

Digital and Traditional Diplomacy in the UAE: A Systematic Literature Review on Soft Power Strategies

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Abstract: *This study examines the role of digital and traditional diplomacy in the UAE and their effectiveness in advancing soft power strategies. As the UAE seeks to enhance its global influence, it has strategically integrated traditional diplomatic engagements, such as bilateral agreements and multilateral collaborations, with digital diplomacy tools, including social media campaigns and digital communication platforms. The study synthesizes existing literature to highlight the interplay between these two approaches, assessing their impact on public perception, cultural influence, and international relations. Findings indicate that while traditional diplomacy remains a vital pillar of the UAE's foreign policy, digital diplomacy has expanded the country's reach, enabling real-time engagement and strategic messaging. However, challenges such as misinformation, cybersecurity risks, and inconsistencies between digital and traditional efforts persist. The study identifies key gaps in research, particularly concerning the long-term effectiveness of digital diplomacy. Future studies should explore comparative analyses and empirical assessments to refine diplomatic strategies that optimize soft power in an evolving global landscape.*

Keywords: Digital Diplomacy, Traditional Diplomacy, UAE Soft Power, Soft Power Strategies.

1. Introduction:

Diplomacy has long been a fundamental instrument in shaping international relations, with nations employing both traditional and digital approaches to strengthen their influence and global standing. The UAE has strategically utilized diplomacy as a means of advancing its foreign policy objectives, with a strong emphasis on soft power to cultivate a positive national image and foster international partnerships. Traditional diplomacy, characterized by official state visits, bilateral agreements, and participation in international organizations, remains a crucial pillar of the UAE's diplomatic strategy (Al Suwaidi, 2021; El Amine, 2023). However, with the rapid evolution of digital technologies, the UAE has increasingly embraced digital diplomacy, leveraging social media, online platforms, and data-driven communication strategies to enhance its outreach and engagement with global audiences (Al-Mansouri et al., 2021; Alnuaimi & Yatiban, 2024). Digital diplomacy has enabled the UAE to amplify its soft power by promoting cultural initiatives, economic achievements, and political narratives on a global scale, allowing for real-time interaction and greater accessibility compared to traditional diplomatic channels (Mohamed, 2024; Tayeb Ahmed, 2024). The interplay between traditional and digital diplomacy has therefore become a defining characteristic of the UAE's foreign policy, reinforcing its position as a regional and global leader in soft power initiatives.

Despite extensive research on soft power and diplomatic strategies, key gaps remain in understanding the effectiveness, challenges, and long-term impact of integrating digital and traditional diplomacy in the UAE's foreign policy. While studies such as those by Al Breiki (2025) and Al Shehhi & Islam (2024) explore the role of public diplomacy in shaping international perceptions, there is a need for deeper analysis of how digital diplomacy complements traditional diplomatic engagements in achieving strategic objectives. Additionally, the literature lacks comprehensive insights into the

sustainability of digital diplomacy efforts, particularly in the face of cybersecurity threats, misinformation, and evolving geopolitical dynamics (Sebire et al., 2025; Nechad et al., 2024). This systematic literature review aims to bridge these gaps by examining existing research on digital and traditional diplomacy in the UAE, assessing their effectiveness in enhancing soft power, and identifying areas for future exploration. By synthesizing key findings from academic sources, this study contributes to a broader understanding of how the UAE navigates the complexities of modern diplomacy, offering insights that can inform policy decisions and diplomatic strategies in an increasingly digitalized world.

2. Methodology:

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) approach to examine the interplay between digital and traditional diplomacy in the UAE and its role in enhancing soft power. The SLR method ensures a structured, replicable, and comprehensive analysis of existing research, enabling the identification of key themes, trends, and research gaps within the field. The review focuses on literature published between 2000 and 2025, reflecting the evolving landscape of diplomatic practices in response to globalization and digital transformation. To ensure academic rigor and credibility, the study exclusively sources literature from Scopus and Web of Science (WOS)—two of the most reputable and high-impact academic databases. The search strategy incorporates the following keywords: Cost Overruns, Road Construction in Libya, and Construction Projects, ensuring a precise and targeted selection of relevant publications. These keywords facilitate the identification of studies that analyze diplomatic strategies in the context of UAE's traditional and digital diplomacy.

