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Σπουδές**

**«The challenge for the European Union in promoting its Foreign
Policy through AI »**

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The challenge for the European Union in promoting its Foreign Policy through AI

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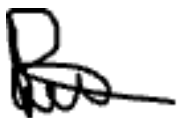


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Abstract

This study examines how the promotion of digitalization, new technologies, and artificial intelligence enhances and transforms the European Union's actorness. Through a qualitative thematic analysis, the research employs Jupille and Caporaso's (1998) actorness theory to reach conclusions on how this digital turn has reshaped the EU's actorness. In order to do so, four key EU documents are analyzed: the EU Global Strategy (2016), the White Paper on Artificial Intelligence (2020), the Artificial Intelligence Act (2024), and the Joint Communication on an International Digital Strategy for the EU (2025). By identifying recurring themes via Thematic Analysis, a Discourse-Historical Analysis (DHA) is applied complimentary to the extracted thematic axes to reveal how new EU strategies construct the Union's identity, legitimacy, and roles within the digital world (Wodak, 2015).

The findings indicate that through AI technologies the EU's actorness is strengthened reinforcing its values-based identity (Manners, 2002) and expanding its "regulatory" power (Bradford, 2012), to legally and morally bind its partners. As it appears, AI frameworks generate new forms of actorness altering the EU's external action, towards a digitally empowered model. Thus, new technologies have become both the tools and the terrain through which the EU asserts to gain influence redefining its role as an international actor (Fiott, 2018).

Keywords: EU Actorness, Digital Diplomacy in EU, Artificial Intelligence in the EU, EU foreign policy, Digitalisation of the EU.

Greek Abstract

Η παρούσα μελέτη εξετάζει τον τρόπο με τον οποίο η προώθηση της ψηφιοποίησης, των νέων τεχνολογιών και της τεχνητής νοημοσύνης ενισχύει και μετασχηματίζει την ικανότητα της ΕΕ να δρα ως διεθνής δρώντας της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης, ενισχύοντας τη δρώσα ικανότητα της (Actorness). Μέσω ποιοτικής θεματικής ανάλυσης, η έρευνα αξιοποιεί τη θεωρία της δρώσας ικανότητας των Jupille και Caporaso (1998) προκειμένου να καταλήξει σε συμπεράσματα σχετικά με το πώς αυτή η ψηφιακή στροφή έχει αναδιαμορφώσει τη δρώσα ικανότητα της ΕΕ.

Για τον σκοπό αυτό αναλύονται τέσσερα βασικά έγγραφα πολιτικής της ΕΕ: η Παγκόσμια Στρατηγική της ΕΕ (2016), η Λευκή Βίβλος για την Τεχνητή Νοημοσύνη (2020), ο Νόμος για την Τεχνητή Νοημοσύνη (2024) και η Κοινή Ανακοίνωση για μια Διεθνή Ψηφιακή Στρατηγική της ΕΕ (2025). Μέσα από τα επαναλαμβανόμενα θέματα που προκύπτουν από τη Θεματική Ανάλυση, και επιπρόσθετα, από τη Λογο-Ιστορική ανάλυση (Discourse-Historical Analysis – DHA) που εφαρμόζεται στους θεματικούς άξονες, αναδεικνύεται ο τρόπος με τον οποίο οι νέες στρατηγικές της ΕΕ κατασκευάζουν την ταυτότητα, τη νομιμοποίηση και τους ρόλους της Ένωσης στον ψηφιακό κόσμο (Wodak, 2015).

Τα ευρήματα δείχνουν η χρήση νέων τεχνολογιών ενισχύει την ικανότητα της ΕΕ να δρα ως διεθνούς δρώντος, ενδυναμώνοντας την ταυτότητά της που βασίζεται σε αξίες

(Manners, 2002) και επεκτείνοντας τη «κανονιστική» της ισχύ (Bradford, 2012) ώστε να οποία δεσμεύει νομικά και ηθικά τους εταίρους της.

Παράλληλα, τα πλαίσια διακυβέρνησης της τεχνητής νοημοσύνης φαίνεται να δημιουργούν νέες μορφές δράσας ικανότητας, μέσω της ανάπτυξης ικανοτήτων που μεταβάλλουν την εξωτερική δράση της ΕΕ προς ένα ψηφιακά ενδυναμωμένο μοντέλο. Κατά συνέπεια, οι νέες τεχνολογίες έχουν καταστεί τόσο τα εργαλεία όσο και το πεδίο μέσω του οποίου η ΕΕ ασκεί επιρροή, αναδιαμορφώνοντας τον ρόλο της ως διεθνούς δρώντα (Fiott, 2018).

Λέξεις-Κλειδιά: Δρώσα ικανότητα της ΕΕ, ψηφιακή διπλωματία στην ΕΕ, τεχνητή νοημοσύνη στην ΕΕ, ευρωπαϊκή εξωτερική πολιτική, ψηφιοποίηση της ΕΕ.

1. Introduction

Digital technologies and artificial intelligence in international relations have reshaped dynamics and power relations in the field of international relations taking over governance models. The European Union must adapt to these evolving technologies as domains that require values-based governance, international coordination and leadership to secure its position in the global sphere. Since digital technologies and AI have become central components of the Union's strategic vision, this study is relevant and, important as it highlights this the EU's adaptation to new technologies and how important that is (Christou et al, 2025).

Many scholars name this a technological turn in applying diplomacy that reshapes the foreign policy agendas of states (Manor, 2016; Bjola & Holmes, 2015; Saveliev & Zhurenkov, 2021). With Digital Diplomacy emerging as the evolution of diplomacy. the latter is transformed by introducing new means of communication (Pamment, 2013; Manor, 2019). Online platforms, for example, assist diplomatic actors in shaping public opinion and influencing global discourses. Additional research on artificial intelligence demonstrates that it is also evolvingly integrated into decision-making and regulatory agendas, posing questions about autonomy, ethics, and governance at both national and supranational levels (Floridi, 2019; Meleouni & Efthymiou, 2023).

In the European Union context, the EU is presented as a normative, regulatory, and hybrid global actor whose influence is highly boosted by AI technologies (Manners, 2002; Damro, 2012; Jupille & Caporaso, 1998; Bretherton & Vogler, 2006). Both digital diplomacy and AI systems enhance the EU's presence by promoting its values-based identity and extending its legal influence all while strengthening its institutional coherence (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020; Tallberg et al., 2024; Barman, 2024). On the other hand, only a few studies analyze how these new technologies are institutionalized by the EU to promote its actorness and, even fewer discuss the extend of efficiency achieved. This research aims to focus on this gap for an integrated mapping of how digital tools reshape the Union's external action and to what point.

This goal is achieved using qualitative thematic analysis of four official policy documents of the EU to understand how digital tools and AI are used as instruments of EU actorness. The chosen texts (the EU Global Strategy, the White Paper on AI, the AI Act and, the Joint Communication on an International Digital Strategy for the EU (2025) represent different stages in the evolution of the EU's digital agenda. They were thoroughly selected as they are written by the EU itself, they represent the European view on the subject and provide a comprehensive lens through which to explore the EU's digital turn. Utilizing Jupille and Caporaso's (1998) actorness theory and Reisigl and Wodak (2017) DHA analysis, patterns are identified and conclusions are drawn based on them.

A roadmap of the study consists of four interconnected chapters that build the groundwork for analyzing the EU's actorness. In short, the first chapter "Theoretical Framework" sets the foundations on which this study is based. Starting with the conceptual foundations of the main concepts (Digital Diplomacy and Artificial

Intelligence) the study sets a common ground for understanding these newly established concepts that affect the EU's Actorness establishing transparency and cohesion in the EU context. Last but not least, foreign policy, as a core concept to be introduced when studying EU's actorness, is framed theoretically and defined. Not only does foreign policy change drastically in the digitalized era but it also, seems to be the higher goal to which new technologies serve as instruments.

The second chapter "Methodology" explains all the methodological choices made in this study and justifies these choices introducing the research question, the research design along with the selected corpus and tools employed, the research gap and more technical terms.

The third chapter "Analysis" is where this study begins to uncover the actual ways in which the aforementioned technological shift is operationalized in the EU framework. It introduces the analytical tools, Thematic Analysis (TA) and Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), and correlates the selected documents to Jupille's and Caporaso's (1998) actorness theory. These tools are utilized to extract conclusions on the EU's adaptation to new technologies. As emerging themes are identified, such as the EU's normative and regulatory power, the goal of technological sovereignty, and the seek for partnerships, together, they demonstrate the Union's use of digital technologies to raise its capacities and create new agencies. By combining the theoretical frame with empirical findings, the study suggests that digitalization has become central for the European Union.

The fourth chapter introduces this study's "Findings" based on six identified thematic axes that are drawn from keywords tracked in the analysis stage. Each axis is depicted by the way it is connected to the actorness theory and the research question while DHA analysis is conducted to enhance that.

Conclusions are introduced in the final chapter along with future research directions, such as examining soft-power dimensions in official EU texts and, a discussion on whether EU's actorness, and its dimensions, is boosted enough to transform it into a global actor. Concluding, a full bibliographic reference list and an appendix are added with the selected excerpts on which the analysis is based.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Conceptualization

This chapter defines thoroughly the terms Digital Diplomacy and Artificial Intelligence to explain the role of digitalization, new technologies, and artificial intelligence in the EU agenda shaping. Each term describes a single dimension of the EU's external action ensuring that the analysis that follows is coherent, transparent, and established.

2.1.1. Digital Diplomacy: Evolution and shift in EU power

Diplomacy, as defined by Bull (1977) is «*the conduct of interactions between states and other entities*» (p.156) in a «tactful» manner with the purpose of promoting peace

and regulating international affairs. Building on this traditional understanding, public diplomacy (PD) emerges as a strategy consisting of traditional and up-to-date tools to promote communication between governments, organizations and publics (Cull, 2008). Drawing from the «Excellence Theory» which promotes mutual understanding and symmetrical communication (Grunig, 2008) this multi-level communication results in convincing citizens to support or tolerate foreign policy agendas.

Starting from the area outside of the European Union (EU), specifically in the USA, President Barack Obama's Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, stated in an official statement: « ...to secure our national strategic interests in today's world, the United States must continue to move beyond traditional government-to-government diplomacy and seek innovative ways to communicate and engage directly with foreign publics.... (para. 6) ... at every level (para. 10) ... in all sectors of their societies...(para. 4)» (McHale, 2009).

This is depicted in EU policies as well, and it aligns with the main goal of public diplomacy: to shape multilateral relations and promote national images of states in the international sphere (EEAS, 2025). In the European context, Public diplomacy legitimizes the EU's external actions in correspondence to its interests by promoting cultural exchange and national heritage. This resonates strongly with its self-conception as a union founded on democratic values, transparency, and dialogue (Melissen, 2005). Public diplomacy also enables governments to communicate more directly with international organizations and publics, these one-way, 'elite-to-elite' interactions are to be transformed into a two-way democratic dialogue (Pamment, 2013).

Digital Diplomacy (DD) emerges as a continuation of public diplomacy and an immediate response to the technological and societal changes introduced by the latter (Manor, 2015). It refers to the use of digital tools such as social media to conduct diplomatic acts and connect people and states as a nonviolent approach to solving problems and protecting a state's status quo (Bjola & Holmes, 2015). With the use of AI technologies and by establishing international order, information is spread instantly and as a result, boundaries have been blurred between public and private sectors (Carpenter & Drezner, 2010). This leads to digital media functioning as a foreign policy resource, projecting and expanding the "normative power" of the European Union based on peace, justice, democracy, and human rights aspiring to shape global norms and values through foreign policy and institutional framework (Manners, 2002; Smith, 2013).

In sum, both public and digital diplomacy are used by state and non-state actors to understand cultures and behaviors, to build international relationships. As stated by Cull (2008) public diplomacy uses a variety of tools to achieve mutual communication. On the other hand, digital diplomacy primarily uses merely online platforms, to influence publics carrying out diplomatic activities such as communication, negotiation, and relationship-building (Bjola & Holmes, 2015; Manor, 2016). With digital diplomacy, public diplomacy aspires to build relationships between states and citizens both horizontally (between actors at the same level) and vertically (between the state, organizations and citizens).

More specifically, digital diplomacy was initially defined as «the use of social media platforms by a country in order to achieve its foreign policy goals and proactively manage its image and reputation» (Manor & Segev, 2016, p. 6). It later evolved to being more broadly described as the «overall impact ICTs (information and communication technologies) have had on the practice of diplomacy, ranging from the email to the smartphone and social networking sites» (Manor, 2016, p. 3). However, a more inclusive definition was later coined again by Manor (2019) defining digital diplomacy as as the long-term process that impacts four dimensions of diplomacy (audience, institutions, practitioners, and practice) across four fields (normative, behavioral, procedural, and conceptual). *Normative* is about norms, values, and beliefs that are promoted by *Behavioral*. *Procedural* refers to the tools used to conduct diplomacy while *conceptual* refers to ways of interpreting the world. All along, they show how digital tools and practices influence diplomacy.

Wendt (1998) adds on to this by arguing diplomacy shapes and is shaped by society. According to this approach, digital diplomacy is a causal and constitutive process with variations in the adoption of societal alternations that can be explained by the variety of cultures engaged. DD in this context, serves as a social practice that is imagined, conceptualized, and enacted differently across states and institutions (Bjola & Manor, 2022).

As a result of the new technologies shaping societies, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs), driven by accountability, transparency and efficiency, have successfully adapted to the online world adopting communication tools for reaching populations and narrating policies. Consular services, policy management and international negotiations conducted by MFAs in the digitalized era show that diplomacy is now undergoing significant changes (Hocking & Melissen, 2015). Therefore, the very nature of diplomacy has now altered as new norms and routines are created through social media platforms, big data analytics, smartphone applications, and digital campaign tools used to reach, understand, and influence foreign publics. MFAs actions include public affairs, nation branding, advocacy, and public diplomacy but still, each ministry differs from the other (Manor, 2023).

As the European Union adapts to the online environment, EU institutions also alter their norms and practices to remain relevant in the digital era employing DD as a foreign policy tool to provide insights into occurring changes (Bjola & Holmes, 2015 ; Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020). Embracing transparency and openness, the goal is to operate online, establishing new foreign policy strategies and leveraging digital tools and value-driven communication. Digital diplomacy turns online platforms into spaces where foreign policy is conducted, and nation branding is promoted (Bjola & Manor 2022). This reflects a broader understanding of digital diplomacy as a soft power tool (Zinovieva & Bulva, 2022).

The power that digital diplomacy holds derives from the fact that it brings citizens and states together influencing them to serve common interests. At the same time, it

diffuses power across many actors as public opinion is heightened, which is exactly why the use of soft power is important (Bjola, 2016). Soft power as a means of persuasion along with smart power which uses digitalized means to reach audiences and influence them (Nye, 2004) maximizing a state's attraction and promoting cultural exchanges through online space and constant exposure to information (Bjola & Holmes, 2015).

