RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Contextual Model for Enhancing the Effectiveness of Nigeria's Digital Diplomacy in Achieving Foreign Policy Objectives

Chima Paul[1*], Sule Haruna[1], Ahmadu Jumai[1]

[1]Department of Public Administration, University of Abuja, Nigeria

Corresponding Author: Chima Paul: Email: chimapaul2006@yahoo.com

Abstract

Nigeria's foreign policy increasingly relies on digital engagement to strengthen its global presence. However, persistent challenges such as inadequate digital infrastructure, cybersecurity vulnerabilities, and low digital literacy hinder effective digital diplomacy. This paper aims to develop a conceptual and context-specific model to enhance Nigeria's digital diplomacy for improved foreign policy implementation. Drawing from Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and Constructivist Theory, the study integrates theoretical insights with contextual realities to design a framework that links digital tools, strategic techniques, and intended foreign policy outcomes. The proposed model emphasises coordination among state and non-state actors, capacity building, and the secure deployment of digital technologies. Findings reveal that when effectively implemented, the model can bridge existing theoretical and practical gaps, strengthen Nigeria's diplomatic influence, and enhance its participation in global governance. The study's implications extend to policy formulation, institutional reforms, and the strategic use of ICTs in achieving Nigeria's foreign policy goals.

Introduction

In an era of swift advancement in technology and worldwide connectivity, digital diplomacy, which involves employing websites and social media to conduct diplomatic operations, has emerged as a crucial aspect of international relations (Adesina, 2017). With advancements like artificial intelligence (AI) and big data playing crucial roles, the digital age has revolutionized diplomatic practices by facilitating real-time global communication and interaction (Kurbalija, 2021). This change has reshaped public narratives by enabling states to interact directly with people around the world, eschewing traditional media. During the COVID-19 pandemic, e-diplomacy became even more important, accelerating virtual meetings and digital linkages in place of in-person diplomacy (Sharma & Sisodia, 2022). Digital diplomacy presents an opportunity for countries like Nigeria to enhance their relations with other countries, increase their voice in the global arena, and more successfully pursue their foreign policy objectives. The increase in social media campaigns shows that Nigerian diplomats can now engage directly with other countries, increasing transparency and inclusivity (Kediehor, 2020). However, Nigeria's digital infrastructure constraints, such as poor internet access, digital literacy gaps, cybersecurity threats, and misinformation, remain significant obstacles (Oghuvbu, Gberevbie, & Oni, 2022).

An attempt has been made to analyse diplomacy network challenges using several theories, including Actor-Network Theory (ANT) (Barry, 2013) and Constructivist Theory (Adler, 2013). The result of this theoretical analysis shows that while ANT provides insight into the technological and relational dimensions of digital diplomacy, and Constructivism explains the role of social interaction and identity formation, both fall short in capturing the unique socio-political and practical challenges Nigeria faces. The absence of a contextual model that addresses these local realities has led to fragmented digital initiatives, weak inter-agency coordination, and underutilization of online platforms in advancing Nigeria's foreign policy goals. Capturing these socio-political and practical challenges is therefore essential, as overlooking them may continue to limit Nigeria's ability to project soft power, influence international discourse, and respond swiftly to global diplomatic dynamics. This highlights the need to develop a model that reflects Nigeria's local context while integrating global best practices. Accordingly, this paper aims to fill these theoretical and practical gaps by presenting a conceptual model specifically designed to enhance the effectiveness of Nigeria's digital diplomacy. The model integrates technological tools, strategic approaches, and contextual realities to optimise Nigeria's digital diplomacy strategies and navigate the intricacies of the digital era to achieve meaningful foreign policy objectives. Theoretical guidance is drawn from ANT to address technical and relational networks, and from Constructivism to illuminate narrative-building and identity aspects in Nigeria's digital diplomacy practice.

Literature Review

Digital Diplomacy

The use of digital technologies, especially social media and online platforms, for managing public diplomacy and foreign relations is known as "digital diplomacy." Digital diplomacy has become a vital instrument for communicating with foreign publics and enhancing statecraft since conventional diplomatic methods lag behind the 21st century's rapid technological improvements. Digital diplomacy is therefore a crucial component of contemporary foreign policy since governments are depending more and more on digital channels to engage and connect with audiences around the world. International diplomatic communication has been transformed by the use of information and communication technologies, or ICTs. In this regard, scholars such as Adesina (2017) and Frey (2024) emphasize the vital role social media plays in promoting statecraft by enabling governments to quickly and directly reach larger audiences. Furthermore, a study by Özdemir & Yıldız (2024) demonstrates that e-diplomacy enhances relations between governments, speeds up information sharing, and improves transparency. This shift is indicative of a wider trend that uses digital technologies for collaborative interactions as well as message distribution. According to Hanson (2010), the traditional framework of diplomatic interactions has changed as a result of ICT breakthroughs that have made communication faster and more direct. Beyond communication, information access has become more effective with the use of cloud platforms for diplomatic document storage (Heeks & Bailur, 2007; Ehiane et al., 2013).

