used ones by IGOs are: X; Facebook; Instagram; Threads; LinkedIn; TikTok; and YouTube (Lüfkens, 2025a).

How powerful is digital diplomacy to increase the influence and reputation of IGOs? Determining the effects of digital diplomacy on the reputation of an IGO is quite challenging, although many IGOs are adapting to the digital diplomacy revolution. In addition to the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in 2022 brought more attention to the global conversation on a number of issues related to energy challenges, as well as the rapid rise in inflation and the cost of living. The instability, uncertainty and prolonged sense of emergency that have accompanied the years 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, continued to be present throughout the year 2024 and 2025. Health crises, humanitarian, climate and environmental emergencies, but also economic ones require global solutions, so IGOs responding to them are making maximum efforts to find new levels of digital impact. It can be asserted that digital diplomacy has already illuminated the power of international affairs conducted through the digital channels of IGOs.

Within social media spaces, there are various ways to calculate the activities of IGOs, such as engagement rates, audience impressions, likes, clicks, etc. However, managing a global network of digital communications and working on social media is not easy. It is very challenging to maintain a consistent brand while allowing the flexibility needed to adequately communicate and reach a global audience. Being fully aware of the importance of building their brands globally, as well as the limited capacities of staff in worldwide communication, the initial focus and strategy of IGOs was to start with global accounts in each language. Initially, this enabled them to build a global audience and focus on creating content on a few select platforms. Then they expanded their strategies and after a few years they also opened regional accounts. Of course, this also helped them better represent relevant content to different regions. Digital organisation teams, when preparing a social media plan, should focus on the objectives, target audience, capabilities and suggested platforms. This strategy allows the amplification of the

content of IGOs' social media accounts, resulting in the best performance on the platforms, which in turn strengthens their brand.

It should be clarified that the digital diplomacy of states and the digital diplomacy of IGOs have differences in terms of scope and goals. States use digital diplomacy to protect their national interests, increase the effectiveness of public diplomacy, and achieve foreign policy objectives. Digital diplomacy tools enable states to address a global audience, as well as facilitate the management and control of the international narrative, in order to present a positive image. While the digital diplomacy of IGOs aims to coordinate multilateral cooperation on a variety of issues that concern world politics. Through the tools of digital diplomacy, IGOs act and serve as a multilateral voice, engaging with citizens around the world, their member states, and non-state actors to provide solutions to a range of global problems. The relationship between IGOs and states in digital spaces is characterised by interdependence that results from the dynamic cooperative interactions of states.

3. KEY FEATURES OF THE DIGITAL DIPLOMACY OF THE UNITED NATIONS AND ITS AGENCIES

The UN is an international political organisation based in New York, which was founded on October 24, 1945, as a replacement of the League of Nations that was dissolved on April 18, 1946 (Lamb and Robertson-Snape, 2017, p. 214). The Charter of the UN is its founding document, while its main bodies are: the General Assembly; the Security Council; the Economic and Social Council; the Trusteeship Council; the International Court of Justice; and the Secretariat. The activity of the UN is based on several important principles, which are: the principle of sovereign equality; peaceful resolution of international disputes; prohibition of the use of force or the threat of force; prohibition of interference in the internal affairs of states; the principle of cooperation; the principle of equality and self-determination; and the principle of fulfilment of obligations (Rashica, 2023, p. 106). The UN has 193 member states divided into two categories, of which 51 states are founding members and the others are members that joined the UN later. Meanwhile, the UN system, in addition to the UN itself, comprises many funds, programs and specialised agencies, where each of them have their own area of work, leadership and budget. The specialised agencies are independent international organisations funded by both voluntary and assessed contributions (United Nations, n.d.a).

