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### Open Access

### ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Public Diplomacy as a Media Instrument and its Role in the Success of National Development Programs (A Case Study of the Seventh to Tenth Administrations of the I.R. of Iran)

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### EXTENDED ABSTRACT

#### Interdiction:

Public diplomacy as media-driven strategic communication has evolved into a decisive arena where states not only inform but actively construct meaning to advance national interests. Within this framework, media function as both the infrastructure and the operational arm of public diplomacy, facilitating direct interaction among the peoples of different societies, fostering discourse production, stimulating cultural exchange, and cultivating positive international relations. In practice, media serve as the most visible and influential tool for mobilizing public

opinion - domestically and abroad - enabling the transfer of state narratives beyond geographical and political boundaries. This capacity of media transforms public diplomacy into a multidimensional instrument for maintaining legitimacy, enhancing soft power, and securing external cooperation.

In the governance context, the level of a president's engagement with national development plans and the strategic employment of media as part of public diplomacy represent an essential metric of governmental accountability. In the Islamic Republic of Iran's democratic framework, two dominant political currents - Reformists and Principlists - have alternately assumed the presidency, each imposing its own priorities in both domestic governance and foreign policy. Their differing discourses illustrate dynamic media strategies: one leaning on collaborative communication and shared narratives, the other asserting more independent and often confrontational communicative stances. This study addresses the question: What role did the media, operating within public diplomacy, play in shaping the accountability of the 7th to 10th Administrations toward the implementation of the Third and Fourth National Development Plans?

### **Methods:**

Adopting a descriptive-analytical method grounded in political communication theory, the research examines the development-related policies, performance, and approaches of the 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th Administrations concerning their responsiveness to public diplomacy-particularly its media dimension - across domestic and foreign arenas. The research framework integrates constructivist assumptions, which stress that national interest formation is mediated by shared ideas, cultural norms, and mediated discourse. This approach allows for understanding how media not only transmit messages but also shape the interpretative environment in which policy legitimacy is assessed.

Data collection draws from primary and secondary sources, including official documents, national and international media archives, records of televised and print political discourse, as well as internet-based publications. Expert interviews with scholars in political science and communication studies further enrich the analysis. The triangulation of sources ensures a comprehensive perspective on how media were mobilized as instruments of public diplomacy and tools of political positioning in relation to development objectives.

### **Results:**

In democratic states, the capacity of media to persuade and mobilize public opinion is pivotal in sustaining policy agendas. The Iranian case between the 7th and 10th Administrations reveals a distinct bifurcation in media utilization within public diplomacy. The Khatami Administrations (7th and 8th) leveraged national broadcasters, international cultural platforms, and media-based diplomacy to create a narrative of political openness, economic partnership, and integration into global systems. Through this media-anchored approach, they aimed to advance both political development domestically and cooperative foreign relations, aligning these goals with their commitments to the Third and Fourth National Development Plans.

Conversely, the Ahmadinejad Administrations (9th and 10th) prioritized direct presidential messaging and more autonomous media narratives, frequently bypassing mediated multilateral

channels in favor of speeches, press conferences, and symbolic media events designed to assert sovereignty and ideological independence. This revisionist communicative stance reframed Iran's image internationally but also led to diminished participation in cooperative media diplomacy and reduced responsiveness to development plan objectives.

The divergence between the two periods underscores how media strategies - whether integrative or confrontational - mediate the relationship between political discourse, foreign policy orientation, and measurable accountability in governance. Constructivist analysis suggests that changes in media framing, agenda-setting, and narrative cohesion directly influenced both domestic legitimacy and the reception of Iran's policies on the international stage.

Additionally, with globalization intensifying cross-border media flows, the Administrations' differing approaches had tangible effects on Iran's soft power. The Reformist era's emphasis on interactive media exchange bolstered perceptions of Iran as a constructive actor, facilitating foreign investment and cultural linkages. The Principlist era's more defensive media posture heightened perceptions of resistance but strained economic and diplomatic engagement.

### **Conclusions:**

Both Reformist and Principlist Administrations sought to shape their domestic and foreign policies in accordance with constitutional principles and long-term development frameworks. However, their chosen media strategies within public diplomacy significantly diverged. The 7th and 8th Administrations deployed media as diplomatic capital - bridging domestic consensus with external goodwill - to achieve progress in economic growth, peaceful regional relations, and cultural enrichment. They demonstrated higher accountability to development objectives, as evidenced by their integrated media campaigns supporting governmental initiatives.

In contrast, the 9th and 10th Administrations' preference for unilateral messaging and skepticism toward cooperative media diplomacy limited their capacity to fulfill certain development provisions, particularly those reliant on sustained international collaboration and positive image-building. This selective engagement with media as both a channel and actor in public diplomacy resulted in underutilization of a key governance lever.

By empirically comparing the two political eras, it becomes evident that media - when embedded as a strategic core of public diplomacy - amplifies governmental accountability and enhances the success of development plans. Ignoring this capacity, or deploying it solely for confrontational purposes, narrows diplomatic options and diminishes potential economic and cultural gains. The Iranian experience between the 7th and 10th Administrations thus illustrates a critical lesson: in the contemporary interconnected world, effective governance and developmental achievements are inextricably tied to the deliberate, coordinated, and adaptive use of media in public diplomacy.

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Data available on request from the authors.

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### Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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