This power shift in the international system disturbs power balances. From hierarchical state-based networks there are now, decentralized networks that threaten the existing organizations and states. As a result, DD can be seen as either a toolkit to influence other states or a strategic plan to influence multiple actors. Either way, diplomacy is shifting and embracing openness. It is extending beyond social media including negotiations, delegations, and multilateral forums as part of the European Union's external action (Manor & Pamment, 2019).

The adaptation of the EU to digital diplomacy emerged slowly in 2008, uncoordinated, on social media. In 2015 member-states joined and coordinated a unified approach for technology (Zinovieva & Bulva, 2022). The *Council Conclusions on EU Digital Diplomacy* in 2022 legalize this pointing out the change of balance in power relations as a result of emerging digital technologies. It re-defines the EU's goals: to strengthen its image in digital affairs by implementing regulations based on human rights and values. Additionally, the need for a free, open, and secure digital space is promoted and for protection, cyber diplomacy and cybersecurity are now central for interdependence between technologies and governance (Manor, 2016)

The *Joint Communication on an International Digital Strategy for the EU* in 2025, establishes that technology is a prerequisite of modern economies and societies. It prioritizes technology in defense and security securing a stronger position as a key actor in the digital turn. As a result, the EU enhances its technological competitiveness levels cooperating with businesses, reflecting its commitment to its values upon its digital sovereignty, and democratic principles (European Commission & High Representative, 2025).

Thereby, DD is depicted as a tool and an instrument for the EU's Actorness transforming digital platforms into sites of foreign policy activities. Drawing from actorness theories, the EU builds visibility, coordinates and regulates digital platforms, and foster a unified context. It also allows the EU to boost its normative power by promoting its virtues in the digital sphere as a main component and mechanism of EU foreign policy action (Manners, 2002; Bjola & Holmes, 2015).

In conclusion, it appears that interaction of nations has been altered due to digital means and traditional methods of foreign policy are redefined as a now core element of the foreign policy toolkit (Barman, 2024).

2.1.2. Artificial Intelligence: Definitions and EU Adaptation

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a technological development of intelligent systems trained to perform human-like tasks such as decision making. It consists of algorithms and data

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which collected can create software systems designed to analyze behaviors, outcomes, and actions benefiting humans (Saveliev & Zhurenkov, 2021; Carrozza et al, 2022; Meleouni & Efthymiou, 2023).

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2024, p.6) AI is defined as *«a machine-based system that [...] from the input it receives, how to generate outputs such as predictions, content, recommendations, or decisions that can influence physical or virtual environments. Different AI systems vary in their levels of autonomy and adaptiveness after deployment»*.

At the same time, the EU legally defines similarly the AI systems in the AI Act as *«... a machine-based system that is designed to operate with varying levels of autonomy and that may exhibit adaptiveness [...] from the input it receives, how to generate outputs such as predictions, content, recommendations, or decisions that can influence physical or virtual environments... »* (Regulation (EU) 2024/1689, art. 3(1)).

The life cycle of AI systems typically encompasses four not necessarily sequential phases: planning and design; collecting and processing data; building and using the model; verifying and validating; operating and monitoring. Data collection and processing, performance evaluation through testing, implementation in real-world contexts and assessment of outcomes are parts of the procedure as well (OECD, 2022).

Building on these, AI employs a variety of techniques and applications to perform complex tasks. Through “neural” networks, AI simulates the functioning of the human brain, thereby enabling deep learning which is applied in image recognition, speech recognition, and text analysis. As a result, ‘Natural Language Processing’ (NLP) enables machines to understand and analyze human language, and ‘computer vision’ allows AI systems to perceive the physical world through cameras and sensors with, ‘reasoning capabilities’ allowing AI systems to derive new knowledge from existing (Moskalyk & Revera, 2025).

AI systems are rapidly spreading over a spectrum of intelligence categorizing them into three main types. The ‘narrow’ AI systems relate to these systems whose intelligence is limited to a single task and refer to all existing ones so far. They are not exceeding human-based levels. Yet to be developed are ‘general’ AI, systems capable of human-level intelligence across a broad range of tasks while ‘Superintelligent’ systems are said to surpass human-level cognition and act beyond that since AI is now leaning towards a point of rapid self-improvement. This represents the ultimate evolution of AI to be autonomous, raising profound considerations (Floridi, 2019; Regulation (EU) 2024/1689, art. 3(1)).

It is crucial when referring to AI’s autonomy, to speak of balance in decision-making procedures. To secure stability, a framework of 47 ethical principles has been proposed: there are five core principles for AI technologies, beneficence, non-maleficence,

autonomy, justice and explicability, entailing both intelligibility and accountability (Floridi et al. 2018 ; Saveliev & Zhurenkov, 2021).

In the EU context, AI is broadly applied and actively incorporated in the European Union's strategies as a «visionary roadmap that blends ethics, safety, and innovation» (Balcioglu et al., 2025, p.7). So, it is employed as a strengthening instrument for the Union's presence and influence within its context and outside of it. As it appears to directly affect internal governance and, external action, it evolves rapidly into a central component of all EU initiatives. Still, it remains a risky task and for that matter the AI act in 2024 is proposed as the world's first regulatory framework for AI, promoting transparency and safety in fields like cybersecurity, health, climate and diplomacy allowing the EU's AI tools to make it go beyond its borders, to external actors that often follow its example. This requires the EU's normative power to become a global regulatory framework that enhances its actorness (Stockreiter, 2025).

In sum, AI is a technological development that alters foreign policy and is trained to perform human-like activities to simplify and help international relations but, it must be used mindfully to prevent potential harm. As it reshapes the foreign policy agendas of states, it can be a challenge to handle properly.

2.2. Actorness

2.2.1. Actorness : Role in International Relations

Foreign policy agendas include security and defense policies connected to internal and external actions internationally (Grişevci, 2011). Actorness as a term, refers to the ability of an actor to affect international affairs and manage strategic goals. Its capacity is a result of an entity's delimitation from other actors, its autonomy in decision-making, and its legality. The ability to be internationally recognized, and to act externally when the external environment allows, are vital for actorness (Sjöstedt, 1977). As for legitimacy, it is a key factor of establishing and enhancing actorness, since an actor must be trustworthy (Čmakalová & Rolenc's, 2012).

When referring to actorness and its agents, "actors" as they are called, can be either state-related or non-state related. The former are defined as sovereign political entities that have the authority and capacity to operate in the global scene. The latter are defined as diverse groups like Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), corporations, religious groups, or diasporas, all which lack sovereignty but can still influence public opinion. State building, and therefore state actors, are a result of three key action resources: coercive power, economic power and the capacity to implement and enforce laws. International actors, whether states or organizations, operate in a coordinated way to achieve their objectives. As for state actors, recent theories mention five characteristics that define them: sovereignty, legalization, decision-making, autonomy (and capacity) and representation in the global scene (McLarren & Stahl, 2025 ; Grişevci, 2011).

In this context, institutions are the frameworks that guide, constrain, and enable actors, helping determine what they can do, how they do it, and why they do it (Čmakalová & Rolenc, 2012). Therefore, as per institutional analysis, actors are viewed in two ways. First, institutions can be seen as independent (exogenous) or shaped by theory (endogenous). Second, institutions can affect what other actors want.

In Sjöstedt's (1977) framework, actorness refers to the capacity of an entity to act effectively and purposefully in the international system. He identified four key elements of actorness: presence, which ensures the entity exists as a recognizable actor; capability, which provides the material means to act; willingness, reflecting intent; and opportunity, representing the external conditions. Capability to be acquired needs to be separated from the external environment being dependent interests and resources.

Sjöstedt's framework was expanded by Jupille and Caporaso (1998) introducing four criteria: recognition (the acceptance and interaction of one with others), authority (legal competence), autonomy (independence), and cohesion (unified policies). Potential conflicts that can disturb this can be both horizontal conflicts, (disagreements among member states) or vertical (disagreements between different levels of authority) (Greißeveci, 2011; Niemann & Bretherton, 2013).

Furthermore, Bretherton and Vogler (2013) emphasize the interaction between internal and external factors proposing three components: opportunity (environmental opportunities), presence (influence of others), and capability (ability and resources).

Lastly, McLarren and Stahl (2025) refer to transnational elements (religion, ideology) as elements that boost actorness. By leveraging transnational connections states can further influence their values and perceptions. 'Hybrid actors,' emerge as a result combining elements that are state and non-state related for transnational actors (TNAs) across.

In sum, actorness represents the capacity of entities to effectively engage in and shape international affairs. It is determined by a combination element such as presence, capability, willingness, opportunity, authority, cohesion, and transnational linkages. It is a dynamic and multi-dimensional concept, reflecting the interplay between internal and external environments.

2.2.2. Actorness in the European Union

Federica Mogherini's foreword to the EU Global Strategy introduces three key features on EU Actorness. Firstly, it suggests strategic autonomy by creating the European Union Security and Defence (EUSD) institution (EU Global Strategy, 2016). Secondly, the EU demonstrates actorness through its regulatory capacity, normative influence, and cohesive institutions. As a transnational actor, it functions as a legal entity above the state level that can shape political and social structures. Thus, the legal authority

and autonomy of the EU enhance its actorness as a process of social interaction (Klose, 2018). Thirdly, the European Union shall continue to work with other actors being a democratic and cooperative entity. For instance, its security and defence system must act autonomously but still, in cooperation with NATO (Greißeveci, 2011).

EU actorness draws from fundamental actorness theories creating a mixture of elements. For example, in Sjöstedt's theory presence refers to the EU's structural influence deriving from the Union's economic, diplomatic, military, and normative capacities, and it is strengthened by opportunity, the external environment that enables or constrains EU action. Capability, as another important factor refers to the EU's internal capacity to act—either in vertical coherence or horizontal coherence. Institutional coherence is also required (Sjöstedt, 1977).

Sjöstedt's aforementioned opportunity linking actorness to external environment is enriched by capability, cohesion, and recognition by Jupille and Caporaso (1998). That is, the EU shall acquire the resources to reach unanimity easily, through international acknowledgement. Therefore, its ability to act internationally not only builds on the Union's legal authority but also its recognition depending on its evolving external environment (Sjöstedt & Rhinard, 2019).

Externally, international actors experience and express themselves in society by drawing on two intertwined aspects of agency: the 'me' and the 'I' according to Klose (2018). While the 'me' agent signifies an actor's capacity to see its 'self' agent through the eyes of others the 'I' agent denotes its ability to generate impulses in reaction to the 'me'. Therefore, to analyze the EU's emerging actorness, it must re-imagine its international role then realize its re-imagined role in social interaction, and lastly, assess the potential implications. Moreover, another factor is cohesion: internal cohesiveness refers to the EU's ability to represent a collective position externally, while external effectiveness depends on the dynamics of international negotiations (da Conceição-Heldt & Meunier, 2014).

Negotiations are important due to its sui generis nature of the European Union, its status as neither a state nor a non-state actor. Hence, its power relies on cooperation of many which comes from its ability to project values such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law beyond its borders. This results in potential risks: institutional fragmentation as control is dispersed among numerous bodies, and, integration marked by territorial differentiation (Genschel & Jachtenfuchs, 2016 ; Črnákalová & Rolenc, 2012).

For that, the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) moderates the EU's normative aspirations while enhancing institutional integration illustrating how the EU adapts its foreign policy in response to pressures and seeks to enhance its effectiveness. The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is a result of the EU's effort to boost its effectiveness, its actorness. It promotes economic interests and the diffusion of EU values (Asderaki, 2021). ENP launched in 2004, is the EU's framework for promoting

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bilateral relations with third countries to promote stability and strengthen cooperation relying on treaties with extra-EU countries (EEAS, 2025).

Bilateral agreements are a result of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 where external relations, introducing reforms were enhanced as well as EU global presence securing legality for it. It created the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the European External Action Service (EEAS), and a permanent President of the European Council to enhance coherence, coordination, and external representation (Westlake, 2020). Moreover, Article 47 of the Treaty on European Union grants the EU its legal status and defines competences that are either its sole responsibility (exclusive), or require joint action with Member States (shared), or involve coordination and support (supporting) of parties (TEU, Art. 47).

All the above are efforts to articulate the EU's attempt to develop a union with an active global influence and role to promote cohesion and peace. Mechanisms like the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) were also established by treaties such as the Maastricht Treaty and reflect these goals (Greiçevci, 2011).

In retrospect, legal power is secured by treaties which are the foundations of the Union, and adhering to them is crucial for the EU's legal identity. They allow the EU to project power and influence externally grounded in its legal personality. Rauh (2025) adds that the EU's legal competence to act externally is required although internally established. He views the EU as a bipolar continuum with the promotion of its virtues on one side and the emergence of external obstacles on the other. So, internal cohesion and actorness enhancement alone are not sufficient to transform the EU's global role. The challenge here lies in being able to secure external recognition given that it relies on all, or most, foreign states to agree on the EU's power.

To gain external influence, the EU shall boost its attractiveness, its recognition and credibility (Christou et al., 2025). The first characteristic is about the actor's willingness to cooperate and leads to compliance through influence. The second refers to the EU as a negotiator that affects international affairs and the third, relates to actors having a good reason to believe in the EU. Together these elements boost one's external external effectiveness as the EU's ability to influence effectively. (Da Conceição-Heldt & Meunier, 2014)

In conclusion, the European Union aspires to gain international actorness, combining legality, coherence, influence, and autonomy. It is able to navigate between state-like authority and supranational integration to exercise foreign policy actions while maintaining coherence across Member States. However, to secure its global position it requires both internal and external influence as a complex supranational entity.

2.3. Foreign Policy in the Digital Age

2.3.1. Definition and the European context

In the context of international relations, foreign policy (FP) has often been conceptualized as the behavior of states within an anarchic international system in which real people's voice influences the outcome (Hudson, 2005). It depends on internal and external factors such as a state's location, size, topography, climate, natural resources, and strategic position, population, industrial and military capacity, technological advancement, education (Huzen, 2019). It is comprised of three main components: ends, ways and means. Ends refer to the desired outcomes while ways depict the strategic moves needed to pursue those. Lastly, means refer to the resources (economic, military, diplomatic) available (Bojang, 2018).

Traditional foreign policy analysis focuses on the decisions and outcomes produced by those involved in policymaking and by the institutional frameworks and domestic political contexts in place. Therefore, the concept of actorness deepens our understanding of foreign policy as the product of complex environments. Hudson (2005) argues that foreign policy should be understood through the lens of actor-specific theory which proposes six key features to take under consideration. FP is multifactorial, multilevel, multidisciplinary, integrative, and agent oriented. This means that individuals reach different decisions even if found under similar conditions. The implications of this approach are profound. By centering the analysis on real people actor-specific theory restores the acknowledgment of the human factor in the international system. In this actor-specific theory, it is important to note that perceptions are guided by underlying beliefs and values, including norms and ideologies.

