

# **The UAE Public Diplomacy Tools**

## **"Tradition and Modernity Hand in Hand"**

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### **Abstract:**

Public diplomacy is vital in shaping a country's image and reputation, aiming to engage with foreign publics and gain international support. This study examines the public diplomacy tools employed by the UAE from a communication and public relations perspective. It highlights the public diplomacy tools of a nation that has attracted over 200 nationalities and provides insights from regions where public diplomacy research has yet to reach a broader audience. Golan's Integrated Public Diplomacy Model is used as a theoretical framework, which includes the mediated, nation branding, and relational levels. The qualitative study is based on in-depth interviews conducted between December 2023 and May 2024, involving 11 participants from state and non-state actors. The findings reveal that the UAE's public diplomacy tools align with Golan's model, particularly at the relational level, which involves face-to-face communication, cultural exchanges, and humanitarian initiatives. Its unique tools, such as cultural exchange, football investment, and souvenirs, reflect Emirati diplomacy and culture.

### **Key Words:**

public diplomacy, integrated public diplomacy model, public diplomacy tools, culture, UAE

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## أدوات الدبلوماسية العامة في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة

### "التقليد والحداثة جنبًا إلى جنب"

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#### ملخص الدراسة:

تلعب الدبلوماسية العامة دورًا حيويًا في تشكيل صورة الدول وسمعتها، وتهدف إلى التواصل مع الجمهور الأجنبي وكسب الدعم الدولي. تستكشف هذه الدراسة أدوات الدبلوماسية العامة التي تستخدمها دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة من منظور الاتصال والعلاقات العامة. كما تسلط الضوء على دولة نجحت في جذب أكثر من ٢٠٠ جنسية، وتقدم رؤى من مناطق لم يصل إليها البحث في مجال الدبلوماسية العامة بشكل واسع. تستخدم هذه الدراسة نموذج جولان المتكامل للدبلوماسية العامة كإطار نظري، والذي يشمل المستويات الثلاثة: المستوى الوسيط، وبناء الصورة الوطنية والسمعة، والمستوى العلائقي. وتعتمد هذه الدراسة النوعية على مقابلات معمقة أجريت بين ديسمبر ٢٠٢٣ ومايو ٢٠٢٤، مع ١١ مشاركًا من الجهات الفاعلة الحكومية وغير الحكومية. وتظهر النتائج أن أدوات الدبلوماسية العامة لدولة الإمارات تتماشى مع نموذج جولان، لا سيما في المستوى العلائقي والذي يتضمن التواصل المباشر والتبادل الثقافي والمبادرات الإنسانية. كما أنها تستخدم أدوات فريدة من نوعها كالتبادل الثقافي والاستثمار في كرة القدم والهدايا التذكارية التي تعكس الدبلوماسية والثقافة الإماراتية.

#### الكلمات الدالة:

الدبلوماسية العامة، نموذج الدبلوماسية العامة المتكامل، أدوات الدبلوماسية العامة، الثقافة، الهدايا التذكارية، الإمارات العربية المتحدة

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## Introduction

Public diplomacy plays a crucial role in enabling countries to communicate effectively with foreign publics, involving state actors and non-state entities. Unlike traditional diplomacy, which is confined to official representatives, public diplomacy opens communication channels that promote understanding, influence perceptions, and build long-term relationships through strategic communication programs (Signitzer & Coombs, 1992; Anholt, 2015).

The practice of public diplomacy by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is deeply rooted in the vision and values of Sheikh Zayed, the nation's founder, emphasizing peace, stability, tolerance, and respect for diversity. This strategic approach has enabled the UAE to attract over 200 nationalities, fostering peaceful coexistence and mutual respect. The success of the UAE's public diplomacy efforts is reflected in its prominent global rankings. For example, in 2020, the Global Soft Power Index ranked the UAE first in the region and 18th internationally (Nusseibeh, 2025). Additionally, in 2022, the UAE emerged as the top destination where Arab youth most desired to live (Mansoor, 2022). Moreover, the UAE passport achieved the distinction of being the most powerful in the world, according to the Passport Index of 2023 ("United Arab Emirates Passport Dashboard," 2025). Such accomplishments highlight the effectiveness of the UAE's distinctive public diplomacy approach.

While many studies have explored public diplomacy from theoretical perspectives, relatively few have examined it through the lens of communication and public relations (Signitzer & Coombs, 1992; Yun & Toth, 2009; Fitzpatrick et al., 2013; Grigorescu & Fawaz, 2014; Golan & Yang, 2015; Vanc & Fitzpatrick, 2016). In the UAE context, most research has focused on foreign policy, soft power, nation branding, trade attraction, and innovation (Abdulla, 2014; Zeineddine, 2017; Guéraiche, 2019; Alsuwaidi, 2021; Denwood, 2022; Albayrakoğlu, 2023). This gap in the literature highlights the need to examine the UAE's public diplomacy tools from a communication and public relations perspective.