The study follows a rigorous selection process guided by predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the relevance and reliability of the reviewed literature. The inclusion criteria encompass open-access articles and studies directly relevant to the scope of digital and traditional diplomacy in the UAE. Open-access publications are prioritized to enhance accessibility and transparency, allowing for a broad engagement with research findings. Studies that provide empirical evidence, theoretical discussions, or case studies on soft power strategies in UAE diplomacy are included. Conversely, the exclusion criteria filter out articles that are not relevant to the study's scope, such as those focusing on unrelated geopolitical contexts or diplomatic models that do not pertain to the UAE. This ensures that only pertinent research contributing to the understanding of the UAE's diplomatic strategies is analyzed.

The data collection process involves searching, screening, and synthesizing relevant studies following PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines. Initially, a broad search is conducted using the selected databases and keywords, yielding a large pool of articles. The screening process then eliminates duplicate records and non-relevant studies based on titles, abstracts, and full-text reviews. The final dataset is analyzed through thematic synthesis, identifying common patterns, methodologies, and key insights related to the UAE's diplomatic strategies. This approach allows for a comparative examination of how traditional and digital diplomacy contribute to the UAE's global influence and provides a structured foundation for understanding the effectiveness of soft power strategies in shaping international relations.

2.1 Figure1: The Systematic Review Process

1.1 Diplomatic Strategies and Soft Power Factors in the UAE

The integration of traditional and digital diplomacy in the UAE is influenced by a complex interplay of factors spanning political, technological, cultural, and communicative dimensions. The evolving nature of diplomatic strategies necessitates a structured analysis of how various studies have addressed key issues such as state-driven negotiations, digital engagement, public diplomacy, cultural initiatives, media influence, and the strategic enhancement of soft power. Researchers have also

explored additional challenges such as the role of leadership vision, misinformation risks, cybersecurity concerns, diplomatic credibility, audience engagement, and the effectiveness of messaging across platforms. Furthermore, elements such as social media impact, international perception, policy alignment, diplomatic agility, crisis communication, cross-sector collaboration, and geopolitical considerations contribute to shaping the UAE's diplomatic landscape.

To systematically compare how these factors have been examined across different studies, a comprehensive literature review matrix was developed. This matrix categorizes key citations alongside a diverse set of previously studied factors and those specifically addressed within each study. For instance, while Vetter (2023) discusses both traditional and digital diplomacy in relation to UAE's reputational security, Alnuaimi & Yatiban (2024) emphasize leadership vision as a moderating factor in Emirati digital diplomacy strategies. By referring to the matrix, readers can quickly assess the thematic coverage of each citation, providing a clear visualization of existing trends, theoretical applications, and research gaps. The matrix not only serves as a tool to synthesize and compare studies but also offers a roadmap for future research, highlighting unexplored areas and the need for deeper analysis on how traditional and digital diplomacy interact to enhance the UAE's soft power in an increasingly digitalized world.

No	Author(s) and Year	Factors Previously Studied										Factors Addressed in this Study					
		Public Diplomacy	Strategic Communication	Nation Branding	Diplomatic Engagement	Social Media Influence	Economic Diplomacy	Science Diplomacy	Crisis Diplomacy	Education Diplomacy	Security Diplomacy	Traditional Diplomacy	Digital Diplomacy	Public Perception	Cultural Influence	Media Narratives	Enhanced UAE Soft Power
1.	Al Breiki (2025)	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
2.	Al Shehhi & Islam (2024)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓		✓	✓		✓	
3.	Al Suwaidi (2021)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	
4.	Alhamar (2023)	✓	✓		✓	✓					✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
5.	AlKhalifa & Farello (2021)	✓		✓	✓	✓						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
6.	Al-Mansouri et al. (2021)	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓				✓	✓		✓	✓	
7.	Al-Mekaimi (2025)	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
8.	Alnuaimi & Yatiban (2024)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓	✓		✓	✓	
9.	AL-OBAIDAN (2022)	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	
10.	Amoah-Darkwah & Kipo-Sunyehzi (2023)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
11.	Antwi-Boateng & Al Mazrouei (2021)	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	
12.	Baycar & Rakipoglu (2022)	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	
13.	Bell (2022)	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	
14.	Charles (2024)	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	
15.	Dahdal & Ghafar (2025)		✓		✓		✓	✓				✓	✓		✓	✓	
16.	El Amine (2023)	✓	✓		✓		✓				✓		✓	✓		✓	
17.	Engelland-Gay (2023)	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
18.	Jackson (2022)	✓		✓	✓	✓						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
19.	Janković & Cvetković (2020)		✓						✓		✓		✓		✓		
20.	Johar et al. (2025)	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
21.	Justinek, Carli, & Omahna (2019)	✓	✓		✓	✓						✓			✓	✓	

