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The Role of Digital Diplomacy in Advancing Foreign Policy in Africa: The Case of Kenya and South Africa

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Abstract

This paper examined the impact of digital diplomacy on foreign policy, focusing on South Africa and Kenya. The study utilized a mixed methods approach, integrating both exploratory and descriptive research methodologies, and was anchored on the Actor-Network Theory. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select 20 diplomatic professionals, ensuring diverse representation across various roles and demographics within the diplomatic community. Data were collected electronically through structured interviews. The findings revealed that the respondents were generally knowledgeable about and actively

involved in digital diplomacy initiatives. They considered digital diplomacy to be crucial for achieving foreign policy objectives, with no participants deeming it ineffective. Social media platforms, particularly Twitter and Facebook, were recognised as effective tools for communicating foreign policy goals, with unique content forms such as official notifications and diplomatic blog posts proving beneficial. Nonetheless, challenges such as inadequate Internet infrastructure, misinformation, and cyber security concerns were identified as the factors affecting the efficacy of digital diplomacy. This study addressed gaps in understanding the practical effects of digital diplomacy within the African context, offering insights into how digital tools can influence diplomatic strategies and global events. Furthermore, the research underscores the importance of investing in enhanced digital infrastructure, bolstering cyber security measures, and developing strategies to mitigate misinformation. Finally, this study contributed valuable perspectives on its potential to engage global audiences and achieve strategic diplomatic goals.

Keywords: *Cyber security, Digital diplomacy, Misinformation, social media.*

1. Introduction

Consistent digitisation of the flow of information and communication has transformed many aspects of life, including diplomacy. The procedure associated with management of international relations and undertaking diplomatic work through the utilisation of Web resources and space is described as e-diplomacy, cyber diplomacy, or digital/online diplomacy.¹ To expand reach, enhance efficiency, and to influence foreign policy activities, this approach makes use of online technology.²

By combining the use of Internet and advancement in technology, digital diplomacy has been embraced in Africa. Thus, this has presented a considerable possibility for African nations to enlarge their global reach and influence.

1 Adesina, O. S. (2020). The Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NiDCOM): An Example of Digital Diplomacy in Practice. Available at: <https://www.africaportal.org/features/nigerians-diaspora-commission-nidcom-example-digital-diplomacy-practice>.

2 Barman, Shanta. (2024). Digital Diplomacy: The Influence of Digital Platforms on Global Diplomacy and Foreign Policy. *Vidya - A Journal of Gujarat University*, 3, 61-75. <https://doi.org/10.47413/vidya.v3i1.304..>

The benefits of gaining insights regarding how digital diplomacy affects foreign policy cannot be ignored. The ever-increasing reliance of state authorities on online platforms for sharing information with global audience, policy messaging, and response to international functions makes it necessary to explore the merits and demerits of this novel diplomatic approach.³ This article elucidates the outcomes of a study that assessed the correlation between digital diplomacy and foreign policy, with South Africa and Kenya being as case studies. Hinged on the premise that they are at the forefront in Africa in adopting digital diplomacy, these two countries are practical research examples.

Outcomes, results, and research conclusions are valid for several reasons. They begin by providing insights into how African diplomats see and use digital diplomacy. Moreover, the study highlights the potential of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to facilitate the accomplishment of foreign policy objectives and furnish diplomats and lawmakers with valuable data. In addition, the study identifies the areas that require development and attention in order to maximise the benefits of digital diplomacy by addressing the obstacles associated with it, such as cyber security concerns, misinformation, and limitations in Internet infrastructure. Ultimately, this research contributes to our understanding of how digital technologies might be utilised in the modern world to promote diplomatic efforts and achieve strategic goals.

Apart from mainstream issues, for example, weak technical infrastructure, this paper further delves into the particular methods and resources deployed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) in the two states. It pays attention to main challenges such as bureaucracy, corporate culture, and workforce deficit. Present research also explores how application of digital diplomacy by MFAs interlinks with the rest of diplomatic agencies' more general policies. The conclusion of this research elucidates the need to handle these issues with the aim of bettering digital diplomacy efficacy; it also provides suggestions to practitioners and policymakers on how to embrace digital instruments to effectively advance national interests along with optimising global engagement.

³ Rashica, Viona. (2018). The Benefits and Risks of Digital Diplomacy. *SEEU Review*. 13. 75-89. 10.2478/secr-2018-0008.

II. Methodology

This study adopted the mixed methods technique, utilising both exploratory and descriptive research methodologies. Data were obtained from the Embassy of South Africa situated in Kenya and from MFAs located in both Kenya and South Africa. Citizens possessing prior knowledge with regard to digital diplomacy in each of the nation and working with the MFA comprised the target population. To choose 10 respondents from each embassy, a purposive sampling technique was utilised, giving a total of 20 participants. A total of 20 copies of an online questionnaire were administered electronically, with 10 participants from the South African Embassy in Kenya and 10 from the Kenyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in South Africa. The choice of online questionnaire was based on the need for efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and broader reach in the context of the study on digital diplomacy. In addition, secondary data were obtained from official state documents, allowing for triangulation. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS software. For quantitative data, descriptive statistics were employed to identify patterns in their answers and were presented as frequencies and means. Qualitative data were analysed thematically and presented as quotes. This allowed for a clear understanding of the participants' perspectives on digital diplomacy.