This study aims to investigate the public diplomacy tools employed by the UAE to communicate with foreign publics and evaluate their alignment with the Integrated Approach to Public Diplomacy. Additionally, it seeks to identify the unique aspects of the UAE's public diplomacy tools that contribute to its remarkable achievements on the global stage.

The theoretical framework guiding this study is Golan's Integrated Approach of Public Diplomacy (2013), which consists of three interrelated levels: mediated public diplomacy, nation branding and country reputation, and relational public diplomacy. By applying this model, the study seeks to address the following research questions: Q1. How do the UAE's public diplomacy tools align with the Integrated Public Diplomacy model? Q2. What unique public diplomacy tools does the UAE employ?

## **Literature Review**

### **Public Diplomacy**

Many researches illustrated the concept of public diplomacy and clarified its importance for governments to communicate with their foreign public (Signitzer & Coombs, 1992; Yun & Toth, 2009; Grigorescu & Fawaz, 2014; Anholt, 2015; Hunt, 2016).

Hunt (2016) stated that Gullion established the Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy in 1965, and his institution defined the concept of public diplomacy as follows;

Public diplomacy... deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. It encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries, the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is communication, as diplomats and foreign correspondents, and the process of intercultural communications (pp. 18-19).

Traditional public diplomacy is a one-way transmission of information or political information for advocacy to foreign publics to influence their behavior and the foreign government's behavior. On the other hand, contemporary public diplomacy emphasizes the role of the genuine actors, the migrants, since they are exposed to the country in destination soft power. Thus, contemporary public diplomacy confirms the importance of two-way information exchange, soft power, and mutual understanding in attracting the foreign public (Anholt, 2015). Thus, public diplomacy uses communication programs to change the attitudes of the foreign public and influence them to influence the foreign government. In addition, public diplomacy came as a shift from traditional diplomacy, which emphasizes government-to-government communication, to public diplomacy, which emphasizes direct and indirect participation of government, and non-government such as groups and individuals in the foreign policy decisions

of a government. This shift toward public diplomacy resulted from the emergence of communication technologies and public participation in foreign affairs (Signitzer & Coombs, 1992). Moreover, public diplomacy is considered as a government support of exchanging ideas and information on culture and education toward foreign audiences to protect the state's image and its economic, cultural, or linguistic interests (Grigorescu & Fawaz 2014).

Deibel & Roberts (1976) states that public diplomacy is used in two ways. First, public diplomacy is used as political information by explaining government policies and defending them to foreign audiences. Second, public diplomacy is used as cultural communication by portraying the national society to foreign audiences. Political communication occurs by the political section of the foreign ministry\embassy. In comparison, cultural communication is deployed to a cultural section of the country's foreign ministry, cultural institute abroad, or semi-autonomous body like the German Goethe Institute or the British Council. Cultural communication creates mutual understanding between the country and its foreign citizens. Cultural communication has two parts: cultural diplomacy and cultural relations. Cultural diplomacy means cultural agreements and conveying a favorable image of the country's image to facilitate diplomatic activities. In contrast, cultural relations seek cultural cooperation for mutual benefit between national societies. Therefore, it portrays an honest image of a country rather than a beautified one.

### **Public Diplomacy and Public Relations**

Many researchers found similarities between public diplomacy and public relations (Signitzer & Coombs, 1992; Fitzpatrick et al., 2013; Golan & Yang, 2015; Vanc & Fitzpatrick, 2016). In this vein, Signitzer & Coombs (1992) explained that public diplomacy uses public relations activities and tools to achieve its objectives, such as self-portrayal, information exchange, image building, and prejudice reduction. Also, they clarified the similarities between public relations and public diplomacy. Public relations seeks to build relations with the public, and technologies encourage organizations to build relations with the international public. Moreover, public diplomacy and public relations are interrelated, as seen in the four models of Peisert for cultural communication and the four models of public relations for Grunig and Hunt for public relations.

The one-way transmission of one's own culture abroad model is the same as the press agency model of PR. The self-portrayal model is the same as the public information model of PR. Peisert's information model is equal to the two-way asymmetric PR model. Finally, Peisert's exchange and cooperation model is similar to the two-way symmetric PR model (Signitzer & Coombs, 1992).

Public diplomacy is considered as a governmental function of public relations, and its objectives are intertwined with public relations. However, the critical difference between these disciplines is that public relations is a management function that builds and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between the organizations and their public for the long-term end of philanthropy or consumerism. In contrast, public diplomacy aims to gain international support for a nation's foreign policy (Golan & Yang, 2015).

Furthermore, Fitzpatrick et al. (2013) examined the similarities and differences between public relations and public diplomacy by conducting quantitative research. Regarding the similarities, they found that both disciplines require communication, management, multicultural/global knowledge, cross-cultural understanding, and foreign language skills. On the other hand, public diplomacy sees research and evaluation skills as less important than public relations. In addition, US diplomats do not find training in communication industries such as public relations, journalism, or advertising important. In terms of practices, there are similarities between public diplomacy practices and the four models of public relations. Rational activities like educational exchanges and program visitors are considered the most important public diplomacy practices. These rational activities represent a two-way symmetrical public relations model, which is the best practice for PR. While the cultural, informational, influential, and political practices for public diplomacy are seen as a two-way asymmetrical model in public relations that aims to influence public debates and opinion. Moreover, propaganda practices are seen as an effective lease activity for both public diplomacy and public relations and are viewed as press agency for PR.