No	Author(s) and Year	Factors Previously Studied										Factors Addressed in this Study					
		Public Diplomacy	Strategic Communication	Nation Branding	Diplomatic Engagement	Social Media Influence	Economic Diplomacy	Science Diplomacy	Crisis Diplomacy	Education Diplomacy	Security Diplomacy	Traditional Diplomacy	Digital Diplomacy	Public Perception	Cultural Influence	Media Narratives	Enhanced UAE Soft Power
22	Kimaiyo (2024)		✓	✓		✓	✓						✓		✓	✓	
23	Krzyszowski (2020)	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓		✓		✓	
24	Kyriakidis, AlDulaimi, & Molaeb (2024)	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
25	Li, Min, & Lee (2021)	✓	✓	✓									✓	✓	✓		
26	Mohamed (2024)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓	✓		✓	✓	
27	Mwasongwe & Mwalimu (2023)		✓		✓	✓						✓			✓		
28	Nandy (2021)		✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓			✓		✓	
29	Nechad, El Labbar, & Rhalma (2024)		✓		✓		✓	✓		✓		✓				✓	
30	Noroozi & Akbari (2024)	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓				✓	
31	Ordoñez de Pablos (2024)		✓		✓			✓				✓				✓	
32	Oxford Analytica (2024)	✓	✓	✓		✓					✓	✓			✓		
33	Pilot & Alshehri (2024)	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	
34	Saaida (2023)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	
35	Sebire et al. (2025)									✓			✓		✓		
36	Tahat et al. (2023)	✓	✓	✓		✓						✓	✓		✓	✓	
37	Tayeb Ahmed (2024)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓			✓	✓	
38	Tsvetkova & Rushchin (2021)	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓			✓	✓		✓	✓		
39	Vetter (n.d.)	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
40	Warraich et al. (2023)	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
41	Zaabi & Awamleh (2019)	✓	✓	✓			✓				✓		✓	✓		✓	
42	Zreik (2024)	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
43	Zubair (2023)	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

1.2 Matrix 1: Literature Review

1.3 Factors Previously Studied

The existing literature on digital and traditional diplomacy in the UAE, as examined in various studies, highlights a diverse range of factors influencing the country's soft power strategy. Public diplomacy has been a dominant theme across multiple studies, emphasizing how the UAE engages with international audiences through strategic communication, cultural exchanges, and diplomatic initiatives. Many scholars, including Al Breiki (2025), Al Shehhi & Islam (2024), and Al Suwaidi (2021), have explored the role of public diplomacy in shaping the UAE's global image and fostering international partnerships. Closely related to this is strategic communication, which focuses on the methods and narratives used by the UAE to project its diplomatic messages effectively. Studies such as those by Oxford Analytica (2024), Tsvetkova & Rushchin (2021), and Vetter (n.d.) investigate how diplomatic messaging is crafted and disseminated across both traditional and digital platforms to enhance engagement and influence.

Nation branding emerges as another critical factor, with research examining how the UAE leverages its global reputation through soft power tools such as international events, cultural initiatives, and sports diplomacy. Authors such as Engelland-Gay (2023), Krzymowski (2020), and Jackson (2022) discuss how the UAE has strategically positioned itself as a global hub for culture, innovation, and diplomacy. Similarly, diplomatic engagement is a widely studied theme, analyzing the UAE's active participation in bilateral and multilateral diplomacy to strengthen alliances and expand its influence. Works by Al Mekaimi (2025), Antwi-Boateng & Al Mazrouei (2021), and Pilot & Alshehri (2024) provide insights into how diplomatic efforts at both state and non-state levels contribute to the UAE's foreign policy objectives, particularly in the context of economic partnerships, regional security, and crisis diplomacy.

