Assessment of Nigeria's Foreign Policy on Digital Diplomacy and Tech Frontiers

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ABSTRACT

The rapid evolution of the global digital order has significantly disrupted traditional statecraft. Nigeria, as Africa's most populous nation and largest economy, faces a critical imperative to adapt its foreign policy to this new reality or risk strategic irrelevance. This study examines the integration of digital and technological instruments into Nigeria's foreign policy architecture, analysing the opportunities and challenges inherent in this strategic transformation. Against the backdrop of a rapidly evolving global digital order, Nigeria has embarked on an ambitious agenda to embed cyber diplomacy, space technology, and digital cooperation into its international engagements. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative analysis of policy documents and official statements with quantitative assessment of cyber threat patterns and bilateral agreements. Findings reveal significant institutional innovation, including the establishment of a Cyber Diplomacy Unit and the launch of anticipatory diplomacy initiatives, alongside practical bilateral cooperation with Sierra Leone, Türkiye, the United Kingdom, and Brazil. However, the study also identifies critical vulnerabilities, particularly technological dependency in satellite infrastructure and the persistent challenge of cyber threats. The discussion situates these findings within broader debates about digital sovereignty, regional leadership, and the transformation of statecraft in the Global South. The paper concludes that Nigeria's ability to become a "principled, capable and forward-looking actor in the evolving global digital order" hinges on its success in harmonizing a complex regulatory landscape, building public-private cyber resilience, and executing a coherent value-chain strategy. The study recommends prioritizing the passage of the National Digital Economy Bill, strengthening indigenous technological capacity, expanding the new Cyber Diplomacy Unit to advance a coherent digital foreign policy framework with Nigeria's national interests and forging targeted international partnerships for technology transfer and capacity building.

Keywords: Assessment, Nigeria Foreign Policy, Digital Frontiers, Digital Diplomacy, Technological Sovereignty

INTRODUCTION

The conduct of diplomacy is undergoing a fundamental transformation. As the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Nigeria, Yusuf Maitama Tuggar, recently observed, "the convergence of disruptive technologies, shifting geopolitical alignments, and deepening digital interdependence is redefining the foundations of diplomacy" (Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025a, para. 3). From artificial intelligence and quantum computing to the geopolitics of data and the militarisation of cyberspace, the very nature of statecraft is being redefined (Bjola & Holmes, 2015; Nye, 2021). For nations of the Global South, this transformation presents both unprecedented opportunities and complex challenges. Nigeria, as Africa's largest economy and most populous nation, occupies a distinctive position in this evolving landscape. Historically, Nigerian foreign policy has been characterised by its Afrocentric orientation, emphasising regional leadership, decolonisation, and continental integration (Fawole,

2023; Ogunnubi & Okeke-Uzodike, 2015). However, the digital revolution demands a fundamental rethinking of how diplomatic power is exercised and how national interests are pursued in an increasingly interconnected world. The emergence of cyber threats, the rise of technology companies as influential non-state actors, and the growing importance of digital infrastructure as a strategic asset have created new imperatives for foreign policy adaptation (Manjang, 2024).

In September 2025, the Federal Government announced the establishment of a dedicated Cyber Diplomacy Unit within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, alongside the launch of an Anticipatory, Cyber and Digital Diplomacy Masterclass Series for diplomats from Africa and the Global South (Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025b). These initiatives signal a recognition that traditional diplomatic methods are no longer sufficient and that Nigeria must position itself as "a principled, capable and forward-looking actor in the evolving global digital order" (Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025a, para. 6).

The significance of these developments extends beyond institutional rearrangement. They reflect a broader understanding that digital technologies are not merely tools to be deployed in service of existing diplomatic objectives but are fundamentally reshaping the terrain on which diplomacy is conducted (Adesina, 2023; Bjola & Manor, 2024). From the governance of artificial intelligence to the regulation of cross-border data flows, digital issues have moved from the periphery to the centre of international relations.

This study examined these developments through a systematic analysis of Nigeria's emerging digital and technological frontiers in its foreign policy.

Problem Statement

Nigeria's foreign policy ecosystem is confronted with a critical challenge. The digital transformation of international relations has created new diplomatic domains cyberspace governance, artificial intelligence regulation, data sovereignty and space technology for which traditional diplomatic methods and institutional structures are inadequately equipped (Manjang, 2024; Nye, 2021).