The main characteristics of digital diplomacy include interactivity, immediacy, transparency, and networked communication. Interactivity allows governments to engage directly with foreign publics and stakeholders in real time. Immediacy ensures that diplomatic responses and messages can be delivered almost instantaneously, reducing bureaucratic delays. Transparency improves trust and openness between governments and citizens, while networked communication connects multiple actors across borders to coordinate foreign policy goals. These characteristics distinguish digital diplomacy from traditional forms, which relied heavily on formal, slow, and hierarchical communication channels. In managing public diplomacy, digital diplomacy operates through social media engagement, online campaigns, and the use of data-driven tools to monitor global sentiment and shape

national narratives. It supports two-way communication where governments not only disseminate information but also receive feedback, analyze trends, and adjust their diplomatic strategies accordingly. For foreign relations, digital diplomacy facilitates online negotiations, crisis communication, and virtual summits that strengthen bilateral and multilateral relationships. It also enables states to project soft power and influence international opinion through digital storytelling and cultural diplomacy. In Nigeria's context, however, digital diplomacy remains underdeveloped due to infrastructural, institutional, and human capacity gaps. Internet penetration remains uneven, with large disparities between urban and rural areas. Digital literacy levels are low among public officials, and inadequate cybersecurity frameworks expose the country's online engagements to vulnerabilities. These challenges limit Nigeria's ability to effectively manage public diplomacy and foreign relations through digital means. Addressing these gaps is essential because they prevent Nigeria from projecting its foreign policy objectives globally, engaging effectively with international stakeholders, and participating in global digital governance. Thus, the Nigerian situation demonstrates the need for a context-sensitive model of digital diplomacy that integrates both technological capacity and strategic communication.

Interestingly, nations like the US were among the first to use digital diplomacy. The "21st Century Statecraft" effort, led by Hillary Clinton, sought to increase international participation through the use of social media platforms such as Twitter (Ross, 2011). By directly addressing the international public, this programme aimed to transcend conventional government communication channels. To improve their foreign policy outreach, countries including the UK, Sweden, and Poland later created their digital policies after being inspired by this concept (Adesina, 2017). In a similar vein, India's Ministry of External Affairs adopted social media in 2010, establishing a precedent that many other countries have since adopted (Natarajan, 2014). By doing this, Indian diplomats have made the diplomatic process more approachable and human by using social media sites like Facebook and Twitter to engage with both domestic and international audiences. This illustrates how digital diplomacy is being used worldwide to address communication gaps and is not just confined to Western countries.

Nevertheless, despite its benefits, using digital diplomacy effectively is not without challenges. Melissen and Keulenaar (2017), for example, contend that many diplomats still find it difficult to fully utilise digital platforms. Instead of using social media as a platform for active public participation, they frequently view it as a one-way communication instrument. In a similar vein, Barman (2024) agrees, pointing out that when digital diplomacy is limited to the distribution of information without promoting substantive discourse, its potential is still underutilised. Similar challenges, like inadequate infrastructure, low levels of digital literacy, and cybersecurity issues, confront developing countries like Nigeria. These obstacles make it more difficult for a country to fully utilise digital diplomacy for the successful execution of its foreign policy. As an instance, Kavanaugh et al. (2011) point out that local officials found it difficult to manage social media, even in technologically advanced areas like Arlington, Virginia, stressing the fact that these difficulties are exacerbated in less developed situations.

In an effort to fully benefit from digital diplomacy, Nigeria must conquer these obstacles. Despite existing constraints, there is significant room to improve engagement through a strategic approach that emphasizes cybersecurity, prioritizes digital tools, and promotes interactive public engagement. By studying the experiences of nations such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and India, Nigeria can create a more robust model of digital diplomacy that is specific to its own context. As digital diplomacy continues to gain traction, nations that successfully incorporate ICT into their diplomatic strategies will be better able to accomplish their foreign policy goals. As a result, the emphasis should not only be on the dissemination of information but also on promoting communication and cooperation with both domestic and foreign audiences. Ultimately, digital diplomacy has changed how nations interact and handle their international interactions. Originally viewed as an additional instrument, it is today a crucial part of public diplomacy. To fully reap the rewards of digital engagement, developing countries like Nigeria must still solve cybersecurity issues and infrastructure deficiencies. Nigeria

may increase the efficacy of its foreign policy in the digital era and make sure that its voice is heard on the international scene by implementing a thorough digital strategy.

Understanding Foreign Policy

considering its inherent complexity and dynamic nature, the idea of foreign policy has been the focus of academic debate. The conventional definition is "the sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually a state) in international relations" (Hill, 2003). According to this concept, the state's activities toward foreign entities are largely motivated by its own national interests. Foreign policy has historically been separated from domestic policy due to the belief that external matters must be kept secret to shield them from volatile public opinion and internal strife that could damage a state's reputation overseas (Hudson, 2018). In the past, foreign policy was seen to be the sole purview of the ruling class, which worked to safeguard national interests out of the public eye. However, the idea of foreign policy underwent a dramatic change in the latter part of the 20th century. According to scholars like Ashley (1987), foreign policy is a political performance that creates the identities and borders between countries rather than just being an instrument of statecraft. This change was a reflection of a larger historical trend in which public opinion and the emergence of civil society started to impact state activities between the early modern era (1600–1850). As a result, foreign policy shifted from being a purely covert endeavor to acknowledging albeit subtly the significance of public participation in influencing state conduct.

Critical literature began to examine the relationship between identity politics and foreign policy studies as the subject developed, emphasizing how governments present their identities internationally (Doty, 1993). However, despite this emphasis on identity, it is still necessary to see foreign policy through practical, goal-oriented lenses. According to Alade (1997), foreign policy is defined as state activities that are influenced by internal circumstances and national interests and are aimed at the external environment. Alade emphasizes the pragmatic element of foreign policy by stating that it consists of standards, concepts, and courses intended to accomplish particular objectives. In a similar vein, Aluko (1981) challenges the idea that foreign policy is exclusively the responsibility of foreign service personnel by emphasizing that it is dynamic and impacted by both local and international variables. Instead, it reflects the socio-political and economic priorities of a state's ruling elite. This perspective reinforces that foreign policy strategies are intertwined with domestic policies, especially where state actions have international implications.

