



Nigeria's foreign policy in an era of digital diplomacy

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Abstract

The advent of the internet revolution has affected all aspects of life, including the way nations interact with each other in the international arena. Foreign policy which is simply the means through which Nigeria like other nations intends to achieve its national objectives; is often anchored on Diplomacy. This tool of foreign policy is being transformed by the internet revolution. Thus, the traditional diplomacy is now being transformed to digital diplomacy. This paper therefore examines the impact of digital diplomacy on Nigeria's foreign policy, how its utilization is changing traditional diplomatic practices; the opportunities and challenges it presents for diplomatic activities. The paper also explores how Nigeria's foreign policy can greatly be strengthened in its foreign policy projections to its domestic and foreign audiences, by the adoption of digital diplomacy.

Keywords: Foreign policy, digital diplomacy, soft power, diplomacy, cyber security, disinformation and social media

Introduction

Foreign policy is the objectives a country seeks to achieve in its interaction with other countries in the international arena. Indeed, foreign policy, reduced to its fundamental ingredients, consists of two elements: national objectives to be achieved and the means for achieving them. The interaction between national goals and the resources for attaining them is the perennial subject of statecraft (Crabb, 1972, p.1). Thus, one of the elements of foreign policy is the means of achieving a country's foreign policy objectives, and one of the major instruments of foreign policy is diplomacy (Adesina, 2017, pg 1-2)^[1].

However, a major change in the world today with regards to diplomacy is the development of the internet. The internet, along with computer systems, provided the first opportunity for instant access to new information and the ability to send a written message in a matter of seconds. In its early innovation, the internet was a tool used only by the government. It was a state-controlled project that relied on expert coders to know how to operate it (Dentzel, Z. 2017)^[6]. Then, as the internet slowly became available to the general public, it became evident that it was going to grow into something larger (Vereikia, B. 2017). At the time, many believe that the world is currently experiencing a second revolution in internet technology, referring to it as the "web 2.0".

Adesina (2017, p.2)^[1] stated that, "One major factor that has affected diplomacy in this modern age is the revolution in information and communication technologies (ICTs). ICTs have revolutionized the way people communicate and exchange information, changing political, social and economic landscapes across the globe". For Faye (2000)^[9], ICTs are offering even less developed countries a window of opportunities to leapfrog the industrialization stage and transform their economies into high value-added information economies that can compete with the advanced economies on the global market. Within this context, it can be unarguably be stated that this technological innovation has contributed to the globalization of the world by

supplying infrastructure for trans-world connections and Nigeria as a country cannot afford to miss out on the opportunities these technologies are creating.

More importantly, is the fact that this revolution in ICTs has also resulted in fundamental changes in the conduct of diplomacy globally. In countries like Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen, the social media has become a platform to distribute uncensored public information among users. The social media aided Arab Spring activities in breaking down "the psychological barrier of fear by helping many to connect and share information" – and, in some cases, in helping to organise physical protests (Kassim, 2012)^[15].

Although there seem to be a consensus among scholars and stakeholders that the traditional mode of conducting diplomacy which is, the interactions between representatives of sovereign states remains crucial, in today's interconnected world, individuals and organizations – not just countries – play a larger role in international affairs. This paper posits that, the internet, which has been conceptualised to refer to, "the means of communication that enables the publication, exchange and storage of information" (Westcott, 2008^[34], p.3 cited in Adesina, 2017)^[1], is no doubt crucial and central to Nigeria's foreign policy makers and stakeholders. This is because, the internet, is now central to public and private communication through such tools as the social media, which have brought millions into open conversation spaces. In fact, it has been said that, with more than 2 billion people using Facebook, Twitter, Ozone, Snapchat and other social media platforms daily, digital connectivity has made the world smaller and, in the process, changed the daily lives of billions of people (Westcott, 2008, p.3)^[34].

It is against the above background that this paper examines the impact of digital diplomacy on Nigeria's foreign policy, how its utilization is changing traditional diplomatic practices, opportunities and challenges it presents for diplomatic activities. It also examines how Nigeria's foreign policy can greatly benefit from the adoption of digital diplomacy.

