

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32782/city-development.2026.2-24>

UDC 327:316.77

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION SYSTEM¹

Yuliia Poliakova

Doctor of Economic Sciences,
Professor of the Department of International Economic Relations
Lviv University of Trade and Economics;
Senior Research Officer
*State Institution "M.I. Dolishniy Institute of Regional
Research of the NAS of Ukraine"*
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8073-6186>

Oksana Shayda

PhD, Associate Professor,
Associate Professor of Department of Entrepreneurship and
Environmental Examination of Goods
Lviv Polytechnic National University
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1666-0436>

Liliia Hrabar

Senior Teacher of the Department of Foreign Languages
Lviv University of Trade and Economics
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-7509-4410>

Summary. The article examines the role of public diplomacy in the system of International Communication as a modern instrument of soft power for sharing and maintaining a state's reputation, expressing its positions, and implementing foreign policy. The essence of public diplomacy as a technology of representing interests, a long-term instrument, and a new form of interstate communication is examined. The main types of public diplomacy have been outlined. The differences between public and traditional diplomacy have been emphasized. It is noted that the Global Soft Power Index serves as a comprehensive tool for quantifying a country's soft power, assessing public perceptions of nations based on the following criteria such as visibility, reputation, and influence. The top 10 countries in the Global Soft Power Index 2026 are reviewed. It is noted that the United States, China, Japan, and the United Kingdom remain in the lead, simultaneously demonstrating divergent dynamics. A correlation has been identified between the "soft power" index score and countries' recognition, as well as the "soft power" index score and countries' reputation in 2026. It has been concluded that public diplomacy, which is organized systematically, can compensate even a shortage of traditional reputation.

Keywords: public diplomacy, International Communication, "Soft Power", reputation, brand recognition.

Relevance of the issue. International Communication plays a vital role in today's world, where countries, business, and individuals interact with one another. Nowadays, International Communication has become more than just an exchange of information, it is an essential tool for cooperation, development, and mutual understanding in a global society. Above all, International Communication lays the foundation of

diplomacy and International Relations. Through effective communication, nations can negotiate, avoid conflicts, and collaborate in order to solve global challenges. International communication also drives economic processes by facilitating cooperation in global trade, investment, and partnerships between companies from different countries. Moreover, International Communication has become essential for cultural exchange, as

¹ This article was prepared as part of the research topic "Models for Optimizing Interaction Among Economic Sectors in Conditions of Developmental Instability" (№ 0123U100385).



it allows people from different parts of the world better understand each other's traditions, values, and lifestyle. International Communication is equally important for the advancement of science and education. The exchange of knowledge, joint research, and international projects enable faster innovation and help solve complex issues.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Ukrainian scholars O. Aksyonova and O. Yatsenko emphasize that the effective development of International Communication is possible only through the integration of institutional, economic, and digital approaches. Institutional mechanisms, particularly international organizations and national institutions, shape the regulatory framework for cooperation, as they provide a platform for dialogue, the exchange of experience, and the development of joint strategies. Economic mechanisms, such as international grants, business projects, and tourism programs foster interaction among representatives of different cultures. Modern digital tools, including digital platforms, online courses, and virtual exchanges, reveal new opportunities for communication by providing rapid and widespread access to information [1]. Foreign scholars, including Khan A., note that technological progress has transformed the nature of international communication, enabling real-time collaboration and information exchange across borders. However, some certain challenges – such as language barriers, cybersecurity issues, and the digital divide – remain and emphasize the importance of balancing technological innovation with communication strategies. At the same time, public diplomacy initiatives are gaining prominence, as they play a crucial role in managing International Relations and fostering intercultural understanding [2].

O. Yurchenko highlights the role of International communication in maintaining a country's image on the world stage through the exchange of information among different cultures, ethnic groups, and nations, emphasizing that International Communication conveys to the global public information about a country's positions on key international issues, its foreign policy initiatives and actions, and its achievements in the fields of the economy, trade, culture, and science [3].

V. Kryvoshein investigates the effectiveness of implementing Ukraine's public diplomacy tools as a means of "soft power" in foreign policy [4]. M. Konovalova examines the relationship between soft power and the effectiveness of a state's foreign policy [5].