Foreign policy is grounded in five main principles to protect it from subjectivity: the protection of individual citizens; the well-being of society and the enhancement of ideology; the strengthening of national security; the safeguarding of group interests; and the preservation of the government and its members (Huzen, 2019).

Main priorities of FP, as stated by the EU Global Strategy (2016), are security, resilience and reciprocity to potential conflicts as well as cooperation and global governance. Tools for promoting it can be of diplomatic, economic, military, cultural and legal forms. Examples of these are treaties, negotiations, trade and alliances.

In short, foreign policy encompasses all actions conducted by a state to promote its national image either internally or externally using various tools which are constantly changing with the technological advancements. Understanding these principles allows us to situate the EU's foreign policy within its unique multilevel governance structure.

In the EU context, the initial form of the union, the European Community (EC) mainly focused on economic integration and bearing the consequences of previous wars, it refrained from expressing expansive policies. The Maastricht Treaty in 1992 marked a major step in European integration, and it was the first EU treaty to explicitly introduce the concept of a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Maastricht aimed to

make the EU a “union of states and citizens”, not just an economic community and through CFSP it could promote peace, security and EU values. Because security and defense are interlinked, the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) was also proposed by the Maastricht Treaty but institutionalized by the Lisbon Treaty. Both of these tools are now used for foreign policy, giving member states a platform to coordinate positions and actions internationally providing civilian and military crisis management tools enhancing the EU’s credibility through its military capacity (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022; Nugent, 2012).

EU enlargement is also one of the Union’s most powerful foreign policy tools, requiring countries to adopt EU norms on democracy, the rule of law, the market economy, and human rights, exporting stability and values without coercion. It affects foreign policy decision-making with the EU’s external policy shaped by a double-pillar structure that represents economic and political dimensions of EU external policy reinforcing the EU’s identity (Bretherton & Vogler, 2006).

Coming to the present framework, the Treaty on European Union (TEU) defines foreign policy and provides it with a legal basis. As it states «...The Union's action on the international scene shall be guided by the principles which have inspired its own creation, development and enlargement [...] shall seek to develop relations and build partnerships with third countries, and international, regional or global organizations [...] and shall work for a high degree of cooperation in all fields of international relations...» (TEU, Art. 21(para. 1; 2)).

It is important to also cite Article 42, paragraph 1, of the TEU, where it is clearly stated that «...The common security and defense policy shall be an integral part of the common foreign and security policy. It shall provide the Union with an operational capacity drawing on civilian and military assets [...] for peace-keeping, conflict prevention and strengthening international security...» (TEU, Art. 42(para. 1)).

As Federica Mogherini, EU’s former High Representative and Vice-President, emphasizes in EU Global Strategy (2009, p.4), «...For Europe, soft and hard power go hand in hand...». This shows that military power is indeed necessary to strengthen the EU’s global image and secure its place in international affairs. National foreign policies may align with the EU’s foreign policy but under Article 42 (para. 7) of the TEU, a mutual defense clause is established: if an EU member state is attacked, other members must provide aid and assistance.

So, it can be concluded that EU foreign policy is a blend of diplomacy, security, trade, and regulatory influence. This multifaceted entity enables multiple methods (intergovernmental or community ones) and given its legal foundation secured by the treaties, creates a dual system in which foreign policy not only shapes but also is shaped by a multilevel structure where interactions between national, EU, and international levels are central (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022).

2.3.2. The Digital Age and the turn in International Relations

As above mentioned, the EU foreign policy refers to the collective actions and strategies of the union to engage with the world. Nowadays, the tools and arenas through which foreign policy is pursued have expanded dramatically given the technological advancements. Diplomacy, for instance, is no longer confined to closed-door negotiations but includes digital platforms and AI-driven analysis.

Foreign policy through its actor-specific theory allows actors to examine how decision-makers interact with digital tools. Manor (2023) proposes that foreign policy is about how well states leverage, regulate, and negotiate around emerging technologies embracing digital innovation, cybersecurity, and global tech standards as critical instruments of national power. This “tech-first” approach implies that technology is now a primary factor in foreign policy decisions and technological leadership is now becoming a priority. For example, states leverage digital and social media platforms to communicate with foreign publics and influence them (Latif et al, 2025).

The internet has also transformed foreign policy by enabling the control of the flow of information worldwide. News now travels faster, is more accessible, and can reach nearly every part of the globe. Both states and non-state actors now compete for influence online. Digital diplomacy is now a key tool for modern foreign policy to improve operational effectiveness. Therefore, foreign policy is now shaped by a state’s ability to harness digital tools for strategic engagement as it allows countries to extend their influence and communicate with foreign audiences (Adesina, 2017).

With the use of Digital Diplomacy and Artificial Intelligence, foreign policy has been highly affected. Governments and, especially foreign ministries, are urged to begin planning institutional adaptation and put digital technologies to use for international relations. All these digitalized means enhance actorness by expanding a state’s capacity to project presence, norms, and resources aligning with Sjöstedt’s (1977) theory. Consequently, digital diplomacy is a part of the European External Action Service (EEAS) transforming how states conduct foreign policy and why they exercise power and influence making DD a central tool of foreign policy (EEAS, 2025).

2.3.3. Digital Diplomacy as a Foreign Policy tool

With the evolution of AI and DD, they both seem to be vital for foreign policy agendas. AI systems are able to predict crises, and outcomes so they can be used as leverage while it also supports diplomacy by doing analysis on online platforms. By analyzing historical treaties, it optimizes peacekeeping and supports complex negotiations. Although it enhances both defensive and offensive cyber operations, it can pose risks and ethical concerns due to the fact that AI-enabled weapons can select and engage targets independently, there is no global regulatory framework and, inequalities are widened. Nonetheless, digital tools allow states to communicate and influence others while AI-trained advanced systems make foreign policy more anticipatory and adaptive

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requiring, though, careful attention to accountability, transparency, and strategic stability (Mhatre, 2025; Schmidt, 2022).

AI supports values-driven foreign policy, strengthening democratic norms developing ideas with social, economic, or political impact. Diplomacy and foreign policy are essential for all states. The former takes various forms, such as bilateral, multilateral, and institutional diplomacy. Foreign policy has undergone a transformation with innovations taking over. New technologies are now central to foreign policy execution, making it proactive, data-driven, and networked assisting in peacekeeping, economic advancement and negotiation (Frey, 2024).

Azeez (2023) argues that diplomacy is central to a state's foreign policy goals by influencing audiences and connecting goals to resources through information and communication technologies (ICTs). Thereby, DD uses digitalization to promote diplomacy, public engagement, crisis management and norms. Foreign policy results boosts effectiveness when tools are informed and coordinated, to guide decisions, anticipate trends ensure cohesion, shape values and foster cooperation.

Mhatre (2025) argues that diplomacy is a conduit of foreign policy that is benefited by technology and more adaptive as to its aspirations focusing on what a state wants and how it pursues it (Barman, 2024). Foreign Affair Ministries (MFAs) utilize social media and young diplomats, to navigate AI and DD tools for a good cause. (Adesina, 2017).

This is explained by the fact that MFAs should be well-informed, and capable of responding quickly to occurring matters (Scott et al., 2018). Therefore, these new digital methods fundamentally alter the pace and nature of diplomatic procedures. Modern tools are employed for effective adaptation which also require structural reforms. Policymakers and labor market shall recognize that AI has the ability to alter global power dynamics and industries. (Barman, 2024).

2.3.4. Artificial Intelligence as a Foreign Policy instrument

Excellence in AI use is mandatory for Europe to boost its competitiveness which can be enhanced by AI development and adoption (European Commission, 2023). This is due to the fact that AI appears to influence international policy formulation. It assists certain stages of foreign policymaking as it has the capacity to foresee actions and outcomes based on data-driven models that train it, enabling the potential use of fully autonomous systems reshaping the landscape of international relations (Meleouni & Efthymiou, 2023).

Therefore, power is increasingly fragmented, shifting from states to other actors like transnational corporations. This development requires a rethinking of the state's role (Roumate, 2021) with AI being used as a diplomacy tool as well. AI contributes to the creation of new forms of communication, starting with emoticons or emojis which with

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automatic translation, help people overcome the absence of a common language (Guru, 2025). What this means is that AI is both a technological and a social issue that must be acquired and developed responsibly (Saveliev & Zhurenkov, 2021)

The expanded use of AI has facilitated access to data and participation in EU procedures easier, enabling a broader range of non-state actors to engage not only with the EU's legal framework but also with its overall activities. These actors include academic and research institutions, businesses, and NGOs all of which can contribute to enhancing transparency, inclusivity, and effectiveness. Business industries are important as their motives are often profit-oriented, and as they prioritize innovation, when referring to cooperation. Although non-state actors agree on the need for a common European regulatory framework for AI, their one-sided preferences may cause conflicts, which are to be addressed by a more coordinated European strategy to AI-related challenges (Tallberg et al., 2024).

All information is saved in the the 'infosphere' which creates a circulation of knowledge where information is shared among humans and AI systems for the latter to be developed (Saveliev & Zhurenkov, 2021). As AI-based systems perform human-like activities, an international consensus is required for the use of these technologies in certain fields. Also, AI influences diplomatic tools by shaping a state's image and thereby, helping diplomats perform their tasks as digital technologies are used to conduct diplomacy (Hachkevych, 2024). While nations engage in bilateral and multilateral relationships to shape views and align strategies, foreign policy shall evolve to maintain a similar pace to AI development (Scott et al, 2018).

AI assists DD are integrated into the core functions of foreign ministries (Puaschunder, 2019). These AI-powered tools are used to conduct negotiations and execute diplomatic actions. Artificial Diplomacy (AD) emerges as the use of AI by diplomats to map global issues and identify potential challenges. This allows diplomats to engage with more complex practices whilst communication with diverse global audiences is promoted as the world becomes one big place unite.

For instance, Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) are two AI-driven technologies used as tools for bringing people and states closer. VR is the computer-generated simulation of environments that allows users to be present and able to interact within a three-dimensional space. For example, VR can allow users to virtually tour the Louvre in Paris. AR, in contrast, is a technology that overlays computer-generated elements—such as text, sound, and video—onto the real world in real time, enhancing physical environments with location-specific information and virtual content, typically via mobile devices or AR glasses. For example. AR apps guide people through city centers narrating historical points. Both examples of technologies are innovative ways to promote cultural and educational information as part of diplomacy (Guru, 2025).

Artificial Intelligence also impacts international relations as it automates foreign policy-making procedures and their potential consequences using fully autonomous

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systems. These uses of AI come for its triple role as analytical, predictive and operational (Meleouni & Efthymiou, 2023).

As stated above, AI is nowadays integrated into diplomacy and foreign policy. Given the fact that a state's primary responsibility is security, AI can be both beneficiary or harmful (Roumate, 2021). The rise of digital tools can transform societies, raising concerns about the protection of civil rights and the ethical implications that follow. High levels of autonomy can also be risky as the amount of data may available may harm individual privacy. These ethical and societal implications arise when data is shared across platforms to train AI systems.

If data is used to control or suppress populations, 'AI repression' is a term that refers to the use of artificial intelligence technologies by governments as repressive actions, including surveillance, and is often associated with authoritarian regime types (European Parliament, 2024). To combat these tendencies, the EU AI Act, proposed by the European Commission in 2021 and adopted by the Council and the European Parliament in early 2024, introduces the first international initiative for regulating AI, aiming to establish a common European regulatory framework (Tallberg et al., 2024).

Data used to train AI systems stem from descriptions of human lived experiences through data (Roumate, 2021). To deal with data leaks, the EU came up with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), a law regulating how personal data of individuals within the EU can be collected, stored, processed, and transferred aligning with data sovereignty (Regulation (EU) 2016/679).

Therefore, responsibility comes in the form of control of AI systems as to what extent they may gain their autonomy. As for social responsibility, AI ethics propose a dual plan where there is the human perspective (how AI affects humans) and the AI perspective (how machines replicate humans) to suppress potential harmful effects like societal inequalities favoring the wealthy (Saveliev & Zhurenkov, 2021; Georgantopoulos, 2022).

In general, AI systems are a blessing in disguise for the global sphere as although necessary for the EU's actorness, can put humans at risk.

2.3.5. The EU's Establishment of AI and Digital Diplomacy in Foreign Policy

The fact that AI and digital diplomacy are taking over international relations is accepted by the EU and thereby, these new tools are now integrated into its foreign policy. To incorporate them in EU's external action initiatives are taken such as The EU Digital Diplomacy Initiative (EEAS, 2022) which enhances the Union's global communication and engagement. In addition, the EU Artificial Intelligence Act (AI Act) legally binds ethical and human-centered AI software for innovation grounded in democracy and values (Tallberg et al, 2024).

The AI Act separates AI systems into four risk levels: unacceptable, high, limited, and minimal or zero risk. Unacceptable-risk AI includes applications that threaten safety, fundamental rights, or democracy and are therefore prohibited. High-risk AI systems

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such as those used in infrastructure, healthcare, education and employment, must comply with strict requirements. Limited-risk AI must meet transparency obligations to ensure users are informed when engaging with AI-generated content. Finally, minimal or zero-risk AI, such as video game AI or spam filters, faces no specific regulations, as it poses negligible risks to individuals or society (Regulation (EU) 2024/1689, 2024).

In agreement with this, three advisory bodies will support the implementation of the rules. First, the European AI Board ensures uniform application of the AI Act across all EU member states and serves as the primary liaison between the European Commission and national authorities. Second, a Scientific Group of Independent Experts provides technical advice and evidence, particularly in relation to law enforcement, and may issue warnings to the AI Office regarding risks linked to general-purpose AI models. Thirdly, an Advisory Forum, composed of stakeholders, guides the AI Office, for inclusivity in governance structures (Puaschunder, 2019).

The EU AI Act also notes eight AI practices that are unacceptable due to their harmful impact to EU's fundamental rights and societal values: manipulation and deception, exploitative use of vulnerabilities, predicting criminal offenses, CCTV data, social scoring systems, emotion recognition and use of biometrics (Regulation (EU) 2024/1689, 2024).

The InTouchAI.eu (2020-2024) project that was put to use for responsible use of artificial intelligence seeking to create the conditions for adopting policies, practices, and standards that ensure an appropriate ethical and legal framework for AI with active public awareness. During its implementation phase, the project carried out a series of activities focusing on dialogue and joint initiatives promoting research on relevant subjects (European Commission, 2025).

Furthermore, the European AI Alliance initiative, is a forum where members regularly engage in discussions regarding AI developments and has hosted events drawing more than 1500 people virtually and physically. The European AI Alliance fosters dialogue exploring key issues, from the AI White Paper to advancing trustworthy AI at a global level.

Moreover, the EU's Joint Communication on an International Digital Strategy for the EU (2025) emphasizes the promotion of trustworthy AI in line with European values, enhancing competitiveness, promoting security, and establishing a network for digital governance. Through its enlargement and neighborhood strategies, the EU leverages instruments such as Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements to develop partnerships in four main ways: deepening existing Digital Partnerships, broadening cooperation by establishing new partnerships, connecting partnerships to operate as a coordinated network, and strengthening security and defense partnerships (Regulation (EU) 2021/694, 2021).

