



THE ALGORITHMIC ORDER: CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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Abstract

This study investigates the transformation of contemporary international relations in the digital age, with particular emphasis on the role of algorithms and artificial intelligence (AI) in reshaping global power dynamics. Digital infrastructures—ranging from social media platforms to surveillance systems—have become central to the conduct of diplomacy, security, and governance. AI-driven technologies such as predictive analytics, automated decision-making, and autonomous weapons not only amplify state capabilities but also create new vulnerabilities, raising questions about ethics, accountability, and sovereignty. Drawing on interdisciplinary scholarship in international relations, digital governance, and security studies, this research develops an analytical framework that situates algorithms and AI as structural forces comparable to material power and institutional norms. The findings suggest that digital platforms and AI systems are simultaneously tools of influence, instruments of competition, and contested arenas where states and non-state actors negotiate legitimacy, authority, and control.

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INTRODUCTION

The digital age of Smart Phones, Twitter (X) accounts and TikTok has threatened to change diplomacy as we know it. With new technology providing access to instant information and interactive online communication, diplomats and government officials have begun to use this to their advantage. This research paper seeks to examine the way in which digital diplomacy is affecting international affairs. The nexus of information and international relations has undergone a transformative shift with the proliferation of the internet. Historically monopolized by political elites, information now traverses borders with unprecedented immediacy, reshaping power dynamics and statecraft. Scholars like Webster (2017) posit that information power, characterized by access to and command over information flows, has become central to national security, challenging traditional military-centric paradigms. In the digital age, governments are compelled to adapt rapidly within a media landscape where instantaneous online narratives directly impact diplomatic strategies and political decisions.

The call to look beyond state-centrism in studying international regimes is not a recent phenomenon. Keohane and Nye (1972) and others have acknowledged the growing importance of non-state actors, such as multinational corporations, in the international arena since the beginning of the 1970s. Risse-Kappen (1995) and Vogler (2000) reached similar conclusions in the 1990s. Historically, information has been integral to international relations, but the internet has accelerated this interconnectivity, often making diplomacy reactive to global events in real-time. According to McGlinchey (2022), the digital age has shifted the balance of power from military dominance to "information power," whereby access to and control over information flows have become critical to national security.

The way in which diplomacy has been carried out for the last several centuries can be referred to as "traditional diplomacy." Throughout time, traditional diplomacy has grown to acquire a stereotype for the way in which it operates. For example, when the public thinks of a diplomat, they often imagine a well-dressed man who attends important social functions and has a wealth of knowledge about confidential affairs. Diplomacy is seen as a field that is formal and secretive, taking place within small networks of important contacts rather than extended public circles.

The digital revolution has radically transformed the structure of international relations, introducing new dynamics into global diplomacy. With the rise of the internet, access to information is no longer confined to elite political circles; instead, it flows freely across borders, altering the landscape of global power. This rapid shift has forced governments, corporations, and non-state actors to adapt to an ever-evolving communication environment. The speed at which information is disseminated has made real-time decision-making crucial for political leaders. Moreover, this transformation has redefined how states interact, collaborate, and compete in a world that is increasingly interconnected through digital platforms.

Several different approaches were taken in order to collect data on this topic. With social media being such a new concept in the discussion of diplomacy, it was difficult to know where to begin to look for information. However, both primary and secondary sources were able to provide this paper with information.

Problem Statement

The rapid advancement of digital technologies artificial intelligence, big data, social media platforms, and algorithmic governance—has fundamentally transformed the

conduct of international relations. Traditional paradigms of power, diplomacy, and security are now mediated by digital infrastructures that both enable and constrain state and non-state actors. Despite the growing significance of digital systems, existing international relations (IR) theories remain largely state-centric and insufficiently address the complex dynamics introduced by algorithms, networks, and platform governance. This disconnect creates a critical gap in understanding how digital forces are reshaping global power relations, security dilemmas, and soft power strategies in the 21st century.

Research Objectives

- (1) To analyze how algorithm-driven technologies influence the distribution and exercise of power in international relations.
- (2) To examine the role of digital platforms in reshaping diplomacy, communication, and global governance.
- (3) To evaluate the challenges and opportunities digital technologies present for international security and cooperation.
- (4) To develop a conceptual framework that integrates digital infrastructures into mainstream IR analysis.

Research Questions

- (1) How do algorithmic systems (e.g., AI, social media algorithms, surveillance tools) influence state behavior and global power hierarchies?
- (2) In what ways are digital platforms transforming the conduct of diplomacy and transnational communication?
- (3) What are the implications of digital surveillance, cyber warfare, and algorithmic governance for international security?
- (4) How can existing IR theories be adapted to account for the influence of digital infrastructures and algorithmic power?