Conceptualising digital diplomacy

Diplomacy is “the management of international relations by negotiation”, or “the method by which these relations are adjusted and managed” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1978). Diplomacy can also be defined as the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between the governments of independent states.

Diplomacy is the “engine room” of international relations (Cohen, 1998, p.1) [4]. It is the established method by which states articulate their foreign policy objectives and coordinate their efforts to influence the decisions and behaviour of foreign governments and people through dialogue, negotiations and other such measures, short of war and violence. Diplomacy, has indeed remained the means by which states for centuries now, seek to secure particular or wider interests, including the redirection of frictions between or among themselves. It is the core instrument through which the goals, strategies and broad tactics of foreign policy are implemented. It strives to preserve peace and aims at developing goodwill towards foreign states and peoples with a view to ensuring their cooperation or, failing that, their neutrality (Adesina, 2017, p.3) [1]. The key component or functions of diplomacy generally are: representation, negotiation, reporting and protection of interest of a country.

The concept of digital diplomacy on the other hand, is relatively new and lacks an all-encompassing definition. Though new, is no doubt becoming an important topic. Several organizations have attempted to form a concrete definition of the term, yet it continues to be used vaguely. This lack of precision in definition has caused different scholars to research digital diplomacy in different ways, focusing on everything from cyber security to social media to internet governance (Hocking and Jan, 2015) [13]. A further reason for this lack of precision stems from the fact that digital diplomacy is often referred to by different names. Scholars have been using the terms “cyber-diplomacy”, “net-diplomacy” interchangeably (Diplofoundation).

For Satiriu (2015) [29], digital diplomacy as a recent development, has been interpreted, defined and understood in different yet, similar ways by researchers and practitioners alike. Thus, it could be safe to say that, there is no widely accepted definition or framework that covers the concept. Therefore, it is not out of place for one to assume that current studies have only begun to scratch the surface of what digital diplomacy means and how it works. This perhaps explains the absence in the current literature of a reliable conceptual framework for assessing the effectiveness of social media for public diplomatic purposes (Bjola & Jang, 2015) [3].

In spite of the above, several scholars have offered some definitions on the concept of digital diplomacy from their various perspectives. Thus, Manor and Segev (2015) [19], defined digital diplomacy as. “mainly the growing use of social media platforms by a country in order to achieve its foreign policy goals and proactively manage its image and reputations. They went further to posit that digital diplomacy exists at two levels: that of the foreign ministry and that of embassies located around the world. These Scholars also argued that, “by operating on these to levels, nations can tailor foreign policy and nation-branding messages to the unique characteristics of local audiences with regard to history, culture, values and traditions, thereby

facilitating the acceptance of their foreign policy and the image they aim to promote. The importance and imperativeness of digital diplomacy adoption in Nigeria’s foreign policy cannot be overemphasized. If only for its salesmanship and image-branding pursuit in the international arena.

Lewis (2014) [16] as cited in Adesina (2017) [1], defined digital diplomacy as the use of digital tools of communication (social media) by diplomats to communicate with each other and with the general public. While for Potter (2002) [25], digital diplomacy mainly refers to the diplomatic practice through digital and networked technologies, including the internet, mobile devices, and social media channels. For Hanson. (2012), digital diplomacy is simply, the use of the internet and new information communication technologies to help carryout diplomatic objectives. According to Adesina (2017, p.3) [1] stated that, Hanson (2012), outlined eight policy goals for digital diplomacy as follows:

1. Knowledge and management: To harness departmental and whole of government knowledge, so that it is retained shared and its use optimized in pursuit of national interests abroad.
2. Public diplomacy: To maintain contact with audiences as they migrate in line and to harness new communications tools to listen to and target important audiences with key messages and to influence major online influences.
3. Information management: To help aggregate the overwhelming flow of information and to use this to better inform policy making and to help anticipate and respond to emerging social and political movements.
4. Consular communications and response: To create direct, personal communications channels with citizens travelling overseas with manageable communications in crisis situations.
5. Disaster response: To harness the power of connective technologies in disaster response situations.
6. Internet freedom: Creation of technologies to keep the internet free and open. This has the related objectives of promoting freedom of speech and democracy as well as undermining authoritarian regimes.
7. External resources: Creating digital mechanisms to draw on and harness external expertise to advance national goals.
8. Policy planning: To allow for effective oversight, coordination and planning of international policy across government, in response to the internationalization of the bureaucracy.

