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# Mapping the Landscape of Publication Trends in Digital Diplomacy: A Systematic Literature Review

## Abstract

This article examines recent publication trends related to the study of digital diplomacy by identifying, mapping, and describing the main themes widely discussed in the literature. This study contributes to the growing discussion of digital diplomacy by bringing together research that is still widespread in various disciplines. Another contribution of this study is that it offers a broader picture of how diplomacy is increasingly being practiced and studied in digital settings. A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was used as a research approach by analyzing 456 peer-reviewed articles indexed in the Scopus database and published between 2020 and 2025. Article selection followed the PRISMA procedure, while bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer was used to explore thematic patterns and main clusters of research. The analysis identified six major clusters in digital diplomacy research: pandemic, digital transformation, diplomatic relations, engagement, content analysis, and digitalization. It shows that the COVID-19 pandemic became an important turning point that accelerated the use of digital platforms in diplomatic practices and maintained diplomatic communication when physical interaction was restricted. The results of this study show that digital diplomacy is gradually shifting from crisis-related discussions to broader issues of governance and technological adaptation. The study also found that the distribution of themes and regional representatives related to digital diplomacy was uneven.

**Keywords:** digital diplomacy; landscape; trend; transformation; pandemic

## Introduction

Diplomacy has long been recognized as a key instrument of foreign policy, with its primary functions as a mechanism for managing international relations through negotiation, representation, communication, and involvement in the political, economic, and sociocultural spheres (Gulenko, 2020; Petrovsky, 2021). In governance studies, diplomacy is increasingly understood not only as a state-centered practice but also as a form of global governance that shapes external relations, foreign policy coordination, and international

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legitimacy through interactions between state and non-state actors (Jarrín, 2025; Nishikawa-Pacher, 2023; Petrovsky, 2021). In this context, diplomacy reflects the adaptive and strategic nature of contemporary governance in responding to complex and rapidly changing global dynamics (Prantl & Goh, 2022).

The rapid transformation of digital communication technology has also contributed to profound changes in diplomatic practices, giving rise to what is now known as digital diplomacy (Adler-Nissen et al., 2021; Meldgaard & Fletcher, 2024). However, instead of replacing conventional diplomacy, digital diplomacy represents the evolution of diplomacy by integrating digital platforms into public diplomacy strategies to expand engagement, manage international narratives, and maintain relations with foreigners (Ong'ong'a, 2024; Yanqiu & Ong'ong'a, 2022). Digital technology has encouraged governments to communicate directly, interactively, and quickly, so that diplomatic practices have become increasingly data-driven and more network-oriented (Aussadyk, 2023).

This development has attracted considerable academic attention, especially following the acceleration of digital diplomacy practices during COVID-19, when physical diplomatic interactions were strictly restricted (Bjola, 2022). However, despite the development of research on digital diplomacy, existing studies are still fragmented and dominated by empirical and conceptual approaches, with limited efforts to map publication trends, dominant themes, and knowledge gaps at the global level. However, the absence of a comprehensive analytical picture makes it difficult to understand how knowledge in this field is structured, what themes dominate academic attention, and what gaps are identified. In particular, comprehensive studies using the SLR approach combined with bibliometric analysis are limited to digital diplomacy studies, especially those using datasets from databases such as Scopus.

Considering this gap, this study was guided by the following primary research question: What are the global publication trends and dominant themes in digital diplomacy research? This study systematically maps the landscape of digital diplomacy research by identifying key research clusters and gaps in the literature. Using 450 Scopus-indexed articles as the unit of analysis, this study contributes to both academic and practical discussions by consolidating the currently scattered knowledge on digital diplomacy and providing relevant insights for policymakers responsible for governance frameworks in addressing diplomacy in the digital age.

This article is divided into several interrelated sections. Following the introduction, the next section reviews the literature on diplomacy and digital diplomacy and describes the research methods employed. Subsequently, the article presents the main findings of the thematic clusters, followed by a discussion of their implications for diplomatic governance and its practice. In the concluding section, the article offers conclusions, outlines the study limitations, and suggests directions for future research.

## Literature Review

Traditionally, diplomacy has served as the key instrument of foreign policy, aiming to regulate and maintain relations between states in the political, economic, social, and cultural fields (Puskara Uma, 2024; Triada, 2023). In modern governance, diplomacy has gone beyond intergovernmental communication and increasingly operates as a global governance mechanism that demands the ability to adapt to technological changes and complex international interactions (Tulqinova, 2025). Ultimately, contemporary diplomacy plays a strategic role in building legitimacy, shaping and maintaining international reputation, and influencing public opinion beyond the diplomatic elite (Marchukov, 2022; Moskalyk & Revera, 2025).

As a result of this transformation, public diplomacy has finally emerged with a new idea that focuses more on engagement with the foreign public as a foreign policy strategy (Marchukov, 2022). Public diplomacy views diplomacy as a two-way communication process that allows governments or states to project values, culture, and policy narratives while fostering dialogue with international audiences (Cull, 2019). As a result, diplomacy is positioned as a collaborative governance process involving not only state actors but also non-state actors, such as media institutions and digital publics (Jarrín, 2025).

Evolving from public diplomacy, the concept of digital diplomacy eventually emerged because of the government's increasingly widespread use of digital technology in interstate communication and diplomatic representation (Virilan, 2025). Digital diplomacy increasingly reflects an adaptive response to global digital transformation, where information, identity, and power are closely interconnected in online space (Manor, 2019). Academics argue that digital diplomacy enables more transparent, fast, and participatory diplomatic practices, but at the same time, it presents new challenges related to unstoppable information, credibility, and strategic communication (Smriti et al., 2025; Virilan, 2025).