In addition to this, the Joint Communication on an International Digital Strategy for the EU outlines the EU's approach to enhancing its global digital presence in 2025. The

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main goals appear to be once again, competitiveness and innovation, this time for all member states supporting the EU's vision. To do so, the EU employs research, trade and the military industry aligning with its original, above mentioned, regulation. The updated document encompasses AI's relation to foreign policy focusing on a much wider variety of tools and policies (EU commission, JOIN/2025/140, 2025).

Another important document highlighting the EU's initiatives in this area is the White Paper on Artificial Intelligence. White papers typically present proposals for discussion to reach consensus. Published in 2020, it outlines the benefits of AI and digital diplomacy for citizens, businesses, and public services, while emphasizing the need for a cooperative strategy. Addressing a legal framework and the elements of a safe and trustworthy AI context, it strengthens EU's image introducing the seven key requirements for trustworthy AI: human agency; technical safety; privacy; transparency; diversity, non-discrimination, and fairness; societal and environmental well-being; and accountability.

The EU Global Strategy (2016) outlines the EU's foreign policy priorities, including strategic autonomy and resilience for its security. These are closely connected to the EU's actorness, which to be maintained and enhanced the EU should keep up with technological updates, including them into its foreign policy agenda.

To conclude, the European Union manages to utilize both artificial intelligence and digital diplomacy, in its foreign policy agenda while promoting its values such as democracy, human rights, and ethical standards. This normative image shapes the role of EU as an actor that uses a soft to be a trusted and attractive. By combining these technologies, the EU strengthens its actorness, enhancing its external action and influencing globally.

3. Methodology

The methodological framework employed in this chapter is explains how the research question is addressed and, by explaining in detail the steps of methodology, this chapter ensures transparency, coherence, and consistency.

3.1. Research Question

The present study explores how the concepts of digital diplomacy, new technologies, and artificial intelligence shape the European Union's actorness.

The main research question of this study is:

How does the promotion of digitalization, new technologies, and artificial intelligence enhance and transform the European Union's actorness efficiently?

A single research question offers clarity and coherence (Thabane et al., 2009) and, employing one central question serves the goal of a contextual, and focused analysis, essential for qualitative, interpretive research (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007).

3.2. Research design

This study follows a qualitative theory-driven structure. It combines document and thematic analysis to explore how new technologies construct the EU's image globally.

For this matter, Jupille and Caporaso's (1998) actorness theory is employed for the research question focusing on how the European Union boosts its actorness via digital diplomacy and artificial intelligence. According to this theory, there are four critical dimensions to EU's actorness: recognition, authority, autonomy, and cohesion.

Data collection is based on purposeful sampling. Official EU documents were chosen as they represent the Union's voice and reflect its views. These texts are important as they illustrate how the Union frames itself as a global actor in the modern world including explicit strategic orientations of EU's external action coming from high-level sources.

The four documents that were chosen for their thematic relevance and representativeness are:

- *EU Global Strategy* (European External Action Service, 2016)
- *White Paper on Artificial Intelligence: A European Approach to Excellence and Trust* (European Commission, 2020)
- *Artificial Intelligence Act* (European Parliament & Council of the EU, 2024)
- *Joint Communication on an International Digital Strategy for the EU* (European Commission and the High Representative, 2025)

3.2.1. Corpus

This study's corpus as above-mentioned consists of four official EU texts that were picked to trace the expression of EU actorness through the use of AI, DD and new technologies in FP. Below these documents are presented to depict the EU's gradual shift for a digitally oriented model.

European Union Global Strategy, 2016

The first document is the *European Union Global Strategy* (EUGS). Published in 2016 by the European External Action Service (EEAS) it redefines the Union's foreign policy. The text proposes a resilient Union that operates in unity and harmony.

In its socio-political context, it appears as a response to many crises that occurred in the European context: the Ukraine conflict (2014), the migration crisis (2015), and the Brexit (2016). Thereby, it is published as an effort to reaffirm the Union's role as a powerful actor in the international field. This text was chosen as the foundation of EU's external strategy that serves as the basis for AI and DD development.

White Paper on Artificial Intelligence, 2020

The second document, the White Paper on Artificial Intelligence: A European Approach to Excellence and Trust was published in 2020 by the European Commission. It outlines an “ethical, human-centric” vision for AI and proposes a European regulatory framework.

In its socio-political context, as part of the EU’s broader Digital Initiative, it places the EU in a influential position in the international scene presenting it as a trustworthy and balanced actor, capable of pursuing innovation, legality and ethics. This document was selected as it marks the EU’s first step toward linking technological innovation with governance.

Artificial Intelligence Act, 2024

The third text, Artificial Intelligence Act, published in 2024 by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union serves as a response to AI’s risks. Through a risk-based approach to AI, it defines acceptable and prohibited practices making the EU the first to regulate AI implementation, boosting its leadership and market-based governance (Damro, 2012).

In its socio-political context, this document was published after growing concerns for AI’s security risks especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. This text was selected as the first legal framework for AI taking into consideration ethical considerations.

Joint Communication on an International Digital Strategy for the EU, 2025

The fourth text, *Joint Communication on an International Digital Strategy for the EU* was published in 2025 by the European Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

It depicts the EU’s strategic effort to becoming a powerful global actor in use of AI and Digital Diplomacy linking them to external relations, cultural diplomacy, and soft power.

In its socio-political context, it can be viewed as a response to the growing competition of China and the United States, aiming to promote the EU. This document was picked for this study as it connects digital policy with foreign policy agendas and soft power.

3.2.2. Thematic Analysis

To analyze the said official EU documents, thematic analysis (TA) was employed and systematically conducted. As Ahmed et al. (2025) note, TA is particularly effective for

deciphering qualitative data, providing a flexible yet structured framework for interpreting and filtering texts. Aligning with Braun and Clarke's (2006) theory the process of thematic analysis involves several key stages: familiarization with the data, code generation, the search for themes, the review of themes, and definition of themes which lead to the final step, writing up. The table below summarizes the six stages applied in this study and outlines what each stage encompassed during the analytical process, as well as the purpose it served.

Figure 1: Thematic Analysis Stages

Stage	Description	Purpose
Familiarization	Collect, read and re-read data	Immerse in text and note key ideas
Code Generation	Examine data with reflexivity	Identify and label key quotes
Search for themes	Group codes into patterns	Build main thematic axes
Review of themes	Evaluate for accuracy and re-assessment	Ensure coherence and validity
Definition of themes	Deeper analysis of themes	Finalize and define each theme
Writing up	Translate data into theory	Create Narratives answering the research question.

Source: Author

Building on the above-mentioned stages, the analysis process follows the same guideline. In application, after choosing the corpus out of a variety of EU official documents, the texts were read multiple times to understand and get familiar with their structure to identify recurring ideas and linguistic patterns related to the four dimensions of actorness (familiarization). Following up, aligning with the actorness theory used as the bone structure, key excerpts were picked in correspondence to each dimension - recognition, authority, autonomy and cohesion. These excerpts were coded and presented in the appendix to enhance textual flow. During this, stage (code generation) descriptive terms such as *values*, *sovereignty*, *leadership*, and *cooperation* and more were highlighted so as to be later grouped into broader thematic axes that reflected the EU's global role (search for themes). Next, the emerging themes were refined, re- assessed (review of themes) and then clearly defined (definition of themes) to ensure internal coherence and alignment with the theoretical framework and, most importantly, with the research question. Finally, the findings were presented addressing the research question, showing how digital diplomacy and AI contribute to EU's actorness (writing up).

3.2.3. Discourse-Historical Analysis

Last but not least, a brief Discourse-Historical Analysis is used to identify patterns on the EU's multifaceted actorness in the digital landscape. As per Reisigl and Wodak (2017), this analysis follows the intertextual relationships between texts. As the corpus selected for this research is intertwined and situated within past, present, and future, this approach is triangulatory, combining insights from theory, methodology, and empirical data. Data collection is based in a deep understanding of context, identifying intertextual links across texts and exploring how actorness practices are embedded in EU. To comprehend the various types of contexts and environments, DHA proposes five essential strategies to secure its successful application : Nomination, Predication, Argumentation, Perspectivization/ framing or discourse representation and, Intensification/mitigation. The table below depicts these five strategies, their definitions, and the questions used to track them.

Figure 2: DHA analytical process

Strategy	Definition	Question
Nomination	How social actors, objects or phenomena are named and referenced in the text	How are persons, objects, phenomena/events, processes and actions named and referred to linguistically?
Predication	Qualities attributed to social actors	What characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to social actors, objects, phenomena/events and processes?
Argumentation	The types of arguments used to justify discourse	What arguments are employed in the discourse in question?
Perspectivisation (framing/discourse representation):	Stances adopted and actors' positioning in all that	From what perspective are these nominations, attributions and arguments expressed?
Intensification/Mitigation	The discursive strategies that strengthen or weaken claims	Are the respective utterances articulated overtly; are they intensified or mitigated?

Source: Author

The thematic axes that were extracted by TA, were now analyzed through a targeted Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) to move beyond the identification of themes and

uncover discourses that shape the EU's actorness. While thematic analysis organizes the material into six axes, DHA examines how they are linguistically constructed, justified, and contextualized across documents. As Wodak (2015) states, DHA is used as a macro-approach in EU foreign policy, emphasizing identity construction and linking discourse to historical and sociopolitical contexts. By applying DHA analysis, we present insights on how the EU portrays its identity and how digital technologies enhance the EU's actorness.

3.3. The purpose of the study

This study tries to examine how the European Union employs new technologies as tools in its foreign policy to act, influence, and communicate on the global stage.

These tools are used as mechanisms to strengthen the Union's image in international relations. Thus, the goal of the study is to understand exactly how the EU's actorness is boosted and to what extent it is efficient (Bojang, 2018)..

3.4. Indicative literature review

Artificial Intelligence encompasses human-like decision-making systems that are used to influence international relations (Saveliev & Zhurenkov, 2021 ; Hachkevych, 2024). In this context, digital platforms as part of digital diplomacy are important for diplomatic communications (Manor & Pamment, 2019). The European Union uses AI and digital diplomacy to promote values like transparency and cooperation (Arifon, 2019) to support its pillars that include democratic values and culture. Nowadays, with the rapidly growing pace of these tools, many studies have been conducted.

AI is often analyzed in terms of leadership, referring to EU's medium capacity which is investigated through legal and regulatory lenses (Christou et al., 2025; Calderaro & Blumfelde, 2022). Meanwhile, the transformational impact of digital diplomacy on communication and international relations is also discussed (Barman, 2024; Frey, 2024). The influence of these new technological tools on international relations is pinpointed when referring to the need for direct enabling in crisis management, taking COVID-19 as an example (Adesina, 2017); Frangonikolopoulos & Spiliotakopoulou, 2022). This shows that AI and digital tools can indeed affect and reshape foreign policy systems and either amplify or distort relations (Roumate, 2021).

At the same time, light is shed on non-state actors and how digital diplomacy reshapes international relations by enabling states and non-state actors and investigating their role in online diplomacy (Tallberg et al., 2023). The EU's role in state-building and Europeanization to which social media seems to enable the global audience and promotes cultural exchange through online means (Bouris & Papadimitriou, 2020; Barman, 2024). As a result, the EU manages to interact in a more engaging way so that digitalization can project a state's foreign policy (Collins & Bekenova, 2019; Frey,

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2024). Arifon (2019) adds to this by saying that there is a gap between projected images (what states communicate) and perceived images (what audiences believe).

Additionally, the EU's digital sovereignty and strategic autonomy is also analyzed as for EU's strength in the market that may come from technology as well (Broeders et al., 2023). Technology can be used as a field alone or as a tool of diplomacy and as an important factor in economy but requires special literacy, boosting education levels and infrastructure settings (Manor, 2025; Karpenko & Kutsenko, 2023). Thereby, the EU's image is boosted through socio-political advancements that change the nature of diplomacy and, thus, foreign policy in general fostering dialogue and cooperation (Budiana, 2023; Bjola & Manor, 2022; Lîsenko, 2025; Thiel, 2023).

In sum, research on digital tools examine how international relations are shaped by them and how the European Union uses them to promote itself through legal, technological, and socio-political frameworks.

3.5. Research Gap

Although the fact that AI Technologies have been broadly studied in the past decades, and the subject has been put through diverse lenses, including technological innovation leadership and governance, and international influence, few studies to none have combined them to existing actorness theories to explore the EU's self-presentation in the global scene (Christou et al., 2025 ; Manor, 2025).

This research aims to understand how digital diplomacy and AI are intertwined in between and with the EU's external action and therefore, its actorness. It suggests that these tools are not only functional but also deeply embedded within the EU's strategy as they not only change its external action but also its overall strategy to be able to efficiently rule internationally. Lastly, it tries to understand how the EU discourse boosts its actorness and to what extent its dimensions are promoted effectively.

3.6. Validity and reliability

In qualitative research, validity depends on trustworthiness and authenticity in presenting a subject while reliability is about consistency (Anderson et al., 2024; Creswell & Miller, 2000). Both concepts are essential in document-based studies, for accuracy and transparency.

In this study, validity is ensured through data and theoretical triangulation. Four official EU texts are compared and analyzed, originating from different years and institutions, addressing digital tools. Also, via theoretical triangulation results are interpreted to avoid misled conclusions.

On the other hand, reliability was ensured by maintaining a systematic and transparent research process where all stages of the analysis were documented. Guided by Jupille

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and Caporaso's (1998) four dimensions of actorness, it is made sure that results are coherent and aligned. At last, Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis were followed for this study to be conducted in a unique way.

3.7. Limitations

This study, although it attempts to remain subject to research principles, presents certain limitations which are acknowledged below and should therefore be taken into consideration when viewing the results. Firstly, it is well noted throughout the text that this analysis is based mostly on documentary sources, namely the EU's official documents selected as most relevant to the research question. This means that it reflects, to a great extent, institutional perspectives that may not always be applied in practice or may be significantly altered. However, this does not affect the research, as its main goal is precisely this: to examine how the EU presents itself as a global actor, not what it does or whether this is indeed achieved, although these points are briefly commented on in the discussion chapter.

Furthermore, this study draws from particular chronological periods, and therefore, its conclusions and interpretations are subject to the context of the current timeframe. As AI and digital technologies continue to evolve rapidly, the findings must be re-evaluated to check their appropriateness for different periods.

Lastly, as content analysis is a deeply interpretive procedure, and although transparency is highly promoted, the results and conclusions are subject to the researcher's subjectivity, as the findings are inevitably influenced by the researcher's analytical lens and theoretical assumptions. This explains why triangulation was used throughout the text and why the findings were supported by theory when presented.

4. Analysis

4.1. Analytical Process

This study employs a theory-driven analysis. It uses Jupille and Caporaso's (1998) actorness theory and interprets texts based on the four dimensions of actorness to explore how digital tools are embraced by the EU to promote its image worldwide.