However, it is perhaps imperative to conclude this section of the paper, by drawing attention to the fact that, though, digital diplomacy is solving foreign policy problems with the internet, we must not forget the point that, it is still conventional diplomacy through a different medium. Similarly, digital diplomacy should not be seen as a replacement for traditional diplomacy which has permeated Nigeria’s foreign policy over the years, but rather we should see digital diplomacy as a compliment to traditional diplomacy.

Theoretical framework

One Fundamental goal of Nigeria’s foreign policy is the settlement of international disputes through peaceful means-

which emphasized the principle of dialogue and persuasion as against coercion. Thus, Nigeria's perception of diplomacy is that of persuasion and about looking for and finding common ground, forging agreement and achieving a balance of benefits that will allow each party to a dispute to go home with at least some degree of satisfaction.

It is against the above background that this paper examines the impact of digital diplomacy on Nigeria's foreign policy through the perspective of soft power approach to international relations. According to Nye, (1990, p. 176)^[21] as cited by Adesina (2017, p.6)^[1] defined soft power to mean the ability to set the agenda in world politics through persuasion, enticing and attracting others through the force of one's beliefs, values and ideas and not through military or economic coercion. Nye went further to differentiate between two types of power, hard and soft power. Hard power is "the ability to get others to act in ways that are contrary to their initial preferences and strategies". (Nye, 2011, p.11 also cited in Adesina 2017, p.6)^[1]. It is the ability to coerce, through threats and inducements ("sticks and carrots"). Soft power on the other hand is the ability to get others to want the outcomes that you want" (Nye, 2004^[20], p.5), and more particularly "the ability to achieve goals through attraction rather than coercion". Finally, Nye according to Adesina, introduces smart power as the "balance of hard and soft power" (Nye 2005). He went further to argue that soft power is as important as hard power and even more so in international politics. Indeed, soft power according to Adesina (2017.p.6)^[1], enables a change of behaviour in others, without competition or conflict, by using persuasion and attraction. Essentially, Hallams (2010, p.541)^[11], argued that, "the art of soft power in the twenty first century is fusing the traditional tools of diplomacy and negotiation and the ability to harness the power and potential inherent in the new and emerging technologies that globalization has wrought".

Nigeria's foreign policy and the evolution of digital diplomacy

So far, it has been established in this paper that diplomacy has existed for many centuries even before Nigeria became a sovereign state. With the attainment of sovereignty, Nigeria began to formulate its foreign policy using diplomacy-through traditional form to achieve its national interests in the international arena. In the context of international affairs, diplomacy is a method by which states manage their relationships with one another and try to achieve national interests (Amacker, 2011)^[2]. Indeed, there are several incentives for Nigeria as a sovereign state to work with other nations within the international system. As described by the realist theory of international relations, state seeks security and power within the international system. In order to obtain security and power states build strategic relationships with one another, constructing alliances to defend their own interests. Therefore, the vulnerability of states, their desire for power, their common interests with other states and their realization of the benefits of trade, motivate states to partake in diplomacy (Rozental Andres and Alicia Buenrostro (2013)^[27].

However, the development of the internet has caused a major change in the way nations now conduct their interaction with other nations of the world. Nigeria is not left out in this internet revolution that has brought a paradigm shift in Nigeria's foreign policy. This shift is what in modern state is referred to as Digital diplomacy. Digital diplomacy is seen as an important tool in furthering a

nation's foreign policy as it enables direct interaction and engagement with foreign public (Hanson,2012).

