# Evolutionary Trends in Kenya's Digital Diplomacy in the Emerging Technological Space of Artificial Intelligence

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## ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the evolving space of digital diplomacy in light of the changes taking place from the perspective of Artificial Intelligence (AI). It evaluates the key trends that are manifesting themselves in the shifting space of Kenya's digital diplomacy and what the future holds. The paper is guided by three research objectives: first, it examines the key developments that have taken place in Kenya's emerging digital diplomacy; secondly, it assesses the impacts that AI has presented to this digital diplomacy space; and thirdly, it investigates possible challenges of integrating AI in Kenya's digital diplomacy. The paper is guided by the constructivism theory as propounded by Alexander Wendt for its theoretical framework. Constructivism challenges the classical beliefs applied in the conduct of interstate relations and underscores their socially-constructed nature. It advocates for transformative shifts in international relations where state actors create and assign meaning to structures that enable them to better achieve their national interests. The paper is guided by the pragmatic philosophy for its philosophical orientation. It relies on secondary data on digital diplomacy and AI from published data sources. The paper observes that there are new trends that present themselves towards the conduct of Kenya's digital diplomacy in an era of AI. In addition, it submits that human skills have been the bedrock of diplomacy and AI only serves to augment such skills in order to enhance efficiency and precision in diplomatic practices. Lastly, the paper holds that, as a developing country, Kenya is predisposed to a myriad of challenges that she must mitigate so as to guarantee the integrity and proficiency of her digital diplomacy space. It presents recommendations on how Kenya can leverage AI to make its digital diplomacy responsive to the emerging technological reality.

**Keywords**—Artificial intelligence, Diplomacy, Digital diplomacy, Foreign policy, Technology.

## INTRODUCTION

Diplomacy has gone through tremendous changes and evolution particularly in the late twentieth century and twenty first century. This is particularly due to the rapid technological changes that saw developments in the internet technology that widened the digital space and how it shapes human interactions. This has necessitated the emergence of an operating environment that makes use of the online technological space. This has resulted in a shift from the traditional form and practice of diplomacy and diplomatic engagements (Manor, 2016). This technological development has birthed an internet revolution that has sparked the development of digital-based platforms that have enabled diplomats and diplomatic actors to engage (Adesina & Summers, 2017). This has instituted a form of diplomatic disruption that has necessitated a departure from the traditional form of diplomacy to the digital form of diplomacy. Developments in artificial intelligence (AI) have accentuated further changes that have widened and broadened these diplomatic disruptions (Bjola et al., 2024). This is a trend that has necessitated an inquiry as this is an area that is yet to receive sufficient scholarly attention. This presents an area with a glaring research and knowledge gap that warrants to be filled. This further calls for the 21st century diplomatic practitioners to find ways of effectively responding to the aforementioned disruptions. Of particular significance is the need to contextualise this to Kenya's experience with digital diplomacy in an evolving foreign policy space.

Recent technological developments in AI have seen its incorporation by states globally. With the technologically advanced states in the Global North at the forefront, the government of the United States (US) in 2023 developed a strategy geared towards the empowerment of diplomacy through responsible AI (US State Department, 2023). This is anchored around building the component of security in the roll out of AI and its use

in diplomacy. Similar concerns have been addressed by scholars keen on evaluating the security implications that AI presents in diplomatic conduct as it replaces traditional secretive diplomacy (Kanovalova, 2023).

The wave of AI powered technological developments imply that all spheres of life will be affected to a great extent. This includes the form and manner that digital diplomacy will take. AI being a recent development presents. African states have not not been left behind in embracing the technological milestones that have been developed in the current century. There are demonstrated re-alignments that digital diplomacy has made to the field of diplomacy and now the advent of AI presents far reaching impacts in the practice of diplomacy that defies the prior constraints of time and space (Miegbam & Bariledum, 2022).

# REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Digital diplomacy has been defined as the use of digital technologies and social media platforms by states to enter into communication with foreign publics in a non-costly manner (Adesina & Summers, 2017). It is a development that has remained cognizant of technological changes in social media platforms which lack the formality associated with formal diplomacy while benefiting from the wider reach of social media enabled digital technologies. Kenya has made an experimentation with digital diplomacy in recent years ostensibly as a realisation of the aforementioned digital developments and the concomitant disruptions they have created. There are findings that however indicate that Kenya's digital diplomacy has not grown nor progressed at the expected rate in terms of the optimality of strategies and tactics deployed to roll it (Mboya, 2021). This thus casts some doubt as to whether Kenya's digital diplomacy has grown and become responsive enough to the pursuit of the state's foreign policy goals and national interests. In addition, it raises questions as to Kenya's preparedness to respond to the emerging force of AI that has revolutionised the space of technology through the introduction of intelligent machine elements that can effectively replace what human beings can do.