Public relations enhance the understanding of public diplomacy in terms of management, relationship building, and the public (Khakimova, 2013). Rana (2011) referred to the definition of public diplomacy from public relations perspective as;

Activities through which governments, working with non- state agencies, reach out to publics and nonofficial actors abroad, covering inter alia information, culture, education, and the country image. PD also includes the activities of the government directed at home publics, concerning foreign affairs and the image of its diplomatic network (pp. 77 – 78).

Regarding the contribution of public relations scholars to public diplomacy research, Vanc & Fitzpatrick (2016) examined the works of public relations scholars between 1990 to 2014. The results indicated that PR scholars have been interested in public diplomacy research since 2003 as they can explain the process of building relations between nations and foreign publics. Also, the researchers found a huge opportunity for public relations scholars to advance their theoretical and practical understanding of public diplomacy. In the same vein, the results emphasized the need for more practical research to explain how diplomatic actors can build and maintain relationships with foreigners and the role of PR in enhancing this process. In addition, it demonstrated the similarities in the conceptual and practical facets of the two fields.

### **Tools of Public Diplomacy**

Public diplomacy involves two approaches: tough-minded and tender-minded. The tough-minded approach focuses on persuasion and propaganda, prioritizing hard political information and fast media like radio, TV, and newspapers. In contrast, the tender-minded approach aims for mutual understanding through cultural programs, promoting truth and veracity rather than propaganda. It emphasizes cultural functions over hard political information, utilizing slow media such as artistic exchanges, films, language instruction, and exhibitions to achieve long-term national objectives (Signitzer & Coombs, 1992).

In the same manner, Hunt (2016) mentions ten tools for using public diplomacy: cultural and educational exchange, training, seminars and conferences, exhibitions, missions, sponsored visits, broadcasting, speeches, managing relations with the media, and the use of the Internet, social media, and mobile phones.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study draws on the integrated public diplomacy model that provides three levels of engagement: mediated level, nation brand and country reputation level, and relational level. Integrating these three levels creates a positive long-term engagement outcome between the government and the foreign public (Golan, 2013; Golan, 2015; Golan & Yang, 2015).

The mediated level is a short to medium-term perspective with a country's interest in shaping and influencing its frames in global media news. The country aims to promote its agenda and frames to impact foreign audiences' opinions through mass media and social media. The country focuses on foreign mass media outlets since the foreign public gets information about other nations from mass media outlets. Therefore, many countries worldwide allocate specific amounts of money for international broadcasting channels.

Nation brand and country reputation level is a medium to long-term perspective. It is related to country's efforts in establishing and promoting its national brand information subsidies and speeches as one-way communication. Thus, the use of new media support countries in creating relationship communication with foreign audiences which enhances the country's efforts in building its brand and managing its perception. Also, the competitive identity presented by Anholt helps nations present themselves holistically to other nations by considering how the image of the country developed. This level requires a successful level of mediated public diplomacy to enhance a successful effort to brand the nation and country's reputation.

The relational level is a long-term perspective that focuses on the efforts of the government, corporations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in managing, building, and maintaining relationships with foreign publics. It aims to maintain the mutual relationship between the country and the foreign public through soft power programs such as development and exchange programs and aids. The success of this long-term relationship is based on the success of the organization, corporate, or NGOs in communicating the culture, values, and policies to the target audiences.

### **Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative research method, to identify the UAE's public diplomacy tools for communicating with its foreign public. Qualitative research explores participants' meanings in natural settings through observation, interviews, and case studies (Arghode, 2012). This study uses in-depth interviews to address the research questions. In-depth interviews provide detailed insights into participants' perspectives and allow interviewers to observe nonverbal responses. They also allow interviewers to adapt questions based on respondents' answers (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011).



### **Population and Sample**

The study targets state and non-state actors involved in UAE's public diplomacy, including government, private, NGOs, and individuals. Snowball sampling recruited 11 participants: five state actors (from government and private sectors) and six non-state actors (NGO members, scholars, researchers, etc.). This sampling method is effective when participants are difficult to access or maintain anonymity (Daymon & Holloway, 2010). The researcher contacted initial participants who recommended others, continuing the chain.

### **Procedure**

Participant selection was guided by Golan's integrated public diplomacy approach (2013) to evaluate its application in UAE's public diplomacy. Participants were classified into five state actors and six non-state actors. State actors were selected based on their roles in government and private sectors related to public diplomacy, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UAE diplomats, Sharjah Institute for Heritage, Barjeel Art Foundation, and political media persons. Non-state actors included members of NGOs and experts on UAE's public diplomacy, such as the UNESCO Intangible Heritage Committee, professors, researchers, and Emirati students who studied abroad.