Ross (2011)^[26] as cited by Adesina (2017)^[1], argues that the proliferation of communications and information technology was not only transforming the means of social protest but that it also pointed towards an emerging revolution in diplomacy. The scholar puts the argument succinctly thus:

Traditionally, diplomatic engagement consisted largely of government to –government interactions. In some instances, it was from government to people, such as with international broadcasting in the 20th century. With the advent of social media and the rapid increase in mobile (technology) penetration, however, this engagement now increasingly, takes place from people to government and from people to people. This direct link from citizens to government allows diplomats to convene and connect with non-traditional audiences, and in turn allows citizens to influence their governments in ways that were not possible ten years ago.

In fact, one of the most significant impacts of digital diplomacy has been on traditional diplomatic practices. In the past, diplomacy was largely conducted behind closed doors with face-to-face meetings between diplomats and leaders being the norm. However, digital diplomacy has changed this by allowing for more public engagement and transparency. For example, social media has become an increasingly important tool for diplomats to communicate with each other and public. Leaders and diplomats can now share their views on global events and policy decisions in real-time, without the need for traditional media intermediaries. This has allowed for a more direct and informal allowed for a more direct and informal style of diplomacy, with tweets and Facebook posts being used to communicate everything from policy positions to congratulatory messages (Mahesh Senadeera, 2023)^[17].

However, it is imperative to note that Nigeria's foreign policy has three key opportunities to exploit from digital diplomacy. These areas according to Nyewusira (2019, p.173)^[22] are:

1. Consular and Diaspora relations.
2. Nation branding.
3. Networking.

Nigeria, through its social media can keep in touch with its larger population in the diaspora for economic and cultural benefits. Nigerian embassies may use Facebook and Twitter to keep nationals abreast with embassy events, consular assistance, political issues and investment opportunities (Nyewusira, 2019, p.173)^[22]. This shall be elaborated upon in subsequent sections of paper.

Benefits of digital diplomacy to Nigeria's foreign policy

Nigeria, like many other countries around the world are seizing advent of digital diplomacy at actively pursue its foreign policy objectives through the creation of websites, blogs and the use of social media platforms-Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, You-tube, Google etc. Schwarzenbach (2015) as cited by Adesina (2017, p.7)^[1] noted that:

The biggest change Twitter has brought to foreign policy has been greater access to unfiltered information and worldwide engagement regardless of nationality or

political status. Additionally, the increasing number of cell phone users in the developing world further democratizes information-sharing. As a result, citizens and civil society are becoming increasingly able to hold governments accountable for policies and for statements made by politicians.

With regard to the statement by Schwarzenbach, example can be cited from Nigeria, when during emergencies and disasters, digital platforms served as Key avenue to reach nationals in different states. Specifically, the Twitter was used by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Geoffrey Onyeama, on April 14th 2020 ^[23], to influence public opinion against the discriminations against Nigerians in China and expressed his displeasure regarding human right discriminations when Nigerians were forcefully evacuated from their homes and forced into quarantine because of the covid-19 pandemic. According to the Minister, “the Nigerian government takes very seriously the issue of human rights and well-being of Nigerians everywhere in the world. Any issue in this regard the Nigerian government considers it absolute obligation to intervene to assure the rights and dignities of Nigerians are protected” (Onyeama, 2020) ^[23]. This benefit is in line with Hocking and Jan (2015) ^[13], when they noted that, “one of the most appealing aspects of digital diplomacy is its ability to foster two-way communication”.

Digital diplomacy has created an opportunity for Nigeria to manage her global image. Social media visibility would tackle stereotypes and change the narrative about Nigeria in the international arena (Nyewusira, 2019, 174) ^[22]. There are over two billion people on social media (Adesina, 2017) ^[1]. While according to Zimako (2009 ^[36] as cited by Nyewusira, 2019) ^[22], government is responsible for Nigeria’s image at home and abroad. The view the world has about Nigeria is generally bad. The lack of faith by Nigerians in Nigeria, bad economy and human rights abuses gives Nigeria a poor image. Between 1999 and 2015, the United States and Britain at different times designated Nigeria an unsafe place for their nationals to visit. This is because of issues of militancy in the Niger Delta, terrorist activities and general insecurity. Nigerians are considered corrupt, drug dealers, prostitutes, child traffickers and fraudsters (Zimako, 2009) ^[36]. Digital diplomacy provides a platform for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to promote Nigeria’s image directly with foreign publics (Nyewusira, 2019) ^[22].