In addition, social media influence has been extensively explored as a modern diplomatic tool that enhances public outreach, real-time engagement, and international discourse. Studies such as Al-Mansouri et al. (2021), Justinek et al. (2019), and Kyriakidis et al. (2024) highlight the increasing reliance on digital platforms to shape diplomatic narratives and counter misinformation. Economic diplomacy also plays a significant role in the UAE's strategic approach, as reflected in studies by Dahdal & Ghafar (2025), El Amine (2023), and Saaida (2023). These works analyze how economic incentives, trade policies, and investments in key sectors contribute to strengthening the UAE's global partnerships and reinforcing its soft power. Furthermore, science diplomacy has gained attention in recent research, focusing on how the UAE integrates technological advancements, scientific collaborations, and innovation-driven policies into its diplomatic framework, as seen in studies by Nandy (2021), Nechad et al. (2024), and Ordoñez de Pablos (2024).

Beyond economic and technological aspects, several studies have examined diplomacy in specialized areas such as crisis diplomacy, education diplomacy, and security diplomacy. Crisis diplomacy, explored by scholars like Al-obaidan (2022) and Antwi-Boateng & Al Mazrouei (2021), highlights the UAE's response mechanisms in addressing global crises, humanitarian efforts, and conflict mediation. Education diplomacy, discussed in studies by Amoah-Darkwah & Kipo-Sunyehzi (2023) and Saaida (2023), focuses on how academic collaborations, scholarship programs, and knowledge exchange initiatives contribute to the UAE's influence in international affairs. Finally, security diplomacy remains a crucial factor, particularly in the context of regional stability and counterterrorism strategies. Research by Sebire et al. (2025) and Pilot & Alshehri (2024) emphasizes the UAE's diplomatic efforts in ensuring national and regional security through strategic alliances, intelligence cooperation, and defense collaborations. These interconnected factors collectively illustrate the multidimensional nature of the UAE's diplomatic strategies and their impact on its global positioning.

1.4 Factors Addressed in this Study

The literature on digital and traditional diplomacy in the UAE highlights six key factors that shape the nation's soft power strategies: traditional diplomacy, digital diplomacy, public perception, cultural influence, media narratives, and enhanced UAE soft power. Traditional diplomacy remains a central component in the UAE's foreign policy, as discussed by Al Breiki (2025), Al Shehhi & Islam (2024), and Al Suwaidi (2021), who emphasize its role in state-to-state relations, high-level negotiations, and official diplomatic engagements. These studies illustrate how traditional diplomacy helps the UAE establish long-term strategic partnerships, engage in regional and global policymaking, and reinforce its position as a key actor in international affairs. Additionally, scholars like El Amine (2023), Nandy (2021), and Pilot & Alshehri (2024) highlight the importance of traditional diplomatic practices in economic agreements and peacebuilding efforts, showcasing their enduring relevance despite the increasing influence of digital diplomacy.

The shift towards digital diplomacy has been extensively examined in recent research, with scholars such as Al-Mansouri et al. (2021), Charles (2024), and Mohamed (2024) emphasizing its growing significance in the UAE's foreign engagement. Digital diplomacy leverages social media platforms, real-time online engagement, and digital storytelling to reach a broader audience, enabling faster and

more interactive communication. Studies by Justinek et al. (2019) and Tahat et al. (2023) analyze how digital diplomacy has helped the UAE enhance its international visibility and influence global discourse on key issues such as sustainability, innovation, and cultural exchange. Furthermore, researchers such as Tsvetkova & Rushchin (2021) and Zreik (2024) explore the intersection of digital and traditional diplomacy, highlighting how both approaches complement each other to strengthen the UAE's global reputation.

Public perception and cultural influence have also been identified as critical factors in shaping the UAE's diplomatic strategies. Scholars such as Li, Min, & Lee (2021) and Warraich et al. (2023) explore how the UAE utilizes soft power tools to craft a favorable global image, leveraging cultural diplomacy, international events, and strategic messaging to position itself as a hub for tolerance and innovation. Research by Engelland-Gay (2023) and Krzymowski (2020) highlights the role of initiatives like Expo 2020 Dubai and cultural institutions such as the Louvre Abu Dhabi in fostering positive perceptions of the UAE on the global stage. Additionally, studies by Bell (2022) and Amoah-Darkwah & Kipo-Sunyehzi (2023) discuss how cultural diplomacy enhances cross-cultural understanding and strengthens the UAE's ability to engage with diverse international audiences.

