

Peripheral Countries' International Insertion in a Changing Global Order:

Digital Diplomacy in Argentina's Foreign Policy

Melisa Deciancio

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WORKING
PAPER

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"Digital Diplomacy and Statecraft" is a research project funded by the Federal Foreign Office. It explores how digitalisation offers new opportunities, challenges, and instruments for foreign policy. By bringing together international experts, it identifies prospects and threats of digitalisation. Digital technologies are fundamentally transforming societies worldwide. The Global South is an important shaper of this change. The project analyses drivers and consequences of digitalisation across the world regions and delivers useful impulses for German foreign policy and for timely responses of (digital) diplomacy.

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Abstract

This article explores the evolution of diplomacy and its adaptation to the digital age, focusing on Argentina's application of digital diplomacy. Traditionally, diplomacy involved diplomats representing their countries in exclusive circles, detached from the public. However, the emergence of "public diplomacy" sought to bridge this gap, making diplomatic work more visible and promoting cultural understanding. The rise of the internet and social media platforms like Twitter (now X) and Facebook has revolutionised diplomacy, giving birth to "digital diplomacy". This trend is embraced by foreign ministries, embassies, and diplomats, reshaping how diplomacy is practised. While digital diplomacy's effectiveness in advancing Foreign Policy (FP) objectives is widely discussed, its role in achieving the goals of peripheral countries remains underexplored. The article investigates Argentina's Foreign Service use of digital diplomacy, considering Argentina's unique position as a peripheral country seeking global *insertion*. While research has primarily focused on digital diplomacy in the Global North, this study contributes to the growing literature by examining digital diplomacy in the Global South. The study employs a multidimensional approach, combining interviews, document analysis, and internal sources to track Argentina's digital diplomacy advancements from 2016 to 2023. It concludes by emphasising the significance of digital diplomacy for peripheral countries, enabling them to project their FP objectives and identity within the global arena, thereby enhancing their international visibility and communicating successful foreign policies to domestic audiences. Argentina's digital diplomacy reflects its insertion strategy and contributes to effectively projecting its identity while engaging in global politics.

Introduction

Diplomacy is one of the most ancient professions, serving as the conduit for Nation-States to represent their interests and execute Foreign Policy (FP) globally. Traditionally, diplomats held positions as representatives of their countries overseas, often entrenched in exclusive circles of power and detached from the public. However, this dynamic has gradually shifted. Efforts have emerged to bridge the gap between diplomats and the public, aiming to increase the visibility of diplomatic work worldwide in what has been called Public Diplomacy (Snow, 2020). These initiatives also seek to foster cultural understanding through exchanges and the accessibility of embassies to regular citizens (Wolf & Rosen, 2004).

The advent of the internet and social media has significantly eased the diplomatic task of disseminating information and engaging with the public. Twitter (X) and Facebook have revolutionised sensible communication strategies, enabling more profound engagement. This shift, known as “digital diplomacy”, has become a global trend. Foreign ministries, embassies, and diplomats increasingly embrace it, and more tools and strategies are being developed to implement it (Bjola, 2016; Bjola & Holmes, 2015; Eggeling, 2023).

Conversations regarding digital diplomacy often revolve around its effectiveness in advancing a nation's FP objectives (Ross, 2012). While insightful analyses of these emerging diplomatic practices have been conducted, the role of digital tools in achieving peripheral countries' FP goals still needs to be more widely studied. This article examines this issue, exploring the significance of institutional culture, the practice of digital diplomacy, and the influence of distinct FP traditions. I specifically investigate Argentina's Ministry of Foreign Affairs' utilisation of digital diplomacy tools, considering Argentina's distinctive position as a peripheral country in the framework of its search for *insertion* into the world (Chagas-Bastos, 2023).

While extensive research has been dedicated to analysing the use of digital diplomacy in countries in the Global North, more research is needed concerning the use of digital tools in diplomatic activities within the Global South. The existing body of research in this particular domain still needs to be expanded, as it primarily concentrates on the context of the United States (US) (Hallams, 2010; Ross, 2012). This trend is expected, considering the pioneering role of the US in initiating digital diplomacy and its engagement in the most wide-ranging digital diplomatic endeavours globally, consequently

leading to the predominant influence of American scholars in shaping the discourse in this sphere (Gilboa, 2016).

There are some exceptions to this tendency, including studies on digital diplomacy in India (Garud-Patkar, 2022; Narayan, 2016; Natarajan, 2014), China (Alden & Chan, 2021; Vila Seoane, 2023; Zhang & Ma, 2022), and in African countries (Turianskyi & Wekesa, 2021; Wekesa et al., 2021). Works addressing this subject concerning Latin American countries are scarce (Aguirre Azócar & Erlandsen, 2018). In this article, I contribute to the growing literature on digital diplomacy by focusing on peripheral countries' behaviour and FP strategies, focusing on the Argentinian case. I draw on three strands of research: digital diplomacy, FP analysis (FPA) and centre-periphery scholarship. This involves studying how digital diplomacy has served or could potentially serve peripheral countries' FP strategies to achieve their goals in terms of development and autonomy. In this way, I hope to advance peripheral countries' FP strategies and public diplomacy by focusing on the explicit communication practices of actors dedicated to state representation abroad.