III. Literature Review

3.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1. Actor-Network Theory

This study was anchored on Actor-Network Theory. Also known as ANT, Actor-Network Theory is a theoretical framework that was proposed by Bruno Latour (1986), Michael Callon (1986), and John Law (1992).⁴ ANT investigates how actors, both human and non-human, interact with one another and establish networks in order to accomplish certain objectives. ANT's overarching goal is to get an understanding of the intricate web of social, political, and technological links and

⁴Ziemkendorf, Mario. *Actor-network theory*. GRIN Verlag, 2008.

connections that affect the world around us.⁵ In the context of digital diplomacy and its role in promoting foreign policy in Africa, especially in Kenya and South Africa, the ANT is able to provide useful insights into the many actors and forces involved in this process. Hence, it is a relevant theoretical tool for this study.

3.2 Empirical Literature Review

Digital diplomacy is increasingly becoming an indispensable tool in the conduct and practice of diplomacy. These revolutionary means of communication provide Foreign Service officers with a digital platform to promote their countries' interests across the world and engage effectively in international diplomacy. Leveraging social media, online platforms, and other digital technologies facilitates more immediate, direct, and broad-reaching interactions, transforming traditional diplomatic practices.⁶ As nations integrate these technologies into their diplomatic endeavours, they encounter significant opportunities to enhance their international presence and influence. However, Kampf, Manor, and Segev contend that, although African MFAs are just as active online as their counterparts across the world, they have not fully embraced digital diplomacy to effectively experience the immense benefit of the digital platforms.⁷

Furthermore, "digital diplomacy" is widely misinterpreted in Africa, meaning that the use of ICTs in the foreign policy sphere on the continent is more incidental than planned and methodical. It is worth noting, however, that the majority of African politicians use social media to promote their foreign policies.⁸ For instance, South Africa has adopted a multifaceted approach to digital diplomacy that reflects its unique diplomatic priorities and its status as a regional leader. The country's approach to digital diplomacy is characterised by a commitment

5 Radaideh, Moh, and Hayder Al-Ameed, eds. *Architecture of reliable Web applications software*. IGI Global, 2006.

6 Rashica, Viona. (2018). The Benefits and Risks of Digital Diplomacy. *SEEU Review*. 13. 75-89. 10.2478/secr-2018-0008.

7 R. Kampf, I. Manor, and E. Segev, "Digital Diplomacy 101. A Cross-state Comparison of Public Involvement in Facebook and Twitter," *European Journal of Diplomacy* 9, no. 3 (2015): 331–362, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1871191X-12341318>.

8 Ibid, Adesina, (2017) page. 11

to open and transparent communication with the global community. Government representatives and diplomats from South Africa regularly share information about the nation's foreign policy perspectives, initiatives, and actions via digital channels such as Facebook and Twitter, official websites, and webcasts.

Similarly, utilising digital tools to promote unity in Africa alongside building bilateral relations is a topmost priority for South Africa. This is concerned with taking part in online debates, conversations, and information sharing with regional bodies, e.g. the Southern African Development Community (SADC) alongside the African Union (AU). South Africa has emerged as a leader in embracing digital platforms for diplomatic engagement. This is demonstrated through a comparison of its projects involving digital diplomacy with those of other states in Africa. Although hindrances such as cyber security and digital inequality still remain, South Africa's tactic for digital diplomacy indicates its sacrifice to boosting regional cooperation and leveraging up-to-date digital tools to portray its global influence.⁹

In Kenya's foreign policy manifesto, digital diplomacy has evolved to become a core component. Thus, social media represents a key forum for diplomatic interaction. If an international crisis emerges, state representatives from Kenya, along with diplomats, have embraced social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to share information with their peers in real time, make official pronouncements, and provide updates. Likewise, web tools have been utilised by Kenya to effectively share financial data and communicate with international firms and investors. Consequently, this has enhanced opportunities in investment and trade, also leveraging technology for economic diplomacy.¹⁰ It is noteworthy to point out that Kenya has experienced notable success with digital diplomacy, although coupled with some challenges. Some of the constraints highlighted include the need to ascertain digital inclusion for all citizens, concerns with cyber security, and instant sharing of false news. Nonetheless, digital diplomacy in Kenya has largely proven to be successful, demonstrating its capacity to boost the country's influence and international presence in diplomacy. For instance, Kenya has achieved notable success with digital diplomacy by enhancing its global

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ndung'u, Margaret Nyambura, Timothy Mwololo Waema, and Winnie V. Mitullah. "Variables affecting usage of new technologies in low income households in Kenya: The case of Nairobi." *info* (2012).

image through campaigns like "Magical Kenya," strengthening diplomatic relations and trade ties via social media, and effectively coordinating disaster response efforts.¹¹ The use of digital platforms has also facilitated regional cooperation within East Africa, showcasing Kenya's ability to leverage technology for international engagement and economic growth.¹²

Apart from digital tools depicting a reliable support system when confronting difficult matters, they offer state authorities with a rare opportunity to portray influence, undertake diplomatic work, and communicate with the global audiences. Therefore, current research attempts to handle the complex matter of understanding how embracing digital diplomacy, as depicted by the South African and Kenyan settings, simultaneously strengthens and interrupts established African foreign policy models. This research intends to examine several facets of digital diplomacy, encompassing its efficacy in attaining foreign policy objectives, its impact on public perception, cyber security threats linked to digital diplomacy, and regional discrepancies in Internet access and engagement.

IV. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

4.1.1. Age of Respondents

The outcomes in Table 1 below depict that the respondents varied in age from 28 to 60 with a mean age of 43.7. This generational difference provides a broad spectrum of deductions; younger respondents may affirm the value of digital tools, while the older generation might prefer mainstream diplomacy. The combination of experience extents, from experienced diplomats to tech-savvy persons, indicates the correlation between age and conformance with foreign policy. Nonetheless, the small sample size warrants caution in deducing broad conclusions, urging further exploration through interviews to gain deeper insights into this

11 Wausi, E. W. (2016). Role of Media Diplomacy in Driving Destination Competitiveness and the Development of Tourism in Kenya. Thesis, University of Nairobi.