The emergence of the digital era has fundamentally altered how diplomacy is conducted. States can interact directly with foreign publics through digital diplomacy, which is defined by the use of digital platforms for diplomatic activity. This approach frequently avoids the use of traditional diplomatic channels. This online interaction supports Alade's (1997) thesis that foreign policy is a dynamic process. Social media in particular gives states the ability to communicate in both directions and spread information, which encourages cooperation and discussion with audiences throughout the world (Hanson, 2010). When conventional diplomatic routes are inadequate, this ability to interact in real time is very important.

Utilizing digital diplomacy presents Nigeria with a viable way to improve the execution of its foreign policy. But there are still major obstacles. According to Kavanaugh et al. (2011), officials in developing countries frequently struggle to use digital tools efficiently because of low digital literacy and limited infrastructure. The use of digital platforms for diplomatic interaction may be hindered by cybersecurity issues and restricted access to digital resources, which are especially severe in Nigeria. Nigeria has demonstrated increasing interest in using digital media for its diplomatic endeavours despite these obstacles. But for Nigeria to be successful, a customised conceptual model that addresses particular obstacles, including poor infrastructure, a lack of diplomatic expertise,

and the requirement for strong cybersecurity measures, must be created. A country can better coordinate its digital diplomacy initiatives with its foreign policy objectives by doing this.

In conclusion, the transformation of foreign policy from a covert activity to a more open and participatory process signifies a substantial change in how nations engage with one another on a global scale. Embracing digital diplomacy presents Nigeria with the opportunity to enhance its foreign policy by interacting directly with audiences around the world. To fully harness the benefits of digital diplomacy, Nigeria must tackle current challenges and implement a comprehensive strategy that incorporates digital tools, bolsters infrastructure and fosters two-way communication. By doing so, Nigeria can effectively advance its national interests and enhance its diplomatic standing internationally. The evolution of foreign policy from its classical foundations to a digital landscape illustrates that states must continuously adapt to shifting global dynamics. To remain relevant in an increasingly interconnected world, Nigeria must utilize digital tools—it's no longer merely an option.

Theoretical Review

Actor-Network Theory (ANT): In the late 1970s and early 1980s, researchers such as Michel Callon and Bruno Latour developed the Actor-Network Theory (ANT). This became a framework for studying the dynamic interactions between human and non-human actors in socio-technical networks within Science and Technology Studies (STS) (Bencherki, 2017). The theory underscores that human actors and technical objects both possess equal influence over social processes. Both human and non-human entities, such as computers, texts, and technologies, are considered "actors" in ANT, whereas "actants" are agents, individuals, or collectives that establish associations inside networks. As actors and actants engage with each other, these networks are considered to be constantly changing and evolving, with their meanings and functions derived from interactions rather than inherent characteristics. In ANT, the major components include actors (both human and non-human), actants (the agents that establish relationships), networks (the interconnected web of interactions), and translation (the process through which actors align interests). The concept of translation explains how different actors negotiate and redefine their roles to achieve a shared objective. A central element of this process is the "Obligatory Passage Point (OPP)," which refers to a critical stage or channel through which all actors must pass to achieve their collective goals. In essence, an OPP acts as a point of convergence that coordinates different interests and resources into a stable network. For example, in digital diplomacy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or a national ICT policy framework can serve as an OPP that connects diplomats, digital platforms, and foreign publics to achieve foreign policy goals.

The concept of translation, or the process by which various actors unite around a common objective through an obligatory passage point (OPP), is fundamental to ANT (Ritzer, 2005). As a result, stable associations are formed that may eventually turn into "black boxes," hiding their underlying complexity and solidifying them into recognized frameworks. These networks are dynamic, reflecting larger socio-political and technological dynamics, and are moulded by the ongoing translation and negotiation of interests among their actors. The operation of ANT can therefore be summarized as follows: (1) identification of actors and actants, (2) translation and negotiation of roles, (3) formation of networks through obligatory passage points, and (4) stabilization of associations that produce outcomes. When applied to digital diplomacy, ANT operates by linking diplomats, ministries, ICT infrastructure, and digital platforms into a cooperative network that pursues diplomatic objectives through coordinated digital interactions.

Given that ANT can analyze how digital technology and state actors influence international relations, it can be applied to digital diplomacy. A network of diplomats, state agencies, and international organizations (actants) and digital instruments (actors) is used to pursue diplomatic objectives. Scholars like Bueger & Stockbruegger (2017)

claim that ANT emphasizes the significance of taking into account both private and professional actors, in addition to the impact of political and cultural circumstances on the digital transformation of diplomacy. These changes demonstrate how digital platforms are becoming more than just tools; they are actively influencing diplomatic procedures. Almuftah et al. (2016) emphasize that ANT is essential for e-diplomacy analysis because it offers a framework for examining the complex interactions among public entities, technology, and governmental organizations. In the Nigerian context, ANT provides a useful way to understand how multiple actors, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, embassies, ICT agencies, and social media platforms, interact within the digital diplomacy ecosystem. However, the weak coordination among these actors, limited ICT infrastructure, and low digital literacy disrupt network stability. Hence, the proposed conceptual model extends ANT by adding context-specific components such as institutional capacity, digital security, and adaptive policy structures that can strengthen Nigeria's digital diplomacy network. When we examine digital diplomacy through the lens of ANT, we realize that digital platforms and the internet are not passive instruments but essential, dynamic parts of the socio-technical networks underpinning contemporary diplomacy. ANT offers a strong foundation for comprehending how human actors and digital technologies interact to influence diplomacy and international relations. It demonstrates how dynamic and intertwined these interactions are, as well as how crucial social and technological elements are in determining diplomatic results. The proposed Conceptual Model for improving Nigeria's digital diplomacy, therefore, builds on ANT by operationalizing its components: actors, networks, translation, and OPP, into practical strategies that can strengthen Nigeria's digital diplomacy architecture.