The world power of international organisations is based on the UN and its agencies, as well as in several other intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations that receive invitations from the UN to have the role of observers. The UN and its agencies provide rich social media content on international mediation processes, focusing maximally on the respect of fundamental human rights and freedoms. The last few years have been quite difficult on the global stage, mainly due to economic, ecological, and technological challenges. Global temperatures are breaking records, which means that climate change, in addition of being a serious threat to the world, is also its new reality. Humanity is at risk of losing the chance to avoid catastrophic climate change, warnings that are constantly part of the posts of the UN and its agencies on social media. Then, their reactions to the outbreak of armed conflicts anywhere in the world are also part of their posts on institutional and personal social media accounts. The war in Ukraine, especially the suffering of the Ukrainian population, is being shown through their posts. The same thing happened when Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, 2023, and in response Israel launched air and ground attacks against Gaza, the

consequences of which are being suffered by Palestinian civilians. The UN addresses technological challenges on social media by posting on combating disinformation and on the dual nature of technological advancements, with a particular emphasis on the ethics of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital inequality.

X remains an important social network for the UN and its agencies, whose communicative power is impossible to ignore. There is still uneasiness with the atmosphere and the changes on X, but there hasn't been any notable exodus from the platform (Lüfkens, 2025b). They have created institutional accounts on X, and even their leaders are present on this platform with their personal accounts. The most followed UN leaders on X are: the Secretary-General of the UN, *António Guterres* (@antoniooguterres); the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), *Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus* (@DrTedros); and the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), *Kristalina Ivanova Georgieva-Kinova* (@KGeorgieva). UN agencies have strengthened their digital teams and are posting in the six official UN languages (English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, and Chinese). Although the large number of followers is part of the priorities of the institutional and personal accounts of the UN and its agencies, it should be noted that it is not the only indicator of their popularity. A significant part of them attaches pictures or videos to each post, while a small percentage of their posts are textual. Posts that have website links attached generate the most interactions of all the posts from the UN and its agencies, followed by posts with native pictures and videos. Teams managing the UN and its agencies' X accounts do not post press releases, but within 280 characters they must shorten the intended media release and post it as a separate organisation post. This is also seen as an effort to provide engaging content to followers. It can be argued that the secret to the success of the UN and its agencies on this social network is demand-driven content, created for the right audience and target. As for followers, their number is not always related to the content provided by the UN or its agencies on X, but to global events, about which different audiences want to be as informed as possible.

Given the potential size of the audience, Facebook is one of the most important social networks for the UN and its agencies. In addition to institutional accounts, their leaders have also created personal accounts. The most followed UN leaders on Facebook are: the Director-General of the WHO, *Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus*; the Managing Director of the IFM, *Kristalina Georgieva*; and the President of the UN General Assembly, *Annalena Baerbock* (Lüfkens, 2025c). Almost half of all posts by the UN and its agencies on Facebook are about other websites. 1/3 of their posts are pictures, including one or more pictures in a single post. Then, Facebook live video streams represent a very important part of all their Facebook posts, which manage to get a large number of interactions, such as likes, comments, shares and views. Videos that provide important messages, promote specific causes, explain certain phenomena, as well as direct interviews related to the activities of the UN, are destined to receive the greatest number of interactions and turn into viral. In addition to reactions with likes and admiring reactions, the posts of the UN accounts in certain situations also receive sad, grateful and angry reactions, depending on the content. News videos specifically edited for social media helped in increasing engagement and significantly increased their Facebook followers. As for personal accounts, some UN leaders personally manage their own accounts. They are very engaged and well followed, which is best proved by the interactions they get on their posts. However, there are also leaders of the UN and their agencies, whose personal accounts are not managed by themselves, but by their teams.

Instagram is the third most used social network by the UN and its agencies, where in addition to institutional accounts, some of their leaders also have personal