In Argentina, digital diplomacy is a fertile field with great potential. It is to be explored as a tool for promoting specific FP strategies that can enhance mechanisms for development and international insertion and achieve greater visibility of what can be offered to the world. This paper examines the advances in digital diplomacy within the framework of the Argentine Foreign Ministry and its embassies and ambassadors. It is based on the premise that digital diplomacy is an advantageous mechanism for foreign policies of peripheral countries to promote international insertion strategies and make their potential visible in specific agendas that do not necessarily respond to the prevailing power games between the major players in the global system. For this reason, this paper seeks to answer how Argentina has used digital diplomacy in its FP strategy from 2016 to 2023. To this end, I develop two central arguments. On the one hand, digital diplomacy allows for deepening the links between diplomats' work and society. On the other hand, digital diplomacy serves as a platform for a peripheral country's insertion strategy and for showcasing the identity it seeks to project to the world.

The article is structured as follows. First, I elaborate on the conceptual values of combining digital diplomacy, FPA, and centre-periphery scholarship to study the role of FP in countries in the Global South. Second, I present the methodology employed to trace the development of Argentina's digital diplomacy advances. Third, I offer an empirical case analysis of Argentina's FP strategies and conduct of digital diplomacy from 2016 to 2023. To this purpose, I have interviewed diplomats and dedicated

specialists on digital diplomacy at the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I explored documents publicly available on the official websites and internal documents of the same office.

I conclude by reflecting on the relevance of the digitalisation of diplomacy for peripheral countries to project their FP goals and identity. I posit that Argentina's use of digital diplomacy reflected the country's insertion strategy and contributed to projecting the country's identity to the world while communicating to the domestic audience the success of foreign policies.

Digital Diplomacy and the FP of Peripheral Countries

Over the past two decades, a growing body of scholars and practitioners has dedicated their attention to the application of information technologies (ICTs) within the realm of FP and diplomacy (Archetti, 2012; Bjola, 2016; Bjola et al., 2019; Bjola & Holmes, 2015; Manor & Bjola, 2021). The concept of digital diplomacy has been the subject of various definitions, encompassing a broad spectrum of diplomatic initiatives, practices, and digital tools (Bjola & Holmes, 2015). Moreover, these studies have delved into the influence of public diplomacy and national branding (Manor, 2023), sometimes also referred to as national propaganda (Bjola, 2019), particularly in the context of leveraging social media platforms like Twitter (X) and Facebook as a means to project soft power through ICTs (Narayan, 2016).

Peripheral and semi-peripheral countries navigate international relations and great powers' interplay from a different perspective from central countries. Within an international system that is hierarchically structured and marked by power relations and central actors' decisions, peripheral countries' bargaining spaces to achieve their FP outcomes are reduced (Narlikar, 2021). While central countries make the rules, peripheral countries seem to be left with the role of rule-takers. The "rest", the "weak", and the periphery must find and create spaces for agency and define their policy strategies in this system based on their position in the world and by considering their margins of manoeuvre to influence world politics from that position.

The peripheral situation of Latin American countries has marked how they historically and currently engage with global hierarchies, trying to influence systemic power relations, moving them from the traditional structural focus to a relational focus. While great powers define their relations as competition for power, Latin American countries grounded their foreign policies in strategies centred on development and autonomy (Deciancio, 2016; Tickner, 2008).

The idea of *insertion*, as a concept and a policy, resonant in LA FP literature, also explains this behaviour (Cervo, 2008; Chagas-Bastos, 2018a). The concept has arisen due to the understanding scholars and politicians have regarding Latin America's structurally dependent position. It has developed not solely through an intellectual critique of neo-realism, prevalent in the Anglo-Saxon world. Instead, it is rooted in the concerns of academics and policymakers about said structural dependency. Unlike the works of dependency and autonomy scholars, the literature on international insertion does not concentrate on the structural role of dependent development. Instead, it examines the role of agency; it explores how a non-core country can emerge from the periphery to be better positioned politically, militarily and economically in global hierarchies (Chagas-Bastos, 2018a). In recent decades, multipolarity and the emergence of regional leaders and middle powers also opened a window of opportunity for peripheral countries to participate and position themselves in global debates (Cooper & Flandes, 2013). In this vein, Latin American FP strategies have been strongly marked by the idea of insertion and the margins of manoeuvre for more autonomous international participation.

Countries have myriad means and resources to achieve the national objectives that constitute FP. As Crabb (1972, p. 1) put it, "the interaction between national goals and the resources for attaining them is the perennial subject of statecraft". Among the many elements to achieve FP objectives, diplomacy, intelligence, trade negotiations, and cultural exchanges all form part of the FP substance between international actors (Alden & Aran, 2016) and diplomacy is one of the most critical instruments (Adesina, 2017). Among the various characterisations, diplomacy has been defined as "The conduct of relations between states and other entities with standing in world politics by official agents and by peaceful means" (Bull, 1977, p. 156). It is the established method through which states articulate their FP objectives and coordinate their endeavours to influence the decisions and behaviours of foreign governments and populations (Adesina, 2017). This is achieved through dialogue, negotiations, and other non-violent measures, thus avoiding war and aggression. In essence, diplomacy represents a time-honoured approach that states have employed over centuries to pursue specific or broader interests, with the additional aim of reducing tensions between themselves or among various nations. It serves as the central instrument for translating FP objectives, strategies, and general tactics into practice (Adesina, 2017).