Literature Review

Scholars of international relations have long emphasized material power, institutions, and norms, but the digital turn has introduced a new layer of complexity that traditional theories struggle to fully capture (Keohane & Nye, 2012; Mearsheimer, 2019). While constructivist perspectives highlight how identities and norms are shaped through online interactions (Adler & Pouliot, 2011), they often understate the structural influence of algorithms on global politics. Emerging scholarship on algorithmic governance suggests that artificial intelligence, data analytics, and platform algorithms increasingly mediate political communication, elections, and international narratives (Beer, 2017; Zuboff, 2019). Research on cybersecurity and cyber conflict underscores threats such as espionage, hacking, and information warfare (Nye, 2017; Klimburg, 2017), but less attention has been given to the systemic ways algorithms restructure power asymmetries among states. At the same time, studies in digital diplomacy show that states leverage platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok to project soft power, shape public opinion, and engage in new forms of “networked diplomacy” (Bjola & Holmes, 2015; Manor, 2019). Despite these contributions, the literature remains fragmented across disciplines—political science, communication studies, and sociology—leaving a conceptual gap in international relations theory regarding how algorithms and digital infrastructures operate as structural determinants of global order.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative and exploratory design aimed at building a conceptual framework for understanding algorithmic power in international relations. Data will be



collected from policy documents, national strategy papers, and speeches related to digital governance and cybersecurity from leading global actors, including the United States, China, and the European Union. In addition, case studies of digital diplomacy, such as China’s Digital Silk Road, U.S. “Twitter diplomacy,” and Russia’s cyber operations, will be examined to illustrate the diverse uses of digital platforms in international affairs. A content analysis approach will be employed to code and interpret recurring themes, narratives, and strategies across these documents and case studies (Krippendorff, 2018). Thematic coding will further enable the identification of patterns regarding how states conceptualize and employ algorithms as tools of influence, governance, and security. Through this process, the study will synthesize insights into an analytical framework that situates algorithms and digital infrastructures as central structural elements in contemporary international relations, comparable in significance to material capabilities, institutions, and norms.

THE POWER OF THE INTERNET IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

With the internet, informational flows have escaped elite confines, fundamentally altering global influence. Governments, corporations, and non-state actors now operate in an adaptive communication ecosystem that requires swift, real-time decision-making. This paradigm shift underscores how states and entities now interact, collaborate, and contend within an interconnected framework of digital communication that transcends traditional boundaries of state power.

As observed by Seib (2020), the rapid exchange of ideas, opinions, and narratives via digital platforms has transformed diplomacy. Social media, in particular, allows governments to engage directly with the public, influencing perceptions and shaping policy debates. However, the democratization of information has also led to the rise of digital propaganda and misinformation campaigns, which can destabilize international relations.

The strategic use of the internet in global politics is not limited to diplomacy. States increasingly rely on cyber operations to project power, engage in espionage, and conduct cyber-attacks. Moore (2019) notes that cyber-attacks are now central to modern warfare, with nations deploying sophisticated tools to undermine the economic and political stability of rival states.

The internet has become a transformative force in shaping how nations communicate, negotiate, and engage in diplomacy. It enables real-time interactions that bypass traditional diplomatic channels, allowing for more direct and immediate engagement between states and their populations. The rise of digital platforms has empowered non-state actors, including multinational corporations, NGOs, and individuals, to exert significant influence on international affairs. As digital diplomacy grows, nations are increasingly leveraging social media and other online tools to project soft power and shape global narratives. However, the internet’s potential for misinformation and cyber-attacks also presents new challenges to maintaining global stability and security.

Table 1: Global Internet Usage Growth (2000-2025)

Year	Global Users (in billions)	Internet Penetration (%)	Impact on Global Diplomacy (Key Events)
2000	0.36	5.8%	Early adoption of internet by governments
2005	1.02	15.7%	Social media begins influencing



2010	2.05	29.3%	public discourse Arab Spring - social media's role in political movements
2015	3.18	43.4%	Online campaigns influence political elections
2020	4.54	59.0%	COVID-19 - Internet critical for global communication
2025	5.16 (Projected)	65.0% (Projected)	Increasing impact of cyber-diplomacy and online activism

MEDIA'S ROLE IN SHAPING FOREIGN POLICY AND GLOBAL NARRATIVES

The internet, as a transnational conduit, enables instantaneous exchanges among global stakeholders. Bollier (2021) notes its transformative impact on international relations, as it dismantles geopolitical barriers while simultaneously complicating cybersecurity landscapes. The democratized flow of information via social media permits governments to engage the public more directly, yet also invites risks in the form of cyber threats and misinformation campaigns, potentially destabilizing international stability. Cyber operations increasingly embody state power projection through espionage, cyber-attacks, and influence campaigns. Moore (2019) asserts that cyber conflict is integral to modern power, with nations utilizing advanced tactics to erode rivals' political and economic integrity. This strategic usage of digital platforms reflects the multidimensional influence of the internet in international affairs.