Five interviews were conducted in person, four online (via MS Teams and Zoom), one by phone, and one by email. All participants consented to recordings and signed consent forms. The interviews lasted between 1.5 to 2.5 hours, conducted over six months from December 2023 to May 2024. The recorded interviews were transcribed and translated from Arabic into English for analysis.

Thematic analysis was applied to the interviews, involving reading the data, coding, deriving themes, and crafting a narrative (Delve, 2020). The process includes five steps: compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding the data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

### **Ethical Considerations**

This research adhered to ethical standards at all stages: before conducting the study, during data collection, and throughout analysis, reporting, sharing, and storing data (Creswell, 2014). Approval was obtained from the University of Sharjah (UOS) by completing the research ethics application form for projects involving human subjects, and the interview guide was prepared in line with ethical guidelines.

At the start of the research, rapport was established with participants, ensuring their autonomy and voluntary participation. Informed consent was obtained, clarifying that this is non-paid research. During data collection, ethical standards were upheld by ensuring interview questions were non-sensitive and non-harmful. Confidentiality was ensured, with responses used only for research purposes, and participants were treated equally. They were informed of their right to withdraw from the study within one month of participation by notifying the researcher via email.

Objectivity in data analysis was maintained by disclosing all themes identified. Reporting was conducted honestly, avoiding biased language, with findings kept confidential. Interview recordings will be stored securely for five years, and participants were informed of potential publication in relevant scientific journals.

### Findings

State and non-state actors confirmed the UAE's use of various public diplomacy tools, including direct face-to-face communication, media, education, culture and art, investing in football and film, and souvenirs (See Table 1).

**Table1**

***UAE's Public Diplomacy Tools***

Direct Face-to-Face Communication	Media	Education	Culture and Art	Sport: Football	Souvenirs
Official and Friendly Visits	Traditional Media	Language Acquisition	Cultural Exchange and Cultural Festivals		Traditional and Symbolic Gifts
Exhibitions and Conferences	New Media	Research	Artistic Exhibitions and Achievements		Heritage and Architectural Souvenirs
		Training and Workshops			Artistic and Cultural Gifts
					Food and Sensory Gifts

As seen in the above table, the UAE uses different public diplomacy tools. In this vein, NSA2 stated, “All these means played an important role in communication at the national, regional and global levels, with each means varying in importance.” SA1 noted that this multi-channel approach helps achieve political objectives. NSA4 highlighted the role of diplomatic networks, investment funds, and humanitarian efforts like the Red Crescent. SA4 emphasized cultural, sports, economic events, and academic exchanges. While actors acknowledged these tools, their significance and application in the UAE varied.

### **Direct Face-to-Face Communication**

The UAE recognized the significance of direct face-to-face communication before the union and employed it as a public diplomacy tool. It has continued to do so after the union to the present day, in various forms such as official visits, friendly visits, and the launching of exhibitions and conferences.

NSA2 highlighted that before the UAE’s union, communication relied on personal connections and trusted delegates delivering messages verbally or in writing. Significant issues were resolved through direct meetings between leaders. With modernization, the UAE adopted technologies, media, and transportation networks, becoming a communication leader. However, direct communication remained central to foreign policy. NSA2 said,

“The leadership of the state was aware that direct meetings between heads of state and repeated delegations to establish joint friendship committees formed the personality of Sheikh Zayed showing how his personal approach to diplomacy earned him deep international respect.”

### ***Official and Friendly Visits***

NSA4 emphasized the importance of international visits, especially official ones, stating that visits are very important, particularly when they are official. They highlighted that the UAE’s diplomacy extends beyond state visits, with figures like Amal Al Qubaisi and Dr. Ali Al Nuaimi enhancing its global presence. NSA4 noted that credibility is gained through actions, models, behavior, and actions, but some friendships must be built through personal communication. UAE leaders, such as Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed and Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed, foster personal connections through informal gatherings like the annual Bani Yas meeting, balancing friendship and formal diplomacy.

### ***Exhibitions and Conferences***

Exhibitions are essential to the UAE's public diplomacy. They are considered very important, effective, and influential tools of the UAE's public diplomacy, with Dubai recognized as the capital of exhibitions in the entire Arab world. Events like GITEX and Expo 2020 attract millions of visitors, promoting UAE's innovation and showcasing Emirati distinction, particularly in Dubai.

NSA3 emphasized the UAE's credibility, stating,

**“Expo 2020 Dubai and COP 28 brought together over 175 countries and resulted in major agreements on climate and sustainability.”**

Conferences play a key role in knowledge exchange and collaboration. As noted by NSA4, In the UAE, conferences are held almost daily in cities like Abu Dhabi, Dubai, or Sharjah, attracting hundreds of attendees. Additionally, UAE-hosted conferences contribute to academic engagement, as demonstrated by a conference that produced a bilingual book on Gulf music.