According to K. Savon, in the current conditions of the transformation of International Relations, intangible instruments of state influence are becoming increasingly important, which are con-

ceptualized through the category of "soft power." According to this approach, a state's ability to achieve its foreign policy goals is determined not only by material resources, but also by its capacity to project a positive image, influence international public opinion, and build trust. "Soft power" is an indispensable priority for modern states [6]. In this context, public diplomacy emerges as a key instrument for implementing soft power, as it facilitates communication with foreign audiences, shapes a country's reputation, and promotes its values and political narratives.

The purpose of this article is to examine the role of public diplomacy within the system of international communication as a soft power tool in formation of a state's reputation and implementing its foreign policy.

Research results. The essence of public diplomacy is revealed in several aspects: as means of representing the interests of a state or group of states on the international stage; as a long-term instrument that creates a favorable climate for foreign policy and diplomacy in general; and as a new form of interstate communication and foreign policy, or an effective means of shaping a positive image of the state abroad. The main components of public diplomacy include cultural, economic, expert, culinary, scientific and educational, sports, digital, and others. For example, cultural diplomacy involves promoting culture, art, language, and traditions through exhibitions, concerts, movie festivals, and the activities of cultural institutions. Educational and scientific diplomacy manifests itself through educational exchanges, international research, and university cooperation. Digital diplomacy is advancing through the use of social media, online platforms, and digital technologies to engage with a global audience. Unlike traditional diplomacy, which operates primarily at the intergovernmental level, public diplomacy is focused on broad social groups, including civil society, the media, and expert communities. In this respect, it is appropriate to view it as a multi-level system of International Communication encompassing the informational, reputational, and behavioral levels. The informational level involves the spreading of messages and the formation of narratives; the reputational level involves building trust and a positive image; while the behavioral level is linked to influencing the decisions and actions of target audiences. In the context of the digitalization of the international environment, these processes gain an interactive nature, which reinforces the role of social media, digital platforms, and informal channels of communication.

The methodological basis of this study is the Global Soft Power Index, developed by Brand Finance, which is one of the most comprehensive

tools for quantitatively assessing the soft power of nations. The index measures the ability to influence others through appeal and persuasion rather than coercion and force [7]. The indicators examined include, in particular, a country’s influence, recognition, and reputation. The index is based on a large-scale international survey covering over 100,000 respondents from more than 100 countries worldwide, and measures perceptions of nations according to key features such as recognition, reputation, and influence. These indicators are supplemented by a system of thematic blocks covering the main areas of soft power formation – from culture and education to governance, international relations, and media. An important feature of the index is its focus on the subjective perceptions of international audiences, which allows it to be interpreted as a comprehensive indicator of the effectiveness of a country’s communication activities.

In this respect, public diplomacy is not merely one of the factors but a systemic mechanism for shaping indicators of soft power. A state’s level of visibility directly depends on the intensity and quality of its informational presence in the global media space; reputation is shaped through the coherence of narratives, political messages, and value orientations, whereas the perception of influence is the result of combining actual international activity with effective communication of that

Table 1 – Top 10 Countries in the Global Soft Power Index – 2026

Countries	“Soft Power”	Recognition	Reputation
The USA	74,9	9,4	6,9
China	73,5	8,8	7,1
Japan	70,6	8,7	7,6
The UK	69,2	8,9	7,4
Germany	67,7	8,7	7,4
France	65,8	8,9	7,1
Switzerland	63,2	7,9	7,8
Canada	63,2	8,5	7,5
Italy	61,6	8,7	7,4
UAE	59,4	6,7	7,1

Source: compiled by the authors based on [8]

activity. Thus, the Global Soft Power Index can be viewed as an aggregated result of the functioning of the public diplomacy system.

Empirical data from 2024 till 2026 confirm this theoretical logic and demonstrate significant changes in the global balance of soft power. In particular, a growing differentiation between countries is observed: leading states are strengthening their positions, while countries with less developed communication strategies are