In the last two decades, research on digital diplomacy has significantly increased, especially with the widespread use of social media and interactive digital platforms (Jiménez-Martínez et al., 2024).

Various studies have examined how governments use digital tools to build their national image, disseminate foreign policy messages, and expand diplomatic networks (Malika, 2023; Manor, 2018). A bibliometric analysis in this study confirms this, revealing a strong conceptual link between digital analysis of research that demonstrates a strong conceptual link between digital diplomacy, public diplomacy, and soft power, with frequently appearing keywords such as communication, engagement, and national branding, indicating a dominant focus on efforts to build influence in the digital sphere.

Recent studies have also linked digital diplomacy to broader geopolitical and policy contexts. For example, a study on China's Belt and Road Initiative demonstrates how digital platforms have been strategically used to expand regional influence and economic diplomacy (Valle et al., 2025; Vila Seoane, 2023). Moreover, themes such as global crises, the pandemic, digital governance, and artificial intelligence have also emerged in the digital diplomacy literature, further underscoring that digital diplomacy is viewed as part of a state's adaptation to systemic disruptions and technological change (Bjola & Manor, 2025; Robinson, 2025).

There are also comparative and regional studies that describe how digital diplomacy practices are influenced by the political structure and institutional capacity of each country. Some examples include studies that focused on Europe and the Middle East, explaining the governance model that affects the digital diplomacy strategy (Frey, 2024; Greco, 2025; Oreqat & Albadri, 2023). Several studies focusing on developing countries such as Indonesia and India highlight the digital divide, bureaucratic capacity, and institutional unpreparedness, which lead to uneven transformation (Dasgupta & Vora, 2024; A. Mazumdar, 2020; Triwibowo, 2023). This reflects that although digital diplomacy has become a global phenomenon, its implementation and impact vary significantly and depend on the context of each country.

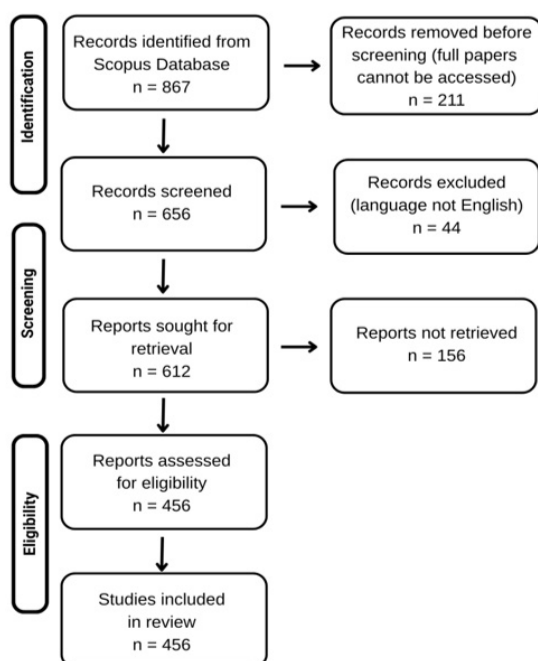
Although the literature has shown that digital diplomacy continues to grow in various fields of study, a systematic study that maps global research trends, thematic clusters, and patterns of collaboration in digital diplomacy is still limited. Some studies tend to

focus on specific cases, platforms, or regions, leaving a gap in understanding how digital diplomacy studies develop as a holistic field. In response to this gap, this research aims to fill the gap by using the SLR approach combined with bibliometric analysis to identify the dominant theme, the direction of emerging research, and the areas that are less studied, especially related to data-based governance and the role of developing countries in digital diplomacy.

## Methodology

The research method for This study adopted a qualitative approach through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to examine publication trends in digital diplomacy. This approach focuses on articles published in international journals indexed in the Scopus database between 2020 and 2025. The SLR approach was used to provide a broader picture of the growth of digital diplomacy research in recent years.

The primary data in this research were obtained from journal articles collected through Scopus search engines using the keyword “digital diplomacy” The article selection process followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) procedure, which consists of three main stages: identification, screening, and eligibility assessment. (Rethlefsen et al., 2021).