Recent studies suggest that diplomatic institutions now employ social media to set the agenda of discussions with their followers. Using social media to address specific issues or events repeatedly,

diplomatic institutions may influence which issues interest their target audience. Additionally, diplomats may use social media as a framing device, influencing how users view a particular country, issue, or policy. Thus, social media has become essential for promoting countries' foreign policies (Bjola & Manor, 2018). It "is much more than world leaders' use of Twitter (X). It is a fundamental dimension of contemporary international politics" (Hedling & Bremberg, 2021, p. 19).

Within this framework, diplomacy becomes an even more challenging endeavour for countries operating at the sideline of global order to achieve their FP objectives with narrower margins for manoeuvre. Diplomatic activities in multilateral spaces become unique arenas to participate in and influence global rulemaking (Deciancio & Tussie, 2020), and while many risks of isolation emerge from their peripheral situation, they can also turn – and have turned – this situation to their own advantage (Narlikar, 2021).

Peripheral Countries' Digital Diplomacy

Digital diplomacy emerges as an excellent alternative for peripheral countries to achieve FP objectives, project various forms of soft power, and contribute to their international insertion. Scholars and practitioners have understood and defined digital diplomacy to delineate what it is and how it works (Adesina, 2017). In line with the extremely rapid growth and change in information technologies, the effervescence of social networks and the always-changing landscape of the internet and its resources, this task is a continuous challenge. Digital diplomacy is often associated with terms such as 'e-diplomacy,' 'cyber diplomacy,' 'virtual diplomacy,' 'real-time diplomacy,' 'networked diplomacy,' or 'social diplomacy' (Gilboa, 2016). Bjola & Holmes (2015, p. 4) called it "a revolution in the practice of diplomacy". They defined it as "the use of social media for diplomatic purposes" (Bjola & Holmes, 2015, p. 4), influencing how diplomats approach information management, public diplomacy, strategic planning, international negotiations, and crisis management. It emerges as an instrument of diplomacy based on new information technologies and serves both traditional and new FP objectives of states and non-state actors (Gilboa, 2016).

However, despite the abundance of insightful analyses about these innovative forms of diplomatic practice, digital tools' role in advancing peripheral nations' FP objectives has received comparatively limited examination. In the forthcoming discussion, we will examine the pivotal role played by institutional culture, diplomats' strategic exercise of public diplomacy, and the prevalence of distinct FP traditions intrinsically tied to a nation's global insertion and pursuit of autonomy. Specifically, we

will explore the use of digital diplomacy tools within the unique context of Argentina's FP and its distinctive conduct as a peripheral nation.

Methods

The research relies on three different data sources. First, I identified the Twitter (X) accounts of specific FP offices and actors, including the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and specific ambassadors. I searched for ambassadors with active profiles on Twitter (X) or who were representing the country in strategic embassies, considered so because of the strategic partnership of the government with its counterpart or because of specific facts that made that embassy strategic at a particular moment (for instance during the Pandemic or the FIFA World Cup in Qatar). In those tweets/posts, I identified the communication strategy the embassy and diplomats developed and the main topics they addressed. To elaborate on how digital diplomacy was thought of and executed in the country, I focused on several critical themes, such as the main topics discussed, the activities promoted, and how the outreach related to the public.

Second, the research draws on the analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted in person or online by the author with eight key specialists and diplomats from the Argentine public sector in August 2023. Interviewees were selected based on their involvement with digital diplomacy or public diplomacy more broadly, first through identifying critical offices at the State level working on these issues and then using a snowball sampling technique. All interviewees consented to publish their names in the research conducted, and the interviewees verified all interviews. Among the interviewees, I included representatives of different offices within the Argentine State (past and present), such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Directorate of International Organisations, Directorate of Digital Communication, the Diplomatic School – *Instituto del Servicio Exterior de la Nación* –, Directorate of Human Security and International Technological Issues, Directorate of Public Diplomacy, Directorate of Press), the Ministry of Sports and Tourism, and different embassies; and consultants that participated in the promotion and impulse of other digital diplomacy actions and experts working on the topic. I asked interviewees to comment on how they understand digital diplomacy, how it is being thought of and put into practice in Argentina – if so – within specific offices of the diplomatic corps and specific cases where they think digital diplomacy has been used to (cor)respond to a particular FP strategy. The interviews were a central source to triangulate and complement the document analysis, mainly to understand how digital diplomacy is being thought of and used for the

country's FP objectives and margins of manoeuvre. The interviews provided insights into the internal processes by which digital diplomacy is thought of and executed and by whom.

Third, I also considered the official websites of the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a selection of Argentine embassies worldwide to understand how and what they communicate as public information about their activities. For further information, I also followed the debate in specialised media (*Diario Perfil, Infobae*). This helped inform the interview content, questions, and overall analysis.