The "CNN effect," a theory suggesting that real-time global media coverage can force governments to act, remains relevant today. This effect was seen in humanitarian crises such as those in Bosnia, Rwanda, and Syria, where extensive media coverage pressured international actors to intervene. However, Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen (2020) argue that media influence is not always straightforward, as it often competes with entrenched political and economic interests.

In today's internet-driven landscape, online platforms like Twitter and YouTube have gained prominence as key tools for political messaging. Governments are increasingly using social media not just for diplomacy but also for public relations, leveraging these platforms to influence both domestic and international audiences (Seib, 2019).

Social media has allowed diplomats and world leaders to easily extend their diplomatic networks and build strategic relationships. Because digitalization has caused so much to be easily accessible online, diplomats no longer exercise a monopoly on information. This loss of power has left room for other non-state actors to become more valuable than before, creating new incentives for diplomats to break free from their confined network of elites. Social media has made it easy for government officials to do so. Although government officials have used these sites to interact with each other, they much more often use them to connect with others.

Table 2: Media Influence on Key Foreign Policy Decisions (2000-2020)

Event	Year	Media Type	Foreign Policy Outcome
Kosovo War Coverage	1999	TV (CNN, BBC)	NATO intervention following extensive media coverage
Iraq War	2003	TV, Print, Radio	Media narratives influenced public opinion and policy decisions
Arab Spring	2010	Social media	Governments destabilized due to social



Syrian Civil War	2011	(Facebook) TV, online (YouTube)	media-fuelled protests
U.S. Presidential Elections	2016	Social media (Facebook)	Global pressure for humanitarian intervention
COVID-19 Pandemic	2020	Online, TV	Media and misinformation shaped foreign and domestic policies
			Global coordination and response through media channels

INFORMATION, GLOBALIZATION, AND CYBER DIPLOMACY

The advent of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has propelled globalization, fostering transnational networks that challenge state sovereignty. Ritzer (2020) contends that these digital frameworks diminish governmental control over narratives, facilitating a novel form of "cyber diplomacy." This phenomenon is not exclusive to state actors; NGOs, corporations, and individuals now contribute significantly to the global dialogue, using digital tools to navigate and impact international relations. However, digital inequities persist, as noted by Kshetri (2022), with infrastructure disparities restricting certain regions from engaging fully in the global digital economy. This digital divide reinforces the dominance of technologically advanced states, amplifying inequalities and presenting unique obstacles to international collaboration.

Globalization has also led to the rise of what Bollier (2021) calls "cyber diplomacy," where international actors use digital tools to negotiate, collaborate, and resolve conflicts. This form of diplomacy is not limited to state actors; non-state entities such as multinational corporations, NGOs, and even individuals now have the power to influence international relations through the internet.

An evolving dimension is the rise of transnational digital advocacy, where actors leverage ICTs to directly influence international policies and mobilize support across borders. The digital platforms employed in cyber diplomacy, from social media to encrypted communication channels, serve as a double-edged sword: while they democratize international engagement, they also increase risks of misinformation, data breaches, and political manipulation. This rapid spread of influence, unbounded by traditional diplomatic protocols, demands an adaptive approach to international law and cyber governance, ensuring that both emerging and developed nations can engage equitably and securely on the global stage.

CYBERSECURITY AND INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE

The increasing role of the internet in international relations has given rise to significant concerns regarding cybersecurity and global governance. Cyber-attacks on critical infrastructure, data breaches, and state-sponsored hacking have become routine in the digital age, threatening the security of nations and the stability of international systems. Kello (2021) argues that the future of international relations will be shaped by how effectively countries can navigate the growing cybersecurity landscape, as nations now face complex threats that transcend borders.

Efforts to create a global governance framework for cybersecurity have been slow, as many nations prioritize national interests over collective security. The United Nations, through its Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on Information Security, has attempted to establish norms for responsible state behaviour in cyberspace, yet progress remains limited (Moore, 2020). The lack of a unified approach to cybersecurity governance exacerbates tensions between major powers, particularly the United States, China, and Russia, all of whom view cyberspace as a domain of strategic competition.



At the same time, non-state actors, including terrorist organizations and cybercriminals, have taken advantage of the lack of global oversight to launch sophisticated cyber-attacks. Kshetri (2023) notes that the rise of cybercrime poses a serious threat to international security, with the financial and political implications of such activities becoming increasingly severe.