Another benefit of digital diplomacy to Nigeria’s foreign policy is that of diplomatic networking. This is because digital diplomacy has allowed diplomats and world leaders to easily extend their diplomatic networks and build strategic relationships (Sandre, 2015) ^[28]. For Adesina, (2017) ^[1], social media gives Nigeria the opportunity to network with other Africa countries. The speed with which information is disseminated across the globe provides a form of mobility on global issues Nigeria can use social media to extend her diplomatic network with other non-state actors and direct public opinion towards its own interest. Obuah (2017, p.147) stated it thus, “the social media can be useful to digital diplomacy by leveraging the opportunity to engage diverse niche communities to market key economic exports, culture, political behaviour etc of a country especially in the era where states have made a significant shift from hard power to soft power in the conduct of interstate relations”.

Furthermore, Nigeria’s foreign policy can benefit from digital diplomacy because it leads to an increased sense of transparency. In the modern world, people put everything online. Individuals broadcast their lives to the public by updating their Facebook statuses and posting pictures on Twitter. This trend along with a natural desire to want to know what one’s government is up to, has led to a public demand for transparency (Finaud, 2017) ^[10]. With diplomacy being a profession that is notorious for its confidentiality, it has been difficult for some diplomats to find balance between the two (Hocking and Jan, 2015) ^[13]. Yet it is important for diplomats to utilize this new technology to its full potential. By making personalized posts about the activities they are carrying out, diplomats and political leaders are able to make the public feel as though they are included in important conversations (Bjola and Holmes, 2015) ^[3].

Finally, Nigeria’s foreign policy can also benefit from digital diplomacy because it leads to decrease in financial and environmental costs. Indeed, with the advancement of technology, foreign representatives no longer need to get on a plane and travel to a distant country in order to hold a meeting. Telecommunication technologies such as Skype and Facetime allow people to communicate remotely, being able to discuss issues as if they were in the same room (Ujvari, 2017) ^[32]. This means that foreign offices no longer need to spend as much on transportation costs and can instead use that money to invest in other areas. But telecommunication does not only provide diplomats with a financial benefit, it also provides an environmental one (Ujvari, 2017) ^[32]. This is so because digital technology in general has a great potential to reduce effects on our environment; as digitalization has led to newspaper and books being printed online, reducing paper printing production. Thus, telecommunication is another way that the environment benefits, through the reduction of Co2 emission (Strau B, *et al*, 2015) ^[31]

Challenges associated with adoption of digital diplomacy for Nigeria’s foreign policy