The four dimensions proposed are: recognition (the EU as a legitimate international actor), authority (the EU's capacity to establish law), autonomy (the EU's ability to act independently) and cohesion (the EU's level of internal coherence).

Revisiting the selection of EU official documents, the actorness dimensions are interpreted and studied based on the corpus that sets out the EU's vision to be viewed as international actor that sets the foundations for others to follow. Thereby, each dimension is directly or indirectly reflected on these texts to improve the EU's external and internal actorness.

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The table below depicts how the actorness theory framework is depicted in the chosen EU policy documents via a visual representation that shows which dimensions are evident and where.

Figure 3: Dimensions of actorness in documents

ACTORNESS DIMENSIONS // TEXTS	EU GLOBAL STRATEGY	WHITE PAPER O N AI	AI ACT	JOINT COMMUNICATION ON AN INTERNATIONAL DIGITAL STRATEGY FOR THE EU
RECOGNITION	✓	✓	✓	✓
AUTHORITY	✓	✓	✓	✓
AUTONOMY	✓	✓	✓	✓
COHESION	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: Author

Further to this, some key excerpts were chosen from each text as per their relevance to the dimensions of actorness; these quotes are the empirical basis on which interpretation is conducted, and the EU's external identity is articulated.

All excerpts are coded (e.g., Ex. 1.3), as presented in Appendix A. The first number refers to the document (1 = EU Global Strategy, 2 = AI Act, 3 = White Paper on AI, 4 = Joint Communication on an International Digital Strategy for the EU), and the second refers to the particular passage selected for each dimension based on keywords (see p. 39). For example, Ex.1.3 refers to the first document (EUGS) and the third excerpt.

As a result, six thematic axes are drawn illustrating how the EU constructs its image to reinforce its actorness. On top of that, an cross-axial analysis takes place that integrates findings from axes on how the EU's international presence and identity are shaped.

Finally, a brief DHA analysis explores how recurring patterns construct the EU's image and identity as a global actor.

4.2. Analysis on Actorness Dimensions

4.2.1. Recognition

Recognition is the first dimension of actorness as per Jupille and Caporaso's theory developed in 1998. It is defined as the extent to which an actor is acknowledged as legitimate and capable in the global sphere. It can be promoted now even more with the use of digital technologies.

The first text, the *EU Global Strategy* (2016) depicts the European Union's recognition as dependent on internal capability and external recognition (Bretherton and Vogler, 2006). As chosen excerpts show (Ex.1.1 and 1.2) the Union acts as a "normative" and "operational power", a "security provider", and a "shaper of digital governance". Its "normative" power derives from the promotion of values such as responsibility and cooperation so that the Union adopts a legitimacy-seeking behavior that constructs its identity morally (Manners, 2002; Sjursen, 2006). Therefore, its actorness occurs through expectation and practice due to the EU's ambition to extend its influence as a credible and influential actor (Christou & Simpson, 2009). By linking technological capacity to diplomacy, its ability to regulate digitalized policies leads to a "governance turn" in which European virtues are promoted (Stockreiter, 2025)

The second text, *Artificial Intelligence Act* (2024) presents the EU's recognition as a legitimate and values-based actor emerging from ethical standards that act as a "guardian of fundamental rights" such as the functioning of the market and the protection of goods (Manners, 2002). As excerpts state, the use of AI should be "human-centric", "trustworthy" and "legal-based" to gain credibility, internal cohesion, external acknowledgment and moral responsibility (Ex. 2.1 and 2.2).

The third document, *White Paper on Artificial Intelligence* (2020) constructs EU's recognition combining its technological and industrial power with infrastructure and legality (Ex. 3.1). Thus, recognition is enhanced by competitiveness, credibility, technological capability, value-based governance, global influence and validation (Ex. 3.2). Aligning with Tocci (2016), the EU documents produce recognition through performative narrative construction indicating how international actors perceive and respond to European recognition. Further to this, the document refers to self-presentation of the EU and reciprocal acknowledgment that introduces the union as an innovator. As a result, regulatory and technological developments are central to EU's normative power with AI governance central to shaping its identity (Manners, 2002 ; Balcioğlu, 2025)

The fourth text, the *Joint Communication on the International Digital Strategy* for the EU (2025) shows the EU's recognition through partnerships, cooperation, and global engagement in pursuit of shared interests (Ex. 4.1). By portraying the EU as a capable actor, it gains legitimacy (Ex.4.2) highlighting the "growing appetite" for digital cooperation through collective action and international collaboration. This suggests that

third countries perceive the EU as a desirable and trustworthy digital partner. Consequently, the EU positions itself as a global leader that attracts cooperation and, by grounding partnerships it illustrates how it influences projecting values, trust, and cooperation (Manners, 2002).

In sum, across all the examined documents, the EU consistently performs its actorness through the exercise of normative power, thus through the influence and promotion of values. Nowadays, with the emergence of AI and DD, the European Union's actorness lies in its capacity to act and be recognized internationally. Therefore, these new digital practices become a key instrument of actorness, transforming a value-driven Union into a regulatory Union with diplomatic power.

By doing so, it is institutionalized through law, that the EU's partners must abide by the Union's standards if they wish to be favorable to the EU and benefit from the use of AI and DD practices in the modern world. Internal capacity, cohesion and external recognition as a "global standard-setter" place the EU in a beneficiary position in the international order as per Bretherton & Vogler (2006). As for the use of AI and DD, the use of these tools promotes cooperation, dialogue, and digital partnerships providing the Union the ability to shape digital norms, infrastructures, and ethical standards.

4.2.2. Authority

Authority, as the second dimension of actorness in Jupille and Caporaso's theory (1998) refers to the legitimate power of the EU to operate both internally and externally. It consists of legal, political, and moral aspects and derives from institutional mandates and collective decision-making processes such as unanimity among members.

EUGS (2016) illustrates authority as a central factor of the EU's actorness; pinpointing legal-institutional and soft-networked forms. Firstly, the Union's formal authority is treaty-based calling for collective action. Therefore, it depends on members' willingness to abide by EU standards and provide mutual assistance (Ex. 1.3). Secondly, the EU is portrayed as an actor capable of shaping agendas and coordinating networks (Ex. 1.4) using coordination and persuasion rather than coercion. Both of these aspects depict the EU's as not only a legal but also a normative power that either binds its members legally or influences them indirectly.

However, the EU appears to be, in practice, less legal and more normative, as it lacks coercive means and hierarchical capacities that states have. Its power mostly lies in shared commitment and a much needed consensus achieved by infusion of norms (Manners, 2002; Damro, 2012). For this reason, even when the EU documents portray its authority as legally grounded, in fact it functions predominantly as a normative, persuasive, and relational power revealing a hybrid form: formal in structure, but normative in operation strengthening actorness through legitimacy, recognition, and shared values (*EUGS*, 2016).

As the EU Global Strategy explicitly establishes the EU's strategy plan as mentioned above, its aspirations and goals are implemented primarily in 2022 Strategic Compass for Security and Defense (EAAS, 2022) which is adopted by the EU as a roadmap for collective security, defense, and strategic autonomy. This EU official document introduces a plan for EU's vision based on four pillars: Act, Secure, Invest and Partner. The compass pragmatizes outlined goals of EUGS utilizing values-based guidance (EEAS, 2022).

The *Artificial Intelligence Act* (2024) also adds to the authority dimension as it sets the legal grounds for a coordinated legal framework around the use of AI and DD. The European Union can impose and, create law (Ex. 2.3) and this enhances its actorness. Member states are motivated to join a common line of action in which non-compliance is implicitly discouraged. Consequently, the EU's institutional and normative authority is enhanced as well as its regulatory power also reflected on the Brussels Effect, through which EU regulations acquire global reach (Bradford, 2012; Damro, 2012).

The said regulatory power goes hand in hand with compliance, which is secured by assessment procedures like the AI sandbox mechanism. In these cases, and under control, providers are allowed to test systems to receive formal proof of conformity (Ex. 2.4). This is a typical procedural and supervisory process within the EU context. By controlling AI and digital tools results, coordinated actions ensure compliance and guidance creating a form of shared authority within a multi-level governance system (Balcioğlu et al., 2025; Stockreiter, 2025). In sum, the EU's capacity to navigate through regulatory power and coordinated governance aligns with its portrayal of a global digital regulator (Bradford, 2012; Renda, 2022).

Furthermore, the *White Paper on Artificial Intelligence* (2020) also reflects the Union's growing authority in emerging technologies (Ex. 3.3). In the passage EU is introduced again as a regulatory and normative actor setting standards beyond its borders and therefore, aspires to create a unified legal framework to protect members from AI's risks. With the EU overseeing, designing, managing, and enforcing the standards for artificial intelligence use, binding rules embedded in ethical values (i.e. transparency, safety) are implemented on the internal market to promote it (Puaschunder, 2019). This aligns with a frictionless internal market that boosts itself along with its economic authority (Kelemen, 2010). The terms "Market Power Europe" and "Brussels Effect" are coined to capture the internal regulations and norms that become de facto for member states to follow to get access to the European market (Bradford, 2012; Damro, 2012). To do so, securing its extraterritorial reach and its capacity to impose obligations on both domestic and foreign actors is essential (Ex. 3.4). The EU exports its legal norms and ethical principles through normative and procedural diffusion (Zenglein et al., 2022; Renda, 2022). Selected excerpts illustrate how the EU positions itself as a rule-maker with legal authority in the global governance of artificial intelligence.

The fourth document, *the Joint Communication on an International Digital Strategy for the EU (2025)* also adds on to the European Union's authority as part of its actorness in the modern world. It refers to its ambition to shape global norms that reflect its interests and values highlighting its tendency for concerted action (Ex.4.3). This statement highlights the EU's normative and political authority as a "guardian of values" (Ex.4.4) also enriched by the fact that the EU is projected as a global leader in cybersecurity through initiatives like the Cyber Resilience Act (Christou & Simpson, 2009). As a result, legal-institutional and market-based authority place the Union as a prestigious actor in industrial leadership through regulatory competence and technological expertise (Bradford, 2012; Damro, 2012; Bretherton & Vogler, 2006).

In retrospect, the examined policy documents, construct the authority of the European Union as its ability to establish, implement, and project power through regulatory, and institutional ways. As a legal entity its power comes from treaties whilst its market-based power is based on cybersecurity and digital governance. As a result, legal competence, is acquired and EU's actorness is consolidated in global order.

4.2.3. Autonomy

The third dimension of the actorness theory as developed by Jupille and Caporaso (1998) is about EU's autonomy which pertains its ability to act independently. This means that the EU gets to pursue its own interests, formulate policies, and implement actions based on its capacity and, free from the influence of external actors. Autonomy is important to the EU's capacity and seeks both internal coherence and external independence (Bretherton & Vogler, 2006; Smith, 2013).

As stated in the first document, *EUGS* (2016), autonomy is vital for the existence of the EU as a powerful actor in international relations as it is deeply related to ambition and strategy for promoting peace and security (Ex. 1.5). To support this, the EU chooses to influence through inspiration rather than coercion (Ex. 1.6) to its own interests and while supporting its partners as they are much needed in order to align with the EU's "strategic autonomy". The latter is also mentioned by the second document, *Artificial Intelligence Act (2024)* which legalizes the use of AI and digital diplomacy in the EU and acts as a role model that other states abide by so that the EU continues to operate as a global actor. Hence, autonomy is viewed as independency and to secure it the EU shall earn and maintain the trust of its member states and partners within and outside of EU borders, limiting dependencies and enhancing tech sovereignty of the EU (Tocci, 2020).

For tech sovereignty to thrive, the *AI Act* (2024) also states that each Member State shall design national frameworks responsible for the use of AI systems in correspondence with the European guidance (Ex. 2.5), to maintain institutional autonomy and impartiality. This depends credibility and harmonized independence for the EU to operate as a unified actor with minor varieties amongst member states. There

is also the part of the EU requiring providers to follow guidelines of AI use to implement AI-trained software only if established within the Union or represented legally within its frontiers (Ex. 2.6). This safeguards that AI procedures remain subject to the EU authority and protect the above-mentioned technological sovereignty in the form of “regulatory autonomy,” making sure that external actors are under control (Tocci, 2020; Bradford, 2012). Thereby, the AI Act secures independence and credibility of authorities, distribution of AI and global standard diffusion.

The *White Paper on Artificial Intelligence* (2020) also pursues technological sovereignty and leadership in the context of autonomy. It describes the Union’s capacity as a regulatory power and as a coherent actor by proposing a “human-centric”, “trustworthy” approach to AI governance (Ex. 3.5). In the emerging AI landscape, it depicts a vision of technological development reducing dependency as a matter of technological sovereignty (Christou & Simpson, 2011). Moreover, investing in next-generation technologies, the EU builds foundations necessary for its technological capacity promoting a dual-ended strategy: minimizing dependency on external technologies and incorporating European virtues in the broader technological legal framework conducting normative power and value-driven governance (Manners, 2002). The document also highlights mechanisms (institutional and procedural) of autonomy that represent coherence and collective action (Ex. 3.6). As stated, by cultivating unified initiatives, the EU boosts its ability to act collectively and strategically across levels of governance for consistency: a key of actorness according to Bretherton and Vogler (2006).

The next document published in 2025, the *Joint Communication on an International Digital Strategy for the EU*, features the EU’s goal to develop into a decisive global actor in digital governance linking digital sovereignty to external projection (Ex. 4.5). As per the excerpt, the union seeks to boost its competitiveness in the tech field and its innovation level. By stating that “no country or region can tackle the digital and AI revolution alone” this tendency for collaboration and coordination is expressed securing balance of internal coherence and external cooperation. The rapid emerging levels of AI technologies and DD brings out the need for rule setting and planning. In this context, the EU aspires to create patterns in delivering and using digital tools by all partners (Ex. 4.6). Through technological capability, the EU manages to stay competitive and a leader in the global arena (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020; Bjola & Holmes, 2015). This official document textualized how the EU sees itself as a standard-setting and innovation-driven actor, utilizing digital sovereignty to influence and promote a human-centric digital strategy.

All in all, across these four documents, autonomy is described as both a prerequisite for internal coherence and a means of projecting global influence. In this sense, the EU demonstrates its capacity to act collectively and strategically in its pursuit ultimately reinforcing credibility and legitimacy.

4.2.4. Cohesion

According to Jupille and Caporaso's theory of actorness (1998) another dimension of it is *cohesion*: the level of unity and consistency within the Union as presented in international relations. Towards this, EU's institutions and Members coordinate on political willingness and a shared identity.

The first examined document, *EUGS* (2016) reflects the EU's ability to join forces and unite through "uniting cultures" (Ex. 1.7) and "forging a common identity among Europeans" (Ex. 1.8). As shared goals, mutual interests, and collaboration are essential to achieve this, any existing differences among nations shall be overcome. As stated, the EU manages to turn different views into an advantageous virtue (Ex. 1.8) and that enhances its legitimacy and credibility as a coherent and reliable international actor (Bretherton & Vogler, 2006). Therefore, internal unity in such a multicultural setting, is acquired and a united entity with international influence is formed (Ex. 1.7). As a result, cohesion is institutionalized by coordinated frameworks with unity being one of the Union's fundamental principles and a key dimension of its cohesion.