### **Media**

**The UAE uses both traditional media (radio, newspapers, magazines, and television) and new media (the internet and social media) for its public diplomacy, as explained below.**

#### ***Traditional Media***

The UAE has utilized radio, newspapers, magazines, and television. NSA2 highlighted radio's significant role during the country's establishment, mentioning that it was audible to some extent in the Arab regional context. However, NSA4 acknowledged its role but considered it less important today. Television and newspapers have also become less relevant, as noted by SA2 and NSA4.

#### ***NewMedia***

Regarding the new media, the UAE's leadership actively uses social media for communication and influence. NSA5 emphasized that social media has become a fundamental tool with a significant and widespread impact. SA1 highlighted Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid's popularity, noting that he is one of the most followed leaders in the world. NSA1 also mentioned Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed's direct engagement on social media, explaining that if someone in a certain country requests treatment, Sheikh Abdullah provides

direct guidance. NSA4 acknowledged the shift to digital communication, saying,

**“Our world is moving towards digitization, and the virtual world has become as important as the real world.”**

NSA4 confirmed that the UAE embassies’ online presence and international helplines enhance accessibility. The UAE continues investing in digital platforms like WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, and artificial intelligence to maintain leadership in the digital sphere.

### **Education**

The UAE uses education as a public diplomacy tool, language acquisition, research, and training. These efforts strengthen cultural understanding and global influence.

#### ***Language Acquisition***

Language plays a critical role in public diplomacy. NSA4 praised the UAE’s efforts to develop, strengthen, and promote the Arabic language, considering these efforts a valuable asset. SA2 noted its importance in building connections:

**“When people of different nationalities are amazed when an Emirati speaks his language... affection and love increase for the whole country.”**

### **Research**

The UAE promotes cooperation through institutions such as the Sheikh Zayed Center and Trends Research, which focus on establishing mutual agreements and addressing intellectual orientations. The Mohammed Bin Zayed University is also dedicated to studies and research in peace and humanitarian work, further supporting the UAE's collaborative efforts.

#### ***Training and Workshops***

NSA4 emphasized the need for skilled representatives who can effectively speak on behalf of the UAE. SA2 pointed out that the UAE’s educational strategy aims to enhance its global reputation by focusing on multilingualism, research, and developing well-trained representatives.

### **Culture and Art**

The UAE’s embassies and consulates actively promote cultural diplomacy. SA1 stressed,

**“Activating the embassies in producing exhibitions, seminars, and invitations is very important.”**

SA3 and SA5 explained that embassies engage with the press, cultural events, and diplomatic efforts while consulates handle localized affairs. SA4 highlighted the role of cultural diplomacy in fostering cooperation on global issues like climate change and extremism.

***Cultural Exchange and Cultural Festivals***

Cultural exchange and cultural festivals are vital in the UAE’s public diplomacy efforts. NSA4 highlighted the value of partnerships like the Louvre Abu Dhabi and the Guggenheim Museum, which present the UAE as a nation promoting culture rather than solely relying on its oil wealth. Additionally, NSA6 emphasized the importance of cultural festivals as a form of open diplomacy, where visitors experience Emirati culture firsthand, enhancing engagement and understanding.

***Artistic Exhibitions and Achievements***

Art exhibitions, particularly those involving youth, are considered essential and increasingly important, and more intensive efforts are needed in this area. SA1 highlighted the UAE’s global art presence, noting that embassies showcase images of Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Emirati art. However, NSA4 acknowledged that while art exhibitions are important, they remain underdeveloped, a concern echoed by SA2, who noted limited progress in this area.

**Sports: Football**

The UAE strategically invests in football and film as part of its diplomatic and soft power efforts. NSA1 highlighted Sheikh Mansour’s investment in Manchester City, emphasizing that this investment in football and entertainment aims to build a substantial fan base contributing to the UAE’s diplomacy.

**Souvenirs**

Souvenirs have been a longstanding part of the UAE’s diplomatic efforts, symbolizing the country’s heritage, culture, and artistry. Over time, these gifts have evolved from traditional items to more artistic and meaningful expressions.

The UAE’s souvenir strategy can be divided into four main themes: **traditional and symbolic gifts, heritage and architectural souvenirs, artistic and cultural gifts, and food and sensory gifts.**

### ***Traditional and Symbolic Gifts***

The UAE has a long-standing tradition of presenting gifts such as falcons, horses, swords, and dolls in national attire to visiting heads of state, symbolizing its cultural heritage. NSA4 highlighted that these traditional and symbolic gifts, including horses, falcons, and boats, have been commonly offered. Falcons, in particular, remain a powerful symbol, often gifted by Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed to world leaders. Additionally, Sharjah promotes local craftsmanship by distributing handmade dolls and Farokha, a scented accessory, with NSA5 noting that over 700 dolls were distributed for free during an event in Athens.

### ***Heritage and Architectural Souvenirs***

Another category of gifts highlights the UAE's architectural and maritime heritage through models of iconic structures such as the Burj Khalifa, Barjeel, and traditional boats. NSA5 indicated that Sharjah has shifted away from gifting daggers and instead offers artistic gifts, following Sheikh Sultan's preference for paintings of Arabic calligraphy and models of a traditional ship called Al Baghla.