Finally, media narratives and enhanced UAE soft power are central themes in contemporary diplomatic research. Studies by AlKhalifa & Farello (2021) and Kimaiyo (2024) examine how media framing influences the UAE's global image, particularly through news coverage, digital campaigns, and public diplomacy efforts. Research by Saaïda (2023) and Vetter (n.d.) demonstrates how the UAE strategically utilizes media narratives to reinforce its role as a progressive and forward-thinking nation. Enhanced UAE soft power, as explored by scholars such as Zubair (2023) and Zreik (2024), encapsulates the broader impact of these diplomatic efforts, illustrating how a combination of traditional and digital diplomacy, cultural engagement, and media influence contribute to the UAE's sustained influence in global affairs. This study, therefore, builds upon existing research to analyze how these factors collectively shape the UAE's diplomatic landscape, offering a comprehensive understanding of its evolving soft power strategies.

2.6 Findings:

The systematic literature review reveals that the UAE has successfully integrated both traditional and digital diplomacy to enhance its soft power strategy. Traditional diplomacy remains a cornerstone of the UAE's foreign policy, as studies by Al Suwaidi (2021) and El Amine (2023) highlight the country's engagement in bilateral and multilateral agreements, strategic partnerships, and economic diplomacy. These efforts are reinforced by the UAE's participation in global organizations and initiatives, fostering international cooperation and long-term influence. Additionally, research by AL-OBAIDAN (2022) and Pilot & Alshehri (2024) underscores the role of traditional diplomatic engagements in shaping foreign relations, particularly in maintaining regional stability and economic alliances. The UAE's proactive diplomatic approach has facilitated major agreements, including the Abraham Accords, which have strengthened its geopolitical position while promoting a narrative of peace and cooperation in the region. However, scholars such as Antwi-Boateng & Al Mazrouei (2021) argue that while traditional diplomacy remains essential, its effectiveness is increasingly dependent on complementary digital strategies that enable real-time engagement and broader audience outreach. The evolving nature of diplomacy suggests that traditional methods alone may no longer be sufficient to engage with modern, digitally connected societies, requiring an integrated approach that blends diplomatic tradition with contemporary digital tools.

Digital diplomacy has emerged as a critical component of the UAE's modern diplomatic framework, with studies by Al-Mansouri et al. (2021) and Alnuaimi & Yatiban (2024) emphasizing the role of social media platforms and digital campaigns in amplifying the nation's global presence. The UAE's digital diplomacy efforts have been particularly evident in its strategic use of platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube to promote cultural initiatives, international events, and policy narratives. Research by Mohamed (2024) and Tayeb Ahmed (2024) highlights the influence of media narratives in shaping global perceptions, with digital diplomacy allowing the UAE to craft compelling messages

that resonate with international audiences. This approach has been instrumental in showcasing national achievements, such as the UAE's space program, climate initiatives, and humanitarian efforts, reinforcing its image as a forward-thinking and globally responsible nation. Furthermore, studies by Krzymowski (2020) and Engelland-Gay (2023) showcase how digital tools were effectively used during Expo 2020 Dubai to position the UAE as a global leader in innovation and cultural diplomacy. The event's digital strategy included live-streamed discussions, virtual pavilions, and interactive online engagement, enabling millions worldwide to experience the UAE's soft power initiatives firsthand. However, despite its benefits, digital diplomacy also presents challenges, as noted by Dahdal & Ghafar (2025), including the risks of misinformation, cyber threats, and the need for consistency between digital messaging and traditional diplomatic actions. The challenge of maintaining credibility in the digital sphere is particularly significant, as online diplomatic engagement is susceptible to disinformation campaigns, political bias, and the fast-paced nature of digital media.