Simultaneously, Nigeria confronts a severe cyber threat landscape, with the country facing over 4,000 cyber attacks daily (Vanguard, 2025) and ranking as the 13th most vulnerable nation globally to cyber threats (Check Point Security, cited in Pulse Nigeria, 2025). With Nigeria facing numerous external pressures and internal imperatives that demand a coherent technological-statecraft response, yet such a response remains nascent and fragmented. In addition, critical digital infrastructure remain target of attacks by criminal elements that disrupts the quality of service provision.

Externally, Nigeria is subject to the policies of dominant tech powers and corporations. Global platforms operate within its borders, harvesting citizen data and shaping public discourse, often with limited accountability to Nigerian laws. Concurrently, the nation is a target for cyber-attacks from state and non-state actors, threatening critical infrastructure and electoral integrity.

Internally, while the government has launched digital transformation initiatives, they are often focused on domestic e-governance with limited foreign policy integration. A surge in domestic digital legislation covering data protection, AI, and online safety creates a complex regulatory environment that foreign businesses must navigate, but these laws are not always strategically aligned with Nigeria’s international economic and diplomatic goals. The core problem, therefore, is the disconnect between accelerating domestic digital regulation and a foreign policy apparatus that has not fully institutionalized the capacity to negotiate, advocate, and build alliances on these issues on the global stage.

Research Objectives

This study is guided by the following objectives:

- Analyse the key drivers behind Nigeria's recent innovative foreign policy shift towards digital and technological diplomacy.
- To examine the scope and substance of bilateral digital cooperation agreements.
- Evaluate the coherence between Nigeria's domestic digital regulatory environment and its stated international digital policy goals.
- Assess the major institutional, infrastructural, and geopolitical challenges that could impede the implementation of this foreign policy vision.
- Provide policy-relevant recommendations for strengthening Nigeria's strategic posture and effectiveness in global digital governance.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

The emergence of digital diplomacy as a field of scholarly inquiry reflects broader transformations in international relations. Bjola and Holmes (2015) conceptualise digital diplomacy as the use of digital technologies to achieve diplomatic objectives, encompassing both the tools of diplomatic practice and the governance of digital spaces as a subject of diplomacy. This dual character digital technologies as both instrument and arena of diplomacy is central to understanding contemporary developments.

Nigerian Foreign Minister Yusuf Tuggar's observation that "private technology firms often wield more influence than sovereign states" (Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025a, para. 8) aligns with scholarly recognition that non-state actors, particularly technology companies, have become significant forces in international affairs. Nye (2021) argues that cyber power is distributed among states, corporations and individuals, creating a more complex international landscape than traditional state-centric models acknowledge. This diffusion of power has profound implications for diplomatic practice, requiring diplomats to engage with a wider range of actors and to develop new competencies for navigating digital ecosystem.

The concept of "anticipatory diplomacy" articulated by Nigerian officials which is "the ability to detect early warning signals, foresee systemic shocks and plan strategically for the future" (Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025a, para. 10), resonates with scholarship on foresight in foreign policy analysis. Meyer (2020) argues that the accelerating pace of technological change demands new approaches to diplomatic planning that emphasise foresight and adaptability rather than reactive response. Similarly, Bjola and Manor (2024) contend that digital diplomacy requires diplomats to develop "algorithmic literacy" and the capacity to understand how digital systems shape political outcomes.

However, Manjang (2024) gives a specifically African perspective on these transformations, arguing that "digital diplomacy in Africa represents a paradigm shift in international relations, leveraging technology to enhance diplomatic engagement, foster economic cooperation and address transnational challenges" (p. 1). She posits that African states must develop digital diplomacy capabilities that reflect their specific contexts and priorities, rather than simply adopting Northern models.

Also, scholarly attention to digital sovereignty has grown substantially, particularly in Global South contexts where technological dependencies intersect with aspirations for policy autonomy. Pohle and Thiel (2020) conceptualise digital sovereignty as the capacity of states to exercise control over their digital infrastructure, data and technological development paths. They pointed out the different between dimensions of digital sovereignty

infrastructural, economic, legal, and cultural and argue that these dimensions may be unevenly developed in any given state.

Wernick et al. (2024) offer a critical perspective on technology transfers from the Global North to the Global South, arguing that such transfers "risk enhancing inequalities, reinforcing digital colonialism and disempowering economies, communities and even individuals" (p. 109). They contend that European legal approaches to governing technology "are not directly replicable in the Global South, because they fail to account for technological and legal dependencies" (p. 110). This critique is particularly relevant to Nigeria's space technology situation, where nominal ownership masks continued dependency.