Argentina's Diplomatic Corps

Argentina possesses an internationally renowned and highly experienced diplomatic corps (Deciancio, 2020). Since 1963, the sole and rigorous mechanism for selecting and evaluating diplomats has been the National Foreign Service Institute (ISEN in Spanish). The diplomatic career path is well-structured and formally hierarchical. During the early years of careers, promotions are smooth and almost automatic. However, in the intermediate stages, more significant challenges emerge, and it becomes increasingly restrictive as diplomats ascend towards the higher ranks. At the top, access to the position of ambassador is, to a significant extent, blocked for a substantial portion of Argentina's diplomats (Solanas, 2017).

The diplomatic corps primarily consists of career diplomats, with a smaller percentage of "political" ambassadors. These political ambassadors are individuals who are not part of the diplomatic career but have been appointed by a government to crucial positions in – usually – strategic embassies. Several interviewees have pointed out that the Argentine diplomatic corps has a tradition of relative detachment from society, avoiding media interventions and maintaining an institutional culture of restraint and discretion. Exceptionally, those who actively engage with the public are the political ambassadors. These ambassadors enjoy a certain professional immunity, being in close proximity to political power. Consequently, their scope of action goes beyond the norms and formal protocols prescribed in that institutional culture, and they, therefore, have different restraints than a career diplomat.

On the one hand, communication with the public becomes a professional and institutional challenge. Citizens increasingly demand accountability from State institutions, and communication of FP is fundamental and challenging. On the other hand, communicating FP decisions, alliances, international

agreements, and positioning regarding global affairs is crucial in presenting the countries' place in the international arena and the image they want to project to the world.

The following section examines the uses and development of digital diplomacy in Argentina's diplomatic corps and the various forms it has adopted.

Digital Diplomacy and FP in Argentina: Where Are We So Far?

Incorporating digital tools in Argentine diplomacy and FP represents a relatively recent and evolving endeavour that continues to undergo improvement and delineation. This section will elucidate four critical facets of Argentina's digital diplomacy and its interplay with its FP goals. Initially, we shall delve into the position held by digital diplomacy within the institutional framework of the foreign service, encompassing its role in both diplomatic practice and training. Subsequently, we will explore the use of Twitter (X) in the realm of diplomacy. Lastly, we will examine the target audiences of digital diplomacy initiatives and their alignment with the specific FP goals and diplomatic missions overseas.

Digital Diplomacy and the Foreign Service

Digital diplomacy directly impacts diplomats' role and actions within foreign ministries and towards the external realm of public diplomacy. As stated before, in Argentina and other parts of the world, the foreign service tends to be highly hierarchical and bureaucratic. It is often perceived as an isolated entity from society (Manor, 2016). This institutional trajectory and the culture it *engenders*, permeate various aspects of Argentine public diplomacy, including the digital sphere.

The integration of digital diplomacy into the Argentine foreign service began around mid-2016 and has since continued to develop in its early stages (interview with GDB and TK). Throughout the two government administrations (Mauricio Macri 2015-2019 and Alberto Fernández 2019-2023) and under the leadership of different foreign ministers (Susana Malcorra 2015-2017; Jorge Faurie 2017-2019; Felipe Solá 2019-2021; Santiago Cafiero 2021-2023), a coordinated action plan was outlined for the use of social media by the Foreign Ministry and Argentine embassies abroad, involving diplomats (interview with TK).

The institutional structure of the foreign service encompasses various offices and departments dealing with issues related to digital technology usage in diplomacy. However, there is currently no dedicated office exclusively focused on digital diplomacy. In 2016, during Susana Malcorra's tenure as foreign

minister, the Subsecretariat for Institutional Relations and Public Diplomacy was established to oversee the public and digital diplomacy strategy of the Foreign Ministry. Subsequently, this agency underwent modifications, and the responsibility for digital diplomacy was shifted to the Press Office, where it remained centralised until 2023 (interview with TK).

Creating the Subsecretariat for Institutional Relations and Public Diplomacy aimed to reorganise various public diplomacy mechanisms, providing a definition that included digital diplomacy for the first time. A set of priorities was established. In this context, public diplomacy was defined by the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs as follows:

We understand public diplomacy as a set of actions aimed at both the national and international public opinion and civil society, capable of promoting our FP agenda and generating awareness, sensitising, and building consensus regarding the work of this Ministry. Examples of these actions are typically carried out by our embassies and representations and include both traditional activities (meetings with social leaders, media, academics, think tanks, representatives of local civil society, etc.) and those related to the new digital diplomacy (social media, digital newsletters, and other means). (...) In the specific case of representations abroad, we also understand public diplomacy actions as any activity to strengthen and enhance the link between the Argentine community residing in each jurisdiction and our country. Examples of such actions include networking and organising meetings with the Argentine community, either jointly or segmented by interest groups (MRECIC, 2016, p. 2).