12 Odera, L. (2024). *Harnessing the potential of digital media for business growth of legacy media in Kenya*. Thesis, THE Aga Khan University

age-driven perspective.¹³

Table 1: Age of respondents

Age	Statistic
Mean	43.7
Min	28
Max	60

4.1.2. Nationality of Respondents

In Figure 1, the majority of respondents were of Kenyan nationality, totalling nine individuals or 60% of the group. Meanwhile, six individuals, constituting 40% of the group, were from South Africa. This nationality breakdown was an essential aspect of the study, as it reflected the demographics of the participants and could have potentially influenced their views and perspectives on the subject matter – the role of digital diplomacy in the foreign policy of Kenya and South Africa. The differing backgrounds of these respondents likely contributed to a richer and diverse understanding of the topic under investigation.

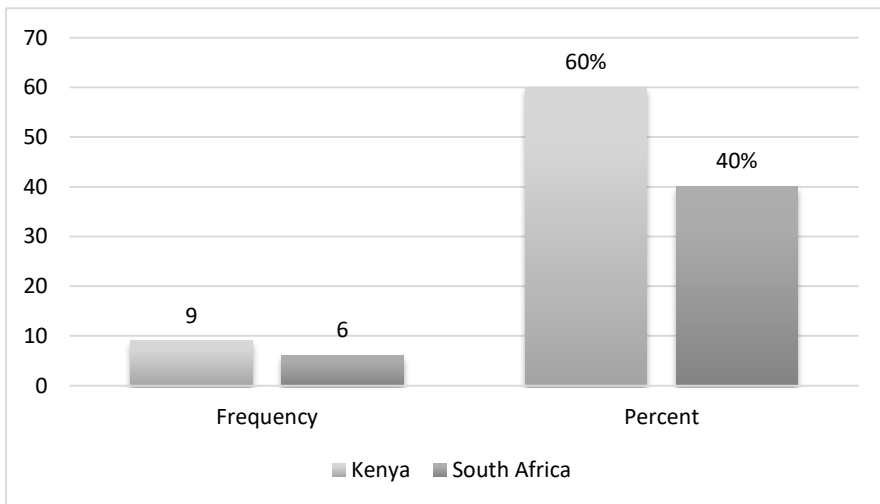


Figure 1: Nationalities of respondents

¹³ Rashica, Viona. (2018). The Benefits and Risks of Digital Diplomacy. *SEEU Review*. 13. 75-89. 10.2478/seeur-2018-0008.

4.1.3. Occupation of Respondents

The findings are presented in Table 2. The distribution of respondents' occupations within the study reveals a diverse representation. With a representation of 20% (3) of the total respondents, the majority comprised of Administrative and Support Staff. Two respondents were designated as Public Affairs Officer, constituting 13.33% of the sample. Additionally, two individuals served as Protocol Officers, representing another 13.33%. There was a single respondent each for Cyber Security Officer, Trade Officer/Economic Officer, and Support Staff, making up 6.67% each. Lastly, three participants served as Attachés, constituting 20% of the sample, while one individual held the position of Secretary, representing 6.67%. This variety of professions, which represent a spectrum of consular and administrative duties, adds to a thorough and diversified viewpoint on the topic under study.¹⁴

Table 2: Occupation of the respondents

Occupation	Frequency	Percent
Administrative and Support Staff	3	20.00%
Public Affairs Officer	2	13.33%
Protocol Officer	2	13.33%
Cyber security Officer	1	6.67%
Trade Officer/Economic Officer	1	6.67%
Support Staff	1	6.67%
Attaché	3	20.00%
Secretary	1	6.67%
Total	15	100.00%

4.1.4. Level of Education

Figure 2 displays a variety of academic degrees and the wide range of educational achievement of the study participants. Fifty-three percent (53%) of the participants have a master's degree, which is a significant indication of the significant amount of advanced education in the sample.

¹⁴ Constantinou, Costas & Cornago, Noé & McConnell, Fiona. (2016). Transprofessional Diplomacy. Brill Research Perspectives in Diplomacy and Foreign Policy. 1. 1-66. 10.1163/24056006-12340005.

Furthermore, there is a significant undergraduate presence among the respondents, with 33.3% holding a bachelor's degree. A smaller but significant minority—13.3%—has a doctorate, indicating that they are not all well-educated. The participants' different backgrounds and levels of experience are indicated by their educational distribution, which may have a big impact on their opinions and understanding of the topic of the study.¹⁵