Constructivist Theory

Constructivist Theory, as put forth by academics such as Alexander Wendt (1995), places a strong emphasis on how social constructs, such as identities, ideas, and common norms, influence state behaviour and international relations. Constructivists contend that social context and the meanings associated with it are essential to comprehending political dynamics rather than depending only on material elements. Wendt (1995), for example, stresses how the threat presented by nuclear weapons fluctuates based on the identities and connections of states, showing that nuclear weapons themselves are perceived through social conceptions rather than having inherent meaning. Beyond conventional materialist viewpoints, this emphasis on the social construction of reality emphasizes the idea that knowledge and reality are dynamic and constantly modified by interactions, ideas, and beliefs. The main components of constructivism include identities (the self-conception of states and actors), norms (shared expectations about appropriate behaviour), and ideas (collective beliefs that shape policy and interactions). These components operate through a process of social interaction, where actors internalize norms and redefine their identities based on ongoing exchanges.

This dynamic environment is reflected in the development of diplomatic practices, such as digital diplomacy, as new media and non-state actors are redefining international relations and pushing for the creation of creative diplomatic strategies and common norms. Constructivism also arose in the 1990s as a critique of rationalist paradigms such as liberalism and realism, providing a fresh perspective on political behaviour by highlighting the fact that preferences and interests are socially produced rather than innate (Jung, 2019). Constructivists contend that actors' identities and the conventions they follow—such as upholding territorial integrity or justifying actions by citing fundamental principles like national security, have an impact on their behaviour. This viewpoint emphasizes the "logic of appropriateness," in which decisions are made based on accepted social standards rather than a strictly consequentialist theory (March & Olsen, 2009). The operation of constructivist theory, therefore, involves the continuous formation and reformation of norms, identities, and ideas through diplomatic

communication and international interaction. Applied to digital diplomacy, it explains how states use online platforms to project national identity, promote soft power, and negotiate shared norms of engagement in cyberspace.

Though its abstract character creates holes when applied to the real-world challenges of digital diplomacy, constructivist theory offers a priceless prism through which to view how identity, norms, and ideas shape international relations. In Nigeria's context, constructivism highlights the need to use digital platforms to reshape the country's international image, communicate its development narratives, and build mutual trust with global partners. However, this process is constrained by weak institutional coordination and inconsistent digital engagement strategies. The proposed conceptual model therefore merges constructivism with ANT by linking social constructs (ideas, norms, and identity) with technological structures (digital networks, platforms, and actors), producing a context-specific framework for understanding and improving Nigeria's digital diplomacy.

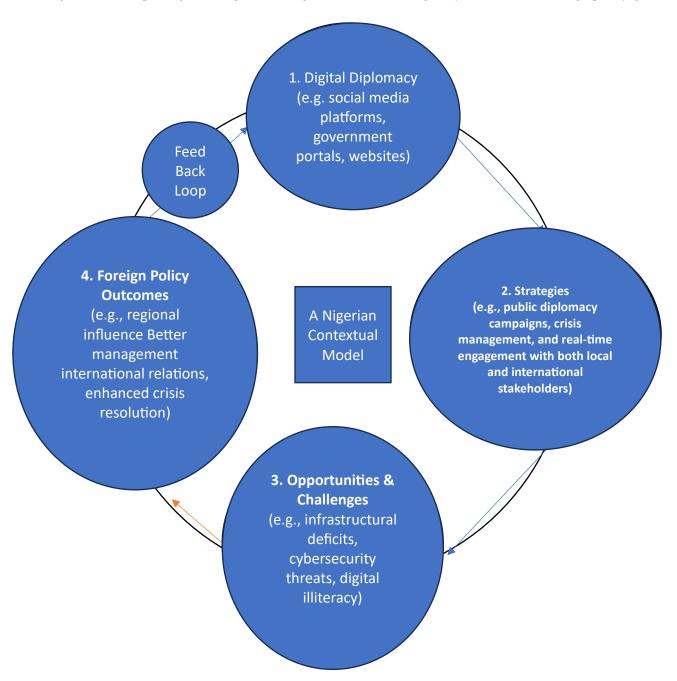**The Proposed Contextual Model**

Digital Diplomacy Tools, Strategies, Opportunities and Challenges, and Foreign Policy Outcomes are the four interrelated parts of the proposed paradigm. The purpose of this model is to demonstrate the dynamic relationships found in Nigeria's framework for digital diplomacy. Figure 1. A Contextual Model for Enhancing Digital Diplomacy to Achieve Foreign Policy objectives in Nigeria

Digital Diplomacy Tools: Digital Diplomacy Tools

Social media, websites, and online government portals are examples of the technical platforms that Nigeria uses to accomplish its diplomatic goals. These tools form the foundation of Nigeria's digital diplomacy ecosystem, providing both interactive and informational interfaces for engaging global audiences. If used properly, these instruments could improve diplomatic engagement by giving Nigeria the ability to engage both state and non-state players, manage international perceptions, and project messages. Specifically, Nigeria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and embassies use social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and Instagram to disseminate real-time information, share official statements, and clarify policy positions. These platforms are characterized by immediacy, interactivity, and wide reach, allowing Nigeria to directly connect with citizens abroad, the diaspora, and international partners. In addition to social media, official websites such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' web portal and Nigerian embassy sites serve as information repositories. They provide policy documents, press releases, and bilateral agreements, ensuring transparency and continuity of diplomatic communication. Online government portals, such as the Nigeria Immigration Service's e-visa platform and the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NiDCOM) portal, enable transactional diplomacy by simplifying services for global citizens and visitors.