Kwet (2019) develops the concept of "digital colonialism" to describe how technology corporations from the Global North extract data and exert control over digital infrastructures in the Global South. He noted that these dynamics reproduce historical patterns of colonial exploitation in new forms, with implications for sovereignty, development, and human rights. For Nigeria, this perspective suggests that digital diplomacy must attend not only to the opportunities of technological cooperation, but also to the risks of dependency and extraction.

The Nigeria space technology shows in the country possesses satellites but lacks control over critical components, exemplifies the dependency dynamics identified in this literature. Adeyemi's warning that "any system capable of generating or transmitting data poses a national security risk if its core components are built abroad" (Uwerunonye, 2025, para. 12). This underscores the security dimensions of technological sovereignty and aligns with Abolarin's (2024) argument that genuine space capability requires not only asset ownership, but also indigenous capacity across the technology value chain.

The transnational nature of cyber threats have also made international cooperation an imperative for states seeking to protect their digital space. The Nigeria-UK cybersecurity partnership, spanning "threat hunting, cyber threat intelligence capability, protection of critical national infrastructure, digital forensics, and national incident response planning" (Pulse Nigeria, 2025, para. 4), exemplifies the forms of cooperation emerging among states confronting common threats. Sadly, research on cyber threat landscapes in Africa remains underdeveloped, but available data indicates growing vulnerability. Nigeria's ranking as the 13th most vulnerable country globally (Check Point Security, cited in Pulse Nigeria, 2025) and the estimated 4,000 daily attacks (Vanguard, 2025) provide empirical grounding for understanding the security imperatives driving cyber diplomacy. NETSCOUT's (2025) Threat Intelligence Report, revealed that Nigeria experienced 1,716 DDoS (Distributed Denial of Service) attacks in the second half of 2024, leading West Africa in attack frequency, with telecommunications and computing infrastructure sectors most heavily targeted.

The economic dimensions are significant. Tech4Dev (2024) reports that Nigerian banks lost ₦14.65 billion ($33 million) to electronic fraud in 2021, a 187% increase from the previous year. These losses reflect both the sophistication of criminal networks and the vulnerabilities in Nigeria's digital financial infrastructure. Minister, Yusuf Tuggar's reference to "billions of dollars" lost to cryptocurrency-enabled crime (Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025a, para. 11) suggests that these figures may substantially understate the full economic impact.

Emerging threats associated with artificial intelligence add new dimensions to the challenge. Deloitte study suggest that Nigerian cybercriminals are leveraging AI tools to enhance the scale and sophistication of their tactics, including AI-assisted phishing campaigns that achieve over 50% success rates (Tech4Dev, 2024). British High Commissioner to Nigeria, Montgomery warned that threats from disinformation, hate speech, and cybercrime are "going to be turbocharged by artificial intelligence tools" (Pulse Nigeria, 2025, para. 8). This evolving threat landscape demands diplomatic responses that are equally adaptive and forward-looking.

On regional integration and digital cooperation, scholarship on African regional integration has increasingly attended to this digital concerns. The Nigeria-Sierra Leone agreements, establishing structured cooperation across "digital public infrastructure, broadband expansion, digital identity, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, digital literacy, and cross-border digital trade" (Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy, 2025, para. 3), represent what Nkrumah (2023) terms "digital regionalism", the use of digital cooperation to advance broader integration objectives.

Oloruntoba and Gumede (2022) examined the political economy of digital transformation in Africa, and posit that regional cooperation is essential for African states to benefit from digital technologies rather than being subordinated by them. They emphasise that individual African countries lack the market size and technological capacity to compete independently in global digital markets, making regional integration a strategic necessity.

The involvement of Nigerian private sector companies like IHS Towers, Flutterwave, CcHUB and others (Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy, 2025) reflects recognition that digital diplomacy extends beyond government-to-government relations to encompass commercial and innovation ecosystems. Friederici et al. (2020) examine the role of digital entrepreneurship in African development, arguing that local technology companies can serve as vehicles for both economic growth and the development of indigenous technological capacity.

The perspective of space technology and foreign policy has also received limited attention in African contexts, though Abolarin's (2024) doctoral thesis argues that space capabilities can strengthen Nigeria's regional power through control of security, production, knowledge and finance structures. He suggest conceptualising "space as a new power structure" and emphasises the importance of "experienced space diplomats who have the interests of the state at heart" to ensure consistency in Nigeria's interactions with global space players.

The Nigeria-Brazil space cooperation agreement, described as "a bridge of innovation and solidarity between two great nations of the Global South" (Voice of Nigeria, 2025, para. 5), exemplifies South-South cooperation in space technology. Brazilian President Lula da Silva's framing of the partnership reflects broader aspirations for alternative development pathways that do not replicate North-South dependency relationships.