Another document, the *Artificial Intelligence Act* (2024) also describes cohesion both implicitly and explicitly: this happens through a common legal framework for AI use. In order to avoid fragmentation coordinated implementation of a common strategy shall support unity and coherence (Ex. 2.7). Consequently, all members function similarly and under common principles for the union to be able to act as an independent entity. The passage cited refers to AI sandboxes, but the following statement is visible throughout the entire document: harmonizing EU practices, an integrated regulatory environment is promoted that enhances cohesion as a prerequisite for EU's actorness. Therefore, international credibility allows the Union's image to be shaped as a unified global actor (Nugent & Rhinard, 2016).

Another aspect of cohesion refers to the fact that the EU must remain up-to-date, and be adaptive to innovation which is essential as it leaves, no space for doubt or inconsistency (Ex. 2.8). Additionally, transparency leads to information distribution and compliance, minimizing asymmetries and enhancing accountability via collective actions (Floridi, 2019). This way, digital governance is strengthened as shared standards are used and provide consistency. As a result, cohesion is both procedural and strategic, leading to the EU's credibility and leadership.

The *White Paper on Artificial Intelligence* (2020) is another document examined for this study and outlines the European vision for a "human-centric", "trustworthy", and "innovative" AI landscape, reflecting the EU's pursuit of actorness. As far as cohesion goes, its "major impact" internally and externally leads to a values-driven strategy to promote human rights and EU virtues (Ex. 3.7). These are central pillars to EU strategy in which fragmentation is not an option (Ex. 3.8). Further research to this illustrates that fragmentation can be combatted by following harmonized AI standards that safeguard the EU's competitiveness (Hoffmann-Riem, 2020; Helberger et., 2017).

All efforts of the EU to foster competitiveness, technology, research, innovation and partnerships is boosted by the employment of “synergies” (Ex. 3.8), that is networks, deriving from Gruning’s excellence theory (2008) enhancing EU’s global image as organizations communicate with audiences to achieve attraction: a tool of soft power (Nye, 2008). Soft power, leads to desired outcomes, enhancing attraction and credibility through institutionalized norms aligning with the EU’s digital and technological policy for a unified international presence (Kelemen, 2010; Duranti, 2005).

The fourth analyzed document, the *Joint Communication on an International Digital Strategy for the EU (2025)* also represents all efforts for development of the EU’s presence and influence. This is possible in digital governance through partnerships, and value-based cooperations internationally. It is advised that internal and external actions are “closely intertwined and mutually reinforced” (Ex. 4.7) suggesting that they remain coherent if relevant to digital policies and external initiatives. This way the EU promotes consistency both institutional and discursive. As Archakis and Tsakona (2012) state, language creates discourse and expresses social needs constructing identities. Therefore, digital diplomacy can be seen as a discursive practice that contributes to the construction of a collective European identity which is shaped through shared narratives of internal unity and visibility (Diez, 2014). “Team Europe” as an initiative and claim in the document strengthens this idea of a shared European identity (Ex. 4.8). This is explained by Archakis and Tsakona (2012), as identities are constructed through participation in social structures and are shaped by dominant norms. In the EU context Member States operate as part of a unified body, fostering coordination and reinforcing solidarity via a sense of belonging to cooperate in a synchronized rhythm. This boosts the EU’s capability to act unanimously as a global digital actor.

To revisit this dimension, the EU’s digital diplomacy synchronizes internal and external actions, building coherence, identity, and credibility. As a result, the EU’s role in international relations is enhanced by cohesion through securing, unity, shared identity, and coordination, transforming diversity into strength, promoting trust, transparency, and excellence.

5. Findings

5.1. Identifying Thematic Axes

The findings presented are based on a thematic analysis that concludes in creating six axes for the EU's actorness in the digital age and correspond to Jupille and Caporaso's dimensions (1998). The thematic axes derived from re-emerging keywords and patterns identified across the four documents. Thereby, the process involved identifying recurrent keywords, expressions, and conceptual patterns on the Union's views on actorness

Figure 4: Keywords for Thematic Axes creation

Thematic Axis	Key - words found in excerpts
1	Values, ethics, human-centric, trustworthy, democracy, transparency, responsibility, fundamental rights, fairness, rule-based order, citizens, protection, human dignity
2	Regulation, framework, compliance, rule-making, standards, governance, monitoring, enforcement, legal certainty, harmonized approach, market regulation, accountability
3	Autonomy, technological sovereignty, independence, resilience, capacity, innovation, leadership, competitiveness, reducing dependencies, digital sovereignty
4	Team Europe, unity, solidarity, joint action, mutual assistance, cooperation, shared vision, common purpose, European identity, integration
5	Partnerships, cooperation, alliances, multilateralism, global leadership, connectivity, collaboration, shared governance, international engagement
6	Cybersecurity, resilience, data protection, safe infrastructures, democratic resilience, stability, protection, safeguarding, risk prevention, defense

Source: Author

Using thematic coding, key terms are analyzed and these thematic axes occur explaining how the EU self-presents its actorness. In the following table, they are described in relation to the dimensions of actorness.

Figure 5: Description of Thematic Axes and Actorness Correspondence

	Thematic Axis	Description	Actorness Correspondence
1	The EU as a Normative Power	This Axis depicts how the EU presents itself as a value-driven actor to gain recognition as a global leader.	Recognition

2	The EU as a regulatory power	This Axis highlights the EU's role as a global digital rule-maker, linking legal power to international political authority.	Authority
3	The EU as a Sovereign entity	This axis shows how the EU links digital progress to independence. Autonomy emerges as both a technological and political necessity.	Autonomy
4	The EU as a united entity	This Axis recognizes unity as mandatory for internal solidarity and external influence.	Cohesion
5	The EU as a global partner	This Axis casts the EU as an inclusive yet influential leader, where collaboration legitimizes global authority.	Recognition / Authority
6	The EU as a Security and Defense Actor	This Axis links digital policy to democracy, cybersecurity, and resilience, as a tool for safeguarding values and strategic stability.	Authority / Autonomy

Source: Author

5.2. Thematic Analysis on Axes

In this chapter, the occurring axes are presented after being identified using selected passages from the examined texts. This analysis is guided by the actorness dimensions, and tries to respond to the main research question, supported by literature review and contextualization.

After finalizing the thematic analysis, a brief Discourse-Historical Analysis (DHA) is applied to all axes, uncovering themes that re-occur linking them to their discourses. This highlights how the EU creates discourses on digital diplomacy and artificial intelligence for its identity, legitimacy, and role in international relations.

Finally, a cross-thematic analysis is conducted connecting the axes together for a more comprehensive understanding of how the role of digital tools in the European Union's actorness.

Thematic Axis 1: The EU as a Normative Power

The first axis "The EU as a Normative Power" illustrates the European attempt to be presented as a normative power (Ex. 2.1) and as a global leader that decides values and ethics that are accepted by all connected actors (Manners, 2002). This axis aligns with actorness' recognition with power deriving from EU's image in the global sphere, (Ex. 3.3), and the security it inspires (Jupille & Caporaso, 1998).

In response to the research question, the EU projects an image of trustworthiness and responsibility (Ex. 3.5) legally binding members to ethical and human-centric principles for technological governance, a key point in all texts. Thus, employing digital tools the EU shapes its international image as a reliable and morally grounded actor (Bjola & Holmes, 2015; Manor, 2019). It is an ethically bound actor to virtues,

fundamental rights and democracy (Manners, 2002; Bretherton & Vogler, 2006). The Union is also presented (Ex. 3.8) as a global security provider that seeks cooperation, engages in multilateral agreements, and builds partnerships within the internal market (EEAS, 2025; Tocci, 2020).

Moreover, its recognition as a normative power enhances the EU's ability to transform its ideals into rules for artificial intelligence and digital diplomacy to which all must adhere (Ex.3.5) to be a part of EU (Bradford, 2012; Damro, 2012). Portrayed as a trustworthy responsible partner its recognition lies in its ability to project universal values and ethical standards (Reisigl & Wodak, 2017; Jupille & Caporaso, 1998).

Employing DHA as per Reisigl and Wodak's (2017) EU is nominated as a values-driven "ethical" and "human-centric" actor (Ex. 2.1; Ex. 2.2; 4.5) that acts as a defender of European fundamental rights predicating a humanly technological approach driven by transparency (Ex. 2.8) and trustworthiness (Ex. 3.3) based on values and law (Ex. 2.5). Perspectivization makes the EU's voice appealing via the use of wording such as "we", "together" or "Europe," creating a shared identity enhanced through argumentation in EUGS "Together we will be able to achieve more than Member States acting alone" (Ex. 1.8). This forged identity must be "ensured," (Ex. 4.8) leading to intensification whilst mitigation is also present through value-driven commitments (Ex. 4.2; 1.7). Overall, these strategies reinforce Jupille and Caporaso's (1998) recognition dimension as part of the EU's actorness in international order.

Thematic Axis 2: The EU as a Regulatory Power

The second axis "The EU as a Regulatory Power" depicts the EU's attempts to becoming a regulatory power, a global authority that sets standards and rules beyond its borders (Damro, 2012). This passage (Ex. 1.5) aligns with the authority dimension of actorness that correlates to the institutional and legal capacity to implement decisions that exert broad influence (Jupille & Caporaso, 1998).

In response to the research question, the EU, creating its legal framework to AI technologies and digital diplomacy (Ex. 2.2) becomes a "rule-maker" and "standard-setter" that gains legal recognition as for the first time a unified AI regulation is created positioning the Union as a leading force (Ex. 3.5) in the international digital scene (Renda, 2022; Stockreiter, 2025).

All documents examined for this dimension reveal the EU's rule-making capacity in relation to Damro's (2012) regulatory power: the EU manages to influence outside of its territory. The excerpts illustrate the Union's ability to internationally influence using up-to-date technologies to monitor compliance and standards across member states, portraying the Union as a "connector" and "agenda-shaper" (Ex. 1.4). Furthermore, the EU gets a leading role in cybersecurity and data protection (Ex. 1.2) projecting law, values, coordination, and legitimacy (Council of the EU, 2022; European Commission & High Representative, 2025). As for its internal regulations market influence mechanism is used rather than a direct political known as the "Brussels effect". As one

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Bradford (2012) argues, multinational companies adopt EU standards to get access to EU's attractive internal market allowing it to shape global norms as a regulatory power.

Under the scope of DHA, the EU is nominated as a “rule-maker and standard-setter” presented as a regulator that protects by establishing a legal framework around the AI and DD (Ex. 2.1; 2.2; 3.1 ; 3.4). Consequently, as far as predication goes the Union is described as a competent, credible, and capable that operates on transparency and trust (Ex. 4.6). Moreover, argumentation refer to discourses of safety and security (Ex. 2.7 ; 3.3) and perspectivization frames the EU's legality in institutional bodies (Ex. 2.3 ; 2.8; 3.6). Lastly, intensification occurs through emphasizing necessity of leadership (Ex. 4.4), while mitigation is about international cooperation being embraced not enforced (Ex. 1.6; 1.8). Collectively, these strategies strengthen the EU's authority dimension of actorness as per Jupille and Caporaso (1998).

Thematic Axis 3: The EU as a Sovereign Entity

The third axis “The EU as a Sovereign Entity” introduces the EU as a sovereign entity: independent and self-reliant despite the fact that it consists of multiple autonomous sovereign states. This global actor focuses on technological autonomy by reducing dependence on external actors (Ex. 3.8). This axis aligns with the autonomy dimension - an entity's capacity to define and pursue its own interests without external influence (Jupille & Caporaso, 1998). By creating unity and a degree of homogeneity, the EU is able to represent all its members collectively and gain both political independence and technological self-reliance. This autonomy is crucial for Europe's capacity to promote peace and pursue its interests (Tocci, 2020; Bretherton & Vogler, 2006).

Building on this, the concept of technological sovereignty (Ex. 2.1) is re-introduced, and re-institutionalized, empowering authorities to operate independently. Although national autonomy is encouraged and promoted, mutual assistance is required, and frequent checks for non-compliance are conducted, with partners and markets remaining under the surveillance of the EU's representatives. As a result, the EU is depicted as a coherent and autonomous actor that can foster independence while simultaneously maintaining interdependence (Ex. 4.5). By establishing this feature in the field of AI and digital diplomacy, the EU connects autonomy with competitiveness, supporting innovation and technological advancement (Ex. 4.2) for Europe's leadership in emerging technologies (Calderaro & Blumfelde, 2022; Stockreiter, 2025).

In relation to the research question, by employing AI and digital diplomacy, the EU enhances its autonomy and reinforces its image as a sovereign power. With the help of AI and digital diplomacy, digital sovereignty is acquired presenting the EU as an autonomous actor (Ex. 4.7) in the global digital sphere with technological independence (Fiott, 2018; Schmidt, 2022; Zenglein et al., 2022).

Analyzed through the DHA framework, EU's effort to reinforce its actorness by creating an image of a sovereign technological entity (Ex. 3.5) is depicted. The Union presents itself as an autonomous, strategic, and self-reliant actor, and it is nominated as

such through wording such as “technological sovereignty” “strategic autonomy,” and “European industries leadership” (Ex. 1.5 ; 4.4). Predicating the EU’s qualities, it gets to construct its image as a self-resilient and capable actor. Argumentation strategies emphasize the essentiality of innovation and competitiveness (Ex. 4.5), while perspectivization presents the EU as a collective strategic actor offering its members prosperity, safety, and security as long as its actorness continues to thrive (Ex. 1.3). Intensification is visible in strong claims about “urgent” need for coordination (Ex. 1.8) and “critical infrastructures” (Ex. 4.4) strengthening the EU’s portrayal as a capable actor. Lastly, mitigation also appears when this pursuit of autonomy is framed through cooperative and future-oriented language through a highly promoted cooperation (Ex. 1.5; 3.6; 4.2) that is mentioned in each excerpt more than once, and by wording such as “growing appetite” (Ex. 4.2) and phrases like “The EU will act...” (Ex. 1.4) showing that the EU aspires to become what it describes in a ongoing procedure.

Thematic Axis 4: The EU as a United Entity

The fourth thematic axis “The EU as a United Entity” encompasses the EU as a united entity: acts cohesively and collectively in the international sphere on behalf of its member states and partners (Ex. 1.2). This reflects the ambition to strengthen internal coordination and solidarity and corresponds to the cohesion dimension of actorness: the degree of internal consistency and shared purpose (Jupille & Caporaso, 1998).