**Figure 1. Steps of article selection**

Source: Processed by the author using Scopus data from 2020 – 2025

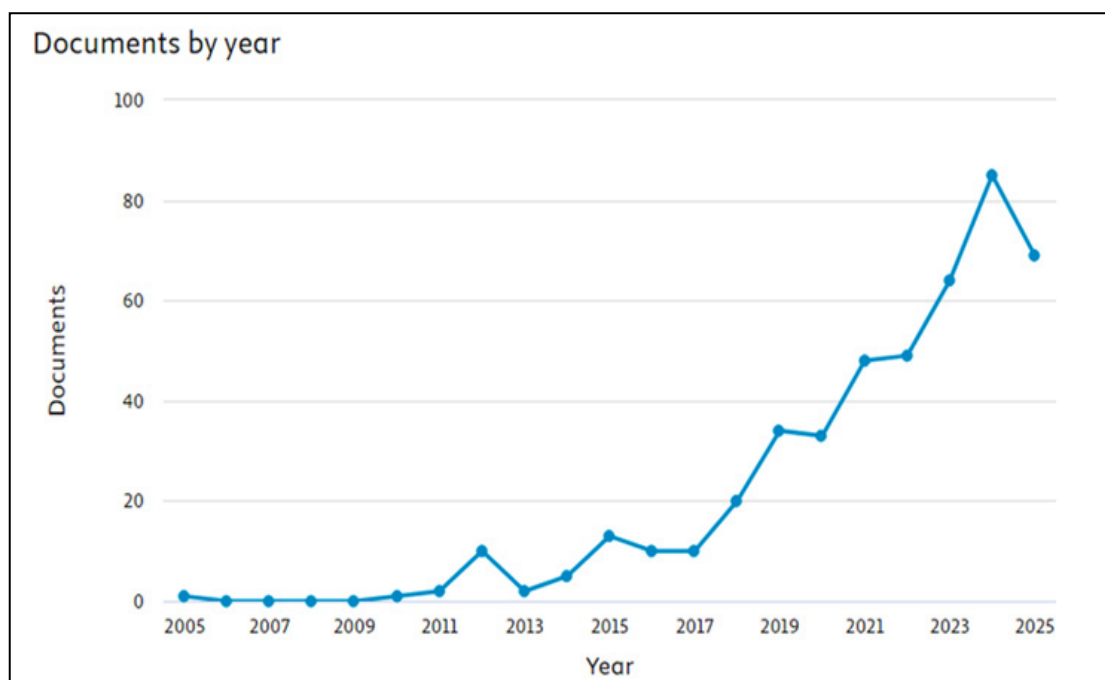
During identification, a total of 867 documents were initially found in the Scopus database. Articles that were inaccessible were excluded, leaving 656 articles for the screening step. Next, 44 non-English articles were excluded, and 156 articles were not used because they were not journal articles or did not meet the criteria for this research. Finally, 456 articles were included in the final review for analysis using VOS software. The selection process is illustrated in Figure 1.

A bibliometric analysis was used in this study to examine publication trends, thematic clusters, and research patterns in the field of digital diplomacy. The articles were analyzed using VOS to visualize keyword co-occurrence and the relationship between research topics. Through this process, we identified dominant themes, emerging research areas, and gaps in the existing literature. The results of the analysis are explained in the next section.

## Research result

This section presents the results of the bibliometric analysis conducted in this study, describing the general structure, trends, and thematic distribution of digital diplomacy studies over the past few years. The findings are presented in stages, with the first section providing an overview of the annual distribution of publications, illustrating trends or shifts in academic focus over time. The next section presents a thematic cluster analysis based on the emergence of dominant keywords in the digital diplomacy literature. These results provide an empirical basis for understanding how digital diplomacy studies have developed and how the existing themes are interconnected, which is further interpreted in the research discussion section.

Figure 2 shows the development trend of academic publications on diplomacy studies from 2005 to 2025. This figure shows that academic attention to digital diplomacy has emerged since 2005. However, from 2005 to 2010, the number of publications was still very limited, reflecting that digital diplomacy was still developing in the study of diplomacy and international relations. Indirectly, this also makes the study of digital diplomacy in that era marginalized. This initial phase also reinforced the fact that digital technology had not yet been integrated



**Figure 2. Trends in diplomacy and digital publications from early 2005 to 2025**

*Source: Scopus database processed by the author*

into diplomatic practice, resulting in exploratory discussions. (Pamment 2018; Reshetnikova and Samokhina 2023).

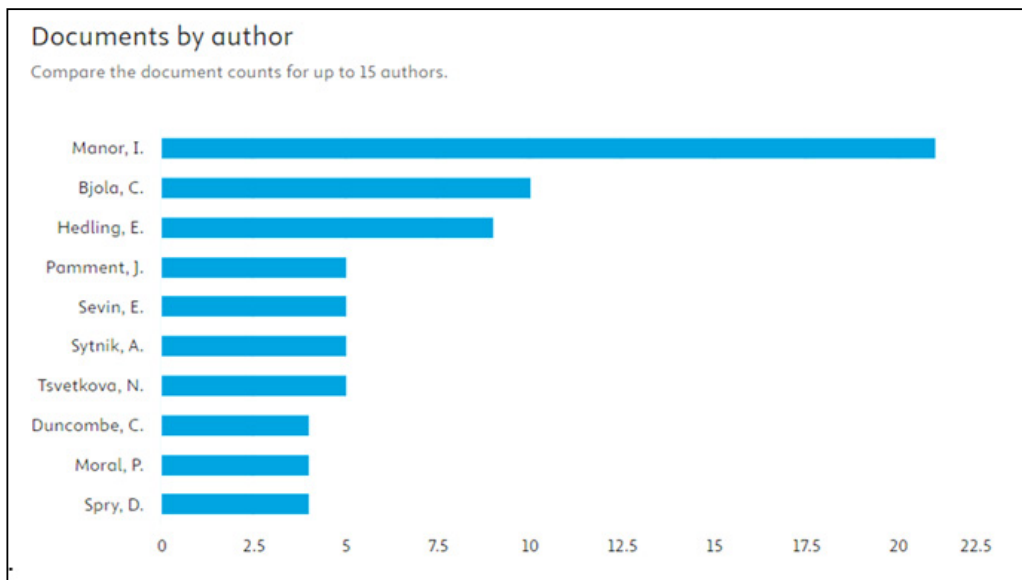
Increases began to emerge gradually between 2011 and 2019, although these increases were relatively limited. This trend is linked to the growing use of social media by governments and diplomatic actors, particularly in public diplomacy, nation branding, and international communication (Cull, 2019; Duncombe, 2019). However, during this period, digital diplomacy was still not a major research agenda, as reflected in the low number of publications and their fluctuating tendency.