However, the dependency critique articulated by Adeyemi (Uwerunonye, 2025) complicates narratives of space capability acquisition. The distinction between assembling satellites with foreign components and genuinely building them has profound implications for national security and foreign policy autonomy. This aligns with Harding's (2023) analysis of African space programmes, which argues that while satellite ownership can provide valuable capabilities for development and security, it does not automatically confer technological sovereignty. Moltz (2019) provides a broader framework for understanding the international politics of space, examining how space capabilities intersect with national power, international cooperation, and global governance. His analysis suggests that states like Nigeria should navigate complex trade-offs between cooperation (which provides access to capabilities they cannot develop independently) and autonomy (which requires investment in indigenous capacity).

Interestingly, the legal and regulatory frameworks for digital diplomacy have received commendable scholarly attention. The Nigerian Attorney General and Minister of Justice Lateef Fagbemi emphasis that "legal frameworks should be updated to address emerging challenges" (Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025c, para. 4), reflects recognition that law plays a crucial role in enabling both domestic enforcement and international cooperation.

Weber (2023) examines the challenges of governing cyberspace, arguing that the borderless nature of digital networks creates fundamental difficulties for traditional territorial approaches to law. He contends that effective cyber governance requires both robust national legislation and mechanisms for international cooperation,

including mutual legal assistance treaties, extradition arrangements, and harmonisation of substantive criminal law. For Nigeria, the Cybercrimes Act 2015 provides the primary legislative framework, but scholars have identified implementation challenges and gaps in international cooperation provisions (Manjang, 2024; Ogunleye, 2022). The Nigeria Data Protection Regulation 2019 addresses data governance but lacks the comprehensive approach found in frameworks such as the EU's General Data Protection Regulation.

Theoretical Framework and Research Gaps

The literature reviewed, reveals several theoretical perspectives relevant to this study. Institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) provides tools for understanding how Nigeria's Cyber Diplomacy Unit emerged as an institutional response to environmental changes in international relations. Securitisation theory (Buzan et al., 1998) helps explain how cyber threats are constructed as security issues requiring diplomatic responses. Regional integration theory (Nkrumah, 2023; Oloruntoba & Gumede, 2022) provides frameworks for assessing digital cooperation's contribution to broader West African integration. However, the study is anchored on Sovereignty and dependency theories (Pohle & Thiel, 2020; Wernick et al., 2024) which illuminated the tensions between cooperation and autonomy in Nigeria's technological partnerships in its digital frontiers.

Several research gaps emerge from this review. First, there is limited empirical research on Nigeria's specific digital diplomacy initiatives, with most literature addressing either general theoretical questions or other national contexts. Second, the intersection of space technology and foreign policy in African contexts remains understudied, despite growing investment in space capabilities across the continent. Third, systematic assessment of the implementation and effectiveness of digital diplomacy initiatives is lacking, with most analysis focused on policy announcements rather than outcomes. Fourth, the perspectives of diverse stakeholders government officials, private sector actors, civil society, international partners are rarely integrated into analysis. This study aims to address these gaps through systematic, multi-method analysis of Nigeria's digital and technological frontiers in foreign policy.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis of digital and technological frontiers in Nigeria's foreign policy. The methodology is informed by established approaches in foreign policy analysis and digital diplomacy research, recognising the need to capture both policy articulations and empirical patterns.

The research employs an embedded case study design, with Nigeria as the primary unit of analysis. This design enables in-depth examination of institutional developments, policy initiatives and diplomatic engagements while allowing for comparative insights through analysis of bilateral partnerships. The temporal focus encompasses the period 2024-2025, a period of significant policy innovation in Nigeria's digital diplomacy architecture. Qualitative data collection was through three principal channels. First, documentary analysis examined official policy statements, ministerial announcements, joint communiqués, and legal frameworks pertaining to digital diplomacy. Primary sources included announcements from the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy, and official records of bilateral engagements. This documentary base was supplemented by analysis of speeches by key policymakers, including Nigeria’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Tuggar's address at the inaugural seminar on Anticipatory, Cyber, and Digital Diplomacy and the Sierra Leonian Minister Tijani's statements during the mission.