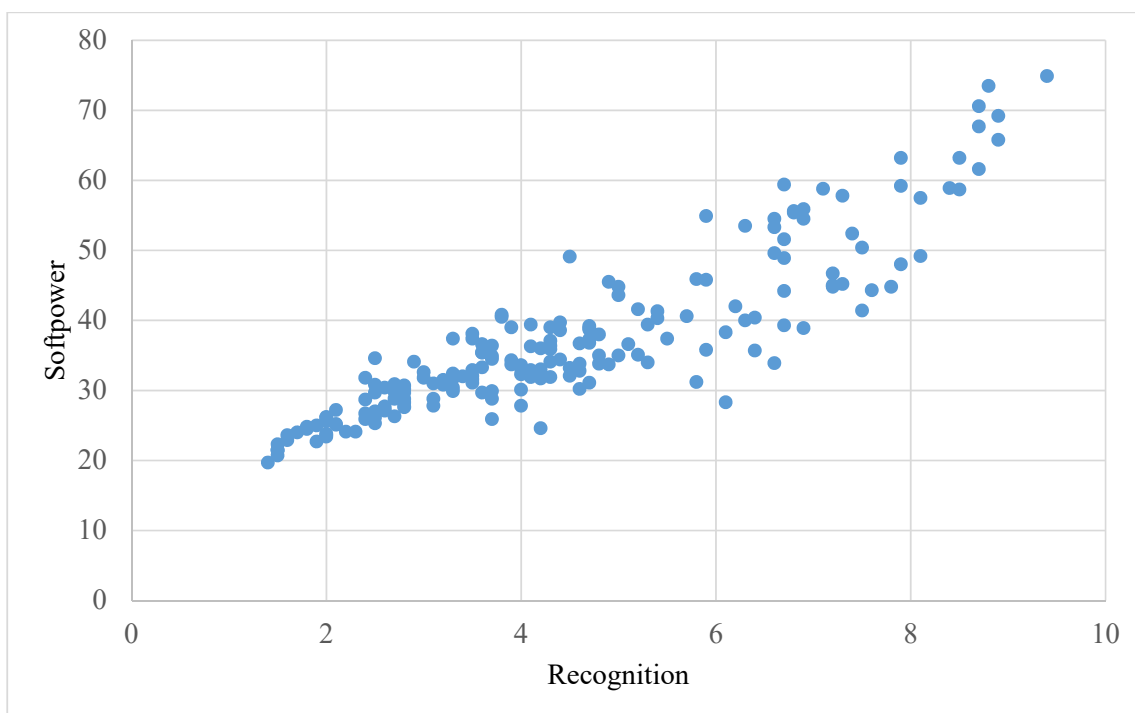


Figure 1 – Relationship between the «soft power» index score and country recognition in 2026

Source: compiled by the authors based on [8]

showing declining indicators. This indicates that public diplomacy is taking on the characteristics of a strategic tool, the effectiveness of which depends on the systematic nature of communication policy, rather than merely on the availability of objective resources.

The 2026 Global Soft Power Index reveals a broader structural trend affecting countries around the world: a global decline in sentiment driven by economic uncertainty, geopolitical tensions, and social pressures. This phenomenon is systemic in nature and is not limited to individual countries. Throughout the survey, the audience has been more cautious, less inclined to express enthusiasm, and more inclined to scrutinize countries' behavior, reflecting concerns about disruptive security crises, pressures on the cost of living, and speculation about an artificial intelligence in the stock markets.

In 2026, the United States, China, Japan, and the United Kingdom remain in the lead, though their dynamics are mixed. In particular, despite retaining first place, the USA shows a decline in its overall score, which is linked to a decrease in trust level and a deterioration in the perception of certain aspects of governance and international policy. The USA exhibits a negative trend of declining trust indicators and a worsening perception of governance and international relations. This means that even the most powerful

state can lose soft power when its communication signals are inconsistent.

In contrast, China has demonstrated steady growth and a strengthening of its position, due to the active implementation of public diplomacy strategies, the expansion of its cultural and economic presence, and the systematic use of International Communication. In 2025, it surpassed the United Kingdom for the first time, taking second place, and in 2026, it continues to decrease the gap with the leader. This was the consequence of a targeted policy: active cultural diplomacy; economic presence; and investment in International Communication. In 2026, China has outperformed the United States on 19 out of 35 indicators and improves its position in the areas of Governance, Values, and Sustainability. It can be concluded that systematic public diplomacy is capable of compensating even for a lack of traditional reputation. These trends suggest a transition from a relatively stable hierarchy of soft power toward a more dynamic and competitive multi-polar model, in which the effectiveness of communication strategies plays a key role. Furthermore, it is important to note that changes in states' positions do not always directly correlate with their economic or military power, which once again highlights the significance of public diplomacy as a distinct dimension of international influence.