### ***Artistic and Cultural Gifts***

The UAE increasingly presents creative artwork by Emirati artists as gifts, moving away from traditional offerings. According to NSA4, these new gifts hold moral rather than financial value, promoting Emirati artists like Abdul Qader Al Rais and Najat Makki on a global scale.

### ***Food and Sensory Gifts***

Food items such as dates, Bathitha, and Arabic coffee are commonly presented as gifts, highlighting the UAE's rich coffee traditions. NSA5 emphasized that coffee is a cultural ambassador, representing the original Arabic coffee distinct from Turkish coffee. Additionally, henna and scented items like the Farokha enhance cultural connections.

### **Discussion**

This discussion section explores how the UAE's public diplomacy tools align with Golan's Integrated Public Diplomacy Model and highlights the unique tools employed by the UAE.

### **The Alignment of the UAE's Public Diplomacy Tools with the Integrated Public Diplomacy Model**

The public diplomacy tools employed by the UAE align well with Golan's Integrated Public Diplomacy Model, which consists of three levels: the mediated level, the nation brand and country reputation level, and the relational level. Below is an analysis of how the UAE's public diplomacy efforts fit within this framework.

The results indicated that the UAE has made efforts at the mediated level, focusing on shaping and influencing a country's image through global media and social media. However, it does not heavily rely on this approach compared to other aspects of its public diplomacy. The UAE has used media and international advertising to project its image to foreign audiences. This aligns with the definition of public diplomacy as the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies, which involves communication between diplomats, foreign correspondents, and the public (Hunt, 2016).

One of the key aspects of the UAE's mediated public diplomacy is its presence in international media. Social media has emerged as the dominant medium for the UAE's international communication strategy. Influential Emirati figures, including government leaders, often utilize social media platforms to reach global audiences, with their tweets and posts sometimes having a greater impact than traditional news agencies, as confirmed by SA2 and NSA4.

The UAE also actively leverages new media and digital diplomacy to enhance its international image. NSA5 reinforced this by stating,

"Social media is the basis. This is what has started to have a terrible impact."

Additionally, SA1 emphasized the unique influence of the UAE's leadership in the digital space, noting that His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid is one of the most followed leaders in the world. Furthermore, NSA1 pointed out that Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed is personally active on social media, engaging directly with issues related to the country:

"For example, if someone in a certain country requests treatment, Sheikh Abdullah directs directly."

UAE embassies have also embraced digital diplomacy, with NSA1 highlighting their active presence on social media, such as the UAE embassy accounts in Belgium, Russia, London, and the U.S.

Another significant tool, as highlighted by NSA5, is international advertising. The UAE has invested heavily in promoting its global image



through traditional advertising campaigns in key locations such as Germany and Las Vegas. NSA5 mentioned seeing “Dubai Dubai Dubai” plastered across staircases in Germany, along with images of Burj Khalifa and Burj Al Arab. These efforts ensure the UAE’s presence remains visible and appealing to international audiences.

The UAE’s focus on social media and digital diplomacy, highlighted by SA1, NSA1, and NSA5, reflects the transition from traditional public diplomacy (one-way information transmission) to contemporary public diplomacy, emphasizing two-way communication, soft power, and mutual understanding (Anholt, 2015). This also illustrates how new communication technologies contribute to public diplomacy by providing platforms for engagement and fostering cultural exchange (Signitzer & Coombs, 1992).

At the nation brand and country reputation level, the UAE has actively applied various strategies to establish and enhance its global image. The country has positioned itself as a hub of innovation, culture, and international cooperation through cultural, educational, economic, and sports diplomacy.

Cultural and educational diplomacy is a key pillar of the UAE’s nation-branding strategy. NSA4 highlighted the importance of Arabic language promotion through initiatives like the Abu Dhabi Center for the Arabic Language. The UAE has also fostered international collaboration through academic institutions such as NYU Abu Dhabi and Sorbonne University, which attract global scholars, reinforcing its reputation as an academic and research hub. This aligns with the goal of public diplomacy, which is to promote cultural understanding and educational exchange (Grigorescu & Fawaz, 2014).

The UAE has further solidified its reputation as a global leader in hosting exhibitions and conferences. NSA4 emphasized Dubai’s status as the “capital of exhibitions in the entire Arab world,” with events such as GITEX, Expo 2020 Dubai, and COP 28 serving as key diplomatic platforms. NSA3 reinforced this by highlighting how Expo 2020 and COP 28 showcased the UAE’s global leadership in sustainability and governance.

Another vital tool in the UAE’s nation-branding efforts is its strategic investment in sports. NSA1 highlighted Sheikh Mansour’s investment in Manchester City, noting,

“Sheikh Mansour and Manchester City are investing in football and entertainment to build a very large fan base in the UAE’s diplomacy.”

This investment aligns with public diplomacy as a mix of hard and soft approaches (Signitzer & Coombs, 1992).

Economic and humanitarian engagement also play a vital role in shaping the UAE's international reputation. NSA4 confirmed that, beyond media, the UAE relies on diplomatic networks, investment funds, and humanitarian efforts, such as the work of the Red Crescent, to facilitate political and economic collaborations.

