CONCEPT

Digital and Public Diplomacy: Soft Power, Social Media Statecraft and Foreign Audience Engagement

21 – 25 December 2026
Barcelona - Eixample district four-star



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Introduction:

Digital diplomacy now decides how foreign publics perceive an institution long before any official meets them: a single post can start an online row, rival narratives fill silence within hours and campaigns are judged by follower counts instead of shifts in attitude. This Core Concept course equips diplomats, government communicators and international relations staff to plan public diplomacy that listens before it speaks, builds soft power through culture and exchange, runs social media statecraft, counters disinformation and proves impact. Each participant produces a Digital Public Diplomacy Campaign Plan for a case institution.

Course Objectives:

- Apply the soft power sources model and the five public diplomacy components to diagnose how foreign publics currently perceive an institution
- Design an audience listening system that segments foreign publics and tracks sentiment, narratives and influential voices across platforms
- Plan cultural, educational and exchange programmes and an institution or place brand proposition that support stated foreign policy aims
- Write strategic narratives, message houses and platform-specific content calendars for official social media accounts of ministries, missions and envoys
- Respond to disinformation, hostile campaigns and online diplomatic rows using prebunking, debunking and escalation protocols
- Set outcome indicators and an evaluation framework that link digital engagement to changes in foreign audience attitudes and behaviour

Target Audience:

- Mission and embassy staff who manage press, culture and outreach portfolios with host-country publics
- Government communication managers who run official social media accounts for ministries and agencies with international mandates
- International relations managers who coordinate cooperation programmes and represent their institution abroad
- Cultural relations and educational exchange managers who run scholarships, festivals and visitor programmes for foreign audiences
- Investment, tourism and place promotion managers who shape the external image of a city, sector or institution
- Strategic communication and media monitoring leads who track foreign coverage and online narratives

Course Outline:

Day 1: Public Diplomacy Foundations and Soft Power Diagnosis

- Public Diplomacy Versus Traditional Diplomacy: Government-to-Public and Multi-Actor Engagement
- Soft Power Sources Model: Culture, Political Values and Foreign Policy Legitimacy
- Five Public Diplomacy Components: Listening, Advocacy, Cultural, Exchange and International Broadcasting
- Composite Soft Power Indices at Overview: Pillars, Indicators and Limitations
- Soft Power Baseline Audit of a Case Institution's External Image

Day 2: Audience Listening, Cultural Exchange and Place Branding Models

- Foreign Audience Segmentation Grid: Elites, Opinion Formers, Diaspora, Youth and Mass Publics
- Social Listening Set-Up: Keyword Taxonomy, Sentiment Coding and Narrative Tracking
- Cultural and Educational Exchange Programme Logic Model: Scholarships, Festivals and Visitor Schemes
- Institution and Place Brand Proposition: Identity, Reputation Drivers and Proof Points
- Stakeholder and Partner Mapping for Co-Delivered Public Diplomacy Initiatives

Day 3: Social Media Statecraft and Strategic Narrative Design

- Official Account Architecture for Ministries, Missions and Envoys: Roles, Voice and Clearance Rules
- Strategic Narrative Canvas: System, Identity and Issue Narratives
- Message House and Platform-Specific Content Calendar for Foreign Publics
- Multilingual and Visual Content Adaptation: Video, Infographics and Live Formats
- Influencer and Network Engagement: Supernode Mapping, Validators and Digital Diaspora

Day 4: Disinformation, Online Crises and Reputation Risk

- Disinformation Anatomy: Actors, Tactics, Amplification Networks and Coordinated Inauthentic Behaviour
- Prebunking, Debunking and Counter-Narrative Response Decision Tree
- Online Diplomatic Row Escalation Protocol: Holding Lines, Sign-Off Chain and De-Escalation
- Digital Reputation Risk Register and Account Security Controls
- Public Diplomacy Evaluation Framework: Reach, Engagement, Attitude Shift and Policy Outcome Indicators

Day 5: Case Workshop: Digital Public Diplomacy Campaign Plan

- Case Institution Briefing Pack: Foreign Policy Aims, Target Publics and Current Perception Data
- Campaign Plan Drafting: Objectives, Audience Segments, Narrative and Channel Mix
- Campaign Plan Drafting: Cultural Activation, Influencer Partnerships and Content Calendar
- Crisis Annex and Measurement Dashboard Build for the Campaign Plan
- Campaign Plan Defence Before a Mock Ministerial Review Panel with Peer Challenge

Skills You Will Gain:

- Soft Power Diagnosis
- Foreign Audience Segmentation
- Social Listening Analysis
- Place Brand Positioning
- Strategic Narrative Design
- Official Social Media Management
- Counter-Disinformation Response
- Public Diplomacy Evaluation

Why Attend This Course:

- Leave with a Digital Public Diplomacy Campaign Plan, including a crisis annex and measurement dashboard, built on a case institution
- Replace follower counts with indicators that show whether foreign audience attitudes actually moved
- Rehearse the first hours of an online diplomatic row and a disinformation surge before facing one on an official account
- Compare approaches with mission, ministry, cultural relations and place promotion peers from several institutions and sectors

Conclusion:

Public diplomacy works when an institution listens to foreign publics, speaks through credible culture, exchange and brand assets, and treats each official post as a statement of policy. This course moves from soft power diagnosis and the components of public diplomacy, through audience listening, exchange programmes and place branding, to social media statecraft and narrative design, then to disinformation, online rows and evaluation. The final day produces a Digital Public Diplomacy Campaign Plan ready to adapt to each participant's own institution and target publics.