Social media was used by Nigerian government organizations to notify worldwide communities about containment efforts during the COVID-19 epidemic, encouraging openness and cooperation (John, 2023). During this period, platforms like Twitter were used to share verified health information, coordinate international support, and promote Nigeria's global image as a responsive and transparent state. In summary, these digital tools can be categorised based on their function: Communication tools (e.g., Twitter, Facebook) for direct engagement; Information tools (e.g., MFA and embassy websites) for policy dissemination; and Service tools (e.g., government portals) for citizen-diplomacy interaction. Together, they enable a blend of public diplomacy, soft power projection, and e-governance in the foreign policy domain. Hence, understanding the technical and

functional characteristics of these tools provides a foundation for designing appropriate diplomatic strategies. The next stage involves exploring how Nigeria leverages these tools strategically to achieve its foreign policy goals.

Figure 1. A Contextual Model for Enhancing Digital Diplomacy to Achieve Foreign Policy objectives in Nigeria
Source: Authors' Construct, 2024

Strategies: Nigeria uses a range of digital diplomacy tactics, including digital public engagement, real-time crisis communication, and public diplomacy initiatives (Adesina, 2024). These tactics are used to control global narratives, dispel false information, and cultivate connections with regional and international stakeholders. Digital

public engagement involves the deliberate use of online platforms to communicate national interests, values, and policies to both domestic and international audiences. Through official social media handles, virtual town halls, and online press briefings, Nigerian diplomats can reach wider audiences faster than traditional media allows. This approach enhances transparency, accessibility, and responsiveness in foreign relations. Real-time crisis communication is another important strategy. In times of emergencies such as natural disasters, security incidents, or public protests, the Nigerian government uses digital platforms to share updates and manage international perceptions. For instance, during the #EndSARS demonstrations, Nigerian diplomats and official government accounts used social media to engage with the global community, share government perspectives, and mitigate misinformation that could damage Nigeria's image. Public diplomacy initiatives are also being digitalized. These include online cultural exchanges, virtual educational programs, and webinars organized by Nigerian missions abroad to promote Nigeria's heritage, tourism, and innovation. By doing so, Nigeria seeks to build soft power and strengthen people-to-people relations.

For instance, Nigerian diplomats used social media to interact with the world during the #EndSARS demonstrations, sharing updates to control opinions and preserve diplomatic ties (Imam, 2024). There are possibilities and obstacles associated with the strategy's execution. Digital diplomacy strategies in Nigeria are guided by a combination of proactive and reactive approaches. Proactively, they aim to promote Nigeria's interests and leadership in Africa, particularly within ECOWAS and the African Union. Reactively, they help address misinformation, security concerns, and crises that affect Nigeria's reputation. However, the effectiveness of these strategies depends on the country's digital infrastructure, cyber capacity, and institutional coordination. Furthermore, Nigeria's digital diplomacy strategies align with broader global practices such as e-participation and e-consultation. They enable collaboration with international partners, promote development cooperation, and strengthen bilateral relationships through online platforms. In essence, digital diplomacy strategies operationalize the tools discussed in the previous section. They define how social media, websites, and online portals are utilized to advance Nigeria's diplomatic agenda. However, as with any digital approach, these strategies come with both opportunities and challenges that shape their outcomes. The next stage therefore explores the opportunities and challenges associated with Nigeria's implementation of digital diplomacy.

Opportunities and Challenges

Nigeria has access to global awareness, engagement, and reach through digital diplomacy (Chituru, 2019). Digital tools provide Nigerian diplomats with opportunities to project soft power, attract international investment, and enhance the nation's visibility in global discourse. For instance, through official online campaigns, Nigeria can promote its peacekeeping roles, tourism potential, and cultural assets. This improves the country's reputation and strengthens its influence in regional and global decision-making platforms such as ECOWAS, AU, and the United Nations. One major opportunity lies in global networking and collaboration. Digital diplomacy allows Nigeria to establish and maintain direct contact with foreign governments, international organizations, diaspora communities, and non-state actors. Platforms like Twitter (now X), LinkedIn, and official embassy websites enable immediate interaction, bypassing bureaucratic delays and traditional diplomatic protocols. This creates space for dialogue, negotiation, and policy advocacy in real time. Another opportunity is digital inclusivity and participation. Online engagement through e-conferences, virtual summits, and global digital platforms provides Nigeria with access to discussions that might have been logistically or financially challenging through traditional diplomacy. It also empowers Nigerian citizens abroad to participate in national dialogues, thereby enhancing participatory diplomacy.

However, issues include high levels of digital illiteracy, cybersecurity threats, and inadequate infrastructure in rural areas (Chituru, 2019). These challenges limit Nigeria's ability to implement and sustain digital diplomacy effectively. Poor internet connectivity, inconsistent electricity supply, and limited broadband penetration hinder the performance of digital communication tools. Additionally, the lack of trained digital diplomats and weak institutional frameworks result in inconsistent messaging and reduced credibility in the international space. Cybersecurity threats pose another serious challenge. Nigeria's diplomatic and governmental websites are vulnerable to hacking, misinformation, and disinformation campaigns that can damage its image or disrupt official communication. The proliferation of fake news on social media platforms also complicates diplomatic communication, especially during crises. Thus, cybersecurity resilience must be prioritized as an integral part of Nigeria's digital diplomacy strategy. Digital literacy also affects the internal capacity of ministries and embassies. Many officials lack adequate training in managing digital platforms, data analytics, and online engagement, which limits the effectiveness of their digital interactions. This creates a gap between available tools and the ability to utilize them effectively.

For digital diplomacy initiatives to be successful, these issues must be resolved. Given that Nigeria's digital landscape is so susceptible to cyberattacks, cybersecurity must be given high consideration when implementing digital diplomacy (Imam, 2024). Nigeria's foreign policy results are directly impacted by the efficacy of the tactics used in digital diplomacy, which are determined by how the country navigates the opportunities and difficulties that come with it. In summary, the opportunities present a pathway for Nigeria to amplify its diplomatic presence, while the challenges expose systemic weaknesses that require urgent attention. The balance between the two determines the success of Nigeria's foreign policy outcomes. The following stage, therefore focuses on these foreign policy outcomes—how effective digital diplomacy translates into tangible results such as regional influence, global partnerships, and improved international cooperation.