Second, semi-structured analysis of policy frameworks examined the mandate and operational parameters of newly established institutions, particularly the Cyber Diplomacy Unit. This analysis drew on official descriptions of the Unit's functions, including coordination of cyber-related foreign policy, capacity building for cyber

negotiations, and promotion of ethical digital governance. Thirdly, qualitative assessment of bilateral agreements examined the substantive content of Memoranda of Understanding signed between Nigeria and partner countries. The Nigeria-Sierra Leone agreements received particular attention, given their comprehensive coverage of digital public infrastructure, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and technology transfer.

Accordingly, the quantitative analysis done, addressed two dimensions of the research. First, is the descriptive statistical analysis which examined patterns of cyber threats affecting Nigeria, drawing on available data from cyber-security firms and official sources. This included analysis of daily attack frequencies and threat categorisation, providing empirical foundation for understanding the security imperatives driving cyber diplomacy initiatives. Secondly, is the quantitative content analysis of bilateral agreements that identified the frequency and distribution of cooperation areas across Nigeria's digital diplomacy engagements. This analysis enabled systematic comparison of priority areas, revealing the relative emphasis accorded to infrastructure development, security cooperation, capacity building, and innovation partnerships.

Data were drawn from multiple sources to enable triangulation to enhance validity. Primary sources included official government announcements, joint communiqués, and ministerial statements. Secondary sources comprised media reports from established Nigerian publications, including The Sun, Punch Newspapers, Independent Newspaper Nigeria, and Voice of Nigeria, as well as international coverage. Academic literature on space, cyber diplomacy and Nigerian foreign policy provided theoretical and contextual grounding.

However, there were some limitations which deserves acknowledgment. For instance, the recent nature of many initiatives, particularly the Cyber Diplomacy Unit established in September 2025, means that long-term outcomes cannot yet be assessed. Additionally, quantitative data on cyber threats, while indicative of general patterns, may underrepresent the full scope of challenges given reporting gaps and the evolving nature of cyber operations. The study's focus on official policy articulations may not fully capture implementation challenges or informal dimensions of digital diplomacy practice.

Findings

Institutional Innovation in Digital Diplomacy The most significant finding concerns the establishment of dedicated institutional infrastructure for digital diplomacy. In September 2025, the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched a Cyber Diplomacy Unit with a mandate encompassing five core functions: coordinating Nigeria's cyber-related foreign policy across all diplomatic platforms, building capacity for cyber negotiations, championing ethical and inclusive digital governance, fostering public-private partnerships for national cyber resilience, and ensuring Nigeria's voice is influential in global cyberspace governance.
This institutional innovation represents a formal recognition that cyber diplomacy has become an indispensable component of modern statecraft. As the Nigeria’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yusuf Tuggar articulated, "The purpose of cyber diplomacy is to help systems catch up, to promote the best technology can do to accelerate growth, stability, and freedom". The Unit is positioned to address the regulatory lag that characterises digital governance, where technological development typically outpaces legal frameworks.

Complementing this institutional development, the Ministry launched the Anticipatory, Cyber, and Digital Diplomacy Masterclass Series for diplomats from Africa and the Global South. Described as "Nigeria's digital gift to the world," this initiative makes training resources freely accessible online, extending Nigeria's diplomatic reach beyond traditional bilateral channels. The masterclass series embodies what Minister Tuggar termed "anticipatory diplomacy", the capacity "to detect early warning signals, foresee systemic shocks, and plan strategically for the future, whether in the global race for critical minerals, the regulation of artificial intelligence, or the restructuring of global supply chains".

The institutional framework explicitly addresses the changing nature of international relations in the digital age. The recognition of technology companies as significant international actors represents an important conceptual shift in Nigerian diplomatic thinking.

Bilateral Digital Cooperation

A second major finding is the emergence of comprehensive bilateral digital cooperation frameworks. The Nigeria-Sierra Leone Digital Economy Bilateral Trade Mission culminating in November 2025 with the signing of multiple Memoranda of Understanding, provides a template for regional digital diplomacy. The agreements establish structured cooperation across six priority areas: digital public infrastructure and interoperable government systems; broadband expansion and resilient connectivity; digital identity, cyber-security, and data governance; artificial intelligence development and responsible innovation; digital literacy, talent development and institutional capacity building; and cross-border digital trade and private-sector partnerships. The comprehensiveness of this framework distinguishes it from narrower technical assistance agreements, signaling an ambition to build integrated digital ecosystems across West Africa.

Significantly, the MoUs extend beyond government-to-government cooperation to encompass private sector engagement. Leading Nigerian technology companies, including IHS Towers, Flutterwave, CcHUB, Miden, Cybervergent, Prunedge, Itana, and Awarri, participated in structured business-to-business matchmaking sessions with Sierra Leonean counterparts. This private sector dimension reflects a sophisticated understanding that digital diplomacy must engage the full spectrum of actors shaping technological development.