accounts (Lüfkens, 2025d). The platform combines three distinct channels: the main feed where pictures and videos are displayed in the traditional square format; the reels feed where videos are displayed in vertical format; and the stories feed with full vertical pictures or videos (Lüfkens, 2023a). The most followed UN leaders on Instagram are: the President of the UN General Assembly, *Annalena Baerbock* (@abaerbock); the Secretary-General of the UN, *António Guterres* (@antonioguterres); and the Director-General of the WHO, *Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus* (@drtedros). Institutional and personal accounts of the UN and its agencies post mostly pictures on Instagram. Although video posts have a lower share compared to pictures, they receive a higher number of interactions, such as likes, comments and views. The UN and its agencies also post on Instagram Stories, and such posts are considered the best way to stay in the minds of their followers. Their teams publish every activity on the Instagram space, including several one-minute video statements by their leaders. With specific posts, they take their followers inside their special sessions, sharing behind-the-scenes pictures and videos. In cases of natural disasters, diseases and various pandemics, but also wars, they post on Instagram Stories pictures from the subsequent crises, informing followers about the current circumstances. The UN and its agencies, along with their leaders, have also opened accounts on *Threads*, Meta's attempt to compete with X (Lüfkens, 2025e). The most followed UN leaders on *Threads* are: the Secretary-General of the UN, *António Guterres* (@antonioguterres); the Director of the UN World Food Programme, *Cindy Lou McCain* (@cindymccain); and the Director-General of the WHO, *Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus* (@drtedros).

Although *LinkedIn* is often not considered a powerful social media channel, the UN and its agencies have a presence on it. It appears that *LinkedIn* is the least used social media by them as their engagement on it is generally much lower compared to other social media platforms. Then, few leaders of IGOs have an official presence on *LinkedIn* and few of them are part of the select group of *LinkedIn* influencers. Those who are influencers in the latter, regularly share their personal opinions in the format of blog posts. Most other leaders just have regular *LinkedIn* profiles and few of them are active, posting status updates or long-form content. The most followed UN leaders on *LinkedIn* are: the Secretary-General of the UN, *António Guterres*; the Executive Director of the Joint UN Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS), *Winnie Byanyim*; and the Director-General of the WHO, *Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus* (Lüfkens, 2025f).

Since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, the UN and its agencies have gradually launched their own *TikTok* accounts (Lüfkens, 2025g), initially as an effort to combat online disinformation about the virus. Operating on *TikTok* and producing content, especially for the UN and its agencies is not easy, both in terms of planning and creation. They just need to understand the vibe and culture of *TikTok* if they intend to produce content, as it is very different from any other platform. *TikTok* can be described as an example of the democratisation of creativity, a new and globally influential community that enabled the spread of messages with extraordinary results. Overall, *TikTok* has moved from being an entertainment application to a platform that includes talking about political and social issues (Sandre, 2020).

The UN and its agencies are present on *YouTube* with their own channels, which also have a large number of subscribers (Lüfkens, 2025h). Some of their channels are quite active, in which case they share and store various video content for the activities they characterise. Some of them are active every day with videos that promote causes and offer important messages, while some publish videos from their sessions, and there are those who provide important information when the world faces global phenomena and processes. This variety of videos on the channels of the aforementioned institutions

has resulted in thousands to millions of subscribers. Also, their videos reach millions of views, thus receiving many likes and comments. The UN live streams on YouTube public events from the Security Council and has a live broadcast from the annual UN General Assembly in September. It also has dedicated channels in all six official languages, namely Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish (Lüfkens, 2023b).

The table 1 presents a ranking of the UN and its agencies' accounts on X, Facebook, Instagram, Threads, LinkedIn, TikTok and YouTube. The data presented shows the five most followed accounts on the aforementioned social media. Each account is also accompanied by the number of followers, data collected in November 2025. This account ranking based on the number of followers and subscribers demonstrates the reach and popularity of the UN, the WHO, the UN Children's Fund (**UNICEF**), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (**OHCHR**), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (**UNHCR**), the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (**UNESCO**), The UN Programme for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (**UN Women**), the UN Environment Programme (**UNEP**), the World Food Programme (**WFP**), and the UN Network on Migration (**UN Migration**).