As supported by the EU’s official texts, unity and cohesion are essential for the Union to evolve into a globally influential actor and maintain its prestige. Therefore, the EU is presented as a united entity, as a structural and symbolic foundation that is characterized by credibility and effectiveness as preconditions for being a global actor (Ex. 4.8). As a consequence, unity is institutionalized and a form of harmony is proactively promoted, designed to avoid fragmentation and ensure consistency (Ex. 2.7). These virtues are important when referring to the EU’s cohesion and its success in maintaining competitiveness on a global scale. On top of that, the EU texts praise unity as a collective identity by highlighting the notion of “Team Europe” and by explicitly stating that, to achieve its goals, cultures must be joined and diversity must be appreciated (Ex. 1.7; 4.8). In this case, the EU takes advantage of the various cultures and people that shape it and calls them to share a common policy and a mutual feeling of belonging by creating the identity of a European—someone with dual nationality, both that of their member state and of the EU. This way, people are praised and naturally led to align with EU standards as European identity assists national identities to flourish and interests to be promoted (Checkel & Katzenstein, 2009).

In relation to the research question, through AI cooperation and digital diplomacy, the Union manages to reach internal unity, thereby enhancing its credibility and effectiveness. Thus, it presents itself as a coherent, unified and influential actor (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020; Manor, 2023).

Examined in a DHA focus, the EU's effort to reinforce its actorness by creating an image of a unified sovereign technological entity is depicted (Ex. 3.5). As the EU creates the identity of its members by nominating "Europeans" (Ex. 1.8), it is predicated that EU members are strong although diverse (Ex. 1.7) following virtues that align with human dignity (Ex. 3.7). Argumentation strategies emphasize the essentiality of uniting cultures in pursuing mutual goals (Ex. 1.7). Perspectivization in this sense is constructed by stating that to avoid fragmentation, unity is the solution (Ex. 2.7) whilst intensification is visible in strong claims about the challenge of diversity and the rhetorics of presenting the EU able to overcome these challenges (Ex. 1.8). Lastly, mitigation is a result of stating that the EU's efforts are already thriving in pursuing unity (Ex. 4.7).

Thematic Axis 5: The EU as a Global Partner

The fifth thematic axis "The EU as a Global Partner" explores the EU as an actor that builds international relations with other states or entities. This axis applies to two dimensions of actorness as per Jupille and Caporaso(1998) recognition and authority: for the EU to be a partner it must not only present itself as a powerful ally but also be able to set the framework for cooperation when building alliances that remain at the top of the hierarchy based on mutual trust, values, and goals,

As a global partner, it gets to promote cooperation, dialogue, and multilateralism through its diplomatic and technological engagements (Ex. 3.8). Through partnership, cooperation, and dialogue (Ex. 4.1), the Union attempts to build a strong network to influence (Ex. 1.6). This approach applies to AI and DD areas, where surveillance activities and regulatory frameworks provide EU's partners the necessary structures and standards for it to be a desirable and reliable partner (Christou & Simpson, 2011; Bjola & Holmes, 2015). For instance, "Team Europe" network of bilateral and regional partnerships allow it to act collectively and influence globally. Hence, EU is presented as a facilitator of international collaboration and a leader that governs through inclusion and persuasion (European Commission & High Representative, 2025; EEAS, 2025).

In response to the research question, the EU constructs its image as an international actor that is reinforced through multilateral agreements and, by partnerships in technology and digital diplomacy, it becomes a credible, trusted, and influential partner (Da Conceição-Heldt & Meunier, 2014; Tocci, 2020).

Under the scope of DHA, the EU as an international partner, leader, and negotiator (Ex.1.4 ; 3.8) is presented. By engaging with global actors, the EU becomes part of an influential community (Ex. 3.2), which frames it as a cooperative, credible, and values-driven actor as a result of predication. Drawing on discourses of global responsibility and leadership (Ex. 3.1 ; 3.8 ; 4.2 ; 4.5) , argumentation demonstrates the EU's diplomatic influence (Ex. 1.2) as per Bretherton and Vogler (2006). In addition, perspectivization situates the EU within international networks shaping global standards (Ex. 4.4). Finally, intensification appears through affirmative language about global leadership, while mitigation is used when acknowledging global uncertainty (Da

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Conceição-Heldt & Meunier, 2014; Christou & Simpson, 2011). A few instances of the words and phrases used are “Europe can combine ...strengths... to become a Global leader...” (Ex. 3.1) and “never has our unity been so challenged ” (Ex.1.8).

Thematic Axis 6: The EU as a Security and Defense Actor

The sixth and last thematic axis “The EU as a Security and Defense Actor” focuses on the EU as a security and defense actor that safeguards its digital space along with its values and virtues, with emphasis on resilience, cybersecurity, and technological protection (Ex. 4.4) This axis corresponds to both the authority and autonomy dimensions of actorness: it demonstrates the EU’s capacity to protect its interests while acting independently (Jupille & Caporaso, 1998).

Although this aspect of the EU is vast and not extensively described within the scope of this work, it is essential to recognize that the Union’s capacity to build a safe environment for its members to thrive is fundamental to enabling and strengthening its actorness (Ex. 2.3). The EU, as a provider of stability and security, projects its normative authority by institutionalizing mechanisms for risk prevention, resilience, and ethical safeguards that support digital security (Ex. 2.4). In doing so, it gives its partners the freedom to exercise AI and digital diplomacy practices responsibly and under common regulatory oversight (autonomy). By establishing a legal framework for AI and DD, the EU creates a digital and normative domain (authority) in which the protection of data, values, and infrastructures becomes central to its regulatory and strategic autonomy

In response to the research question, the Union self-presents its agenda being an autonomous actor capable of managing technological and cyber threats. This inspires a sense of security that can be applied beneficially to all axes of EU actorness (Fiott, 2018; Saveliev & Zhurenkov, 2021).

Viewed through the lens of DHA, nominating the EU as a protector of digital infrastructures, markets and democracy (Ex. 2.1; 3.5). Moreover, predication strategies associate the EU with resilience, and defense, especially against cyber threats (Ex. 4.4). Justifying policies relating to cybersecurity, data governance, and resilience (Ex 2.3 ; 3.6; 4.4), argumentation is achieved and, by framing threats externally, the EU is presented as a guardian through perspectivization (Ex. 1.1; 1.5). This focus on safeguarding the EU members (Ex. 3.3) leads to intensification while mitigation appears in the form of cooperation (Ex. 4.5; 4.6) reinforcing the EU’s identity as a resilient and security-oriented global actor (Calderaro & Blumfelde, 2022; Tocci, 2020).

5.3. Cross-Thematic Analysis on Axes

The following chapter analyzes the six thematic axes that were identified in relation to highlight points of correlation, contradiction, and transformation to the main research question that is re-introduced below:

How does the promotion of digitalization, new technologies, and artificial intelligence enhance and transform the European Union's actorness effectively?

It appears that new technologies and artificial intelligence operate across all thematic axes to enhance and transform the Union's actorness. This particular chapter examines how these axes interact for a cohesive and multidimensional EU image.

The EU as a Normative and Regulatory Power

The first axis that comes from this cross-axial analysis focuses on the European Union's normative and regulatory role that is intertwined and interdependent. In this context, EU ethics are transformed into legal norms that are enforced broadly. Normative power as defined by Manners (2002) refers to an actor's ability to shape conceptions of the "normal" in international relations based on its principles. The Union's influence stems from its hybrid nature, supranational and international, guided by five core principles: peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law, and human rights.

As a result, the EU's actions reflect and boost these principles. For example, in the Artificial Intelligence Act (2024), the EU projects credibility and trustworthiness strengthening its authority via its image globally that stems from recognition (Jupille & Caporaso, 1998). This interplay between moral legitimacy and mere legitimacy depicts how digitalization affects the Union's actorness globally.

Simply put, EU standards are transformed into law and regulations that EU partners are to abide by. Hence, AI and DD shape the European identity re-defining the digital norms as well. In the international system the EU acts as a rule-maker and ethical leader starting from AI regulations and moving into other areas as digitalization facilitates easier information distribution, norm diffusion and attractiveness.

The EU as a Sovereign and Security/Defense actor

The second axis that comes from this cross-axial analysis focuses on the European Union's concept of EU's sovereignty being bolstered by technological autonomy and, the need for cybersecurity. As AI-driven strategies and resilience mechanisms are utilized to safeguard values, the EU proves to be an autonomous, sovereign entity with digital sovereignty as an extension. Drawing from actorness dimensions, autonomy and authority are significant for the EU to protect digital space maintaining ethical standards (Jupille & Caporaso, 1998). As a result, "technological sovereignty" is achieved to ensure that innovation, production, and data governance remain under European control (Fiott, 2018; Schmidt, 2022; Zenglein et al., 2022)..

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In sum, digitalization and artificial intelligence enhance the EU's actorness by transforming autonomy into strategic capability and security into legitimacy and authority allowing Union to act independently and monitor compliance (Calderaro & Blumfelde, 2022; European Union, 2022).

The EU as a United and Global Actor

The third axis that comes from this cross-axial analysis focuses on the European Union's ability to interact closely utilizing cohesion internally and externally. As unity is foundational to the EU's along with partnerships, initiatives such as "Team Europe" enable the Union to act collectively and coordinately to reach agreements (European Commission & High Representative, 2025; EEAS, 2025).

The interplay of these two axes enhance the EU's actorness as it presents itself as a coordinated, credible, and inclusive global actor to establish common ground in AI and digital diplomacy. However, global influence cannot be acquired without internal unity and external attractiveness (Rauh, 2025). Therefore, drawing on cohesion and recognition dimensions of actorness (Jupille & Caporaso, 1998), a united Europe becomes appealing to partners boosting its the evolution and overall ability to lead (Bretherton & Vogler, 2006; Da Conceição-Heldt & Meunier, 2014; Tocci, 2020).

5.4. Overview of Thematic Axes

As a result of this study's analysis, the six thematic axes reveal a coherent and multifaceted narrative of the European Union's actorness in the age of artificial intelligence and digital diplomacy. Across all policy contexts, these occurring axes and dimensions interact forming the EU's identity: a normative, regulatory, sovereign, united, global and secure entity.

Each axis highlights the discourse through which the Union promotes its actorness demonstrating consistency and revealing how digital tools strengthen external action. Through a brief Discourse-Historical Analysis (DHA), this study explores how linguistic choices construct the EU's identity as such (Bjola & Holmes, 2015; Manor, 2019).

As already mentioned, the pinpointed axes are directly related to the four dimensions of actorness outlined by Jupille and Caporaso (1998). Recognition is reinforced through the EU's role as a Normative Power and Global Partner, projecting values and fostering cooperation. Authority is expressed in the Regulatory Power and Security and Defense actor axes to establish binding rules and exercise influence. Autonomy is embodied in the Sovereign Entity axis, reflecting the Union's pursuit of technological sovereignty and strategic independence and, cohesion is captured in the United Entity axis, which emphasizes the importance of internal alignment for consistency. Together, they depict how digital diplomacy and artificial intelligence boost the EU's actorness as a digital international actor.

The cross-axial analysis that follows confirms that the promotion of new technologies, and artificial intelligence enhances and transforms the European Union's actorness by strengthening its dimensions. Embedding values into regulation (recognition and authority), developing technological sovereignty (autonomy), and reinforcing unity via digital cooperation (cohesion), it transforms actorness redefining EU's identity as a strategic, value-driven, and digitally empowered global actor (Fiott, 2018; Schmidt, 2022; Zenglein et al., 2022; Tocci, 2020; Stockreiter, 2025).

DHA findings show that the EU's digital discourse employs linguistic patterns that reinforce the dimensions of actorness outlined by Jupille and Caporaso (1998), framing the EU as a values-driven, regulatory, united, globally engaged, and security-oriented actor. This is also visible through the use of language in its official documents for the EU's broader goal: to become an influential global actor. What is more interesting is that these linguistic constructions operate through naturalization. As Reisigl and Wodak (2017) argue, ideology and power are often embedded in discourse through taken-for-granted linguistic forms. In this context, narratives shape public perception while being neutral, and internalized. This means that the EU itself presents the Union as the image it aspires to create.

Lastly, this alignment between empirical findings and theoretical dimensions confirms that digital diplomacy and AI are not merely tools but strategic instruments. Thereby, their enhancement redefines how the EU presents itself in the international arena (Bretherton & Vogler, 2006; Damro, 2012; Bradford, 2012).

6. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that, indeed, digitalization, new technologies, and artificial intelligence enhance and transform the European Union's actorness at a great extent. The analysis focuses on EU's digital turn that is closely tied to European values, fundamental rights, and ethical principles (Manners, 2002). Since AI is framed as trustworthy, human-centric, and aligned with Union values, digital tools (i.e, digital diplomacy) become instruments that help the EU articulate its identity and exercise influence in the international system. In this light, technological platforms serve as spaces where the EU acts as a normative actor (Smith, 2013).

AI and DD are not only domains that boost competitiveness; they also provide mechanisms for infrastructures, standards, and digital order based in EU values (Roumate, 2021). These narratives strengthen the EU's visibility and credibility whilst strategic narratives materialize regulatory and diplomatic instruments. The AI Act, for instance, establishes the EU as the first global actor to comprehensively regulate AI (Damro, 2012; Tallberg et al., 2024). Similarly, the Digital Strategy operationalize values-based governance to project external influence with its regulatory capacity linked to technological sovereignty beyond the EU's traditional toolbox (EU4Digital, 2024).

The analyzed documents also confirm that communication, partnerships, and global engagement are central to EU's digital agenda. The Digital Strategy notes a "growing appetite" for cooperation much needed for digital governance (Zinovieva & Bulva, 2022). At the same time, digital diplomacy emerges as a tool for narrative projection, alliance-building, and coordination by making negotiations, discussions and bilateral relations easier (Zervaki, 2025). To this, the EU Global Strategy (2016) promotes unity (Ex. 1.8), while the Joint Communication on an international digital strategy for the EU (2025) promotes institutional coherence through initiatives such as "Team Europe" (Ex. 4.8). This reflects Archakis and Tsakona's (2012) claim: identities are shaped through narrative participation. Digitalization thus becomes both the arena and the instrument through which the EU navigates global competition and shapes emerging technological ecosystems.

To answer the main research question more in detail, indeed, the digitalization, new technologies, and artificial intelligence enhance and transform the EU's actorness in three concrete ways. First, they strengthen existing abilities by enhancing the EU's normative identity. Second, they create new forms of actorness, as digital sovereignty, AI governance, cybersecurity, and digital diplomacy. Third, they reshape external action by enabling a digitally empowered model of global engagement based on rule-setting, technological governance, and international digital partnerships.

However, it is imperative to discuss in this section how effectively that occurs in fact. In retrospect, the four dimensions run through the selected corpus and extensively shape the overall EU actorness especially with the rise of AI technologies. The two points that one shall take under consideration at this point are: one, which dimension is more boosted and, two, how effective is the EU actorness promotion in practice.