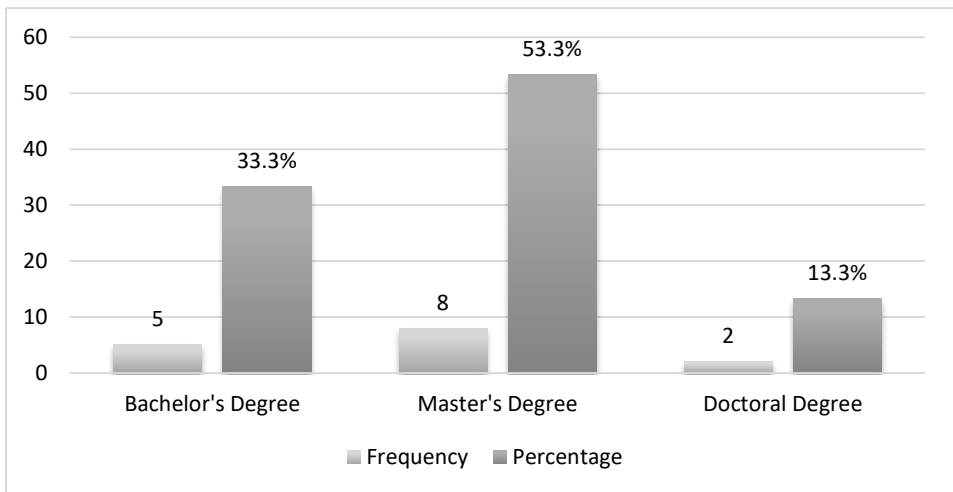


Figure 2: Level of education

4.1.5. Awareness of and Involvement in Diplomatic or Foreign Policy-Related Activities

According to the survey, a significant proportion of the participants, specifically 86.7%, are now involved in diplomacy or foreign policy-related endeavours. Given that the study focuses on the use of digital diplomacy and how it affects foreign policy, the large percentage of the participants suggest that the bulk of them are directly involved in these fields. Figure 3 illustrates that, on the other side, 13.3% of the respondents do not work in foreign policy or diplomatic relations. This result emphasises the significance of gathering insights from people who have first-hand knowledge of these areas since they are probably able to

¹⁵ Jilcha Sileyew, K. (2020). Research Design and Methodology. IntechOpen. doi: 10.5772/intechopen.85731

provide insightful opinions and knowledge pertinent to the goals of the study.¹⁶

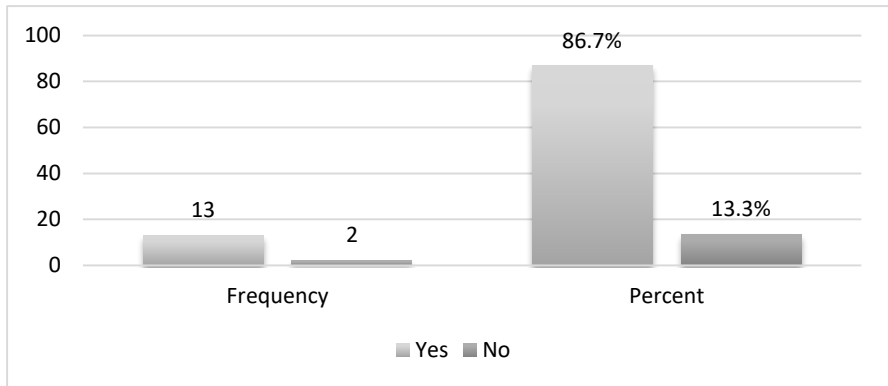


Figure 3: Awareness of and involvement in diplomatic or foreign policy-related activities

4.1.6. Roles Played in Diplomatic or Foreign Policy-Related Activities

In this group, a number of the respondents are mostly in charge of diplomatic operations. Their duties encompass overseeing the logistical backing of diplomatic missions, guaranteeing the seamless completion of administrative assignments, and acting as the foundation of diplomatic missions, so augmenting their effective operation. They contribute to the general efficacy of diplomatic missions by acting as their fundamental support system. Other participants concentrate on public diplomacy initiatives, online presence management, and media interactions. Their mandate entails modelling their country's reputation and communication strategies for the international audience, demonstrating their country's global dominance and image.

The respondents concerned with diplomatic processes, and etiquette forms another unit. Further to promoting visits of foreign dignitaries, important for establishing diplomatic connections and international cooperation, their function is key in ascertaining the smooth

16 Ahmad, Sharique & Wasim, Saeeda & Irfan, Sumaiya & Gogoi, Sudarshana & Srivastava, Anshika & Farheen, Zarina. (2019). Qualitative v/s Quantitative Research. 6. 2828-2832. 10.18410/jebmh/2019/587.

enforcement of formal diplomatic events and ceremonies. One of the respondents is experienced in cyber security, whose main role is to safeguard digital assets of MFA's and classified information from web threats. This stance stresses how valuable cyber security is evolving to contemporary diplomacy.¹⁷ One respondent is also keen to matters relating to trade and financial, with the sole objective of furthering their nation's monetary interests abroad. This is vital for boosting economic diplomacy as it encompasses assignments, for instance forming trade deals and strengthening the firms interested in growing internationally.¹⁸

4.1.7. Awareness of the Concept of Digital Diplomacy

In relation to research outcomes depicted in Figure 4, 93.3% of those interviewed indicated that they were aware of digital diplomacy, hinting that the vast majority of the respondents are familiar with it. This high extent of awareness illustrates how valuable and applicable Internet diplomacy is to current diplomatic work. It is noteworthy that just 6.7% of the participants reacted they were unfamiliar with the concept. Outcomes reveal that, although this sample has a wide comprehension regarding digital diplomacy, there exists room for more education and extensive investigation of its complexities among persons who are less familiar with the concept.¹⁹

17 Rashica, Viona. (2018). The Benefits and Risks of Digital Diplomacy. *SEEU Review*. 13. 75-89. 10.2478/seur-2018-0008.