In line with the FP objectives established for that period, the Foreign Ministry defined a series of public and digital diplomacy priorities:

- a. Emphasizing Argentina's commitment to multilateralism, the defence of human rights and democracy, and maintaining international peace and security.
- b. Fostering the dynamism of MERCOSUR (trade, investments, Agreement with the EU, convergence with the Pacific Alliance) as a platform for internationalisation to create employment and strengthen social cohesion.
- c. Contributing to the country's international positioning by supporting export promotion and investment attraction policies.
- d. Strengthening the country's commitment to sustainable development and environmental protection.
- e. Consolidating the country's image as a leader in nuclear and space matters and promoting its achievements in science, technology, and innovation.
- f. Projecting Argentine culture and sports internationally while highlighting the country's open and inclusive profile.
- g. Establishing an emotional connection with Argentinians abroad and acquainting the Argentine civil society with the Ministry's work.

Since 2016, a plan was implemented to update the Foreign Ministry's and embassies' websites, improving access to information related to the activities of the President and the Foreign Minister on the international stage, as well as the services offered by the Ministry to the public (interview with MS). For embassies, the goal was to showcase the ambassador's work and embassy activities and facilitate access to consular services. Specific measures were taken to establish a protocol for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and embassies on social media usage and to standardise processes and publications, including the accounts and usernames of Argentine representations abroad. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and embassies created and circulated a procedural manual regarding what and how to publish on official social media accounts.

Table 1. Measures taken on digital diplomacy in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2016)

<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Official Ministry of Foreign Affairs accounts were launched on Facebook, an English Twitter account was added to the existing Spanish one, and a LinkedIn account was created. Additionally, the following initiatives were undertaken:▪ Standardization of social media for Argentine representations on Facebook and Twitter, with training for their use.▪ Development of documents and guidelines for social media usage, including "Best Practices Manual for Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Representation Social Media", "Protocol for the Management of Official Representation Accounts on Social Media," "Legal Implications of Social Media Usage for Representations", and "Instructions for Configuring Official Representation Accounts on Facebook and Twitter".▪ Creation of original audio-visual and graphic content for all Ministry of Foreign Affairs and representation of social media accounts in Spanish, English, and French.▪ A bilingual monthly newsletter was produced featuring updates on Argentine FP. It is sent to more than 8,000 interested parties and opinion leaders and distributed through representations to the main local stakeholders in each jurisdiction.
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Source: MRECIC, 2016.

In alignment with the work conducted by the Subsecretariat for Institutional Relations and Public Diplomacy, the Press Office, which assumed responsibility for digital diplomacy activities in 2019, continued similar efforts. Protocols for creating videos and instructions for audiovisual materials during official events were introduced.

Institutionally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs developed strategies and concrete plans for using digital tools, primarily associated with specific officials tasked with promoting their adoption (interview with MS). Despite changes in government and officials dedicated to public diplomacy within the foreign

service, the intention to continue working with these tools and professionalising their use within the foreign service persists, as dictated by current technological trends.

In line with these initiatives, efforts were made to include training courses in digital diplomacy at the Institute of the Foreign Service of the Nation (ISEN), the diplomatic training centre. Institute officials noted the growing interest and demand among aspiring diplomats for using social media in diplomatic activities, an area expected to gain increasing prominence in training (Interview with LN). Starting in 2016, Public and Digital Diplomacy courses were introduced for aspiring diplomats, and a Digital Tools for Diplomats course was launched as part of the career advancement programme. Furthermore, a Memorandum of Understanding on Public and Digital Diplomacy was signed with Brazil.

These initiatives acknowledge the need for foreign service and diplomatic corps to acquire knowledge of these tools and promote professionalism in their usage.

Twiplomacy

Twitter (X) remains the primary platform for interaction between diplomats and politicians with a broader audience. It is still the preferred platform for politically engaged and informed users and serves as a shortcut to reach the press quickly. By searching for recurring themes in Twitter (X) channels – and other social networks – operated by foreign ministries, it is possible to gain insight into how countries portray themselves to the outside world in general and to specific foreign publics in particular (Bjola & Holmes, 2015, p. 7). As (Duncombe, 2017, p. 547) put it, “If diplomacy is the ‘art of communication’, then Twitter is another platform for dialogue between states”.

The use of these social media platforms for Argentine public diplomacy has been steadily growing. The Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs joined Twitter on 27 July 2010 (@MRECIC_ARG) under the initiative of then-Foreign Minister Héctor Timerman (2010-2015). Since then, it has opened a new communication channel between the foreign service and its various audiences. Similarly, foreign ministers' press offices and some ambassadors on their accounts have employed Twitter (X) to disseminate various activities and important events in Argentine international politics and its connections with the world. Twitter (X) has swiftly emerged as the preferred platform for this cross-cutting exchange. Many embassies have Twitter (X) accounts sharing pertinent information on administrative procedures, cultural events, scholarships, and insights about each country. Many foreign representatives using Twitter (X) as a communication platform are individuals with their own accounts and actively engage with the public. They have participated in discussions on important

matters, such as multinational agreements and their implications, while fostering a sense of proximity and empathy with the people.