Foreign Policy Outcomes: Effective digital diplomacy can yield a range of foreign policy outcomes, including increased regional influence, improved international cooperation, and effective crisis communication (Adesina, 2017). Through the strategic use of digital tools, Nigeria can enhance its visibility, strengthen its global partnerships, and assert its leadership role in regional and international affairs. One significant outcome is the strengthening of Nigeria's regional influence. By actively engaging in digital dialogues through official government social media handles, websites, and virtual diplomatic summits, Nigeria can position itself as a key actor within West Africa and beyond. For instance, Nigeria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and embassies can use online platforms to shape narratives on regional peacekeeping efforts, counterterrorism initiatives, and cross-border trade facilitation. These activities enhance Nigeria's image as a stabilizing force and promote soft power influence across the ECOWAS sub-region. A second major outcome is the improvement of international cooperation. Digital platforms facilitate real-time collaboration between Nigeria and other countries, international organizations, and diaspora communities. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Nigeria utilized digital diplomacy to share health information, coordinate vaccine access through the WHO and COVAX platforms, and promote data-driven responses to global challenges (Grenfell & Oyeyemi, 2022). Such engagements promote transparency, trust, and mutual support, aligning with Nigeria's broader foreign policy goal of maintaining strong international relations.

A third outcome involves crisis management and image restoration. Digital diplomacy provides rapid-response channels for communicating government positions during crises, countering misinformation, and managing reputational risks. For instance, during the #EndSARS protests, Nigerian diplomatic missions leveraged digital platforms to clarify government actions, appeal for calm, and maintain diplomatic communication with international partners (Imam, 2024). The ability to respond swiftly through digital media strengthens Nigeria's

crisis diplomacy capacity and enhances its international credibility. Beyond these, effective digital diplomacy can also attract foreign investments and promote national branding. When Nigeria's ministries, embassies, and agencies project consistent, professional, and engaging online communication, they create an image of a stable and forward-looking country. This enhances economic diplomacy outcomes, such as attracting trade partnerships, tourism, and development aid. Based on the foregoing, foreign policy outcomes not only reflect the effectiveness of Nigeria's digital diplomacy efforts but also provide feedback that informs future policy design and implementation. When digital diplomacy yields positive results, such as improved cooperation, increased visibility, or successful crisis response—it encourages further investment in digital infrastructure, capacity development, and strategic innovation. Conversely, when challenges like cybersecurity threats or digital literacy gaps hinder success, they signal areas requiring institutional reform and technological upgrading. This process creates a dynamic feedback loop. As illustrated in the conceptual model, the outcomes of digital diplomacy feed back into the system, strengthening or recalibrating the use of digital tools and strategies. The lines connecting the circles in the model therefore represent not just sequential stages, but continuous interactions, showing how success or failure in one area influences the others. For example, positive foreign policy outcomes can prompt government agencies to enhance their digital communication infrastructure, while negative outcomes may trigger policy reviews and improved training for digital diplomats. In summary, foreign policy outcomes serve both as the culmination and catalyst of Nigeria's digital diplomacy process. They demonstrate the tangible benefits of effective digital engagement, regional leadership, global visibility, and stronger alliances, while also reinforcing the need for adaptive learning. By understanding these interconnections, policymakers in Nigeria can develop a more integrated and responsive digital diplomacy framework that continually evolves through feedback, learning, and innovation.

Discussion of Theoretical Limitations and Model Enhancement

While both the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and Constructivist Theory provide valuable theoretical foundations for analyzing digital diplomacy, they each present limitations when applied to the Nigerian context. The proposed Conceptual Model for Enhancing Digital Diplomacy in Nigeria builds upon these frameworks but extends them through four key components—Digital Tools, Strategies, Opportunities and Challenges, and Foreign Policy Outcomes—to create a more context-sensitive and actionable model.

Digital Tools: ANT effectively explains the interaction between human and non-human actors within a network but does not sufficiently explore the agency of digital tools in shaping diplomatic practices. It often treats technology as a neutral intermediary rather than as an active influencer in the network. Similarly, Constructivist Theory, while emphasizing the role of ideas and norms, underplays the technological dimension of diplomacy. The proposed model enhances both theories by explicitly positioning digital tools—such as social media platforms, official websites, and data-driven applications—as active agents that shape communication flows, information dissemination, and perception management in diplomacy. In Nigeria's context, the model highlights how these tools can be leveraged to overcome structural limitations such as limited physical presence in global affairs, enabling broader participation and visibility in international dialogue. By integrating the technological component, the model operationalizes what ANT and Constructivism overlook: the transformative power of technology in shaping modern diplomacy.

Strategies: Both ANT and Constructivist Theory provide strong analytical lenses but offer limited practical guidance for overcoming real-world challenges in digital diplomacy. ANT focuses on network relations but does

not propose strategies for addressing issues such as misinformation, cyber threats, or low digital literacy. Constructivism emphasizes identity and norms but lacks concrete pathways for policy execution. The proposed Conceptual Model bridges this gap through the strategies component, which offers actionable approaches for Nigeria's digital diplomacy. These include implementing real-time crisis communication, developing digital public diplomacy campaigns, and fostering collaborative online engagement with citizens and international partners. These strategies are grounded in Nigeria's realities—such as infrastructural limitations and cultural diversity—thereby transforming theoretical insights into applicable mechanisms for strengthening diplomatic performance.