18 Hussain, A. (2006). Economic Diplomacy and its Significance for Foreign Policy. *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal*, 1(4), 35–45. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45340592>

19 Hocking, Brian & Melissen, Jan. (2015). *Digital Diplomacy in the Digital Age*. Clingendael Institute Editor: Brian Hocking, Jan Melissen

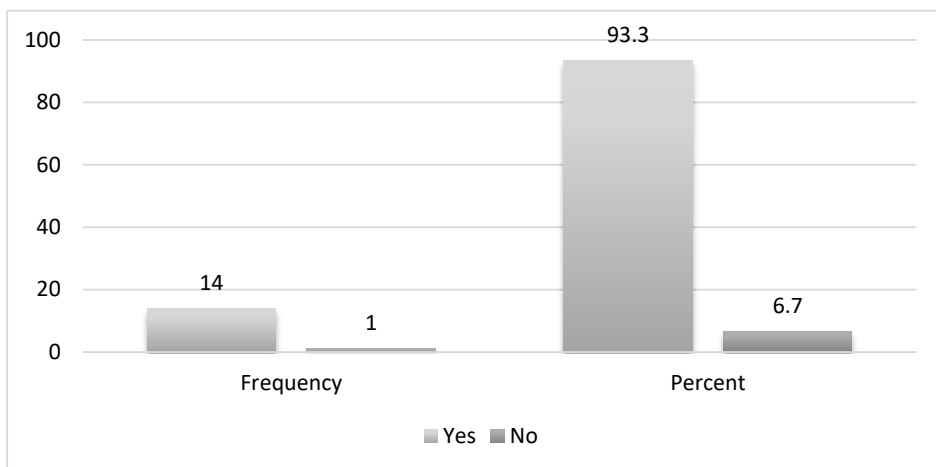


Figure 4: Awareness of the concept of digital diplomacy

4.1.8. Engagement in Digital Diplomacy Initiatives and Content Related to Your Country's Foreign Policy

Strong support for and knowledge of digital diplomacy projects are evident from the survey responses shown in Figure 5. Regarding those interviewed, a vast majority representing 93.3% reacted that they had, on personal level, engaged with digital diplomacy programmes or foreign policy-linked matter. This notable extent of engagement demonstrates how actively web platforms and instruments are embraced in diplomacy models, stressing the value of technology in mainstream global relations. Six-point seven percent (6.7%) of the respondents, representing a minute segment, indicated that digital diplomacy was new to them. These outcomes demonstrate how digital diplomacy is evolving to an increasingly valuable element of modern foreign policy and diplomatic endeavours.²⁰

²⁰ Ibid.

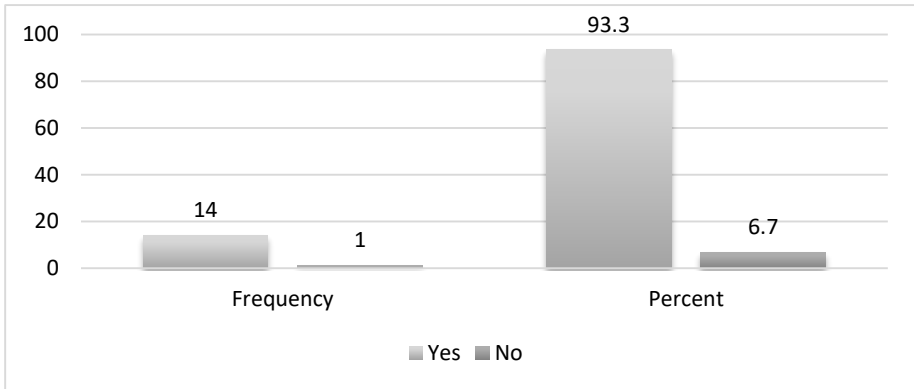


Figure 5: Engagement in digital diplomacy initiatives and content related to your country's foreign policy

4.1.9. Experiences in Engagement in Digital Diplomacy Initiatives and Content Related to Your Country's Foreign Policy

The respondents who reacted, having undertaken programmes in digital diplomacy, elucidated a spectrum of experiences connected to their stature and responsibilities in foreign policy and diplomatic contexts. According to the participants, some of these experiences include handling global obstacles, directing social media platforms to engage with foreign audiences and boost the interests of their countries and beliefs, overseeing publicity and messages for their respective MFAs, and engaging in managing online events.

Some of the afore-mentioned experiences comprise communications and public relations management for their respective Foreign Affairs ministries. 'This mandate deals with the expertise to innovate and share messages that effectively advance their countries' objectives and interests across different digital media. In this regard, digital media is embraced to share their diplomatic messaging; adequately showcasing their country's input on the global arena.²¹

In current times, social media has evolved to become a powerful weapon in digital diplomacy. Platforms on social media, for instance, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, are significantly utilised by the respondents to relay information to world audience. They are able to interact with global populations, disseminate knowledge concerning

21 Rashica, Viona. (2018). The Values and Threats of Digital Diplomacy. *SEEU Review*. 13. 75-89. 10.2478/secu-2018-0008.

policies of their country and endeavours, and toil to portray a strong and favourable picture abroad through different channels.²²

They are obliged to handle global constraints which form part of their engagement in order to be successful. In a global village, digital diplomacy offers a virtual setting for settling disturbing global matters.²³ The respondents, in most instances, engage in partnerships, debates, and actions that are enhanced by online resources, tackle global health matters and climate change, and settle conflicts.

Their past encounter with digital diplomacy further encompasses a key segment of coordinating online functions. This deals with establishing online debates, virtual conferences, and webinars. These virtual assemblies act as platforms for promoting global cooperation, allowing decision-makers, specialists, and interested parties to participate in fruitful dialogues and cooperative projects without regard to physical distance.²⁴

Furthermore, there are unique challenges in the digital world, like cyber security risks.²⁵ Because technology and digital platforms are so important to digital diplomacy, identifying and reducing these risks is a crucial part of their jobs. To ensure the security and integrity of their country's digital diplomacy activities, it is crucial to protect digital assets and sensitive information related to diplomatic projects.