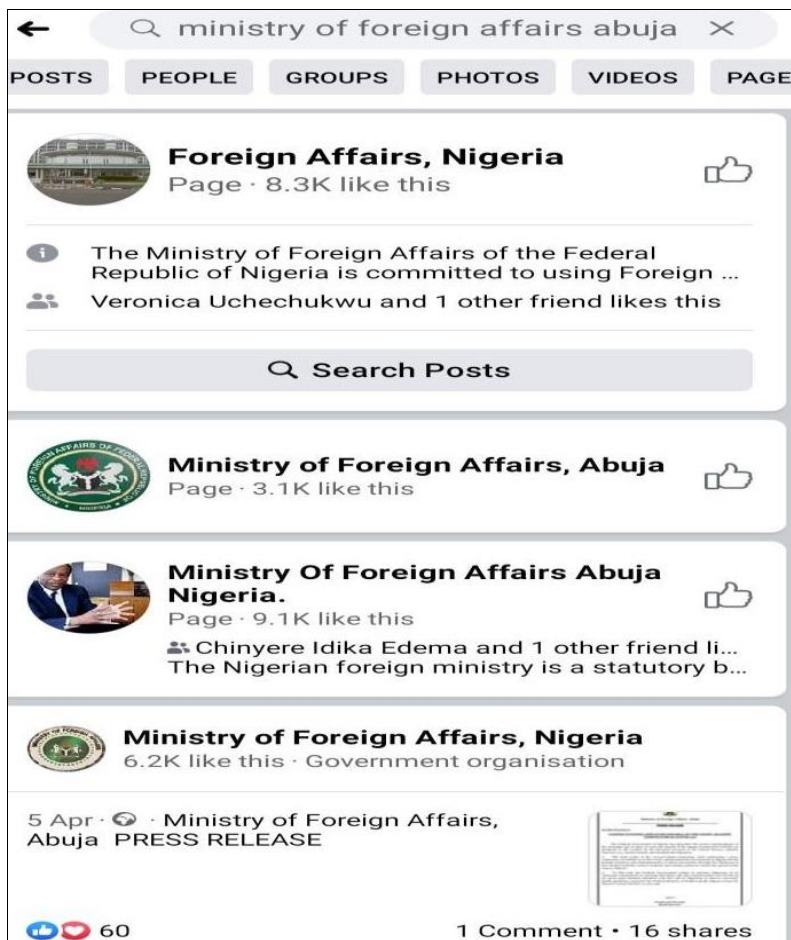
Technological advancement and the subsequent evolution of digital diplomacy have no doubt impacted on diplomatic practices of all nations, Nigeria inclusive, positively but that in itself does not suggest that it is immune from challenges and risks. In Nigeria for instances, according to Nyewusira (2019, p.174) ^[22], digital diplomacy have brought some challenges to Nigeria’s foreign policy to include, the lack of professionalism in digital diplomacy, the presence of bots and algorithms on the internet, and the possibility of cyber hacking.

According to Nyewusira (2019, p.175) ^[22] citing Euka and Ojukwu (2016) ^[8], argued that “Nigerian diplomats and foreign policy practitioners have not received the required training and orientation to meet up with the realities and changes of contemporary diplomacy. Nigerian diplomats are yet to fully incorporate the digital aspects of their practice.” Therefore, Nigeria records a poor social media activity. According to these scholars, “a look at Nigeria Ministry of Foreign Affairs Twitter handle (see.fig.1) shows that not only is it not verified, it has only 6,549 followers”. This is low when compared to their peers at the Somalian ministry of Foreign Affairs with 142,000 followers (Euka and Ojukwu, 2016) ^[8].



Source: Twitter (2020)

Fig 1: The official Twitter account of the Nigeria Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



Source: Facebook (2020)

Fig 2: Multiple Facebook accounts attributed to the Nigeria Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs according to Enuka and Ojukwu (2016) ^[8] is compromised on face book as there are a number of unverified accounts using the ministry's name (see fig2).

With respects to the presence of bots and algorithms on the internet Nyewusira (2019, p.177) ^[22], argues that, "digital diplomacy is challenged by the presence of Bots and Algorithms". These according to him, are technical difficulties in the diplomatic practice. Bots are computer programs that act like an internet user to post certain comments and opinions on social media and websites. Algorithms tailor an online user's experience. For instance, an algorithm may detect a user's political affiliation, world view and even sexual orientation. The algorithm then opens the user primarily to contents that confers with his/her opinion or belief. This actually limits the world view of the internet user (Manor, 2016). Nigerian contents on social media may end up being sabotaged by a computer program or not even seen at all because of algorithms (Nyewusira, 2019.p.177) ^[22].

The implication of the above two challenges is that Nigeria's internet tools are susceptible to hacking. Hacking according to Adesina (2017, p.11) ^[1], is a risk which has existed since the advent of the internet. A recent example according to her is the case of a hacking attack on the personal website of Yuli Edelstein, Israeli Minister of Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Affairs. Commenting on this according to Adesina (2017, p.11) ^[1], the Minister said that nothing could stop him from performing public diplomacy on behalf of the state of Israel. He intends to continue to defend the interests of the state in all fronts including in the internet (Permyakova, 2012) ^[24].