Opportunities and Challenges: Neither ANT nor Constructivism fully contextualizes the opportunities and constraints that shape digital diplomacy in developing nations. ANT overlooks local socio-political and infrastructural conditions, while Constructivism focuses on identity and norms without accounting for material and institutional barriers. The opportunities and challenges component of the model situates Nigeria's digital diplomacy within its unique environment. It identifies opportunities such as the potential to expand regional influence and enhance transparency through digital communication, while acknowledging challenges like cybersecurity risks, digital illiteracy, and inconsistent internet access. This contextualization ensures that digital diplomacy strategies are locally adaptable and responsive to Nigeria's internal dynamics—an area that both theories fail to sufficiently address.

Foreign Policy Outcomes: ANT is limited in assessing outcomes; it maps interactions but does not evaluate their effectiveness in achieving policy objectives. Similarly, Constructivism offers rich insights into identity formation and norm diffusion but lacks measurable indicators for success. The proposed Conceptual Model incorporates foreign policy outcomes as a distinct component, linking digital diplomacy initiatives to tangible results such as improved regional cooperation, enhanced global image, and strengthened international partnerships. By embedding measurable foreign policy outcomes, the model transforms theoretical analysis into an evaluative framework that can assess the effectiveness and impact of Nigeria's digital diplomacy efforts.

In summary, while ANT and Constructivism provide essential theoretical underpinnings for understanding the socio-technical and normative dimensions of digital diplomacy, they are limited by their lack of contextual adaptability, practical strategies, and measurable outcomes. The proposed Conceptual Model addresses these gaps by integrating: Digital Tools as active agents of diplomacy, Strategies that provide actionable pathways, Opportunities and Challenges reflecting Nigeria's contextual realities, Foreign Policy Outcomes that connect digital diplomacy efforts to national objectives. Through these components, the model not only enhances the explanatory power of ANT and Constructivism but also offers a comprehensive, context-driven, and policy-relevant framework for advancing Nigeria's digital diplomacy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The proposed Conceptual Model for Enhancing Nigeria's Digital Diplomacy provides a comprehensive and contextually grounded framework that bridges theoretical limitations and practical realities. By integrating the four core components, digital tools, strategies, opportunities and challenges, and foreign policy outcomes, the model advances understanding of how technology can be harnessed to improve Nigeria's diplomatic engagement and global positioning. The digital tools component recognizes social media platforms, government websites, and online portals as active instruments in shaping Nigeria's diplomatic communication and image projection. These

tools facilitate real-time engagement, promote transparency, and enhance Nigeria's visibility in global forums. When effectively utilized, they enable the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and related agencies to communicate policies, manage crises, and engage citizens and foreign publics more efficiently. The strategies component focuses on the operational mechanisms that make digital diplomacy effective. These include real-time crisis communication, digital public diplomacy campaigns, and data-driven engagement with both state and non-state actors. Through these strategic actions, Nigeria can control global narratives, build international partnerships, and respond swiftly to transnational issues such as security, migration, and health crises. The opportunities and challenges component situates digital diplomacy within Nigeria's socio-political and technological environment. Opportunities include expanded reach, increased participation, and greater access to international audiences, while challenges stem from infrastructural deficits, low digital literacy, and cybersecurity risks. Addressing these limitations through targeted investments and capacity building is essential for sustaining digital diplomacy effectiveness. Finally, the foreign policy outcomes component provides measurable indicators for evaluating success. Enhanced regional influence, improved multilateral cooperation, and positive global image are among the outcomes expected from effective digital diplomacy. The model emphasizes that overcoming challenges and strategically utilizing digital tools can strengthen Nigeria's foreign policy objectives, particularly within ECOWAS and the African Union frameworks.

This study carries significant implications across multiple dimensions:

Theoretical Implications: The model extends the boundaries of existing theories such as Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and Constructivism by contextualizing them within Nigeria's socio-technical realities. It demonstrates how digital technologies function as active participants in diplomacy and how norms, ideas, and identities shape digital engagement. Thus, it contributes to the evolving scholarship on digital diplomacy and international relations in the Global South.

Practical and Policy Implications: The model offers a blueprint for the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, embassies, and other government agencies to modernize diplomatic practice. By institutionalizing the use of digital platforms, enhancing cybersecurity frameworks, and promoting digital literacy among diplomats, Nigeria can improve both the efficiency and transparency of its external relations.

Academic and Research Implications: The conceptual model serves as a foundation for future empirical studies. Researchers can apply or test the model to measure the impact of digital diplomacy on Nigeria's international standing, or compare it with practices in other African states. This strengthens academic discourse around the intersection of technology and diplomacy in developing contexts.

Regional and Developmental Implications: Beyond Nigeria, the model has value for other African and developing countries seeking to integrate digital tools into their diplomatic systems. It promotes the idea of a digitally inclusive foreign policy, encouraging regional cooperation in capacity building, data governance, and online representation. This can contribute to a stronger collective African voice in global digital governance.

Recommendations

    i.   **Institutional Integration:** Nigeria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs should integrate the conceptual model into its diplomatic training, communication, and engagement frameworks.

ii. **Capacity Building:** Continuous training in digital diplomacy, cybersecurity, and online communication should be provided to diplomats and public officials to enhance their digital competence.

iii. **Infrastructure Development:** Investments in digital infrastructure, secure communication networks, and data management systems are essential to support sustainable implementation.

iv. **Collaborative Engagement:** Nigeria should partner with technology firms, international organizations, and universities to develop innovative tools for digital engagement and diplomacy.

v. **Further Research:** Future studies should empirically test the model's validity using mixed methods, focusing on how digital diplomacy influences Nigeria's regional and global relations.

References

Adesina, O. (2024). Digital Diplomacy and African Countries: Opportunities, Challenges, and Future Prospects. 411445 Bytes. https://doi.org/10.6084/M9.FIGSHARE.26063185.