A rapid increase in publications has been observed since 2020. The number of documents increased significantly from the usual figure, reaching approximately 33 publications in 2020, and then almost doubling that number in 2023. This increase is closely related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which fundamentally changed diplomatic practices by limiting face-to-face interactions and accelerating the use of digital platforms in communication, negotiations, and diplomatic engagement between countries (Bang, 2023; Moral, 2023). In this situation, digital diplomacy is not only a supporting practice or marginal, but has developed into a primary mechanism for maintaining

international relations, thus attracting increasing academic attention (Pauletto, 2023).

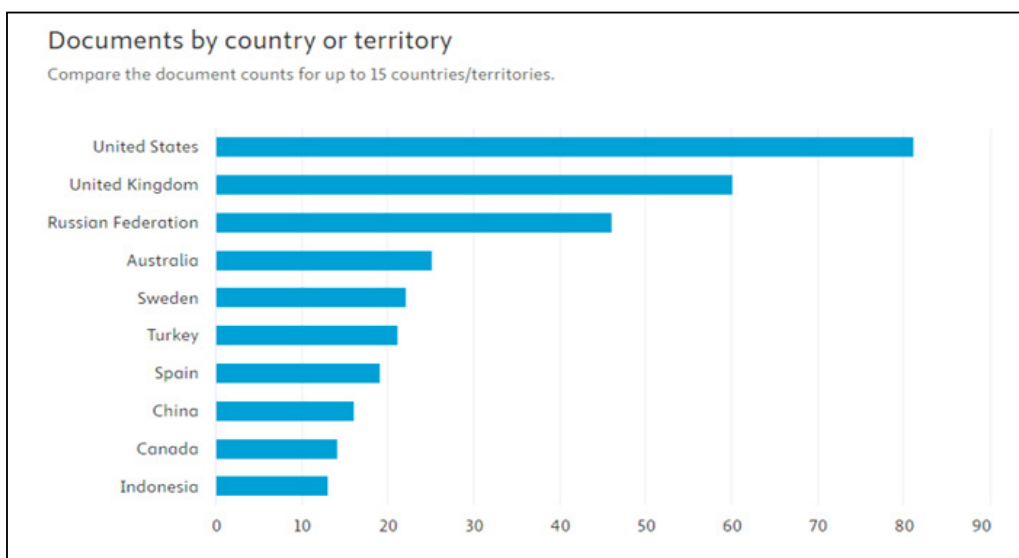
The highest number of publications reached its peak in 2024, with 85 documents, meaning that this was the period of highest academic production on digital diplomacy. This shows that digital diplomacy has developed into an increasingly established field of study with more diverse themes, methodological approaches, and geographical coverage (Adler-Nissen et al., 2021; Attatfa et al., 2020; Vila Seoane, 2023). In 2025, although publications reached only approximately 70 articles, the decline does not necessarily indicate a lack of academic interest. This may be caused by delays in publication, the indexing process, or incomplete data at the time of analysis.

The selected publications, limited to the research period between 2020-2025, it demonstrate the rapid rise of digital diplomacy as an important field of academic study. This increase also reflects the growing academic recognition of the role of information and communication technology as a transformative force in contemporary diplomacy and strengthens the relevance of digital diplomacy studies in understanding changing patterns and international interactions in the digital age.



**Figure 3. Authors in studies of diplomacy and digital technology**

*Source: Scopus database processed by the author*



**Figure 4. Distribution of publications on diplomacy digital by country**

*Source: Scopus database processed by the author*

Figure 3 displays the ten most prolific authors in digital diplomacy studies in the Scopus database. Among these authors, Manor emerged as the author with the most publications, with approximately 22. Manor's involvement and contributions to digital diplomacy studies encompass topics such as digital public diplomacy, strategic communication, and the use of social media in foreign policy practice (Manor, 2023; Manor & Huang, 2022). Next, after Manor, there are Bjola and Hedling in sequence, with approximately 12 and 10 publications, respectively. These two authors have contributed to the development of digital

diplomacy theory, particularly regarding digital power, network-based diplomacy, and the transformation of diplomatic practices in the digital era (Bjola & Manor, 2022; Hedling, 2021). Subsequent authors, such as Pamment, Sevin, Sytnik, Tsvetkova, Duncombe, Moral, and Spry, show a balanced publication with approximately five to seven articles. Despite the relatively small number of published documents, their research contributes to broadening the field through other perspectives, such as regional case studies and diverse methodological approaches, including nation branding, audience engagement, digital narratives, and