The official Joint Communiqué articulated a vision of regional integration that transcends traditional diplomatic frameworks: "Both sides affirmed that the bonds shared across the sub-region are stronger than the borders that separate us, and that a distributed innovation system will unlock new opportunities for growth". This statement encapsulates a distinctive approach to digital diplomacy, emphasising regional collaboration as a pathway to collective technological advancement.

Intercontinental Partnerships

Nigeria's digital diplomacy extends beyond regional partners to encompass strategic engagements with established technological powers. The partnership with the United Kingdom, formalised through a cyber-security Memorandum of Understanding in 2024, provides insight into the dynamics of North-South digital cooperation.

The UK-Nigeria collaboration spans five technical areas: threat hunting, building cyber threat intelligence capability, identifying critical national infrastructure, digital forensics, and national incident response planning. British High Commissioner in Nigeria, Richard Montgomery described these as "fundamental to building government cyber capabilities and effective international cyber diplomacy". The partnership includes practical intelligence sharing and joint operational cooperation, with both countries reporting "shared successes" in tackling cyber fraud and crime.

Notably, the UK engagement explicitly respects Nigerian sovereignty in digital policy. Montgomery emphasised that "Nigeria will shape its own sovereign cyber decisions," with the UK role limited to sharing lessons from its own experience. This sovereignty-affirming approach may provide a model for Nigeria's engagements with other external partners, balancing the benefits of technical cooperation with the imperative of maintaining policy autonomy.

In addition, the 2026 bilateral agreements with Türkiye, which include defence cooperation and a target of $5 billion in trade, exemplify this approach, (Onanuga, B. 2026, January 27). While covering multiple sectors, such

partnerships are strategically valuable for accessing Turkish expertise in defence industries and manufacturing, it is also directly relevant to building a more technologically advanced industrial base.

Space Technology, Ambition and Dependency

The findings on space technology reveal a more complex picture of aspiration tempered by structural constraints. Nigeria possesses significant space capabilities, including satellites developed through partnerships with China Great Wall Industry Corporation and Surrey Satellite Technology Limited in the United Kingdom. These assets have been deployed for weather mapping, communications and various civilian applications.

However, expert analysis raises fundamental questions about the strategic utility of Nigeria's space assets for foreign policy and security purposes. Aerospace engineer, Adeyemi Nurudeen offered a sobering assessment: "If we look at the satellites owned by Nigeria, it may be appropriate to say that they were assembled by Nigeria and not built. When you assemble satellites with components built by other people, they have control over your satellites. We didn't even launch them by ourselves. Other people did it for us".

This technological dependency carries significant implications for foreign policy. Adeyemi drew parallels with United States restrictions on Chinese drones and applications, explaining that any system capable of generating or transmitting data poses a national security risk if its core components are built abroad. For Nigeria, this means that sensitive security applications of satellite technology may be compromised by foreign control over critical components.

The dependency extends to launch capabilities. Despite Nigeria's advantageous equatorial location, which makes satellite launches cheaper and more energy-efficient, the country has not developed domestic launch infrastructure. Adeyemi noted that states such as Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Ondo, and Lagos are within equatorial range and could host world-class spaceports, but this potential remains unrealised.

Academic research confirms the centrality of space technology to Nigeria's foreign policy ambitions. A recent doctoral thesis by Abolarin (2024) argues that space capabilities can strengthen Nigeria's regional power through control of security, production, knowledge, and finance structures. The research proposes "space as a new power structure" and emphasises the importance of "experienced space diplomats who have the interests of the state at heart" to ensure consistency and tangible results in Nigeria's interactions with global space players .

The Threat Landscape: Magnitude and Implications

Quantitative findings underscore the security imperatives driving Nigeria's cyber diplomacy initiatives. According to cyber-security firm Nitroswitch, Nigeria was reportedly facing over 4,000 cyber attacks daily by 2024 . This threat level reflects both Nigeria's growing digital connectivity and its vulnerability to malicious actors operating across borders.

Minister Tuggar provided concrete examples of the real-world consequences of digital vulnerabilities: "Billions of dollars left the country in the first quarter of 2024" due to cryptocurrency-enabled criminal activities, while "viral but fake memes of leaders romancing rock stars, viral but fake reports of coups or deaths" erode public trust in information ecosystems. These phenomena, he argued, represent "the real-world consequences of the changes we see: lives lost, futures ruined, an anonymous few hijacking the welfare of the many".