Table 1: Ranking of institutional accounts of the UN and its agencies on X, Facebook, Instagram, Threads, LinkedIn, TikTok and YouTube by number of followers

X	Facebook	Instagram	Threads	LinkedIn	TikTok	YouTube
@UN - 16,3 million followers	World Health Organization (WHO) - 37 million followers	@who - 11,8 million followers	@who - 2 million followers	@United-Nations - 6,3 million followers	@who - 4,5 million followers	@unitednations - 3,26 million subscribers
@WHO - 12,1 million followers	UNICEF - 29 million followers	@unicef - 11,3 million followers	@unicef - 1,5 million followers	@World-Health-Organization - 6,1 million followers	@unmigration - 1,8 million followers	@who - 948,000 subscribers
@UNICEF - 9 million followers	United Nations - 6,2 million followers	@unitednations - 8,2 million followers	@unitednations - 1,4 million followers	@UNICEF - 5,3 million followers	@refugees - 1,6 million followers	@UNICEF - 765,000 subscribers
@UNHuman Rights - 4,1 followers	UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency - 4,8 million followers	@unesco - 3,4 million followers	@unesco - 588,000 followers	@UNDP - 2,7 million followers	@worldfoodprogramme 1,3 million followers	@UNESCO - 523,000 subscribers
@WorldBank - 3,8 million followers	United Nations Human Rights - 3,2 million followers	@unwomen - 2,1 million followers	@unep - 461,000 followers	@UNESCO - 2,3 million followers	@unicef - 530,000 followers	@WorldBank - 442,000 subscribers

Source: Data collected by the author on the social media accounts of these IGOs

4. THE BENEFITS OF DIGITAL DIPLOMACY FOR THE UNITED NATIONS

The era of globalisation is characterised by the growth and intensification of political, economic and cultural interactions around the world (Salmon, 2000, p. 24). The main characteristic of international relations in the 21st century is the fact that in addition to states, comprehensive spaces have been created for IGOs to solve global emergencies. Digital diplomacy has extraordinary power in terms of increasing international cooperation, thus contributing to the growth of international interdependence. For example, a global challenge that has made cooperation between states more than necessary, whether bilaterally or multilaterally, is climate change. Through digital diplomacy tools, raising the voice for the drafting of more ambitious policies and regulations is facilitated, as well as demonstrating a more serious commitment to tackling climate change. Then, on social media specific communities can be created for the dissemination of serious research on climate change, communications and responses in various cases of natural disasters are facilitated, and disinformation is combated through credible research results. As a result, the UN, by applying digital diplomacy, has facilitated and strengthened international cooperation.

In the last two decades, diplomatic tools changed rapidly as a result of electronic mail, the use of websites, the presence of computers in conference rooms, the intensive use of social media, but also of AI tools. Digital technologies and platforms have proven to be very useful in responding and reacting quickly in cases of complicated situations, such as natural disasters, crises caused by human rights violations, terrorist attacks, or armed conflicts. Many argue that diplomacy generally, and face-to-face diplomacy specifically, is cheap talk. Costless communication that is expected to reveal preferences often fails to do so because diplomats and leaders have incentives to deceive during crisis bargaining (Holmes, 2018, p. 3). Therefore, facilitating large-scale data collection and public dissemination of information are some of the main benefits of digital diplomacy against face-to-face diplomacy. Social media has transcended the hierarchical chains of diplomatic communication and have brought diplomats closer to various audiences around the world, thus facilitating their targeting. The UN and its agencies on social media are committed to create a good image and cultivate relations with the public, making diplomatic processes more transparent and participatory, as well as fighting the hate speech and different types of violence. The internet and social media have proven to be quite successful in combating terrorism and reducing violent extremism.

If traditional diplomatic methods are compared with the tools of digital diplomacy, it is noted that the latter are more affordable for carrying out diplomatic engagements, especially from the financial perspective. Digital diplomacy, in addition to not always requiring financial investments, also aims to reduce costs and result in budget savings. On the side of low financial costs, social media and other internet providers are also developing quite favourable technological solutions. The COVID-19 pandemic further revealed the dependency they have created in the modern world (Rashica, 2022, p. 62). Zoom, Google Meet, and other similar platforms became important for global decision-making meetings, diplomatic summits, and conferences, since travels were hardly feasible. However, the use of video conferences is continuing even in the post-pandemic period by the UN and its agencies for internal coordination and meetings. The main advantages of using them lie in saving time and travel expenses. A very important part of the UN's digital diplomacy is the training of its officials and diplomats. Even in this process, the financial costs of using online learning for them are quite modest, including payments for teaching staff and lecture support.