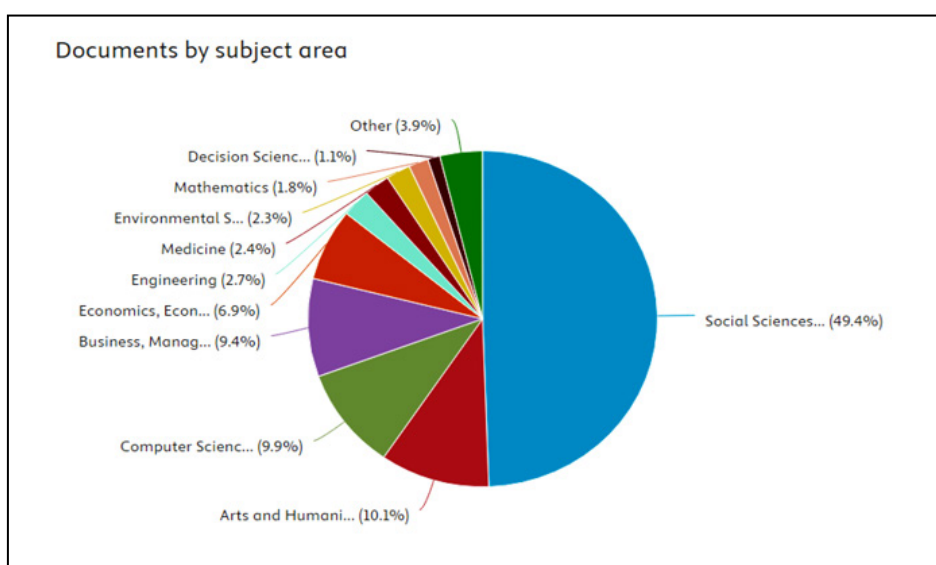
digital communication governance. These authors are core contributors to the study of digital diplomacy in this SLR, as evidenced by their consistent publication output in the Scopus database.

Figure 4 shows the geographical distribution of publications on digital diplomacy by country. This reveals that digital diplomacy research remains heavily concentrated in developed countries, leading to an imbalance in the global distribution of research. In this case, the US leads the way with the highest number of contributions, totaling approximately 85 publications. This is linked to its well-established academic infrastructure, research funding, and long-standing engagement in the study of international relations, communication technology, and public diplomacy (Özdemir & Yıldız, 2024). The US has also played a key role in the development of digital innovation and social media, which in turn has stimulated the study and practice of digital diplomacy in the US. US-based academics and institutions have developed and influenced numerous conceptual frameworks and empirical studies (Pavliuchenko, 2025).

Following the United States, the United Kingdom also ranks second in term of the number of publications, with approximately 60 published documents, then followed by Russia totaling approximately 50. The UK's significant contribution can be attributed to its strong academic tradition in the study of diplomacy, media and communication, and international governance (Fakuade, 2024). Russia's

contribution demonstrates academic attention that views digital diplomacy as a strategic instrument in global political communication, information management, and geopolitical competition (Manor, 2021). This demonstrates that digital diplomacy is understood not only as a cooperative communication strategy but also as a tool of power and influence in international relations.

Countries with a moderate level of contribution to the study of digital diplomacy, such as Australia, Sweden, and Turkey, each of which has produced approximately 20 to 30 documents, are also equally important. The presence of these countries indicates that the trend of digital diplomacy has expanded beyond nations with long-standing diplomatic ties. These countries' contributions also recognize digital diplomacy studies as a critical issue in policy and governance in Western and non-Western nations. Spain, China, Canada, and Indonesia have relatively low publication contributions, with fewer than 20 documents. This indicates disparities in academic publication capacity, the dominance of the English language, and access to international indexing platforms such as SCOPUS. For developing countries like Indonesia, research on digital diplomacy still faces limitations in terms of research funding, institutional support, and the framework for international publications (Triwibowo, 2023). This condition also causes an imbalance in the literature, especially regarding the representation of the Global South perspective.



**Figure 5. Distribution of publications on diplomacy digital technology based on research subject area**  
*Source: Scopus database processed by the author*

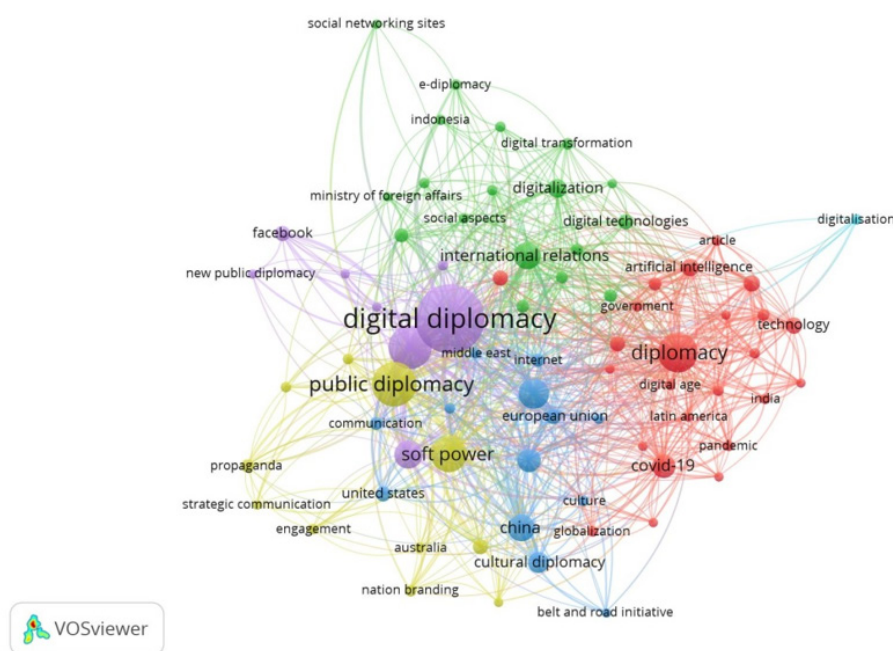
Figure 5 shows that the scientific field of digital diplomacy is still rooted in the Social Sciences, which accounts for nearly half of the total publications. Digital diplomacy is widely understood as an extension of the study of international relations, public policy, political communication, and governance. Consequently, many scholars view digital diplomacy as a socio-political phenomenon related to power relations, the formation of legitimacy, narratives, and communication, and not merely technological innovation (Khalid, 2021; Sebastião & de Carvalho Spínola, 2021; Tang, 2022). Therefore, concepts such as soft power, public diplomacy, governance, and political communication remain the primary frameworks for discussions regarding the role of digital platforms in transforming diplomatic practices and interactions between states and the global community.