The threat landscape encompasses diverse actors and motivations. British High Commissioner Montgomery warned that "threats from hostile states, disinformation, hate speech, and cybercrime are real and growing," expressing concern that "this grey zone is going to be turbocharged by artificial intelligence tools". This

assessment highlights the convergence of traditional security concerns with emerging technological capabilities.

Nigeria's previous encounters with digital diplomacy challenges inform current policy responses. The June 2021 suspension of Twitter, following the platform's removal of a post by former President Muhammadu Buhari, sparked international debate around digital sovereignty, platform accountability and freedom of expression . This episode illustrated the complex interplay between domestic digital regulation and international relations, providing lessons that appear to inform the more systematic approach embodied in the new Cyber Diplomacy Unit.

Legal and Regulatory Dimensions

The findings reveal growing recognition of legal frameworks as essential components of digital diplomacy. Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Lateef Fagbemi, emphasised that "the 21st century has introduced a paradigm shift in the nature of conflict, communication, and cooperation, demanding a fundamental transformation of traditional statecraft". From a legal perspective, this transformation requires that "legal frameworks are updated to address the emerging challenges".

Fagbemi articulated the specific legal imperatives: "Cyber threats pose a danger to national infrastructure and the rule of law. A legal framework should, therefore, be robust enough to deter cybercrime, enforce justice and foster international cooperation to protect digital sovereignty". This statement links domestic legal capacity with international diplomatic engagement, recognising that effective cyber diplomacy requires both robust national laws and mechanisms for cross-border cooperation.

The Ministry of Justice has positioned itself as a partner in developing the legal architecture for digital diplomacy, committing to collaboration with "security agencies, foreign affairs officials, the private sector, and civil society to build a comprehensive and effective strategy". This whole-of-government approach recognises that digital diplomacy cannot be the exclusive domain of foreign affairs ministries but requires coordinated action across multiple institutions.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The Nigerian experience contributes to evolving theoretical understandings of digital sovereignty in Global South contexts. Traditional conceptions of sovereignty, rooted in territorial control and non-interference, are challenged by the borderless nature of digital space and the concentration of technological capabilities in a small number of states and corporations. Nigeria's response—establishing dedicated diplomatic institutions while simultaneously pursuing regional cooperation—represents a distinctive approach to navigating these challenges.

The concept of "anticipatory diplomacy" articulated by Nigerian officials resonates with broader discussions of how states can exercise agency in contexts of rapid technological change. By training diplomats to "influence events before they unfold", Nigeria seeks to move beyond reactive engagement with digital issues toward proactive shaping of outcomes. This approach acknowledges that digital governance norms are still being formed and that early participation in norm development can yield long-term influence.

The space technology findings complicate narratives of technological sovereignty. While Nigeria possesses nominal ownership of satellite assets, the reality of foreign control over critical components and launch capabilities reveals the limitations of ownership without control. This finding supports Adeyemi's warning that "relying on foreign-assembled satellites comes with hidden dangers" and suggests that genuine technological

sovereignty requires indigenous capacity across the entire value chain, from design and manufacturing to launch and operations.

On its regional leadership and the African digital agenda, Nigeria's digital diplomacy initiatives carry significant implications for its regional leadership role. The 2025 Sierra Leone agreements is a practical example that demonstrate a model of cooperation that prioritises mutual capacity building over asymmetrical assistance. Minister Tijani's statement that the partnership aims "to ensure that technology, talent, and trade flow seamlessly across our continent" articulates a vision of regional digital integration that could reshape West African economic and political relationships. This approach positions Nigeria as a coordinator and enabler of regional digital development rather than simply a recipient of external technical assistance. The participation of Nigerian private sector companies in the Sierra Leone mission suggests that digital diplomacy can serve as a platform for expanding commercial relationships alongside governmental cooperation, creating material incentives for regional integration.

However, the regional leadership role also carries responsibilities. If Nigeria is to "lead Africa's digital future" as Minister Tuggar advocates, it must demonstrate that its digital diplomacy benefits partners as well as itself. The Sierra Leone agreements appear designed with mutual benefit in mind, but sustaining this approach as Nigeria engages with larger and more diverse partners will require careful attention to the distribution of gains from cooperation.

The findings indicate clearly evolving relationships between diplomatic practice and technological capability. Traditional diplomacy emphasised interpersonal negotiation and representation, with technical expertise often confined to specialised attachés. Nigeria's emerging approach integrates technological considerations into the core of diplomatic practice, recognising that issues such as data governance, artificial intelligence regulation, and cyber-security are now central to international relations.