In the case of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the official account – managed by the Press Office under the Minister's chief of staff – has primarily focused on reflecting the Foreign Minister's activities and the President's activities in international politics (interview with GDB, MS, TK). The account has been active in presenting the country's positioning regarding international conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine war and the Hamas attacks on Israel on October 7th, 2023, highlighting trade agreements with the EU, China and other trade partners, and showing the activities where the Ministry was active in helping Argentine citizens abroad. During the Russia-Ukraine war, the official accounts were used to provide information about the situation of those seeking to leave Ukraine. In the same vein, the official accounts immediately condemned the Hamas attacks on Israel. They offered assistance to the Argentinians who wanted to leave Israel. During the debate within Mercosur concerning Uruguay's unilateral positions within the bloc, the Twitter (X) account was used to release a joint statement with Brazil and Paraguay.

Regarding the embassies, the representations used their accounts in diverse ways and with varying strategies, depending on the audience they sought to target, as we will see in the next section. For instance, during the FIFA World Cup in Qatar, career ambassador Guillermo Nicolás (@Guille_Nicolas) used social media to communicate with many Argentinians travelling to the World Cup. He also showcased Argentinian customs and organised cultural activities reproduced on social media. On the other hand, the (political) Ambassador to Brazil (2020-2023), Daniel Scioli (@danielscioli), a prominent figure in Argentine politics and former presidential candidate in 2015, has also been very active on Twitter (X). He highlighted the advancements in trade agreements with the neighbouring country and promoted bilateral relations (interview with JCC).

Jorge Arguello, Ambassador to the United States (2020-2023) also played an active role on Twitter (X) from his personal and embassy accounts. He participated in public debates in Argentina and around the world, emphasising multilateral and commercial matters. This embassy, one of the largest in terms of human and financial resources, has also organised numerous activities through social media during the pandemic, showcasing Argentine customs such as barbecues, wine, tango, etc. (interview with GDB). Among the embassy's officials and big promoters of digital diplomacy within the diplomatic corps, Gerardo Diaz Bartolome (@GerryDBartolome) has developed a strong strategy of digital diplomacy to promote Argentinian culture in the US. After interviewing him in Buenos Aires in his seat

as the Director of International Organizations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which he occupied until December 2023, he used Twitter (X) to advance the multilateral role of Argentina. He tweeted in English to continue engaging with the international community interested in the country.

A remarkable case to highlight is the role of football/ soccer and the FIFA World Cup in 2022. Because of this, Argentina gained special visibility worldwide, and official accounts of many ministries promoted and celebrated the Argentine Championship of the Soccer World Cup. During the World Cup in Qatar, the Argentine ambassador to the country used his Twitter account to disseminate information about Qatar to the Argentinians travelling to the tournament and organised several activities to promote Argentine culture, having open barbeques and inviting bands to play for the Argentines and the international audience visiting Qatar. Most of the activities were broadcast on social media and spread worldwide, as the interest in the country was at its highest. In this regard, the country's visibility grew exponentially in those days, and diplomacy used it to promote Argentine products to a broad audience. This embassy has notably used the Argentine national football team's triumph to promote the country. However, more broadly, football/ soccer could be exploited further to promote the country (interview with CCQ). In fact, because of the passion of Bangladeshis for the national team, particularly for Lionel Messi, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, for instance, decided to re-open an embassy in Bangladesh that the Dictatorship had closed in 1978¹.

As both the past and present heads of the Ministry's Press Office have pointed out, the use of Twitter (X) by the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the embassies has only recently been regulated. After the creation of the Ministry's Twitter account and its use to showcase the activities carried out by the Minister and the President, the standardisation of the embassies' Twitter (X) accounts (they all adopted @ArgEmbin...), their profile pictures and some standardised guidance for the communication, diplomats have growingly used Twitter (X) accounts and digital tools for their tasks (interview with TK and MS). However, the ones more active in public debates have been the political diplomats or those positioned at high levels of the Ministry's rank. Young diplomats have been more reluctant to participate in public debates and activities and to use their personal Twitter (X) accounts. As it emerged from the interviews, most of them have been trained within an institutional culture that promotes a certain isolationism from citizens and public opinion (and criticism). This could change as

¹ <https://www.cancilleria.gob.ar/es/actualidad/noticias/bangladesh-cafiero-inauguro-la-nueva-embajada-argentina-en-medio-de-un-fervor>. Also see: <https://www.forbesargentina.com/qatar-2022/de-haiti-bangladesh-soft-power-messi-seleccion-argentina-termina-aprovechar-n25590>

new generations enter the diplomatic career and demand social networks as valid tools to carry on their tasks as diplomats. This has been reflected in the recent inclusion of courses and training in the use of social media during the initial stages of the career by the Institute of the Foreign Service of the Nation (ISEN), as mentioned above.

As Duncombe puts it, diplomacy pursued through Twitter (X) becomes a public resource, "as opposed to the traditional view of diplomacy as 'behind closed doors'". Thus, Twitter (X) is implicated in structural change – shifts in the social practice of diplomacy – and in how and for what purpose diplomats appropriate this technology in pursuing their duties (Duncombe, 2017). The following section will explore the audiences addressed through digital diplomacy by Argentina's diplomatic corps, the main agendas promoted, and critical issues raised as a reflection of the country's insertion strategy.

