

## Conference Paper

# Digitalization As a Growth Factor of "Soft Power" in the Context of Globalization

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## Abstract

Digitalization as a new theoretical concept is actively used by researchers to evaluate economic, socio-political and other processes in a contemporary society. Digitalization, infiltrating the system of international relations, changes not only the principles of international communications, but also its tools. Peculiarities, risks, and prospects of digitalization in particular spheres and society as a whole, are actively explored in various branches of science, however, digitalization of economy, business processes, social institutions, society and humans remain priority issues. To analyze digitalization, academic science uses comparative and system analysis. In particular, to determine the tools that contribute to the growth of "soft power" in the digital society, secondary data analysis is used. In the context of digital transformation of the system of international relations, the scope and range of "soft power" tools are expanding. In addition, digitalization is adapting the tools of "soft power" to the modern system of international relations, so one of the important tools and factors in the growth of "soft power" becomes digital diplomacy. The authors of the article define "digital diplomacy" as a foreign policy instrument, which implies flexible forms of interaction between actors in international relations using new forms of mass communication and network technologies with the aim of influencing the world discourse on pressing issues, promoting national interests and producing an operational response to the latest information challenges. It has been established that the growth of the country's "soft power" correlates with the introduction of digitalization tools, however, soft digital influence can lead to negative consequences, namely the appearance and mass distribution of fake news, manipulation of the global agenda, and digital inequality, *inter alia*. The development of objective criteria and methods for distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate digital instruments of "soft power" of a country is a further direction in the research of the phenomenon of "soft power" digitalization.

**Keywords:** digitalization, globalization, "soft power", digital society, digital diplomacy.

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## 1. Introduction

Currently, the vector of research in the field of humanities is being shaped by the digitalization process. The architecture of international relations and world politics is also being transformed under the influence of technological changes. The phenomenon of digitalization or digital transformation is of great interest to Russian and foreign researchers. The problems of digitalization are actively studied in different scientific fields: as a socio-political, socio-economic phenomenon, as well as cultural, legal, technical, philosophical phenomenon, etc.

This study is devoted to the analysis of the phenomenon of digitalization or digital transformation in general and its impact on the growth of “soft power” of the actors of international relations, in particular. The information components of “soft power”, as well as the digitalization of society and human being, are changing the familiar landscape of international relations. Despite the fact that the concept of “soft power” is well studied and described in the works of Russian and foreign scientists, namely J. Nye, G. Gallarotti, M.M. Lebedeva, O.F. Rusakova [4, 9, 16, 20] and others, the influence of the digitalization process on the system of international relations and on the growth process of “soft power” requires closer attention.

The main scientific problem is the study of digitalization as a factor of growth of “soft power” in connection with the reorientation of many states to the digital vector of development. The purpose of this study is to identify the peculiarities of representation of the digitalization process in the academic discourse, as well as the key components of “soft power” in the context of digitalization and globalization of international relations. This study includes two sections: peculiarities of digitalization analysis in the academic science; digitalization as a factor in the growth of “soft power”.

## 2. Methodology and Methods

According to the goal of the study, general scientific methods are used, namely: analysis, comparison, generalization. To determine the peculiarities of digitalization analysis in the academic science, comparative and system analysis is used. The method of secondary data analysis is used to identify the resources that contribute to the growth of “soft power” in the digital society. “The Global Ranking of Soft Power 30” for 2017, 2019 [13, 14] are analyzed. In addition, this research is a logical continuation of the study of information components of “soft power” [19].

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. Peculiarities of digitalization analysis in the academic science

In the academic field the works on digitalization and digital transformation can be divided into several thematic clusters. The first cluster concerns the digitalization of economic processes, namely, the development of strategies and programs of the digital economy, modeling the risks and consequences of introducing innovations and information and communication technologies, etc. In addition, it is worth noting the staffing and legal support of the process of digitalization of the economy, as well as the development and maintenance of software products [6, 11]. Certain aspects of digitalization, for example, the Internet of things, artificial intelligence and big data, their role and potential are of great interest to the scientists [2, 22]. So, M. Bunz identifies three basic technological principles (combination of technologies) that laid the foundation for the development of the Internet of things: an increase in the number of devices connected to the Internet; the use of chips (“the wireless communication RFID”) to identify everyday things; transition to a new Internet protocol [2, p.110]. In the field of mass media, the digitalization process is quite clearly traced with the advent of new media, namely social networks, instant messengers, smartphones and other smart gadgets.

The second cluster deals with the digitalization of the educational system [15, 17]: distance and network education, development and maintenance of electronic information and educational environment in higher education institutions, virtual academic mobility of students, scientists and teachers as a component of lifelong education due to various educational projects of the MOOC type (massive open online course), for example, Coursera, EdX, Udacity, Open Education, etc. For example, Kovba D.M. and Gribovod E.G. consider international academic mobility as a resource of “soft power” in the context of the digitalization and globalization of higher education [8]; Macek A. and Ritonija N., as well as Petrova L.E., Kuzmin K.V. reveal the possibilities of virtual mobility and network learning [10, 18].

The third cluster concerns the digitalization of state and municipal government, as well as politics in general. This process has a technical dimension, being connected with the transition from electronic government to digital [1, 7], the provision of public services in electronic form (replacing analog documents with digital ones) confirmed with electronic signature. At the same time it has a discursive (media discourse, Internet discourse) and communicative dimension (communicative practices and strategies).

Thus, along with conventional methods of diplomacy, the actors of international relations use digital diplomacy (the term synonymous to “hashtag-diplomacy”).