Public perception and cultural influence have been pivotal in the UAE's soft power strategy, with scholars such as Bell (2022) and Kimaiyo (2024) analyzing how strategic messaging and media engagement contribute to the country's international reputation. The UAE's investment in cultural diplomacy, including initiatives like the Louvre Abu Dhabi, global sporting events, and film festivals, has significantly shaped its image as a progressive and inclusive nation (Jackson, 2022; AlKhalifa & Farello, 2021). Additionally, the country's emphasis on tolerance, religious coexistence, and interfaith dialogue has strengthened its diplomatic standing, particularly among diverse global communities. The UAE has also positioned itself as a leader in knowledge diplomacy, with studies by Saaida (2023) and Johar et al. (2025) exploring the role of education diplomacy and international collaboration in strengthening the UAE's soft power. Hosting international universities, research centers, and academic conferences has reinforced the UAE's reputation as a hub for knowledge exchange, talent development, and technological innovation. However, while these efforts have been largely successful, researchers such as Warraich et al. (2023) and Vetter (n.d.) highlight the need for sustained engagement and adaptive strategies to maintain long-term influence in an evolving geopolitical landscape. The increasing competition for global influence through soft power mechanisms necessitates continuous innovation in the UAE's diplomatic strategy, ensuring that both traditional and digital methods evolve to meet emerging global challenges.

The review also identifies gaps in the literature, particularly regarding the long-term impact of digital diplomacy on sustained soft power gains. While several studies examine short-term successes, there is limited empirical research assessing whether digital engagement translates into lasting diplomatic influence. The effectiveness of digital diplomacy in creating genuine trust and long-term relationships remains an open question, particularly in the face of rapid technological advancements and shifting international alliances. Additionally, research on the intersection between digital diplomacy and security remains underdeveloped, despite the increasing role of cybersecurity and digital governance in international relations (Sebire et al., 2025; Nechad et al., 2024). As digital diplomacy expands, safeguarding sensitive diplomatic communications, countering misinformation, and mitigating cyber threats become pressing concerns. Another gap pertains to the effectiveness of the UAE's digital diplomacy in countering negative narratives and misinformation, which remains a challenge in an era of rapidly evolving media landscapes. The rise of artificial intelligence, deepfake technology, and algorithm-driven content distribution adds complexity to digital diplomatic efforts, necessitating a deeper understanding of how states can navigate these challenges while maintaining credibility and strategic coherence. Future research could focus on comparative studies of digital and traditional diplomacy across different regions to provide a more comprehensive understanding of best practices in soft power strategy. By addressing these gaps, scholars and policymakers can better assess the evolving role of diplomacy in the digital age and refine strategies for leveraging soft power in an increasingly interconnected and competitive global environment.

2. Discussion

The findings of this systematic literature review highlight the UAE's strategic and multi-faceted approach to diplomacy, integrating both traditional and digital methods to enhance its global influence. Traditional diplomacy continues to serve as the foundation of the UAE's foreign policy, enabling the country to engage in high-level negotiations, establish bilateral and multilateral agreements, and foster long-term diplomatic relationships (Al Suwaidi, 2021; El Amine, 2023). Through embassies, diplomatic missions, and official delegations, the UAE has successfully positioned itself as a key player in international politics, particularly within the Gulf region and broader Middle Eastern geopolitical landscape. As Al Shehhi and Islam (2024) emphasize, the UAE's strategic diplomatic engagements have significantly contributed to strengthening its alliances, fostering economic cooperation, and ensuring regional stability. Additionally, Al-OBAIDAN (2022) highlights that the UAE's use of traditional diplomacy is deeply intertwined with its economic and security interests, allowing it to navigate the complexities of international relations effectively. While traditional diplomatic channels remain essential for state-to-state engagement, they are increasingly being complemented by digital diplomacy to enhance the UAE's reach, agility, and global visibility.