Audiences, Agendas, and Critical Issues

Digital diplomacy is much broader than using Twitter (X) by diplomats and Foreign Affairs officials. Digital tools in public diplomacy are used to reach and engage different audiences. Bjola and Manor maintain that digital diplomacy represents a "two-level game" simultaneously directed at foreign and domestic audiences (Bjola & Manor, 2018, p. 7). However, Gilboa identifies three types of audiences: internal, domestic, and foreign. Internal audience refers to people and units inside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other relevant agencies. The domestic audience is citizens and residents of a country. The foreign audience is people in another country or worldwide (Gilboa, 2016).

In Argentina, digital diplomacy has been employed to reach the three distinct audiences delineated by the above-mentioned author on various occasions and by different actors, albeit in diverse ways and relevance. Various FP agendas and key themes that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sought to promote and disseminate fell within the messages directed at these audiences. However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs digital tools and social media platforms have prioritised domestic audiences. On the one hand, this involved reflecting on the activities of the Foreign Minister and the President and making them known to the local public (interview with MS). On the other hand, it included the communication of Argentina's participation in international forums, presidential summits, the signing of trade and cooperation agreements, Argentina's presence at international fairs, and the country's positions on international conflicts and disasters. Notable among the disseminated highlights have been Argentina's participation in the G20 summits and United Nations General Assemblies, its

accession to the BRICS in 2023, various meetings related to the negotiation of the Mercosur-European Union agreement, and Mercosur activities.

Within the specific outlines of the agenda, both from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website and through its Twitter (X) and Facebook accounts, there has been a clear interest in showcasing a series of strategic topics in Argentine FP. This included the commitment to multilateralism, the central importance of Mercosur in Argentina's FP agenda, Argentina's persistent claim to sovereignty over the Malvinas Islands, the country's history in defence of Human Rights and memory, and the promotion of international trade and investments. These elements are evident in the dissemination of activities, the promotion of significant national dates, and the communication of specific agreements on various export products with different countries (interview with MS).

The situation regarding the promoted agendas has been similar for specific embassies and ambassadors in strategic embassies. However, the emphasis on particular issues varied depending on the country where the embassy was situated. The FP agendas mentioned earlier have been mirrored in the communications of the embassies: the commemoration of specific dates related to human rights and the Malvinas cause, as well as the promotion of trade agreements signed with the host countries of each embassy. Additionally, there has been a dissemination of the embassies' activities aimed at promoting Argentine culture, including tango, wine, "asado" (barbeque), and football.

For instance, in the case of the Argentine Embassy in Brazil, the (political) Ambassador was Daniel Scioli (2020-2023). Both countries share a historic and geographically strategic relationship of cooperation and complementarity. Argentina is Brazil's leading trading partner, while the Brazilian market is Argentina's foremost export destination. As a reflection, the embassy (@ArgentinaEnBras) and Ambassador (@danielscioli) concentrated their communication efforts primarily towards the Argentine audience, highlighting advancements in trade and cooperation. With the arrival of Luiz Inacio Lula Da Silva to the presidency in January 2023, the Argentine ambassador also showed on his Twitter account the close personal relationship they had and highlighted the importance of that friendship for both countries. During his period in Brazil, he primarily focused on promoting the commercialisation of more Argentine products to Brazil, guaranteeing access to new exports. Based on this, he also launched a book titled *"La Nueva Era de la Diplomacia. La proyección de la Argentina y Brasil en el contexto global"* (Diplomacy's New Era. The projection of Argentina and Brazil in the global context). He promoted it on his social networks with the hashtag #NuevaEraDeLaDiplomacia (Diplomacy's New Era).

On the other hand, the Argentine Embassy in the United States (@Arginusa) also actively promoted its activities. It maintained a bilingual presence on Twitter (X), catering to domestic and international audiences. Additionally, the embassy issued newsletters in English and Spanish, disseminating updates on recent embassy activities. This embassy represented one of the nation's most resourceful diplomatic missions. The communication of their activities revolved around the promotion of bilateral trade with the United States, investment agreements, international political agendas, cultural activities aimed at showcasing Argentine customs and products, and the commemoration of national dates, including patriotic holidays, human rights milestones, and the remembrance of the Israeli Embassy bombing in 1992 and the AMIA bombing in 1994. Argentine Ambassador in the US from February 2020 to December 2023 is an active Twitter (X) user and a good communicator of the participation of Argentina in multilateral and global governance organisations and the country's position regarding international issues.

On a different note, the Argentine Embassy in China also had a communication channel through Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/ArgentinaEnChina/>), and it did not have a Twitter (X) account. Considering the limited access to these networks in China, this could be expected, although the Chinese Embassy in Argentina has been highly active in its digital diplomacy through its Twitter (X) account (@ChinaEmbArg). The Facebook account of the embassy in China has mainly published news related to Ambassador Sabino Vaca Narvaja's (2021-2023) activities directed to the Argentine audience (the posts are in Spanish). The account has not been very active. Most posts showcased cooperation agreements signed with China, mainly related to the Belt and Road initiative and Chinese investments in Argentina. Other posts referred to important national dates such as Independence Day and Day of Remembrance for Truth and Justice, cultural promotion activities and the Malvinas' sovereignty claim.

Digital Diplomacy for International Insertion

After studying the advances in digital diplomacy within the framework of the Argentine Foreign Affairs Ministry and its embassies and ambassadors, it is possible to examine the relationship between using digital tools and promoting a specific insertion strategy. As detailed above, digital diplomacy within the diplomatic corps is relatively recent in Argentina. Although these tools have spread, they still have some limitations and many possibilities to explore in the future.