Finally, the digital revolution has not ignored economic diplomacy. The respondents take part in online trade events where they host webinars on various trade-related themes, network with potential foreign business partners, and promote their countries' goods and services. In doing so, they actively support the advancement of their nations' economic goals and the creation of business alliances on a global scale.²⁶

22 Ong Hai Liaw, Jessica. (2020). Digital Diplomacy: The Role of Social Media. *Solid State Technology*. 63. 7551.

23 Adesina, Olubukola. (2017). Foreign policy in an era of digital diplomacy. *Cogent Social Sciences*. 19. 169-189. 10.1080/23311886.2017.1297175.

24 Dwivedi, K. et al. (2022). Metaverse beyond the hype: Multidisciplinary perspectives on emerging challenges, opportunities, and agenda for research, practice and policy. *International Journal of Information Management*, 66, 102542. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2022.102542>.

25 Saeed, Saqib & Altamimi, Salha & Alkayyal, Norah & Alshehri, Ebtisam & Alabbad, Dina. (2023). *Digital Transformation and Cybersecurity Challenges for Businesses Resilience: Issues and Recommendations*. Sensors (Basel, Switzerland). 23. 10.3390/s23156666.

26 Elmuti, Dean & Kathawala, Yunus. (2001). An overview of strategic alliances. *Management Decision*. 39. 205-218. 10.1108/EUM0000000005452.

4.1.10. Effectiveness of Digital Diplomacy Initiatives in Achieving Foreign Policy Objectives from Kenyan and South African Perspectives

The survey findings in Figure 6 indicate that the majority of the respondents, 73.3%, perceive digital diplomacy initiatives as "Very Effective" in achieving the foreign policy objectives of Kenya and South Africa. An additional 20.0% consider these initiatives to be "Effective." Notably, no respondents deemed digital diplomacy initiatives as "Ineffective" or "Very Ineffective." However, a small fraction, 6.7%, maintained a "Neutral" stance. These results suggest a high level of optimism and confidence in the power of digital diplomacy to advance the foreign policy goals of both countries, underlining the significant impact of digital tools and platforms in the contemporary diplomatic landscape. 27 The overwhelmingly positive sentiment among the respondents underscores the potential of digital diplomacy in shaping international relations and achieving strategic objectives.

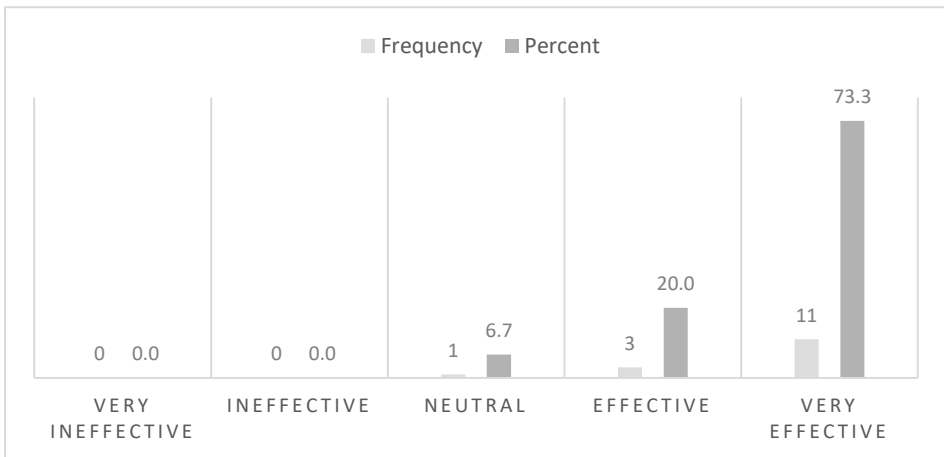


Figure 6: Effectiveness of digital diplomacy initiatives in achieving foreign policy objectives from Kenyan and South African perspectives

27 Adesina, Olubukola. (2017). Foreign policy in an era of digital diplomacy. *Cogent Social Sciences*. 19. 169-189. 10.1080/23311886.2017.1297175.

4.1.11. Examples of Specific Digital Diplomacy Initiatives that Respondents Believe Have Been Particularly Effective

The respondents highlighted several digital diplomacy initiatives they believe have been highly effective in advancing the foreign policy objectives of Kenya and South Africa. These initiatives encompass a broad spectrum of strategies.

One significant achievement is the establishment of visa-free travel between South Africa and Kenya, fostering regional cooperation and people-to-people connections. *"Twitter Diplomacy"* has emerged as a powerful tool for engaging with both domestic and international audiences. The use of social media platforms like Twitter enables real-time communication, information sharing, and direct public engagement.

South African diplomatic missions in the global arena are active on social media. This is notable on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. They participate significantly with international audience by utilising these platforms to relay briefs regarding bilateral engagements, cultural feats, and foreign policy. Embracing targeted hashtags, e.g. #Kenya Inaction, can enhance the reputation of a nation abroad by attracting attention to its efforts and accomplishments on the global setting. Digital diplomacy functions a key part in forming public perception in crisis moments. Adequate management techniques in the event of a crisis have embraced social media debates monitoring, correcting fake news, and open communication with aggrieved population.

Online movements, e.g. #KenyaChat, on Twitter motivates direct public participation, availing people and the global community an avenue to dialogue with ambassador one-on-one and share knowledge concerning international relations and foreign policy. Promoting a conducive international image and bolstering cultural diplomacy programs is attained through displaying a country's rich cultural history on web platforms, including events, art exhibitions, music, and literature discourses.