Other contributions from the fields of Arts and Humanities, Computer Science, and Business and Management indicate that the study of digital diplomacy is evolving in an increasingly interdisciplinary direction. For example, in the Arts and Humanities, research focuses on discourse analysis, cultural representatives, and narrative strategies used in digital settings. In computer science, research tends to focus on platform infrastructure, algorithmic

visibility, and data analysis. These examples illustrate that digital diplomacy is no longer viewed merely as a political activity but also as a data-driven one.

Meanwhile, other fields such as Economics, Engineering, Medicine, Environmental Science, Mathematics, and Decision Sciences, which have relatively fewer documents, indicate new and rarely explored research directions. This field generally links digital diplomacy to communication issues during the pandemic, technological infrastructure, and decision-making support. This encourages future research to elaborate on the study of digital diplomacy, making it more comprehensive as a multi-dimensional governance practice.

The VOS analysis results show that digital diplomacy studies are developing with other interconnected concepts. Digital diplomacy and public diplomacy emerge as key concepts at the core of the VOS map, indicating that most of the existing literature views digital practices as part of the transformation of existing diplomatic communication. The appearance and interconnection of international relations themes such as soft power, engagement, and communication serve as evidence that digital diplomacy is generally examined through these topics, particularly regarding a state's efforts to build influence, legitimacy, and



**Figure 6. Clusters in the study of digital diplomacy**

Source: Processed by the author, VOSviewer analysis based on Scopus database (2020–2025)

interactions within the digital sphere. This further reinforces the notion that digital technology serves as a tool that transforms how diplomacy is conducted while remaining within the broader framework of governance and foreign policy.

Meanwhile, the mapping of clusters outside the core or those that tend to be smaller, such as governance, technology, and the terms digitalization, digital technologies, etc., indicates an increase in institutional adaptation and socio-technical conditions in contemporary diplomatic practices. VOS visualization also strengthens the finding that digital diplomacy exists because of its connection

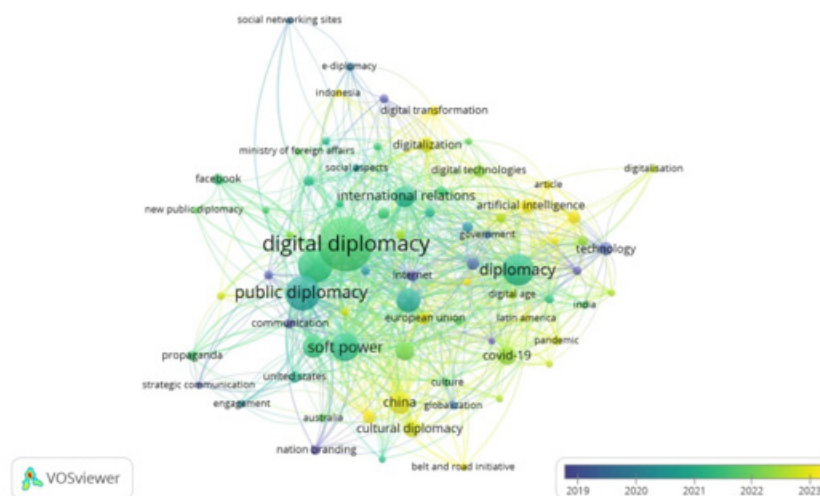
to crises and regional contexts. Themes such as Covid-19, globalization, the EU, and China’s Belt and Road Initiatives demonstrate that this study is closely linked to the global crisis, geopolitical competition, and regional political dynamics (Marchukov, 2022; Vila Seoane, 2023). These themes are not developed as separate sub-studies; they remain connected to the core study of digital diplomacy, and it can be concluded that this phenomenon is increasingly moving towards a multidimensional issue because it is right between technology, governance, and global power dynamics.

Table 1 shows the themes based on clusters related to the study of digital diplomacy.