5. THE CHALLENGES OF DIGITAL DIPLOMACY FOR THE UNITED NATIONS

Within the spaces of the internet and social media, cyberbullying, self-harm, fake news, harmful or disturbing content, as well as threats to privacy also find their place. For IGOs, in this case the UN, it was very shocking that many citizens of the world had abandoned their homes to join terrorist organisations operating in Syria, Iraq, and Libya. The number of those joining the fight on the side of the extremists, and many more who were caught trying to join them, became a global nightmare. Terrorist groups had a variety of reasons to use social media, whose popularity was adapted in many forms, mainly due to its easy way of use and low financial costs. By using social media, terrorists can tailor messages to narrow audience groups, but at the same time manage to penetrate the homes of millions of people. The abuse of internet freedom and social media for terrorist and extremist purposes continues to be a highly problematic challenge for UN's digital diplomacy. It is continuously making efforts to combat extremism on social media, promoting cooperation among stakeholders, but also supporting national strategies and building digital resilience. Together with its agencies, the UN encourages partnerships between governments, technology companies and civil society to combat terrorist narratives, develop tools for content moderation and use advanced technologies such as AI to identify extremist content (United Nations, n.d.b). The UN supports initiatives aimed at increasing media literacy, empowering victims, and funding research to understand and address the spread of extremism online (United Nations, n.d.c).

The UN has offices in 193 countries and a staff over 37,000 employees (United Nations, n.d.d), while the entire UN system has over 130,000 personnel (UNSCB, n.d.). Lack of knowledge on the use of digital technologies and platforms poses a difficult challenge of digital diplomacy for the UN. Adopting digital diplomacy does not require a degree in computer engineering, web development, computer science, telecommunications, or any similar field. However, diplomats must be motivated to take basic training in the use of digital technologies, the internet, social media, and even AI tools. The lack of knowledge on the use of digital technologies and platforms has created favourable spaces for the penetration of weapons and means of attacks against various targets. Referred to as "defects of the mind", including users' lack of awareness, ignorance, negligence and carelessness, they can result in costly damages, thereby endangering the careers of politicians and diplomats. The most common mistakes made by diplomats on social media are: sharing confidential or sensitive information; posting inappropriate or offensive content; mixing personal and professional accounts; engaging in arguments or drama; and neglect of reputation on social media (LinkedIn, 2023).

Symbolic violence relates to the power of symbols to impose, destroy, attack, suppress and distort ways of seeing, thinking and speaking. Its most negative characteristic is the fact that it can be far more destructive than physical assault, to the extent that it imposes and reinforces the social damage caused by class, gender and status differences, strengthens social barriers and reinforces culturally embedded dominance games. Symbolic violence has a very large presence on social media. This is demonstrated by the use of insults, intimidation caused by various threatening forms, comments that distort the truth, etc. It is done with the intention of damaging the reputation or status of an actor, whether state or non-state (Kurbalija, 2018). Addressing symbolic violence is one of the most complex challenges of UN digital diplomacy, especially disinformation, which is not only inaccurate, but intends to deceive and is spread in order to cause serious damage. Disinformation can be spread by state or non-state actors. It can affect a broad range of human rights, undermining responses to public policies or amplifying tensions in times of emergency or armed conflict (United Nations,

n.d.e). Quite problematic for the UN in the age of digitalisation is finding a balance between fundamental rights to freedom of expression and countering harmful narratives. The UN has several initiatives and strategies to demonstrate its efforts in preventing symbolic violence. "The UN Global Principles For Information Integrity" presents a vision of a future in which power imbalances are redressed so that a small group of actors, including technology companies based in a handful of countries, no longer monopolise control over global information flows. Its five principles are: Societal trust and resilience; healthy incentives; public empowerment; independent, free and pluralistic media; as well as transparency and research (United Nations, n.d.f).