Having conversations with foreign dignitaries and visitors is smoothed by meticulous management of digital events, including electronic RSVPs and reservations. These illustrations in entirety depict the multi-pronged setting of digital diplomacy work and the manner they have been instrumental in articulating goals of foreign policy by fostering communication, advocating engagement, and forming perceptions of the

public on a global level. In the opinion of Rashica,²⁸ initiatives in digital diplomacy have proven to be effective at improving communication. To cross geographic barriers and interact with global audiences, diplomats and practitioners of foreign policy are using social media platforms, government websites, and digital communication channels. These digital tools have completely changed the speed and reach of communication in diplomacy, whether it is for delivering policy messages, responding to international emergencies, or enabling diplomatic debates.

4.1.12. Challenges and Limitations in the Effectiveness of Digital Diplomacy in Kenya and South Africa

The respondents pointed out several challenges and limitations that impact the effectiveness of digital diplomacy efforts by Kenya and South Africa. Firstly, the poor quality of Internet infrastructure in certain areas can impede accessibility and reliability, limiting the reach of digital diplomacy initiatives.²⁹ This infrastructure issue hampers the ability to effectively utilise online platforms. Secondly, the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation in digital spaces poses a significant obstacle. False or misleading information can erode the credibility of diplomatic messages and create confusion among the public.³⁰ Additionally, political polarisation, both within and beyond the country's borders, can complicate digital diplomacy efforts. It is essential to navigate the intricacies of varying political perspectives.³¹ Cyber security concerns are ever-present, demanding robust measures to protect digital assets from cyber threats that can compromise diplomatic communications.³²

28 Rashica, Viona. (2018). The Benefits and Risks of Digital Diplomacy. *SEEU Review*. 13. 75-89. 10.2478/secur-2018-0008.

29 Abu Addous, Hayfa & Zalisham, Mohd & Basir, Nurlida. (2016). Web Accessibility Challenges. *International Journal of Advanced Computer Science and Applications*. 7. 10.14569/IJACSA.2016.071023.

30 Kim, Bogoan & Xiong, Aiping & Lee, Dongwon & Han, Kyungsik. (2021). A systematic review on fake news research through the lens of news creation and consumption: Research efforts, challenges, and future directions. *PLOS ONE*. 16. e0260080. 10.1371/journal.pone.0260080.

31 Adesina, Olubukola. (2017). Foreign policy in an era of digital diplomacy. *Cogent Social Sciences*. 19. 169-189. 10.1080/23311886.2017.1297175.

32 Rashica, Viona. (2018). The Benefits and Risks of Digital Diplomacy. *SEEU Review*. 13. 75-89. 10.2478/secur-2018-0008.

Language and cultural barriers can hinder effective communication and engagement with diverse audiences, both domestically and internationally, highlighting the need for cultural sensitivity in digital diplomacy.³³ Lastly, the abundance of information available online can lead to information overload, making it challenging to ensure that key diplomatic messages are noticed and absorbed amidst the digital noise.³⁴

4.1.13. Most Effective Digital Platforms or Channels for Conveying Foreign Policy Messages and Initiatives

The respondents have expressed a clear preference for social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook as the most effective channels for conveying foreign policy messages and initiatives, with 86.7% of the participants favouring these platforms. This high percentage suggests the recognition of the wide-reaching impact and real-time engagement opportunities offered by social media.

Conversely, government websites and official government apps received relatively lower support, with 13.3% favouring them. Online news outlets and other digital channels were not mentioned as effective means for conveying foreign policy messages, as illustrated in Figure 7.

This data underscores the prominence of social media in contemporary digital diplomacy efforts, highlighting its role as a primary conduit for engaging with domestic and international audiences, disseminating foreign policy updates, and fostering diplomatic relations. This strong backing highlights the understanding of the prospects for immediate involvement and broad reach provided by social media. These channels are incredibly adaptive for communicating ideas about foreign policy because they interact with broad global audiences, provide quick reactions to emergent problems, use an informal tone, and make use of visual content. Government websites and official apps, however, gained less support probably due to their perceived formality and lack of involvement.³⁵ Online news sites were not mentioned, indicating a preference for direct communication through official channels and emphasising the critical role social media plays in modern diplomatic

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Melinat, Peter & Kreuzkam, Tolja & Stamer, Dirk. (2014). *Information Overload: A Systematic Literature Review*. 10.13140/2.1.4293.7606.

³⁵ Ong Hai Liaw, Jessica. (2020). Digital Diplomacy: The Role of Social Media. *Solid State Technology*, 63. 7551.

communication.³⁶

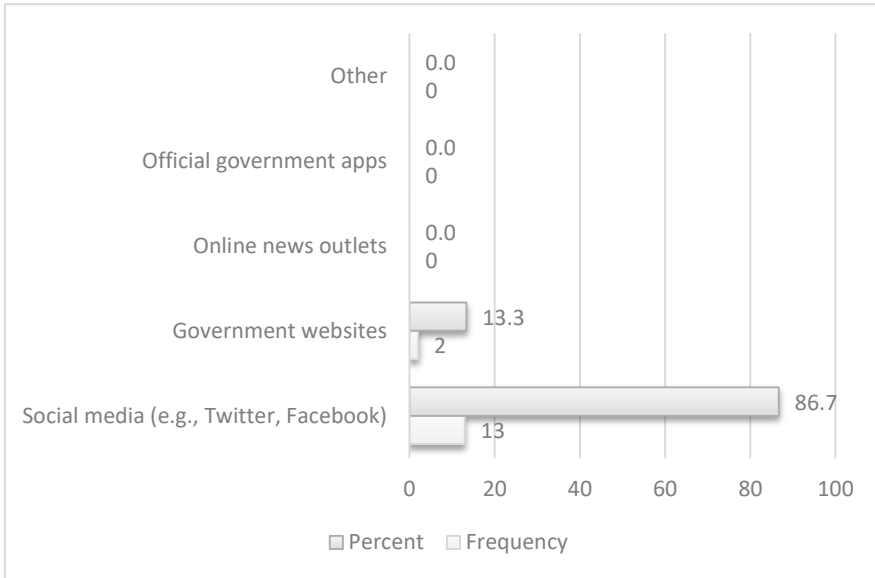


Figure 7: Most effective digital platforms or channels for conveying foreign policy messages and initiatives