The third challenge of digital diplomacy on Nigeria's Foreign policy as identified by Nyewusira (2019) ^[22] was, the possibility of cyber hacking. What he actually intend here is nothing but the act of leaking of classified information. Adesina (2017, p.10) ^[1] noted that, "a good example of information leakage is the wikileaks episode. citing Manor (2015a) ^[19] Adesina stated that, "on the 28th of November, 2010, pandemonium spread among Foreign Ministers throughout the world as wikileaks began publishing some 250,000 diplomatic cables sent between US missions around the world and the state department in Washington. These cables included frank assessments by US diplomats of world leaders, government and their host countries". It is imperative to mention here that Nigeria and her foreign policy diplomatic practices is not immune from this challenge pose by digital diplomacy.

Apart from the above enumerated challenges, Nigeria's foreign policy is also prone to the following risks. The first is the challenge of digital diplomacy that has to do with internet's "culture of anonymity" which allows anyone to adopt any persona, address or even attack anyone (Yakovenko, 2012) ^[35]. Anyone can mimic and pretend to be someone else, or actively seek to cause mischief. This is so because of social media's egalitarian open nature which is making it challenging for governments to censor content believed to be dangerous to national security. This has therefore become a significant challenge to diplomacy and foreign relations, which demand secrecy and control over information. The concept of "secrecy" as well as the "culture of anonymity" in diplomacy has been overtaken by the advent of social media. Thus, it has now become difficult for diplomats to escape the public spotlight and

they can no longer be certain that their opinions won't be revealed to audiences they have never intended. A good example is that of the Swedish Foreign Minister who, on the eve of the 2012 World Economic Forum in Davos, posted a very politically, incorrect tweet, which caused a lot of criticism from its microblog subscribers: He tweeted "Leaving Stockholm and heading for Davos. Looking forward to world food program dinner tonight. Global hunger is an urgent issue! #davos". Tweeter users immediately condemned the Minister and called his tweet a #fail. You would agree that hunger and sumptuous dinner do not sit happily side by side (Permyakova.2012) ^[24].

Another potential risk to Nigeria's foreign policy is the lack of cyber security and privacy. Although the rapid spread of information is often an advantage for digital diplomacy, it can also turn out to be a great disadvantage (Jacobson, 2017) ^[14]. This dangerous ability for information to be leaked and accounts to be hacked has caused many online users to be wary of attack (Adesina, 2017) ^[1].

Also, another potential challenge to Nigeria foreign policy is the issue of misinformation, fake news and the lack of digital ethics. There is no doubt that, this is one of the greatest challenges facing not just foreign policy but also governance of the Nigerian state. It is becoming a big threat to unity and stability of the country in general. This can be seen in the activities of mischief makers and terrorists in Nigeria. Example can be cited with militant groups, terrorist groups like Boko Haram and others, and the threat they pose with their access to the internet. Thus, it's safely to argue that the proliferation of digital tools such as social media platforms in Nigeria has caused a crisis of trust in information on the internet as being witnessed by the controversies this is promoting with regards to the 2023 presidential elections in particular and the entire 2023 general elections in general. Most disturbing is the fact that, the internet also offers a ton of information with suspicious origins. In short, most information that is exchanged in recent time in Nigeria on social media is marked by defamation and fabrication. It needs be noted that digital ethics, and digital frustration are interrelated.