Two interrelated problems arise from the internet, which are the lack of reliable user identification and the lack of content verification. Social media users can hide behind pseudonyms, or provide false identities, take on different personalities, thus spreading the culture of anonymity. Psychologists claim that in conditions of anonymity individuals or groups tend to become much more extreme. The consequence of anonymity and great openness is the impossibility of adequate content verification. Not all can be checked, not all can be used, or rather people can sink in unverified information (Matteucci, 2015). Anonymity allows stigmatised and abused communities to find safety and support on social media because revealing their identity in the real world can expose them to danger. However, following the horrific racism and abuse that is happening on social media, many politicians and diplomats are facing the worst level of online abuse. Concerned about the risks arising from the culture of anonymity on social media, the UN should pressure digital platform leaders to implement a stronger system of verification and security measures.

Cyber threats targeting the UN and its agencies are increasing in frequency and severity, representing a critical risk to the entire UN system. The UN experiences cybersecurity incidents ranging from advanced actors to cyber criminals and hacktivists. The main goals of these adversaries include information gathering, financial gain through different targeted fraud schemes or disrupting the mandate of the UN. As attackers increasingly leverage AI, the threat landscape is expected to evolve, making detection of these threats increasingly difficult (UNICC, 2024). Adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2024 after five years of negotiation, the Convention against Cybercrime establishes the first universal framework for investigating and prosecuting offences committed online, from ransomware³ and financial fraud to the non-consensual sharing of intimate images (UN News, 2025). AI is defined as the ability of a computer or other machine to perform actions thought to require intelligence. Among these actions are logical deduction and inference, the ability to make decisions based on experience or insufficient or conflicting information, and the ability to understand spoken language (Roumata, 2024, p. 1). It can be used for political influence and information warfare. AI-generated content, deepfakes, and automated propaganda campaigns can sow discord, manipulate public opinion, and undermine democracy (Kurbalija, 2025, p. 342). As AI technologies become more widespread, there is a need for globally coordinated AI governance to effectively minimise AI cyber risks. In response to this challenge, the UN Secretary-General has established a High-Level Advisory Body on AI. It engages with various stakeholder groups, including governments, the private sector, and civil society, to ensure a collaborative approach and outlines a blueprint for addressing AI-related risks (United Nations, n.d.g).

³ Ransomware is a type of malware that encrypts a victim's files, making them inaccessible. Beyond encryption, modern ransomware attacks may also steal data and threaten to release it if the ransom isn't paid.

6. CONCLUSION

Global economic, energy, ecological and technological emergencies have imposed the cooperation of states and non-state actors. As a result, the 21st century has seen a strengthening of the position of IGOs as subjects of international law, as they serve as a multilateral voice and offer an extraordinary contribution in providing adequate solutions to the aforementioned challenges. However, the growth of the role of IGOs in the international arena has also been influenced by their adoption of digital diplomacy. The latter, through ICT, the internet and social media, has contributed to increasing public support, which is very necessary for IGOs in advancing their goals. It is standard practice for IGOs to have their own websites and provide information about their activities, but also to be present on social media (X; Facebook; Instagram; Threads; LinkedIn; TikTok; and YouTube) with institutional and personal accounts.

When analysing the digital diplomacy of IGOs, the focus is on the UN with its agencies, as the most powerful international political organisation in the world. The adoption of digital diplomacy by the UN has resulted in a multitude of benefits in terms of achieving its diplomatic objectives. Increasing international cooperation, fast and direct communication with global audiences in cases of world crises, as well as high effectiveness and low financial costs of using digital platforms are benefits of digital diplomacy that contribute to the core principles of the UN.

However, very challenging for UN digital diplomacy are issues such as the abuse of internet freedom and social media for terrorist and extremist purposes, the lack of knowledge among UN staff and employees about the use of digital technologies and platforms, combating disinformation without harming fundamental freedoms of expression, the presence of racism and online abuse as a consequence of the culture of anonymity on the internet and social media, as well as cyber threats, including those evolved by AI. Therefore, the UN establishes and implements a multitude of strategies and initiatives to prevent the risks of digitalisation.

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