4.1.14. Types of Content Respondents Find Most Engaging or Informative in Digital Diplomacy Efforts

The respondents highlighted various types of content that they find engaging and informative in digital diplomacy efforts. Official statements received significant recognition, with 73.3% of the respondents valuing these as effective means of communication. These statements are appreciated for their clarity and authoritative nature.

Multimedia content, such as videos and infographics, resonates with 46.7% of the participants, indicating that visual and interactive elements enhance engagement and facilitate better understanding of foreign policy initiatives. Virtual events and webinars were valued by 33.3% of the respondents, highlighting the importance of real-time interaction and in-depth discussions in the digital diplomacy landscape.

Interactive campaigns, like quizzes and polls, are found engaging by 20.0% of the participants, underlining the appeal of participatory content that involves the audience. Diplomatic blog posts also received high

³⁶ Ibid.

recognition, with 73.3% of the respondents expressing appreciation for these insights as shown in Table 3. The diversity of content preferences underscores the importance of employing a varied content strategy to effectively convey diplomatic messages and engage with digital diplomacy audiences.³⁷

Table 3: Types of content respondents find most engaging or informative in digital diplomacy efforts

Answer Choice	Frequency	Percentage
Official statements	11	73.3
Multimedia (videos, infographics)	7	46.7
Virtual events/webinars	5	33.3
Interactive campaigns (e.g., quizzes, polls)	3	20.0
Diplomatic blog posts	11	73.3

³⁷ Spry, Damien. (2018). Facebook diplomacy: A data-driven, user-focused approach to Facebook use by diplomatic missions. Media International Australia. 168. 1329878X1878302. 10.1177/1329878X18783029.

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

The study reveals a high level of awareness and engagement with digital diplomacy among the respondents from Kenya and South Africa. Social media platforms are deemed highly effective for conveying foreign policy messages, although challenges such as poor Internet infrastructure, misinformation, and cyber security concerns persist. Diverse content types, including official statements and multimedia, are valued for their ability to engage and inform. Hence, digital diplomacy is seen as a potent tool for achieving foreign policy objectives, though continued adaptation and addressing inherent challenges are necessary for maximising its effectiveness.

5.2 Recommendations

Respondents had provided beneficial suggestions to bolster digital diplomacy programs efficacy in both Kenya and South Africa. To begin with, a mutual recommendation was to expand access to internet, aimed at settling infrastructure impediments to ensure optimal engagement and reach. Likewise, the establishment of an extensive plan for digital diplomacy was recommended. Through embracing a strategic methodology, measures to advance diplomacy would conform to aims of foreign policy by provision of an organised model for employing digital tools and platforms. At the same time, cybersecurity preventive measures were floated as being essential to safeguard private online diplomatic correspondence. Similarly, cultural awareness was singled, acknowledging the need of embracing and understanding different cultures while connecting with international audiences.

5.2.1. Methods through which Government can improve its engagement with the public and stakeholders through digital diplomacy work

Reactions from those polled offered insightful information on how state authority might expand engagement of both stakeholders and the public by means of digital diplomacy initiatives. It is thus suggested to continually form a well-laid-out mechanism that adopts both online platforms and technologies to foster communication, develop networks, and share knowledge. This type of strategic technique ascertains the need

for coordinating operations associated with digital diplomacy.

A crucial tactic for engagement is to cooperate with the youth. Acknowledging the stand and Internet expertise of youthful generations, for example, involving them in diplomatic assignments, can inject fresh energy and ideas. It is emphasised that there is a need to customise content and messaging in order to conform to the specific features of each online platform. Content ought to be programmed to suit the unique segment and dynamics of each platform with an aim to optimise engagement and resonance. Involving local stakeholders alongside those working outside the government is deemed to be a beneficial tactic for expanding the digital diplomacy influence and context. It takes the opportunity to utilise networks and expertise of different stakeholders. In the end, it is suggested to adopt different web platforms so as to expand penetration and fit varying audiences with differing interests and predispositions.

5.2.2. Other Reactions in Relation to Digital Diplomacy in Kenya and South Africa

The value of consistently exploring the success of digital diplomacy programmes by the use of analytics and feedback modalities was noted by the respondents. This stresses the need for an adaptable and data-driven tactic to ascertain that digital diplomacy strategies proceed to be both effective and applicable. In this regard, it is emphasised that visual content utilization, e.g. infographics and videos, is a credible mean to educate and involve audiences. Visual proponents can increase the appeal of diplomatic statements and accessibility.

Likewise, it is of importance to focus different audience categories by adopting a mix of digital streams, e.g. authorised websites, webinars, email newsletters, Instagram accounts, and virtual events. Better targeted and thorough outreach is attainable with this multi-channel technique.

Similarly, it is a practical idea to invest resources in capacity building and training for government workforce, communication units, and diplomats to assist them transform to better digital ambassadors. Teams and units can be better placed to manage the evolving digital landscape by consistent updating on the latest digital tools and techniques.

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