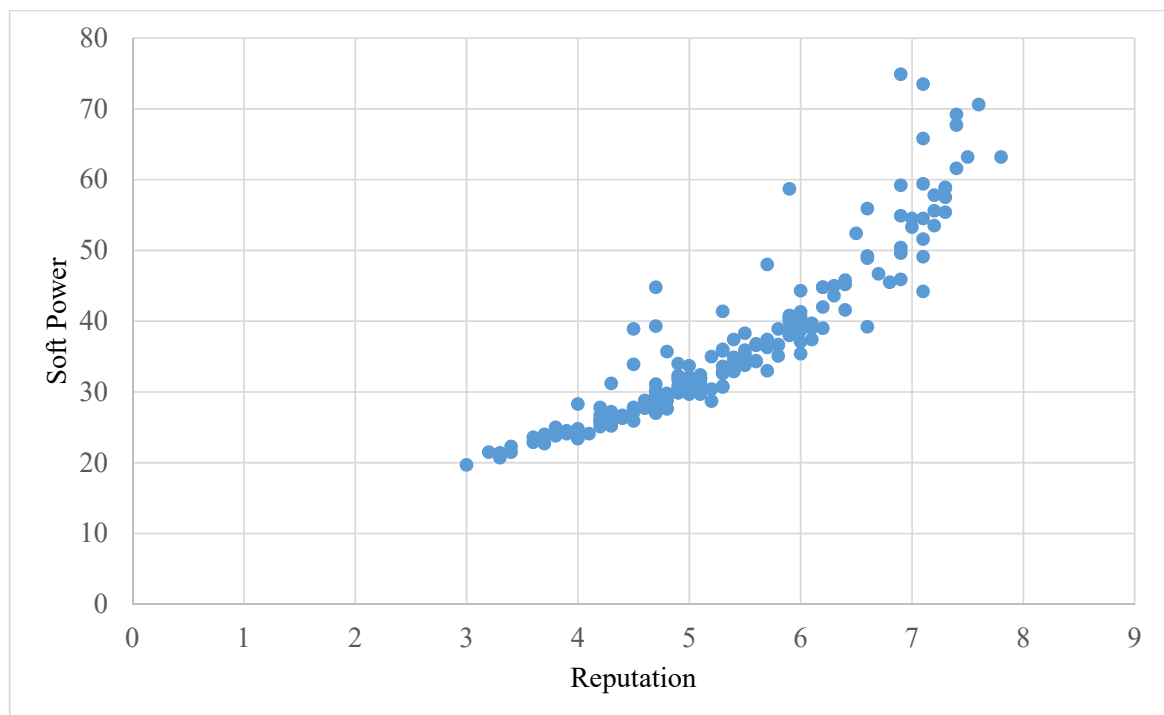


Figure 2 – The relation between the «soft power» index score and countries' reputations in 2026

Source: compiled by the authors based on [8]

Specific examples confirm the role of various public diplomacy channels in formation soft power. In particular, South Korea's rising influence is largely due to the global dissemination of its cultural products, which demonstrates the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy as a long-term instrument of influence. Japan, in turn, is strengthening its position thanks to a high level of trust in national brands and the development of economic diplomacy, which indicates the integration of business into the system of International Communication. At the same time, the example of Switzerland demonstrates that a stable reputation and a high level of trust can serve as the most enduring components of soft power.

Declining in trust in the global environment is a common trend, which heightens the importance of consistency, predictability, and coherence in states' communication. In such conditions, even minor discrepancies between declared values and actual policy can significantly influence a country's image. This confirms that in today's world, soft power is formed not only by creating a positive image but also by the ability to sustain it over in the long term.

Thus, the results of the analysis of the Global Soft Power Index for 2024–2026 lead to the conclusion that public diplomacy is a key mechanism for shaping states' international influence, and

its effectiveness is directly reflected in global perception indicators. In this case, the index serves not only as a measurement tool but also as a unique model of the global communication space, reflecting the interaction between states and international audience in the process of formation the contemporary world order.

Conclusions. In today's globalized world, public diplomacy plays a vital role in the development of International Communication, as it has moved beyond traditional intergovernmental contacts and focuses on engaging directly with the foreign public. In the face of contemporary challenges, public diplomacy is becoming an important tool for building trust and mutual understanding among nations. It covers a wide range of activities: from cultural programs and educational exchanges to social media engagement and international information campaigns. This allows countries not only to speak out their position but also to better understand the values, interests, and priorities of other societies. Global Soft Power Index enables a quantitative assessment of how countries are perceived based on key criteria such as visibility, reputation, and influence. According to this indicator, the United States, China, Japan, and the United Kingdom will remain in the lead in 2026, implementing a variety of measures to form and maintain their national reputation and advance their foreign policy priorities.