The establishment of the Cyber Diplomacy Unit within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs institutionalises this integration, creating dedicated capacity for technical diplomatic engagement. This structure acknowledges that cyber diplomacy requires specialised expertise that cannot be developed incidentally alongside traditional diplomatic responsibilities. The Unit's mandate to coordinate across "all diplomatic platforms" positions it as a central node in Nigeria's engagement with digital issues across multilateral and bilateral contexts.

The anticipatory diplomacy masterclass series addresses the human capital dimensions of this transformation. By training diplomats from across Africa and the Global South, Nigeria seeks to build a cadre of practitioners equipped to engage with digital issues. The decision to make these resources freely accessible online reflects an understanding that digital diplomacy capacity building is a collective good for the Global South, not merely a national interest.

In response to tensions and trade-offs, the analysis reveals several strains inherent in Nigeria's digital diplomacy approach. First, there is a tension between cooperation with established technological powers and the imperative of maintaining policy autonomy. The UK partnership demonstrates that technical cooperation can be structured to respect sovereign decision-making, but as Nigeria engages with a more diverse set of partners—including China, which has played a significant role in space technology development maintaining balanced relationships while preserving autonomy will require careful diplomatic management.

Second, there is a tension between regional cooperation and national competitive advantage. While Minister Tijani emphasises harmonisation and integration, Nigeria's technology sector also competes with counterparts across Africa for investment, talent, and market share. Managing this tension requires distinguishing between

areas where cooperation benefits all parties (such as cybersecurity threat intelligence sharing) and areas where competition may be appropriate (such as commercial technology markets).

Third, there is a tension between the urgency of responding to immediate threats and the long-term investments required for technological sovereignty. The 4,000 daily cyber attacks demand immediate responses, yet building genuine indigenous capacity in areas such as satellite technology requires sustained investment over decades. Nigeria's digital diplomacy must navigate between these temporal horizons, addressing present vulnerabilities while building future capabilities.

In comparative perspectives, Nigeria's digital diplomacy initiatives can be usefully compared with developments in other Global South contexts. Countries such as Kenya, Rwanda and South Africa have also developed digital diplomacy capabilities, though with varying emphases. Nigeria's approach is distinctive in its comprehensive institutionalization the creation of a dedicated Cyber Diplomacy Unit within the Foreign Ministry and in its explicit articulation of "anticipatory diplomacy" as a guiding concept.

Compared with established technological powers, Nigeria's approach reflects its position as a rule-taker in some digital governance domains and a potential rule-shaker in others. While Nigeria cannot unilaterally set global standards for artificial intelligence or data governance, its leadership in regional cooperation and its role as a voice for Global South perspectives in multilateral forums position it to influence how digital norms evolve in ways that accommodate developing country interests.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research has xrayed the integration of digital and technological frontiers into Nigeria's foreign policy architecture, revealing a period of significant innovation and institutional development. The establishment of the Cyber Diplomacy Unit, the launch of anticipatory diplomacy initiatives and the conclusion of comprehensive bilateral digital cooperation agreements demonstrate Nigeria's commitment to positioning itself as an active participant in shaping the global digital order. However, the findings also reveal persistent challenges.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered for strengthening Nigeria's digital and technological frontiers in foreign policy.

- Nigeria should develop a comprehensive roadmap for achieving greater technological independence, with particular attention to satellite technology, cyber-security capabilities and artificial intelligence development.
- Strengthen coordination mechanisms among the diverse institutions involved in digital diplomacy. A national digital foreign policy framework, developed through inter-agency consultation and formally adopted by the Federal Executive Council, would provide better strategic guidance.
- The Cyber Diplomacy Unit should be adequately resourced to participate effectively in multilateral forums where digital norms are being developed to enhance engagements on digital issues. Integrate digital considerations into all diplomatic trainings and practices, alongside traditional diplomatic skills for all diplomats.
- Develop systematic engagement with technology companies as significant international actors to understand their perspectives and to communicate Nigerian interests and concerns.
- Deepen regional digital cooperation through ECOWAS by developing regional digital governance frameworks that facilitate integration while respecting national sovereignty.
- Pursue strategic partnerships with established technological powers on terms that respect Nigerian sovereignty and build indigenous capacity with a view of ensuring meaningful technology transfer.

- Invest in research on digital diplomacy and technology policy by drawing on the expertise of universities, think tanks and civil society organisations.
- Develop frameworks for evaluating whether cyber diplomacy engagements are achieving their intended objectives and for learning from experience to improve future practice.

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