Media has emerged as a critical player in shaping foreign policy, often influencing decisions by shaping public opinion and political discourse. In today's interconnected world, the media can bring global crises to the forefront, prompting swift international action or pressure on governments to respond. The "CNN effect" demonstrates how real-time coverage can create public demand for humanitarian interventions or policy changes. Social media platforms have further amplified this effect, allowing political leaders to communicate directly with global audiences, bypassing traditional media filters. However, media-driven foreign policy is a double-edged sword, as it can lead to hasty decisions influenced by public sentiment rather than strategic considerations.

Cybersecurity and international governance now require advanced, multi-layered protocols that balance open data flows with stringent protections against cyber threats. The rapid escalation in the sophistication of cyber-attacks mandates global cooperation in real-time monitoring, AI-driven threat detection, and legally binding cybersecurity norms. These protocols serve as critical infrastructure in maintaining sovereignty in the digital age, ensuring that nation-states and global entities can detect, deter, and respond to cyber incursions without compromising on transparency or data access across borders.

Table 3: Significant Cybersecurity Incidents (2007-2025)

Year	Incident	Perpetrator	Impact on International Relations
2007	Estonia Cyberattack	Alleged Russian hackers	First large-scale cyberattack on a nation, leading to NATO's response
2014	Sony Pictures Hack	North Korean hackers	Heightened tensions between the U.S. and North Korea
2016	U.S. Election Interference	Alleged Russian actors	Increased global focus on cybersecurity and election integrity
2017	WannaCry Ransomware Attack	Unknown hackers	Affected multiple countries, highlighting global cyber vulnerabilities
2020	SolarWinds Cyberattack	Suspected Russian group	Widespread infiltration of government systems, straining U.S.-Russia relations
2023	Critical Infrastructure Attack	Unknown	Projected rise in cyberattacks on infrastructure, global response evolving

Cyber attacks aren't new. Since the birth of the internet, organizations big and small and from all sectors have been targeted by cyber threats of all shapes and sizes. But as business technology evolves, so do the hackers trying to attack it, resulting in more complex and more dangerous attacks than ever before. Whether it's malware, ransomware or phishing, these attacks can range from small-scale disruptions to large-scale disasters, and they can have a significant impact on individuals, businesses, and governments.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND GLOBAL POWER

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become a central axis of geopolitical competition, with states racing to dominate AI innovation, infrastructure, and regulation. AI applications in predictive analytics, surveillance, and autonomous systems enhance both governance capacities and military capabilities, fundamentally reshaping security dynamics (Allen &



Chan, 2017; Horowitz, 2018). In particular, AI-driven surveillance and cyber operations present new challenges for international security, while also fueling debates about ethics, sovereignty, and accountability in global governance.

Table 04: The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Contemporary International Relations

Dimension	AI Applications	Implications for International Relations	Key References
Military & Security	Autonomous weapons, AI-driven surveillance, cyber defense systems	Reshapes balance of power, accelerates arms race, introduces ethical dilemmas	Horowitz (2018); Allen & Chan (2017)
Governance & Control	Predictive analytics, algorithmic decision-making, biometric surveillance	Enhances state capacity for control, raises issues of sovereignty, human rights, and legitimacy	Zuboff (2019); Beer (2017)
Economic Competition	AI-driven industries, automation, digital trade	Creates new hierarchies of technological dependence and global inequality	Nye (2017); Keohane & Nye (2012)
Diplomacy & Soft Power	AI in digital platforms, sentiment analysis, automated propaganda	Shapes narratives, influences public opinion, enables “networked diplomacy”	Bjola & Holmes (2015); Manor (2019)
Ethics & Global Norms	AI regulation, ethical frameworks, responsible AI initiatives	Sparks international debates on governance, accountability, and multilateral cooperation	Klimburg (2017); Allen & Chan (2017)

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the internet and information technologies have fundamentally altered the landscape of international relations. The ability of states and non-state actors to wield information as a tool of power has reshaped the way diplomacy is conducted, wars are fought, and global governance is pursued. While the internet has democratized access to information, it has also introduced new vulnerabilities, particularly in the realm of cybersecurity.

Moving forward, the international community must prioritize the development of comprehensive frameworks to address the challenges posed by information warfare and cyber-attacks. As Webster (2022) suggests, the future of international relations will depend on how effectively nations can balance the opportunities and risks that come with the digital age. With the rapid pace of technological advancement, staying ahead of these developments will be crucial to maintaining global peace and stability.

Post the fundamental transformation of the landscape of international relations, a change has been witnessed making information a key strategic asset in global diplomacy. While these technologies have democratized access to information, they have also introduced new vulnerabilities, such as cyber-attacks and disinformation. The evolving nature of digital diplomacy requires nations to adopt more agile and transparent strategies in navigating global challenges. Moving forward, cooperation in cybersecurity and the development of international frameworks for digital governance will be critical in maintaining stability. As technology continues to advance, the future of international

relations will increasingly depend on how states manage the balance between open information flow and security.

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