Another challenge of digital diplomacy to Nigeria's foreign policy is the difficulties in identifying and targeting an audience. The act of identifying and targeting an audience in a digital driven society is a difficult task for modern diplomats not only for Nigerian diplomats but the entire globe. This is why it is important that diplomats understand who they are targeting, what messages to send, and when to promote a certain message. Thus, rather than taking a uniform approach, countries should carry out some sort of market survey to determine the most effective media tools and messaging, before targeting their audience. Therefore, any diplomat using social media to reach his/her audience need to keep at the back of his/her mind that the essence is to influence the targeted audience both at home and abroad. Finally, another potential risk of digital diplomacy to Nigeria's foreign policy and the Nigerian state in general, is the emergence of non-state actors in the international arena. We have shown above how new digital communication technologies has been approximated and exploited by extremist groups as well as other non-state actors. This is because the internet has proven to be an effective platform for violent extremists to recruit individuals who can assist to spread their violent ideologies, such as Boko Haram, Islamic state of West Africa (ISWAP) and other related

terrorist groups in Nigeria. We have seen in Nigeria how these groups are recruiting young children by infiltrating online video games and chat applications. They are also using such platforms as YouTube and Instagram to glorify their barbaric and destructive acts of terror and brigandage. It is for this reason that the activities of these non-state actors have become a source of perennial worry for most states in the international arena, particularly African states and other developing nations like Nigeria.

Conclusion

In spite of the glaring benefits Nigeria like other African countries stands to achieve by the adoption of digital diplomacy in their foreign policy drive, it is disheartening that Nigeria in particular, seems to be slow in her embrace of these new technologies. Adesina (2017, p.9) ^[1] opined that, "In Africa, despite the apparent embrace of the new technologies by a large number of Africans, digital diplomacy is not yet catching on. Indeed, according to an international telecommunications union (ITU) Report in 2013, Africa was fastest growing region in terms of mobile broadband including 93million subscriptions, 11% penetration and on 82% cumulative annual growth rate (CAGR) between 2010 and 2013. Although nowadays, more and more African Foreign Ministries (MFAs) are embracing the internet and social media and using them as tools for the achievement of foreign policy goals, the percentage of African countries maximizing the potentials of digital diplomacy is negligible (Adesina, 2017, pp.9-10) ^[1]. She went further to note that many African leaders do not have Facebook or Twitter accounts. In short, according to the 2015 Twiplomacy study, Rwanda's @paulkagame is Africa's most followed President with 842,260 followers ahead of Kenya's UhuruKenyatta@Ukenyatta (781,929 followers) and South Africa's Presidential administration presidency ZA (388,418 followers).

Overall, this paper posits that though digital diplomacy presents both challenges and opportunities for Nigeria's foreign policy, it has however, made it easier for Nigerian diplomats to engage with other nation's diplomats in the quest to promote Nigeria's national interests on the global stage. Thus, as technology continues to evolve Nigeria must endeavour to adapt her foreign policy strategies to take advantage of these opportunities while at the same time mitigating the risk associated with the adoption of digital diplomacy in the pursuance of her foreign policy objectives

Recommendation

In order for Nigeria to maximize the opportunities and gains that digital diplomacy presents, this paper has put forward the following recommendations:

1. Notwithstanding the fact that the challenges of digital diplomacy appear to over shadow its benefits; Nigeria must not allow itself to be left behind in this tide because it has many great benefits from the adoption of these emerging diplomatic trends.
2. Digital diplomacy and internet as a whole have the capacity to greatly assist Nigeria's foreign policy in the projection of her foreign policy positions to domestic and foreign audiences.
3. Nigeria must as a matter of urgency be proactive in countering disinformation campaigns and promote digital literacy and media literacy among its population. This includes investing in education programs that are

geared towards teaching critical thinking skills and media literacy as well as working with social media platforms to identify and remove disinformation campaign (Mahesh, 2023) ^[17].

4. It is also recommended that Nigeria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs should establish an e-diplomacy department that would oversee the country's digital diplomacy efforts. This department should actively engage all social media channels with the aim of image protection, and promotion. This department would ensure that the Ministry takes charge of information dissemination to the Diaspora community and foreign nationals (Nyewusira, 2019.p.178) ^[22].
5. There is the need for Nigerian diplomats to bear in mind that in the near future, they will have a wider range of digital tools at their disposal, enabling them to employ data science to undertake intelligent studies to forecast public sentiment and construct models to predict future reactions or creating custom apps for digital diplomacy. In fact, the possibilities are endless.

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