The relational level of UAE public diplomacy emphasizes long-term engagement, particularly through face-to-face communication, cultural exchanges, and humanitarian efforts.

One key component of the UAE's relational diplomacy is direct face-to-face communication. NSA2 highlighted how diplomatic interactions were largely personal before the UAE's union, with trusted delegates conveying messages verbally or in writing. Even after modernization, NSA2 confirmed that face-to-face diplomacy remains crucial, with UAE leaders maintaining a strong presence at international summits and visits. He emphasized that

“The leadership of the state was aware that direct meetings between heads of state and repeated delegations...formed the personality of Sheikh Zayed.”

NSA4 highlighted the importance of informal and friendly visits, such as the annual Bani Yas meeting, where international ministers engage in discussions to build strong relationships. He stressed that “friendship is just as important as credibility.”

The emphasis on building relationships through informal and formal meetings, as noted by NSA2 and NSA4, supports the argument that cultural relations are a core part of effective public diplomacy, aimed at fostering cooperation and mutual benefit rather than merely promoting an idealized image (Deibel & Roberts, 1976).

Cultural exchange is another vital aspect of the UAE's relational diplomacy. NSA4 emphasized that the UAE has only recently begun to fully leverage cultural diplomacy, pointing to successful initiatives such as the Louvre Abu Dhabi and the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi partnership as significant achievements. NSA6 reinforced this idea by highlighting how cultural festivals, where international visitors actively participate in Emirati traditions, serve as open diplomacy. She stated,

“This is what I call open diplomacy; this is you opening the doors of your culture wide open.”

These cultural efforts align with Hunt's (2016) work, which highlighted the importance of openness and intercultural communication as essential aspects of contemporary public diplomacy.

Beyond cultural engagement, the UAE prioritizes humanitarian aid. SA3 noted that while diplomatic gifts like souvenirs have symbolic value, humanitarian efforts have a much greater impact. NSA4 confirmed that the UAE has integrated long-term aid programs into its diplomatic outreach, ensuring a sustainable approach to global engagement. The UAE's focus on humanitarian aid aligns with the tender-minded approach to public diplomacy, emphasizing genuine cultural cooperation and long-term relationship building (Signitzer & Coombs, 1992).

Overall, the UAE's approach to public diplomacy demonstrates a balanced use of traditional and contemporary tools, aiming to build relationships, promote cultural understanding, and enhance its global reputation. This comprehensive strategy is consistent with the literature's emphasis on integrating public relations practices within public diplomacy to build and maintain favorable relations with foreign publics (Fitzpatrick et al., 2013; Golan & Yang, 2015; Vanc & Fitzpatrick, 2016).

### **The Uniqueness of the UAE's Public Diplomacy Tools**

The UAE employs several unique public diplomacy tools that strengthen its international and cross-cultural engagement. These tools reflect the country's emphasis on cultural exchange, personal diplomacy, strategic investments, and souvenirs and symbolic gestures.

One of the primary tools used by the UAE is research and education. NSA1 emphasized the role of research institutions in facilitating mutual agreements and promoting intellectual exchange with other countries, stating,

"Sheikh Zayed Center in China, for example, Trends Research, the Emirates Center—all of them are centers that work on mutual agreements with countries so that they work on talking about the intellectual orientation."

Additionally, NSA3 highlighted the importance of academic institutions like Mohammed Bin Zayed University in Abu Dhabi, stating that it is dedicated to studies and research in peace and humanitarian work.

These efforts reinforce the UAE's commitment to diplomacy through education and intellectual collaboration. This is aligned with the work of Signitzer & Coombs (1992), in which the UAE's approach aligns more closely with the tender-minded line, which emphasizes cultural and

educational exchanges. This method creates mutual understanding and cultural cooperation rather than hard political persuasion. This aligns well with the UAE's emphasis on research and educational institutions as diplomatic tools, as demonstrated by the establishment of research centers and universities aimed at fostering intellectual cooperation.

Cultural festivals are also vital to the UAE's diplomatic efforts. NSA6 emphasized their significance, describing them as a form of open diplomacy where visitors can experience Emirati traditions firsthand. She highlighted the inclusive nature of these events, where people from different backgrounds can participate in traditional Emirati performances such as Liwa and Ayala. She explained,

"This is what I call open diplomacy; this is you opening the doors of your culture wide open because it contains people, and they experience it and take pictures while performing these dances."

Deibel and Roberts (1976) emphasized that cultural communication is a significant aspect of public diplomacy, aiming to create mutual understanding between a country and foreign citizens through cultural diplomacy and cultural relations. The UAE's cultural festivals can be seen as a practical application of this concept, where cultural engagement is utilized to enhance international relationships through shared experiences.

The UAE also emphasizes friendly visits as a key aspect of its diplomatic approach. NSA4 underscored the role of personal relationships in diplomacy, stating,

"Friendship is just as important as credibility."