**Table 1. Themes grouped by clusters**

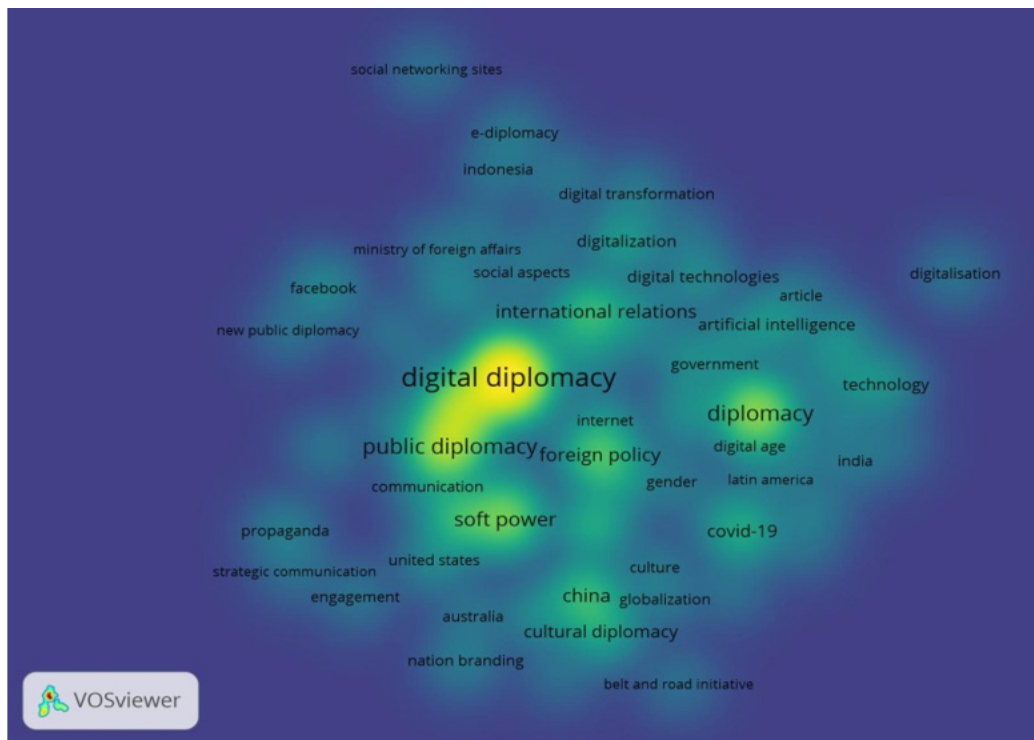
Cluster	Items	Total
Cluster 1	Pandemic, Africa, article, artificial intelligence, covid-19, digital age, digital economy, digital technology, diplomacy, foreign affairs, global health, global south, globalization, government, human, humans, india, information and communication, international cooperation, latin America, leadership, science diplomacy, security, technology	24
Cluster 2	Digital transformation, cyber diplomacy, cyber security, digital technologies, digitalization, e-diplomacy, e-government, Indonesia, information and communication, international relations, internet governance, ministry of foreign affairs, public policy, social aspects, social networking (online), social networking sites, tourism	18
Cluster 3	Diplomatic relations, Belt and road initiative, china, communication, cultural diplomacy, culture, European union, foreign policy, gender, internet, middle east, social network analysis, united states	13
Cluster 4	Australia, engagement, geopolitics, nation branding, disinformation, propaganda, public diplomacy, Russia, soft power, strategis communication, strategic narratives	11
Cluster 5	Content analysis, digital diplomacy, facebook, network analysis, new public diplomacy, social media, twitter, twitter diplomacy	8
Cluster 6	Digitalisation	1

Source: Processed by the author, VOSviewer analysis based on Scopus database (2020–2025)



**Figure 7. Annual trends related to topics in digital diplomacy studies**

Source: Processed by the author, VOSviewer analysis based on Scopus database (2020–2025)



**Figure 8. Mapping of topic density in digital diplomacy studies**

*Source: Processed by the author, VOSviewer analysis based on Scopus database (2020–2025)*

Table 1 was used to validate the thematic structure generated through the VOSviewer analysis by grouping the emerging keywords into six interrelated analytical categories. This table clarifies the thematic boundaries and focus of each cluster. Through this classification, it is clear that diplomatic studies are mapped into broader issues, such as global governance challenges, digital and cyber transformation, methodological approaches, and digitalization processes.

Figure 7 shows a map of the temporal distribution of themes related to digital diplomacy studies. The color gradient from yellow to blue indicates the emerging themes to established themes. The bluer the color, the longer the theme has appeared in the literature. The VOS visualization above illustrates that early academic attention tended to focus on public diplomacy, soft power, and international relations, whereas newer themes focused on artificial intelligence, digital technology, COVID-19, and other issues. This indicates a shift in diplomatic studies due to the influence of technology, while simultaneously positioning digital diplomacy as a developing field of study that continues to adapt to new challenges and innovations in the international system.

Unlike the previous figure, which illustrates the development of themes over time, the visualization in Figure 8 is a theme density map, or a representation of the intensity of academic attention to digital diplomacy research. This map also differs from Figure 6, which shows how research topics are connected to one another. This map shows which topics appear most frequently and dominate the literature. The yellow areas indicate that the theme is dense or consistently the main focus of various studies. The themes of digital diplomacy, public diplomacy, soft power, and international relations remain the main focus. Meanwhile, themes with less vibrant colors represent potential areas for further study, as they have received little academic attention.

## Discussion

This section of the SLR study provides a discussion related to digital diplomacy studies by bringing together various studies that are developing rapidly but are still segmented into many discussion focuses. Unlike other studies that generally discuss digital diplomacy in relation to platforms, regions, or certain aspects separately (Bjola & Csernaton, 2025; Kutryev & Marchukov, 2024; Pavliuchenko,

2025), this study uses an SLR approach with bibliometric and thematic analysis to capture patterns, development directions, and trends in the digital diplomacy literature. By mapping six main clusters over the past five years, the study findings show that digital diplomacy has evolved beyond the mere use of technology in diplomacy into a broader field encompassing institutional transformation, strategic communication, and technology-based governance. (Sebastião & de Carvalho Spínola, 2021).

Previous findings show that studies on digital diplomacy still exhibit imbalances in their analytical focus. This indicates that previous research has focused on the main themes of digital diplomacy and transformation, as well as case studies from several countries. Nevertheless, the results of the bibliometric analysis demonstrate how the crisis has influenced global governance and ultimately influenced the direction of digital diplomacy studies (Bang, 2023; Eksteen, 2022).