Alade, C. A. (1997). Theories, concepts and principles in the study of international relations. Elmi Educational Limited.

Aluko, O. (1981). Essays in Nigerian foreign policy. George Allen and Unwin.

Ashley, R. (1987). Foreign policy as political performance. International Studies Notes, 13(2), 51-54.

Bang, H. N. (2023). Crisis communication in twenty-first-century diplomacy: Implications for digital transformation of foreign policy. In H. N. Ndi, H. N. Bang, Z. S. Takwa, & A. T. Mbur (Eds.), Health diplomacy in Africa (pp. 125-143). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-41249-3_7.

Barman, S. (2024). Digital diplomacy: The influence of digital platforms on global diplomacy and foreign policy. Vidya - A Journal of Gujarat University, 3(1), 61–75. https://doi.org/10.47413/vidya.v3i1.304.

Barry, A. (2013). The translation zone: Between actor-network theory and international relations. Millennium: Journal of International Studies, 41(3), 413–429. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829813481007.

Bencherki, N. (2017). Actor–Network Theory. In C. R. Scott, J. R. Barker, T. Kuhn, J. Keyton, P. K. Turner, & L. K. Lewis (Eds.), The International Encyclopedia of Organizational Communication (1st ed., pp. 1–13). Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118955567.wbieoc002.

Bueger, C., & Stockbruegger, J. (2017). Actor-network theory: Objects and actants, networks and narratives. In C. Bueger & F. Gadinger (Eds.), Technology and world politics (pp. 42–59). Routledge.

Callon, M. (1986). The sociology of an actor-network: The case of the electric vehicle. In M. Callon, J. Law, & A. Rip (Eds.), Mapping the dynamics of science and technology (pp. 19-34). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-07408-2_2.

Doty, R. L. (1993). Foreign policy as social construction: A post-positivist analysis of U.S. counterinsurgency policy in the Philippines. International Studies Quarterly, 37(3), 297–320. https://doi.org/10.2307/2600810.

Ehiane, O. S., & Olumoye, M. Y. (2013). Information and communication technology (ICT) and diplomacy: A conceptual overview. International Affairs and Global Strategy, 17, 1-10. https://www.iiste.org.

Frey, C. (2024). Digital diplomacy: The impact of technology on modern diplomacy and foreign policy. SSRN Electronic Journal. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4864962.

Grenfell, R. F. Q., & Oyeyemi, O. T. (2022). Access to COVID-19 vaccines and testing in Africa: The importance of COVAX—Nigeria as a case study. Pathogens and Global Health, 117(2), 152–166. https://doi.org/10.1080/20477724.2022.2091862.

Heeks, R., & Bailur, S. (2007). Analyzing e-government research: Perspectives, philosophies, theories, methods, and practice. Government Information Quarterly, 24(2), 243–265. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2007.01.005.

Hill, C. (2003). The changing politics of foreign policy. Palgrave Macmillan.

Huxley, A. (2014). Discovering digital diplomacy: The case of mediatization in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. Diva Portal. https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:747680/FULLTEXT01.pdf.

Imam, A. (2024). The impact of cybercrimes on Nigeria's foreign relations and soft power diplomacy. SSRN Electronic Journal. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4896432.

Jung, H. (2019). The evolution of social constructivism in political science: Past to present. SAGE Open, 9(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019832703.

Kediehor, C. (2020). Digital media and the diplomatic relations of Nigeria. Africa Portal. Retrieved November 14, 2024, from https://coilink.org/20.500.12592/fz5dj9.

Kurbalija, J. & Höne, K. E., (2021) 2021: The Emergence of Digital Foreign Policy. DiploFoundation. https://www.diplomacy.edu/sites/default/files/2021-03/2021_The_ emergence_of_digital_foreign_policy.pdf.

March, J. G., & Olsen, J. P. (2009). The logic of appropriateness. In R. Goodin, M. Moran, & M. Rein (Eds.), The Oxford handbook of public policy (1st ed., pp. 689–708). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199548453.003.0034.

Melissen, J., & De Keulenaar, E. V. (2017). Critical digital diplomacy as a global challenge: The South Korean experience. Global Policy, 8(3), 294–302. https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12425.

Natarajan, K. (2014). Digital public diplomacy and a strategic narrative for India. Strategic Analysis, 38(1), 91–106. https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2014.863478.

Nyewusira, C. (2019). Digital diplomacy: Opportunities for Nigeria's foreign policy. Icheke Journal of the Faculty of Humanities, 17(4), 20-35. Retrieved from http://www.ichekejournal.com.

Oghuvbu, E. A., Gberevbie, D. E., & Oni, S. (2022). E-governance in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. RUDN Journal of Public Administration, 9(2), 189-199. https://doi.org/10.22363/2312-8313-2022-9-2-189-199.

Özdemir, G. S., & Yıldız, A. K. (2024). Bringing diplomacy to the digital age: The implementation and impact of digital diplomacy in the USA. In E. Akıllı, B. Güneş, & O. Güner (Eds.), Digital diplomacy in the OSCE region (pp. 213-232). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-50966-7_11.

Ritzer, G. (Ed.). (2005). Encyclopedia of social theory (Vol. 1). Sage Publications. Retrieved from https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/5222_Ritzer__Entries_beginning_with_A__[1].pdf.

Ross, A. (2011). Digital diplomacy and US foreign policy. The Hague Journal of Diplomacy, 6(3-4), 451–455. https://doi.org/10.1163/187119111X590556.

Sharma, A., & Sisodia, V. (2022). Digital diplomacy and the global pandemic. Media Asia, 49(1), 62–64. https://doi.org/10.1080/01296612.2021.1973324.