References:

1. Aksonova O., Yatsenko O. (2025) Instytutsiino-ekonomichni mekhanizmy rozvytku mizhkulturnoi komunikatsii v umovakh transformatsii mizhnarodnykh vidnosyn [Institutional and economic mechanisms for the development of intercultural communication in the context of the transformation of international relations]. *Ekonomika ta suspilstvo – Economy and Society*, vol. 7. Available at: <https://economyandsociety.in.ua/index.php/journal/article/view/5635>
2. Khan A. (2024) Understanding the Dynamics of International Communication. *Global Media Journal*, vol 22. Issue 67. Available at: <https://www.globalmediajournal.com/open-access/understanding-the-dynamics-of-international-communication.php?aid=94081> (accessed April 9, 2026)
3. Yurchenko O. (2024) Publichna dyplomatiia yak forma mizhnarodnykh komunikatsii, yii rol u formuvanni imidzhu Ukrainy [Public diplomacy as a form of international communications, its role in shaping the image of Ukraine]. *Ekonomika ta suspilstvo – Economy and Society*, vol. 64. Available at: <https://economyandsociety.in.ua/index.php/journal/article/view/4339>. (accessed April 2, 2026)
4. Kryvoshein V. (2023) Tekhnolohii publichnoi dyplomatii yak instrument «miakoi syly»: osoblyvosti vprovadzhennia v suchasni Ukraini ta dosvid Izrailiu [Public diplomacy technologies as a soft power tool: features of implementation in modern Ukraine and Israeli experience]. *Mizhnarodni vidnosyny, suspilni komunikatsii ta rehionalni studii – International relations, public communications and regional studies*, vol. 3(17). Available at: <https://relint.vnu.edu.ua/index.php/relint/uk/article/view/335> (accessed April 2, 2026)
5. Коновалова М. (2025) Vid miakoi syly do reputatsiinoi bezpeky: osoblyvosti publichnoi dyplomatii v konflikti [From soft power to reputational security: features of public diplomacy in conflict]. *Visnyk Kyivskoho natsionalnoho universytetu imeni Tarasa Shevchenka. Mizhnarodni vidnosyny – Bulletin of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. International Relations*, vol. 60(1). Available at: <https://intern.bulletin.knu.ua/uk/article/view/3558> (accessed April 2, 2026)
6. Savon K. V. (2020) Vplyv polityky "miakoi syly" na imidzh derzhavy [The impact of soft power policy on the image of states]. *Aktualni problemy polityky : zb. nauk. pr.; NU "OIuA", Pivdennoukr. tsentr hender. problem*. Odesa : Vydavnychiy dim "Helvetyka", vol. 66, pp. 112–117.
7. Ofitsiyniy sait Ukrainskoho instytutu [Official website of the Ukrainian Institute]. Available at: <https://ui.org.ua/sectors/projects/ukraine-global-soft-power-index>

8. Global Soft Power Index 2026. Brand Finance. 2026. Available at: <https://static.brandirectory.com/reports/brand-finance-soft-power-index-2026-digital-3.pdf>

Бібліографічний список:

1. Аксьонова О., Яценко О. Інституційно-економічні механізми розвитку міжкультурної комунікації в умовах трансформації міжнародних відносин. *Економіка та суспільство*. 2025. Випуск № 71. URL: <https://economyandsociety.in.ua/index.php/journal/article/view/5635>
2. Khan A. Understanding the Dynamics of International Communication. *Global Media Journal*. 2024. vol 22. Issue 67. URL: <https://www.globalmediajournal.com/open-access/understanding-the-dynamics-of-international-communication.php?aid=94081> (дата звернення: 09.04.2026)
3. Юрченко О. Публічна дипломатія як форма міжнародних комунікацій, її роль у формуванні іміджу України. *Економіка та суспільство*. 2024. №64. URL: <https://economyandsociety.in.ua/index.php/journal/article/view/4339> (дата звернення: 02.04.2026)
4. Кривошеїн В. Технології публічної дипломатії як інструмент «м'якої сили»: особливості впровадження в сучасній Україні та досвід Ізраїлю. *Міжнародні відносини, суспільні комунікації та регіональні студії*. 2023. № 3(17). URL: <https://relint.vnu.edu.ua/index.php/relint/uk/article/view/335> (дата звернення: 02.04.2026)
5. Коновалова М. Від м'якої сили до репутаційної безпеки: особливості публічної дипломатії в конфлікті. *Вісник Київського національного університету імені Тараса Шевченка*. Міжнародні відносини. 2025. Том 60(1). URL: <https://intern.bulletin.knu.ua/uk/article/view/3558> (дата звернення: 02.04.2026)
6. Савон К. В. Вплив політики "м'якої сили" на імідж держави. *Актуальні проблеми політики : зб. наук. пр.; НУ "ОЮА", Південноукр. центр гендер. проблем. Одеса : Видавничий дім "Гельветика". 2020. Вип. 66. С. 112-117.*
7. Офіційний сайт Українського інституту. URL: <https://ui.org.ua/sectors/projects/ukraine-global-soft-power-index>
8. Global Soft Power Index 2026. Brand Finance. 2026. URL: <https://static.brandirectory.com/reports/brand-finance-soft-power-index-2026-digital-3.pdf>

ПУБЛІЧНА ДИПЛОМАТІЯ В СИСТЕМІ МІЖНАРОДНИХ КОМУНІКАЦІЙ

Полякова Юлія Володимирівна

доктор економічних наук,
професор кафедри міжнародних економічних відносин
Львівський торговельно-економічний університет
старший науковий співробітник
Державна установа «Інститут регіональних досліджень
імені М. І. Долішнього Національної академії наук України»

Шайда Оксана Євдокимівна

кандидат економічних наук, доцент,
доцент кафедри підприємництва та екологічної експертизи товарів
Національний університет «Львівська політехніка»

Грабар Лілія Іванівна

старший викладач кафедри іноземних мов
Львівський торговельно-економічний університет

Анотація. Стаття присвячена вивченню ролі публічної дипломатії у системі міжнародної комунікації як сучасного інструменту м'якої сили у напрямі формування і підтримки репутації держави, вираження її позицій та пріоритетів з різних питань, реалізації зовнішньої політики. Розглянуто сутність публічної дипломатії як технології представництва інтересів, інструменту довгострокової дії, нової форми міждержавного спілкування. Окреслено основні види публічної дипломатії – культурна, економічна, експертна, кулінарна, науково-освітня, спортивна, цифрова тощо. Наголошено на відмінностях публічної дипломатії від традиційної та описано її як багаторівневу систему міжнародних комунікацій, що охоплює інформаційний, репутаційний і поведінковий рівні. Зазначено, що найбільш комплексним інструментом кількісної оцінки м'якої сили держав сьогодні вважається Global Soft Power Index, розроблений Brand Finance, який кількісно оцінює сприйняття держав за такими важливими критеріями, як відомість, репутація та вплив. У проведеному дослідженні

Global Soft Power Index розглядається як агрегований результат функціонування системи публічної дипломатії. Розглянуто Топ-10 країн у рейтингу Global Soft Power Index-2026. Зазначено, що лідерські позиції зберігають Сполучені Штати Америки, Китай, Японія, Велика Британія, водночас демонструючи різноспрямовану динаміку. З'ясовано зв'язок між значенням індексу «м'якої сили» та впізнаваності країн, а також значенням індексу «м'якої сили» та репутації країн на світовому рівні у 2026 році. Зроблено висновок, що публічна дипломатія, організована на системних засадах, спроможна компенсувати навіть дефіцит традиційної репутації. Розглянуто приклад Південної Кореї у напрямі використання культурної дипломатії як довгострокового інструменту впливу, Японії – щодо розвитку економічної дипломатії і Швейцарії – стосовно формування стабільної репутації. Зроблено висновок, що публічна дипломатія сьогодні виступає вагомим інструментом формування і підтримки міжнародного іміджу держав, а її ефективність безпосередньо втілюється у показниках сприйняття на глобальному рівні.

Ключові слова: публічна дипломатія, міжнародні комунікації, «м'яка сила», репутація, впізнаваність.

Дата надходження статті: 10.04.2026

Дата прийняття статті: 10.05.2026

Дата публікації статті: 25.06.2026