Hunt (2016) highlights that public diplomacy tools include methods such as sponsored visits, conferences, and training. The UAE's focus on friendly visits and personal diplomacy aligns well with Hunt's framework, illustrating how interpersonal relationships and informal gatherings contribute to the country's public diplomacy strategy.

Investment in football is another distinctive tool in the UAE's public diplomacy strategy. NSA1 highlighted Sheikh Mansour's ownership of Manchester City, stating,

"Sheikh Mansour and Manchester City are investing in football and entertainment to build a very large fan base in the UAE's diplomacy."

This demonstrates how sports can be utilized to enhance global influence and build international goodwill. According to the literature, sports and

entertainment can be part of cultural diplomacy efforts to influence public perception and foster soft power (Signitzer & Coombs, 1992; Anholt, 2015). The UAE's investment in football represents an innovative application of cultural diplomacy to build positive international relations through entertainment and sports.

Furthermore, souvenirs and symbolic gifts play a significant role in Emirati diplomacy. NSA4 recalled that in the past, the UAE traditionally presented foreign dignitaries with gifts such as falcons, horses, swords, and national attire, saying,

"The UAE used to give its visiting heads of state gifts that we call traditional and symbolic, meaning horses, falcons, and boats."

Over time, this practice evolved, with a shift towards artistic and cultural gifts. NSA4 explained, "

The new Emirati gifts are no longer traditional but creative artwork by Emirati artists. Their value is not financial, but moral."

Heritage-based souvenirs also reinforce the nation's cultural identity. SA2 mentioned that VIP guests are frequently presented with miniature models of landmarks such as the Burj Khalifa, Barjeel (wind tower), and traditional boats, which showcase the UAE's blend of modern innovation and historical heritage.

Signitzer & Coombs (1992) suggest that cultural programs, such as exchanging gifts, can contribute to soft power and mutual understanding. The UAE's evolution from traditional gifts to creative artwork demonstrates how the country continues to innovate within its public diplomacy practices to enhance its cultural appeal.

Food and sensory gifts, including dates, Arabic coffee, and the Farokha, add a personal touch to diplomatic exchanges. NSA5 emphasized their importance, stating,

"Coffee is always an ambassador for us, especially since we tell them this is the original coffee, unlike Turkish coffee, which was discovered 300 years after ours."

Such gifts provide a tangible and sensory experience of Emirati culture, strengthening connections with international recipients.

Research-driven engagement, cultural representation, personal relationships, sports investments, and souvenirs and symbolic exchanges characterize the UAE's public diplomacy strategy. Collectively, these tools enhance the

UAE's global influence, fostering formal and informal international relations.

### **Conclusion**

This study examines the public diplomacy tools employed by the UAE through Golan's Integrated Public Diplomacy Model, which encompasses the mediated, nation branding, and relational levels. The findings highlight the UAE's strategic approach to enhancing its public diplomacy via various communication channels and cultural initiatives.

The UAE effectively uses social media and digital communication at the mediated level, allowing influential Emirati figures to interact directly with global audiences. This approach signifies the UAE's shift from one-way information dissemination to interactive, two-way communication. At the nation branding level, the UAE showcases its economic, cultural, and technological achievements through exhibitions, conferences, cultural festivals, and sports investments. High-profile events like Expo 2020 Dubai and COP 28 emphasize the country's positioning as a global hub for innovation and cooperation. Relational level focuses on building sustainable relationships through direct face-to-face engagement, humanitarian aid, cultural diplomacy, and training programs, promoting mutual understanding and cooperation with foreign publics.

The UAE's unique approach lies in integrating traditional cultural practices with modern technological tools. Its blend of social media engagement, cultural initiatives, and humanitarian efforts reflects a commitment to promoting peace, tolerance, and collaboration.

In conclusion, the UAE's public diplomacy strategy successfully integrates communication, cultural, and humanitarian tools to enhance its global reputation and build lasting international relationships. Continued research is essential to understand the UAE's public diplomacy efforts further. Future research could benefit from focusing on specific event case studies to understand how large-scale events contribute to the UAE's public diplomacy efforts.

### **List of interviewees**

SA1- The owner of a private company in cultural and public diplomacy.

SA2- Employee at the UAE Foreign Affairs.

SA3- UAE Ambassador.

SA4- UAE Ambassador.

SA5- Former UAE Ambassador

NSA1- Political Analyst and active participant in the UAE humanitarian aid.

NSA2- A member of one of the international NGOs.

NSA3- A member of one of the international NGOs.

NSA4- Professor in Political Science.

NSA5- A chairman of one of the cultural institutions.

NSA6- Professor in Arabian Gulf Studies.

#### **List of Abbreviations**

NGOs: Non-Governmental Organizations

NSA: Non-State Actor

SA: State Actor

UAE: United Arab Emirates

#### **List of Tables**

Table 1. UAE's Public Diplomacy Tools

#### **Notes**

All interview participants took part anonymously. Their identities remain confidential, and their statements are referenced using coded labels to protect their privacy. All the participants are Emirati (UAE citizens).

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