As shown in the first cluster, the “pandemic” from 2020 to 2022 was a theme driving increased publication of digital diplomacy studies. This means that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on diplomatic practices, forcing various countries to make changes and adjustments in their interactions (Eksteen, 2022; Manor & Huang, 2022; Vara et al., 2021). Although many diplomatic activities have been disrupted and restricted, COVID-19 has not completely brought IR to a standstill, as advances in technology and digital platforms have enabled countries to coordinate global health policies and crisis responses (Chattu, 2022; Godinho et al., 2022; Moral, 2023). The first cluster shows that digital diplomacy serves not only as a temporary solution but also as a vital mechanism for maintaining communication and diplomatic relations during times of restricted global mobility.

The second cluster reinforced that digital diplomacy is not merely a temporary solution, as it highlights a digital transformation that is increasingly attracting researchers’ attention. Digitalization is not merely viewed as a routine modernization process, but also examines how governments adapt their institutions, bureaucratic structures, and diplomatic practices to function effectively in the digital realm

(Adler-Nissen & Eggeling, 2022; Ayodele, 2021; Voronov et al., 2024; Winata & Panfilov, 2024). Instead of just focusing on diplomatic practices and speed or efficiency, they also look at how technology influences the decision-making process and the patterns of relations between countries (Eksteen, 2022; Luqiu & Yang, 2020). Studies in this cluster also emphasize that digital transformation is not merely a technical issue (Reshetnikova & Samokhina, 2023); it is also related to organizational and political aspects, so institutions must adapt to the demands of real-time communication, data-based governance, and various interactions in the digital space (Virlan, 2025; Zhanaltay, 2024). From this cluster, we can also understand that public engagement and the government’s ability to respond to global audiences are increasing, as digitalization makes diplomacy more open and participatory.

This is further strengthened in the third cluster, where digital media appears in diplomatic relations activities. Studies in this cluster show that digital diplomacy is used not only as a communication tool but also as a means of strengthening branding, a country’s reputation, and soft power at the global level (Jiménez-Martínez et al., 2024; Malika, 2023; Sakamoto et al., 2024; Vlaeminck, 2021). If conventional diplomacy focuses on bilateral relations between countries, this cluster uses digital diplomacy to reach various international publics directly through digital media (Cappelletti, 2019; Danziger & Schreiber, 2021). In other words, diplomatic relations in the digital era are increasingly shaped by visibility, narrative management, and global public perception.

The fourth cluster highlights the interactive aspects of diplomatic practices in the digital realm. The concept of public diplomacy, which was previously two-way in nature, is increasingly shifting toward active participation. The effectiveness of digital diplomacy is also influenced by the government’s ability to maintain dialogue, respond to public feedback, and build sustainable engagement through digital media (Luša & Picula, 2025; Manor, 2025). The theme of engagement in this cluster demonstrates a shift in perspective regarding diplomacy in the digital era, with active interaction becoming the primary focus and a key indicator in evaluating digital diplomatic practices.

Several studies have focused on the content, structure, and framing of diplomatic messages on digital platforms. They studied digital diplomacy using content analysis to see how the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and/or embassies of a country construct narratives, choose symbols, and convey policy priorities through the country's official social media accounts (B. Mazumdar, 2024; Thuno et al., 2025). This fifth cluster demonstrates that social media serves as a means by which diplomatic messages are negotiated, interpreted, and debated (Cull, 2019; Kostadinov & Chow, 2025; Robinson, 2025). By analyzing social media content, it helps the public understand how a state manages, legitimizes, and builds its credibility globally.

Finally, digitalization is the sole theme of the sixth cluster. In this cluster, research focuses on digital technology, not just as a communication channel, but also on the use of technological infrastructure, such as big data and artificial intelligence, in diplomatic practices (Konovalova, 2023). Some studies have shown that data-based systems are beginning to be used in diplomatic decision-making, policy coordination, and strategic predictions for a country (Chugunova, 2020; Zhang et al., 2022).

These six clusters illustrate that digital diplomacy studies are developing rapidly and encompass a wider range of issues. However, issues of data governance, digital ethics, privacy, and structural limitations have not yet received primary attention in analyses (Kazanskaia, 2025; Misuraca and Rossel, 2022; Virilan, 2025). This creates a gap in the study of digital diplomacy. Political disparities, infrastructure, and state governance capacity significantly influence the implementation of digital diplomacy. Therefore, there is a need to strengthen the literature beyond explaining technological capabilities in diplomatic practice, as well as to conduct more critical studies of the infrastructure, ethics, and security gaps inherent in digital diplomacy practices across various global contexts.

## Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion in this study, it is clear that digital diplomacy studies have experienced rapid development over the past five years and increasingly encompass a wide range of

fields. The bibliometric analysis identified six main clusters: pandemic, digital transformation, diplomatic relations, engagement, content analysis, and digitalization. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a factor that accelerated the use of digital technology in diplomatic practices. Another finding points to a lack of research covering digital ethics, security, privacy, and gaps in state capacity within digital diplomacy practices.

However, this study has limitations, as it relies solely on articles and focuses on mapping research trends rather than directly assessing the effectiveness or evaluating digital diplomacy practices. Therefore, future research should expand data sources and develop a more contextual approach to provide a deeper and more diverse understanding of digital diplomacy practices.

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