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**Master Thesis Defense**

Entitled

*THE ROLE OF DIGITAL DIPLOMACY IN UAE FOREIGN POLICY: STRATEGIES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES*

by

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Abstract

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is emerging as a world leader in digital diplomacy due to its excellent communication infrastructure and willingness to connect with the outside world as part of its foreign policy goals. In spite of UAE's central role in this digital diplomacy phenomenon, not much by way of research has been conducted into the UAE's efforts. Thus, this thesis seeks to fill the research gap by addressing three key research questions vis-à-vis UAE's digital diplomacy. First, what are the UAE's digital diplomacy strategies? Second, what are the benefits of digital diplomacy to the UAE? Third, what challenges does the UAE face in its digital diplomacy strategies and how can they be addressed? These research questions are addressed via the qualitative methodology of in-depth personal interviews with Emirati Diplomats and Academics and Expatriate foreign policy practitioners and Academics. This is complimented by primary data from the UAE government and international agencies, as well as secondary data from media, governmental and international organization sources. The UAE's digital diplomacy strategies involve the use of the following tools: Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. The goal is to use the above tools to promote and market the country, serve as a source of information about the country, offer a platform for global interaction and to conduct diplomacy. In spite of the benefits that the UAE derives from digital diplomacy, there are several challenges. These include: personnel challenges in administering the tools; negative regional perception; problem of audience identification and targeting; generational gap in the use of social media in the foreign policy establishment; keeping pace with a fast paced media environment; the growing phenomenon of fake news from hostile sources; the use of digital tools by non-state actors to challenge state authority; the culture of anonymity in the digital realm; the risk of cyber-attacks and organizational culture. In countering all these challenges, this research recommends the following solutions to the government of the UAE: constant training and orientation for UAE diplomats and UAE professionals within the foreign policy media circles; audience research in order to convey the right message as well as increased connectivity through social media; developing a rapid response mechanism to combat fake news; direct messages with other languages apart from Arabic and English and raising awareness among targeted audiences about the risk that comes with social media.

**Keywords:** United Arab Emirates, digital diplomacy, Social Media, Public Diplomacy, Foreign Policy, Fakes News, Cyber Attacks.