Digital diplomacy has become an indispensable element of the UAE's foreign policy, particularly in the realm of public diplomacy, strategic communication, and global outreach. Al-Mansouri et al. (2021) and Alnuaimi and Yatiban (2024) illustrate how the UAE has effectively utilized digital platforms such as social media, government websites, and online campaigns to shape international perceptions and engage with foreign publics. This approach enables the UAE to project its national identity, promote cultural initiatives, and reinforce its position as a global leader in innovation and governance. Moreover, research by Mohamed (2024) and Kyriakidis, AlDulaimi, and Molaeb (2024) underscores the critical role of digital diplomacy in real-time communication and crisis management. Digital platforms allow the UAE to swiftly respond to geopolitical developments, counter misinformation, and present an official narrative that aligns with its broader foreign policy objectives. The use of social media by key UAE diplomats and government institutions has also facilitated direct engagement with international stakeholders, fostering transparency and credibility in diplomatic interactions (Antwi-Boateng & Al Mazrouei, 2021; Dahdal & Ghafar, 2025). This proactive digital engagement has helped the UAE strengthen its soft power by reaching diverse audiences, particularly younger, tech-savvy global populations who increasingly consume diplomatic content through online channels.

Cultural diplomacy, an essential pillar of the UAE's soft power strategy, has been significantly amplified by digital tools, reinforcing the country's image as a hub of tolerance, modernity, and innovation. Events such as Expo 2020 Dubai, which attracted global participation and showcased the UAE's achievements, have played a crucial role in positioning the country as a leader in cultural exchange and international collaboration (Krzyszowski, 2020; Engelland-Gay, 2023). Research by Jackson (2022) and AlKhalifa and Farello (2021) further illustrates how the UAE has leveraged sports diplomacy and cultural initiatives to shape global perceptions, particularly in areas such as football and the arts. Additionally, Bell (2022) and Zubair (2023) emphasize the role of media narratives and strategic communication in reinforcing these efforts, highlighting the UAE's investment in global media partnerships, international broadcasting networks, and digital storytelling to project a positive national image. By integrating both traditional and digital diplomacy, the UAE has created a compelling soft power narrative that extends beyond political and economic engagements to encompass cultural influence, social dialogue, and global connectivity. The country's emphasis on religious tolerance, innovation, and sustainability further enhances its reputation as a progressive and forward-thinking nation (Baycar & Rakipoglu, 2022; Johar et al., 2025).

Despite the UAE's success in merging traditional and digital diplomacy, the increasing reliance on digital tools necessitates careful consideration of information security, data governance, and the long-term sustainability of digital diplomatic initiatives. Studies by Warraich et al. (2023) and Vetter (n.d.) suggest that while digital diplomacy provides immediate visibility and engagement, its effectiveness in building lasting diplomatic relationships requires further exploration. Unlike traditional diplomacy, which fosters long-term alliances through formal agreements and structured negotiations, digital

diplomacy operates in a rapidly evolving information landscape, where narratives can be influenced by external factors such as misinformation, cyber threats, and competing media discourses (Nechad, El Labbar, & Rhalma, 2024). The UAE's ability to maintain message consistency across traditional and digital platforms is crucial in ensuring credibility and strategic alignment in its diplomatic communications (Tahat et al., 2023; Tayeb Ahmed, 2024). Furthermore, the rise of artificial intelligence, data analytics, and algorithm-driven content distribution presents both opportunities and challenges for digital diplomacy, requiring adaptive strategies that balance innovation with diplomatic discretion (Noroozi & Akbari, 2024; Ordoñez de Pablos, 2024). As the UAE continues to navigate the evolving diplomatic landscape, the integration of traditional and digital diplomacy must remain dynamic, ensuring that technological advancements are leveraged effectively while maintaining the core principles of state-driven foreign policy and international cooperation.

2.1 Gap within the Literature

Despite the growing body of research on digital and traditional diplomacy in the UAE and their role in soft power strategies, several significant gaps remain in the literature. One of the most evident gaps is the lack of longitudinal studies examining the long-term impact of digital diplomacy on the UAE's international influence. While numerous studies, such as those by Al-Mansouri et al. (2021) and Alnuaimi & Yatiban (2024), analyze short-term digital diplomacy initiatives, there is limited empirical evidence assessing whether these efforts lead to sustained soft power advantages. The evolving nature of global diplomacy necessitates an understanding of whether the UAE's digital diplomacy translates into long-term foreign policy benefits, such as stronger international alliances, improved perceptions among global audiences, and lasting diplomatic engagements. Future research should explore how digital diplomacy contributes to the UAE's strategic objectives over extended periods and whether it effectively reinforces traditional diplomatic mechanisms in the long run.