The fourth cluster deals with the digitalization of society and humans. It is necessary to indicate studies that touch upon the problems of transhumanism, posthumanism, where modern technologies, including artificial intelligence, play an important role in the transformation of society and the transition to a “posthuman”, etc. Manikovskaya M.A., focusing on the risks and negative aspects of digitalization of education, warns about the consequences that a human has to face [12]. The human digitalization is fixed, both at the cognitive and at the bodily level. Thus, there is a wide range of smart devices (smartphones, smart watches, fitness trackers) and programs, which monitor and digitize the physiological parameters of a human (sleep, steps, heart rate, etc.).

In this regard, the research context of the digitalization process is expanding. An integrated approach to the key areas of digitalization in academic discourse made it possible to identify an important feature of this process. Digitalization is a complex, multi-faceted process that should not be considered only from the technical point of view as “the conversion of information from analog to digital format” [5]. It is the study of the value, power and communicative characteristics of digitalization that will allow us to predict risks and quickly prevent the negative consequences of this process.

### **3.2. Digitalization as a growth factor of “soft power”.**

Digitalization as one of the key processes of contemporary society affects various spheres of social life, penetrating into the system of international relations. Like any process, digitalization can change the balance of power, however, depending on technology and scope, it has both soft and hard impact potential. This process has diversified the structural components of “soft power”. In the most general sense, “soft power” is a concept which is used to achieve certain goals, including political ones, with the help of non-material humanitarian and cultural resources and values [21].

The importance of the impact of digitalization on “soft power” can be seen in the measuring and instrumental dimension. Thus, different “soft power” rankings give priority to indicators that assess the level of development of digital and information technologies, preparedness of infrastructure, public and private sectors to implement these technologies. So, in the Soft Power 30 Ranking, one of the sub-indices evaluating the resources of the “soft power” of countries is sub-index Digital. This sub-index “includes a mix of metrics that capture a country’s digital connectivity, the effectiveness of government online services, and the use of digital diplomacy” [14, p. 60]. According

to the Soft Power 30 Ranking, in 2019 Russia did not enter the Top 10 in any of the sub-indices (Enterprise, Engagement, Culture, Government, Education, Digital), moreover, it fell to 30th place by level of “soft power” development [14, p. 40; p.62]. While in 2017, Russia was at 26th place in this ranking, entering the top ten leaders in the Engagement (8th place) and Digital (10th place) sub-indices [13 p. 43; p. 53]. However, it is worth taking into account the biased and wary attitude to the assessment of the use by the Russian side of its digital technologies, which may affect its “soft power”. It should be noted that, despite Russia’s decline in these rankings, digitalization is one of its priorities, especially in the economy and education, which can positively affect the growth of Russia’s “soft power” in the future.

Information components of “soft power” are considered as “a complex of strategies, technologies, resources and products used in the information space for the benefit of subjects” [19]. Information and communication tools of “soft power” include: firstly, the entire range of value-discursive tools and strategies, namely: media discourses, Internet discourses, fake discourses, “smart crowd” technology, etc. that construct digital and / or information frame of the transmitted message; secondly, conventional and new media (social networks, instant messengers, etc.) [19]. It should be noted that contemporary mass media and digital technologies do not only represent a resource of digital transformation of society, but also form a particular environment that competes for an active audience with conventional media space. Thirdly, among them are advances in science and technology (artificial intelligence, virtual and augmented reality, etc.). And fourthly, they include digitally adapted classic instruments of “soft power”. Thus, along with conventional forms of diplomacy in the digital society there appear new types of diplomacy, and above all — digital diplomacy.

Since there is a shift towards multi-vector communications in the mediatized space of world politics, the network and digital cooperation algorithm competes with bilateral negotiations. In its most general sense, digital diplomacy is viewed as a foreign policy tool, which involves flexible forms of interaction between actors of international relations using new information platforms (for example, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.) with the aim of influencing world discourse on pressing issues, promoting national interests and producing prompt response to the latest information challenges. Digital diplomacy, like public diplomacy, seeks to show the general public a value system and cultural characteristics of a particular actor of international relations by means of cultural, humanitarian and educational projects. Despite the distinction between digital and public diplomacy in academic discourse, a number of researchers view digital diplomacy as a form of public diplomacy adapted to digital society and politics, and not as a

separate form. Moreover, a wary attitude towards the possibilities to use social media and network technologies in current diplomatic practice and their formal application are emphasized [3]. However, in the context of globalization, the digitalization of “soft power” tools helps to accelerate feedback in the form of an informational, cognitive and practical response and to form public opinion, social mood and emotional state in a way the communication actors need.

## 4. Conclusions

Thus, digitalization can affect both the build-up of “soft power” by the actors of world politics and its weakening. On the one hand, digitalization is able to give a new impetus to the development of conventional components of soft power, digitalizing them, while, on the other hand, it forms previously unseen branches of digital production and exchange, such as, for example, the electronic information and educational environment in educational institutions, MOOC, advanced developments and technologies in the field of artificial intelligence, augmented and virtual reality, etc. As a result, there is a general increase in the volume and technological weight of resources and “soft power” tools used in the modern world. Increasing the technological base of “soft power”, digitalization significantly expands its sphere of influence, increases a country’s attractiveness and competitiveness on a global level. Like any process, digitalization of “soft power” can lead to negative consequences, namely: the spread of fake news, the formation of falsified ideas about current events, the manipulation of the global agenda, etc. In this regard, the academic community needs to develop criteria which may help to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate ways of digital influence.

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