For the first part, inspecting our body of selected excerpts but also the full EU official texts, it is noticed that the dimension of authority is probably most prominent in all. That means that the idea of the EU to be able to implement law and diffuse standards is mentioned in every possible way. For instance, the EUGS (2009) although not directly referring to AI or EU actorness, mentions the role of the EU and its strategy in all eight chosen excerpts. It provides security (Ex. 1.1) and facilitates a network of partners (Ex. 1.4) seeking agreements (Ex. 1.2) and drawing from treaties (Ex. 1.3) it promotes peace (Ex. 1.5). Moreover, through "reciprocal inspiration" (Ex. 1.6) it aspires to join cultures and forces (Ex. 1.7) forging the European identity (Ex. 1.8).

The same applies for the AI Act (2024) where by laying down a legal and regulatory framework (Ex. 2.1; 2.2) the EU gets to supervise compliance to AI laws by either Member states (Ex. 2.3) or partners (Ex. 2.4) even though it promoted national frameworks for a secure AI implementation (Ex. 2.5). To safeguard EU standards legal representatives are introduced (Ex. 2.6) as to align with EU regulations (Ex. 2.7) and harmonize with them (Ex. 2.8).

Furthermore, authority is also evident in the White Paper on AI (2020) document where the EU establishes a digital infrastructure and legal framework (Ex. 3.1) to be used as foundations of international discussions (Ex. 3.2) for all partners (Ex. 3.4) creating a

trusty “frictionless” EU market (Ex. 3.3.). Through harnessing such a framework (Ex. 3.5) EU’s technological sovereignty is to be promoted (Ex. 3.6) giving emphasis on building trust (Ex. 3.7) and avoiding fragmentation (Ex. 3.8)

Lastly, the Joint communication on an international digital strategy for the EU (2025) further enhances the EU’s authority dimension. In pursuit of shared objectives (Ex. 4.1) the EU takes part in the global landscape for cooperation (Ex. 4.2) through concerted efforts (Ex. 4.3) and initiatives such as the Cyber Resilience Act (Ex. 4.4). Thereby, it is determined to boost its tech competitiveness and innovation (Ex. 4.5) whilst changing the security and defense landscape (Ex. 4.6) reinforcing internal and external efforts (Ex. 4.7) for a united EU as per the “Team Europe” initiative (Ex. 4.8).

Digitalization does not simply add a new policy area; it fundamentally redefines how the EU presents itself, acts, and influences others in the international system. This digital turn represents a structural shift in where power, influence, and global are reviewed in form of EU actorness and, as it appears authority is the probably the most present dimension in this analysis. The reason for that is that the European Union self-presents itself as a rule-maker whose legal power derives from its regulatory power and ability to influence. As Jupille and Caporaso (1998) state in order for the EU to act internally and externally it must gain legal competence as its external presence is build on its influence which cannot be promoted without internal coherence. Moreover, Bradford’s concept of The Brussels Effect (2020) along with Nye’s perception of soft power (2004) shape the EU’s identity and strategy around using norms and rules to lead and not force. Hence, if authority is established, all other dimensions are reinforced and therefore, the EU gets to promote its image of an international leader in all fields.

However, for the second point made, the unions authority, and therefore its actorness is at risk nowadays due to internal and external challenges that it faces.

Internally, due to the European union, being a supernatural entity and its sui generis nature, it requires unanimity when reaching decisions. This can slow down the progress of the union and stand as an obstacle (Kundera, 2019). To combat this, discussions within the European context have begun proposing a two- speed Europe in which some states progress faster than others. This means that the union would be able to take action upon agreement of the few and not all member states (Voudouri, 2026; Liboreiro, 2026)

Moreover, the high levels of refugee and immigrant influx put pressure on the already at crisis economies which strive to survive, not only price changes that occur from events such as the word in Ukraine, but also from price changes that occur due to environmental fees. To boost the European economy, a “made in Europe” initiative is also under discussion, that is infrastructure within the Europe is to be amplified so that more and more products are created making Europe competitive again against the challenge that superpowers like China and the USA pose (Schnabel, 2026; Pacheco, 2026)

Internal challenges jeopardize external actorness as well. Hence when the European union seems to struggle on the inside the image that it builds and promotes on the outside not as strong. Ongoing conflict and security related events, such as the war in

Ukraine, the conflicts in Syria or the Brexit phenomenon pose a multilevel threat for the Union as a security provider. This “polycrisis” also reinforces in Euroskeptic tendencies that are bolstered China and the USA as EU’s competitors (Riga & Lika, 2024). This creates a polarization of interests and opinions that result in minimalization of EU’s leadership as it is said to lack responsibility and be inconsistent in safeguarding members states (Rauh, 2025).

Lastly, another challenge for the EU derived from its ambitious nature: although there is economic instability and geopolitical tensions, the EU continues to self-present its actorness as a high level influence and power. This affects negatively its influence as its claims seem to increase fragmentation stemming from Member’s discontent (Labrianidis, 2025)

At this point, it is important to mention that to be a member of the European Union states must have economical power, democratic regimes, and close by borders. This limits the influence of the EU and reinforces multilateral agreements only when there are mutual interests as a result of EU attractiveness, which is a product of many factors. The EU market is one of them and is now at risk with the implementation of fees and obstacles in deliveries and industrial autonomy (Rauh, 2025).

In conclusion, the EU’s actorness is a vital part of the EU’s external policy and its agenda shaping procedure. In this study, employing Jupille and Caporaso’s actorness theory, a mapping of the EU’s strategy in promoting itself through AI has been concluded. It appears that AI can indeed assist in bolstering the Union’s image and position in the global order to a great extent. It is significant to keep in mind that although in texts, the EU creates a discourse of a agenda-shaper union, in practice there are plenty of obstacles that have to be dealt with in a continuedly evolving international scene with on-going change events, actors and power distribution.

7. Future Research Directions

Examining the EU’s actorness through the development of new technologies), this study provides insights into how the Union enhances its actorness at to what levels. As the EU continues to promote a value-based normative approach and aspires to maintain a unified and resilient identity, it draws on Nye’s (1990) notion of culture as an intangible resource of soft power and an essential instrument of foreign policy (Liland, 1993, p. 28). This means that it consistently draws from EU ideals, virtues and standards that are diffused to influence others. Accordingly, the use of digital diplomacy and AI is deeply intertwined with the creation and promotion of those cultural narratives that legitimize and project the Union’s values.

Therefore, a potential direction for future research would be to examine soft power as an actorness factor, illustrating how culture and values shape the EU’s external identity and influence (Liland, 1993). Future studies could also compare the EU’s digital diplomacy and AI strategies with those of other global actors, such as the United States or China, to explore differences in normative approaches, governance models, and technological leadership.

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Appendix A — Table of Excerpts

Source: Author

ID	Document	Excerpt (Page)
1.1	EU Global Strategy (2016)	Our partners expect the European Union to play a major role, including as a global security provider. (4)
1.2		The EU will engage in cyber diplomacy and capacity building with our partners, and seek agreements on responsible state behaviour in cyberspace. (47)
1.3		Member States must translate their commitments to mutual assistance and solidarity enshrined in the Treaties into action.(9)
1.4		The EU will act as an agenda- shaper, a connector, coordinator and facilitator within a networked web of players.(43)
1.5		An appropriate level of ambition and strategic autonomy is important for Europe’s ability to promote peace and security within and beyond its borders. (19)
1.6		Where possible and when in line with our interests, the EU will support regional organisations. We will not strive to export our model, but rather seek reciprocal inspiration from different regional experiences.(32)
1.7		Joining all our cultures together to achieve our shared goals and serve our common interests is a daily challenge, but it is also our greatest strength: diversity is what makes us strong.(4)
1.8		Forging unity as Europeans – across institutions, states and peoples – has never been so vital nor so urgent. Never has our unity been so challenged. Together we will be able to achieve more than Member States acting alone or in an uncoordinated manner.(16)
2.1	AI Act (Regulation (EU) 2024/1689)	The purpose of this Regulation is to improve the functioning of the internal market by laying down a uniform legal framework in particular for the development, the placing on the market, the putting into service and the use of artificial intelligence systems (AI systems) in the Union, in accordance with Union values, to promote the uptake of human centric and trustworthy artificial intelligence (AI) while ensuring a high level of protection of health, safety, fundamental rights as enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, including democracy, the rule of law and environmental protection, to protect against the harmful effects of AI systems in the Union, and to support innovation. (1)
2.2		Given the major impact that AI can have on society and the need to build trust, it is vital for AI and its regulatory framework to be developed in accordance with Union values as enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), the fundamental rights and freedoms enshrined in Treaties and, pursuant to Article 6 TEU, the Charter. As a prerequisite, AI should be a human-centric technology. It should serve as a tool for people, with the ultimate aim of increasing human well-being.(2)

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2.3		The market surveillance authorities and the Commission should be able to propose joint activities, including joint investigations, to be conducted by market surveillance authorities or market surveillance authorities jointly with the Commission, that have the aim of promoting compliance, identifying non-compliance, raising awareness and providing guidance in relation to this Regulation with respect to specific categories of high-risk AI systems that are found to present a serious risk across two or more Member States. Joint activities to promote compliance should be carried out in accordance with Article 9 of Regulation (EU) 2019/1020. The AI Office should provide coordination support for joint investigations.(40)
2.4		Upon request of the provider or prospective provider of the AI system, the competent authority shall provide a written proof of the activities successfully carried out in the sandbox. The competent authority shall also provide an exit report detailing the activities carried out in the sandbox and the related results and learning outcomes. Providers may use such documentation to demonstrate their compliance with this Regulation through the conformity assessment process or relevant market surveillance activities. In this regard, the exit reports and the written proof provided by the national competent authority shall be taken positively into account by market surveillance authorities and notified bodies, with a view to accelerating conformity assessment procedures to a reasonable extent.(88)
2.5		Each Member State shall establish or designate as national competent authorities at least one notifying authority and at least one market surveillance authority for the purposes of this Regulation. Those national competent authorities shall exercise their powers independently, impartially and without bias so as to safeguard the objectivity of their activities and tasks, and to ensure the application and implementation of this Regulation. The members of those authorities shall refrain from any action incompatible with their duties. Provided that those principles are observed, such activities and tasks may be performed by one or more designated authorities, in accordance with the organisational needs of the Member State.(99)
2.6		Providers or prospective providers may conduct the testing in real world conditions only where all of the following conditions are met: the provider or prospective provider conducting the testing in real world conditions is established in the Union or has appointed a legal representative who is established in the Union.(93)
2.7		In order to avoid fragmentation across the Union, the Commission shall adopt implementing acts specifying the detailed arrangements for the establishment, development, implementation, operation and supervision of the AI regulatory sandboxes. The implementing acts shall include common principles on the following issues. (90)
2.8		In order to facilitate the work of the Commission and the Member States in the AI field as well as to increase the transparency towards the public, providers of high-risk AI systems other than those related to products falling within the scope of relevant existing Union harmonisation legislation, as well as providers who consider that an AI system listed in the high-risk use cases in an annex to this Regulation is not high-risk on the basis of a derogation, should be required to register themselves and information about their AI system in an EU database, to be established and managed by the Commission.(33)

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3.1	White Paper on AI (2020)	Europe can combine its technological and industrial strengths with a high-quality digital infrastructure and a regulatory framework based on its fundamental values to become a global leader in innovation in the data economy. (2)
3.2		The EU's work on AI has already influenced international discussions.(8)
3.3		A solid European regulatory framework for trustworthy AI will protect all European citizens and help create a frictionless internal market.(10)
3.4		Any new framework should apply to all providers of AI products or services in the EU, regardless of whether they are established in the EU or not.(22)
3.5		Harnessing the capacity of the EU to invest in next generation technologies and infrastructures, as well as in digital competences like data literacy, will increase Europe's technological sovereignty in key enabling technologies and infrastructures for the data economy. The infrastructures should support the creation of European data pools enabling trustworthy AI, e.g. AI based on European values and rules.(3)
3.6		Delivering on its strategy on AI adopted in April 2018, in December 2018 the Commission presented a Coordinated Plan — prepared together with the Member States — to foster the development and use of AI in Europe. This plan proposes some 70 joint actions for closer and more efficient cooperation between Member States and the Commission in key areas, such as research, investment, market uptake, skills and talent, data and international cooperation. The plan is scheduled to run until 2027, with regular monitoring and review. The aim is to maximise the impact of investment in research, innovation and deployment, assess national AI strategies and build on and extend the Coordinated Plan on AI with Member States. Action 1: The Commission, taking into account the results of the public consultation on the White Paper, will propose to the Member States a revision of the Coordinated Plan to be adopted by end 2020.(5)
3.7		Given the major impact that AI can have on our society and the need to build trust, it is vital that European AI is grounded in our values and fundamental rights such as human dignity and privacy Protection.(2)
3.8		Europe cannot afford to maintain the current fragmented landscape of centers of competence with none reaching the scale necessary to compete with the leading institutes globally. It is imperative to create more synergies and networks between the multiple European research centres on AI and to align their efforts to improve excellence, retain and attract the best researchers and develop the best technology. Europe needs a lighthouse centre of research, innovation and expertise that would coordinate these efforts and be a world reference of excellence in AI and that can attract investments and the best talents in the field.(6)
4.1	Joint Communication on International Digital Strategy (2025)	The EU's growing network of bilateral and regional partnerships allows the EU to be stronger on the world stage, building coalitions in pursuit of shared objectives in key international fora and organizations. (1)

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4.2		There is a growing appetite across the world for digital cooperation with the EU, and the current global landscape calls for new, deeper, and more flexible forms of cooperation to nurture mutually beneficial partnerships, which recognise the advances made by many of our partners across the digital arena, from digitising government services to facilitating electronic payments, from supporting citizens' rights to developing local resilience. The EU will keep seeking cooperation – not only with long-time like-minded partners, but with any country with which we share common objectives. (4)
4.3		Concerted EU efforts are necessary to ensure that global digital governance supports EU interests and fundamental values.(1)
4.4		The EU also has the tools to lead at a global scale on cybersecurity. With the Cyber Resilience Act, the EU is setting a new standard for secure-by-design products. As countries worldwide seek to secure their supply chains, the EU's expertise in product security offers a powerful foundation for international partnerships. In a similar vein, as the EU's global partners are investing into securing their critical infrastructures, market opportunities arise in areas where the EU has strong European industrial leadership such as cryptography and highly secure digital products.(9)
4.5		In such context, the EU is determined to boost its tech competitiveness and innovation capacity while working with partners and allies to support their own digital transition. No country or region can tackle the digital and AI revolution alone. The EU remains committed to the rules-based global order and to the defence of its fundamental values.(1)
4.6		As technologies such as AI, semiconductors, cloud and quantum computing are fundamentally changing the industrial as well as defence and security landscape, Europe needs an industry capable of designing, developing, manufacturing and delivering these technologies and products faster and at scale.(2)
4.7		The EU's internal and external efforts on digital policy are closely intertwined and mutually reinforcing.(14)
4.8		The EU will work as Team Europe to ensure a suitable outcome to the WSIS+20 negotiations.(13)