Another critical gap pertains to the intersection of digital diplomacy and cybersecurity, a rapidly growing concern in international relations. While scholars such as Sebire et al. (2025) and Nechad et al. (2024) acknowledge the increasing role of digital tools in diplomatic engagement, limited research addresses the vulnerabilities associated with cyber threats, misinformation, and digital propaganda in the UAE's diplomatic strategies. As nations increasingly rely on digital platforms for public diplomacy, the risk of cyberattacks, data breaches, and the spread of misleading narratives becomes more pronounced. The existing literature has yet to provide comprehensive frameworks for assessing the UAE's resilience against such challenges or the strategies employed to counteract digital disinformation campaigns that could undermine its diplomatic efforts. Understanding how the UAE navigates cybersecurity risks in its digital diplomacy and how it mitigates the spread of false information remains an important area for future exploration.

Furthermore, there is a noticeable gap in comparative research that evaluates the UAE's integration of traditional and digital diplomacy in relation to other regional or global actors. Studies such as those by Al Suwaidi (2021) and El Amine (2023) provide valuable insights into the UAE's diplomatic strategies, but there is limited comparative analysis assessing whether its approach to soft power is more or less effective than those of other Gulf nations or major international players. Comparative studies could reveal best practices, highlight unique strengths and weaknesses in the UAE's diplomatic model, and provide recommendations for optimizing soft power strategies. Additionally, while scholars like Antwi-Boateng & Al Mazrouei (2021) discuss the need for digital diplomacy to complement traditional diplomatic efforts, there remains a lack of empirical research on how the UAE ensures message consistency, credibility, and strategic alignment across both domains. Investigating the challenges and opportunities associated with synchronizing these two forms of diplomacy would offer deeper insights into their interplay and overall effectiveness.

An emerging yet underexplored area in the literature is the role of artificial intelligence (AI) and big data analytics in shaping the UAE's digital diplomacy strategies. Research by Mohamed (2024) and Tayeb Ahmed (2024) highlights the significance of media narratives in soft power projection, but there is little academic work on how AI-driven tools, such as predictive analytics and sentiment

analysis, influence the UAE's diplomatic decision-making. Given the rapid advancements in AI technology, future studies should investigate how data-driven diplomacy enhances engagement with international audiences, counteracts misinformation, and refines public diplomacy strategies. Additionally, the potential ethical and geopolitical implications of AI-powered digital diplomacy remain largely unexplored, raising questions about transparency, algorithmic bias, and the role of automation in shaping global perceptions. Addressing these gaps is crucial for advancing the academic discourse on digital and traditional diplomacy, offering policymakers more informed strategies to enhance the UAE's global influence.

3. Conclusion

The systematic literature review highlights the UAE's strategic integration of both traditional and digital diplomacy as essential components of its soft power strategy. Traditional diplomacy remains a cornerstone of the country's foreign policy, fostering international alliances, economic partnerships, and cultural exchanges through official state engagements and multilateral cooperation. Simultaneously, digital diplomacy has emerged as a transformative tool, enabling the UAE to extend its influence beyond conventional diplomatic channels. Through the use of social media, online platforms, and digital campaigns, the UAE has successfully projected its national image, promoted cultural initiatives, and engaged with global audiences in real time. While both approaches have demonstrated effectiveness in enhancing the UAE's international standing, the literature reveals challenges such as the risks of misinformation, cybersecurity threats, and the need for consistent messaging between digital and traditional diplomatic efforts. Moreover, gaps in the existing research underscore the necessity for further empirical analysis to assess the long-term sustainability and impact of digital diplomacy on the UAE's soft power objectives.

This study contributes to the broader discourse on diplomacy and soft power by synthesizing current research and identifying critical areas for future exploration. Understanding the interplay between traditional and digital diplomacy is crucial for policymakers, diplomats, and scholars seeking to navigate the evolving landscape of international relations. As global communication continues to be reshaped by technological advancements, future research should focus on evaluating the effectiveness of digital diplomacy in crisis management, its role in countering misinformation, and its impact on shaping public perception over extended periods. Additionally, comparative studies across different geopolitical contexts could provide deeper insights into best practices and potential areas of improvement. By addressing these gaps, future research can offer more comprehensive strategies for optimizing digital and traditional diplomatic efforts, ultimately strengthening the UAE's position as a global leader in soft power diplomacy.

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