Institutionally, since 2016, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has formalised procedures and standards for the communication of diplomats through social networks and promoted their use in different stances. This policy had continuity across governments during the period under study and remained an institutional decision of the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This gave diplomats the support and institutional backing for using social media and showed them how to implement it according to the Ministry's objectives. This was also accompanied by different campaigns and training courses launched by the ISEN to support young diplomats entering their careers or in their first stages. However, one of the main constraints to the broad diplomatic corps' more active use of digital tools is a very restrictive institutional culture that formed them in a climate of privacy and isolation, under the assumption that what they do should be reserved. As such, diplomats would be expected to work in their isolated offices while politicians discuss with the public and the media. As it emerged in the interviews, this has also been related to the prevalent impression of diplomats living a superficial life of luxury and cocktails that, in a country with high percentages of the population living in poverty, makes them look selfish, elitist, and wasteful of State resources. This fear goes along with the fear of being exposed by the media and creating a sense of criticism among the public towards the diplomatic corps and the Ministry. Consequently, many diplomats avoid public exposure and remain isolated.

As a result of this institutional culture of reserve and privacy, the more active diplomats in social media tended to be political diplomats – those appointed by politicians and not coming from the diplomatic career – and diplomats in the higher ranks of the career. These have been the cases of many ambassadors with high national and international profiles who have been highly committed to public diplomacy. The above-mentioned ambassadors in strategic embassies, such as the embassy in Brazil or the United States, have been cases in point.

Although still gaining strength, Argentina's digital diplomacy has been mainly directed to the domestic audience and, to a lesser extent and only in specific cases, to foreign audiences. The choices made in communication and for activities in social media and the internet prove that there has been an apparent attempt to promote specific FP strategies to enhance mechanisms for development and international insertion and achieve greater visibility of what Argentina could offer to the world. This reflected the FP goals delineated by the country regardless of the political party in charge of the government and the strategies for international insertion in a global context of hierarchies where the country remains peripheral (Chagas-Bastos, 2018b; Míguez, 2021).

The insertion strategy is suggested in the information shared and promoted publicly in social networks. The commitment to multilateralism, the active participation in Global South coalitions and endeavours, the crucial relevance of the Latin American region, especially the association with Mercosur and Brazil, and the commitment to peace and defence of sovereignty have been at the centre of the profile displayed in social media during the period. A topic that has been controversial in the FP agenda, the agreement between Mercosur and the European Union, has also been highlighted in the communication, both during Mauricio Macri's administration when the agreement was reached in 2019 and later on, during Alberto Fernandez' presidency, in the subsequent negotiations for its revisions and adjustments. This shows the relevance of the negotiations for Argentine FP and the centrality of Mercosur and the EU as trade partners. In line with this, the focus on celebrating trade agreements and access to new foreign markets reflects the insertion strategy adopted during the period. It meant not only the dissemination of "successful" policies conducted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the domestic audience but also a way of showcasing Argentina's role in trade negotiations and the search for markets for its products. This has been evident in promoting the agreements signed and the great diffusion of Argentine products and companies abroad through participating in international fairs and activities in different embassies.

Conclusion

Digital diplomacy has changed the way diplomacy is conducted and practised. It served many purposes and has been used for different FP goals. In the same way, as happens with traditional diplomacy, central countries have developed tools and strategies and dedicated many technological and human resources to the development and implementation of digital diplomacy as it becomes a crucial aspect in the projection of a country's profile to the public and the world (Adesina, 2017; Ross, 2012; Vila Seoane, 2023; Zhang & Ma, 2022). Peripheral countries have fewer resources and knowledge than central countries to dedicate to diplomacy more broadly and public and digital diplomacy more specifically. However, using digital tools to promote FP goals and mechanisms of insertion could become a critical opportunity for these countries to project those goals and identities to the world.

The case of Argentina illustrates how a peripheral country that still has an incipient development of its digital diplomacy could create opportunities to reach its FP goals using social media and the internet. Digital diplomacy allows peripheral countries to reach audiences worldwide in closer communication with citizens within the country, citizens living abroad, and foreign audiences. It

contributes to projecting the country's identity to the world and promoting specific pathways of insertion into world politics and economics. However, digital diplomacy does not emerge as a magic solution to fragilities in formulating and implementing FP. As Gilboa (2016) pointed out, it must be connected to people, strategic purposes, and national communication strategies. In a changing global order where international insertion is more challenging and unstable, digital diplomacy becomes a valuable resource for peripheral countries to showcase their FP strategies to a broader audience. By making targeted use of digital diplomacy, it is possible for them to gain more political relevance in global policies and showcase their culture and products to access markets and trade opportunities.

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Annexe

List of interviews conducted

- Director of Intermediate Organizations and Public Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2019-2022)
(Code: CCQ)
- Specialist in Public Diplomacy
(Code: JCC)
- Director Human Security, Innovation and International Technological Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2023) (Code: GA)
- ISEN Director of Academic Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2023)
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- Director of International Organizations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2023)
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