Saleh (2019) observes that AI is intelligence displayed by machines in contrast to the natural intelligence displayed by humans and other animals. He further outlines the core of AI as being:capability of predicting and adapting by use of algorithm based pattern detection; decision making capabilities; continuous learning based on the construction of analytical models; and AI's forward looking capabilities that reorients how data and information is processed for decision making. Several studies have examined the changes that have taken place in the practice of digital diplomacy in a space that has seen technological developments like AI. Kanovalova(2023) observes that generally, diplomacy has tended to exhibit a lot of conservativeness in responding to the changes that have been taking place and consequently argues that diplomats cannot assume the changes occasioned by AI. Mboya (2021) observes the COVID-19 to be a key turning point in Kenya's digital diplomacy as the state was forced to resort to make use of the available technological tools particularly those provided by social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter)and Facebook as a way of engaging with an attentive public that is keenly following developments that are pertinent to Kenya's diplomatic pursuits.

Developments in AI have received attention in contemporary international relations and diplomacy circles. This is largely due to the fact that rapid digitization has led to a change in how international actors relate with one another and this presents new ways and opportunities for cooperation and diplomatic engagement (Roumate, 2021). AI presents a new technological space that re-defines the form and nature of international relations and diplomatic engagements.

The dynamism within AI innovations portends a rapidly shifting space that diplomatic actors should endeavour to keep up with. As a state that takes technological adaptations seriously, it is imperative that the state strives to catch up with the new evolutionary trends in the tech space to position it better to benefit from the innovative solutions that it presents(Chiimbiru, 2022). It is thus necessary to seek a comprehension of the intricate nexus that exists between Kenya's embrace of digital diplomacy and how this evolving space is rapidly getting revolutionised by technological developments, primarily AI. An inquiry into this facet is critical towards filling the existing knowledge gaps in Kenya's digital diplomacy as well contributing to the literature as well as knowledge generation in the area of focus. It takes cognisance of the shifting space that AI is creating and how this will inform the evolution of Kenya's digital diplomacy.

Developed states have made significant strides above their developing counterparts in the space of AI and this has seen a better appreciation of its impact on the digital diplomatic space. Miegbam & Bariledum (2022) have written on Africa's potential in the adaptation of AI to many sectors including diplomacy. The rapid growth of AI presents a mixed experience for African states. On the one hand, it presents an opportunity for the continent to stay at par with the Global North. On the other hand, it presents a serious problem of assessing the preparedness of the continent with regard to the transformative power of their digital diplomacy environment. Kenya for instance is placed at par with states like Ethiopia, Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa and Egypt among the continent's forerunners when it comes to the embracing of AI (Ibid).

However, the application of AI to digital diplomacy remains uncharted territory which can benefit broader scholarship. This would suffice to demystify the erroneous notions around the digital disruptions that AI technologies will present globally and in particular to the conduct of digital diplomacy. AI technologies have been shown to present immense opportunities to diplomats by supporting critical decision making by availing an array of data in what has been termed as the use of data analytics that are AI powered to foster expeditious decisions (Saleh, 2019; Miegbam & Bariledum, 2022).

**Objectives of The Study**

The paper was guided by three research objectives:

1. To examine the key developments that have taken place in Kenya's emerging digital diplomacy.
2. To assess the impacts that AI has presented to Kenya's digital diplomacy space.
3. To investigate possible challenges of integrating AI in Kenya's digital diplomacy.

# METHODOLOGY

This study adopted an explanatory research design. Explanatory research design is ideal in carrying out studies that seek to explain prevailing patterns of causality where cause and effect analysis is desired in a research study (Bhattacherjee, 2012). This is particularly pertinent where the need is to address phenomena that fall into how, what, and why questions. This is pertinent as research is investigative in nature oftentimes moving from the known towards the unknown geared towards establishing truth or even validation or invalidation of phenomena under study (Sakyi et al, 2020). The target population for this study was 60 comprising 59 Kenyan Embassies, High Commissions and Consulates and the Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs (MFDA) which serves as the headquarters as provided in the 2023 diplomatic directory (https://mfa.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/DIPLOMATIC-DIRECTORY.pdf) . Secondary data was collected from a sample of 18 of these entities derived from 18 missions abroad. The Ministry headquarters was also included as a focal area with the inclusion necessitated by the fact that it is the custodian and driver of Kenya's foreign policy and diplomatic activities The study employed probability sampling with each item within the universe having an equal chance of sample inclusion. This aided in highly reducing the bias in identification of study data sources and errors associated with the sample composition. Specifically, stratified sampling was used with the population divided into stratas as detailed in the table 1.1 below:

**Table 1.1: MFDA and Kenya's Diplomatic Missions Abroad**

| Region | Stations/Population | Sample |
|---|---|---|
| **Africa** | 7 | 22 |
| **Americas** | 4 | 1 |
| **Asia** | 16 | 5 |
| **Europe** | 12 | 4 |
| **Oceania** | 1 | 0 |

| **Multilateral Organizations** | 4 | 1 |
|---|---|---|
| **Total** | 60 | 18 |

**Source: Authors (2024)**

Israel (1992) argues that there are multiple considerations to make with regard to sample size selection. He points out the three key ones to be the level of precision desired, the degree of variability and the confidence level. In this regard, for non-complex random population sampling methods using formulae like the Yamane formula and the Slovin's formula can be relied upon to give a desirable sample size. He however cautions that for complex populations the nature of which may require the subdivision of the population into strata of a non-homogenous nature, it is necessary to take consideration of the general variances for the sample. This study falls under such a category. It takes cognizance of the growing development particularly in qualitative research in which the major focal point is how effectively representative the sample is of the target population (Adekeye & Apeh, 2019).

Arguments point to the fact that 10% of the target population is an acceptable sample size to ensure and enhance representativeness. However, with non-homogeneous data, this can be pushed to 30% of the population. For this study, a 30% factor was taken out of the target population[n=18]. The study sampled the digital diplomacy presence and content from the following missions abroad: Botswana, Djibouti, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, Zambia, Canada, People's Republic of China, Islamic Republic of Iran, Kuwait, Pakistan, South Korea, United Arab Emirates, France, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom.

The study was guided in its theoretical framework by the constructivism theory of international relations as propounded by Alexander Wendt . It was guided by three salient issues in constructivism: first, the idea of the social order being a social construct of our own making. This implies that in her digital diplomacy conduct, the state is guided by the acceptable construct of what is deemed an acceptable result in line with foreign policy goals as well as national interests; second, the perception of the nature of international relations as a byproduct of the interactions of state and non-state actors and these can influence foreign policy related outcomes and developments.

This can be seen from the perspective of the state having to respond to both state led and non-state led factors of which digital developments and related technological developments like AI form a critical part; third, is the assertion that states adopt an identity anchored on interests that reflect the aforementioned interactions between state and non-state actors (Wendt, 1995). This theory was preferred since the desired foreign policy outcome that Kenya seeks to attain through her digital diplomacy can be regarded as a construct to be achieved by making necessary evolutionary steps as a way of responding to new technological demands that dictate the shape and form that digital diplomacy must take to remain responsive to the emerging reality underpinned by AI forces.

Philosophically, the paper advances a pragmatic philosophical orientation.Pragmatism as a research philosophy views concepts as relevant only to the extent that they can support viable practical action towards solving real problems. This has led to its adaptation within social science research disciplines as the world confronts real problems that require practical action-oriented solutions (Frega & Filipe, 2012). The development of AI and the expected disruptions to the conduct of digital diplomacy presents such a reality. This borrows from the world view that a researcher adopts, seen as how one thinks about the real world and how one makes sense of the complexities that are inherent in it (Creswell, 2021). Technologically speaking, as the digital space shifts and changes as new technologies come, the solid expectation is that digital diplomacy will have to shift alongside it and embrace new forms of its expression in diplomatic processes.

Speaking of AI inclusion in digital diplomacy, Miegbam & Bariledum (2022) observes that:

The addition and organisation of a discourse must be based      on the cognitive and analytic aspects made accessible to operators by the digital revolution, from Big Data to AI-based algorithms. This form of discussion enables a diplomat to better comprehend his interlocutors' history, cultures, attitudes, mindset,

ambitions, and interests—that is, the residents of the region in which he represents his nation. In this, it should not be forgotten that, according to the most current figures, more than three billion people everyday use social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Qzone, Snapchat, and others.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study findings indicate that Kenya has embraced digital diplomacy by embracing three key social media platforms: X (formerly Twitter), Facebook and YouTube. The MFDA operates and updates these media platforms and has used them as avenues to disseminate key information and communication regarding the Ministry's activities as well as report on the activities from Kenya missions abroad. It is also noted that the respective missions also maintain their own social media platforms that contextualise their communication to their areas of accreditation. From the available data captured as at July 1st, 2024, these the MFDA social media platforms had a combined following as represented in the table 1.2. Below:

**Table 1.2: MFDA Digital Diplomacy Platforms and Associated Following**

| Digital Platform | Date Joined | No. of Followers/Subscribers |
|---|---|---|
| **X (Twitter) - Foreign Affairs** | May-13 | 426,453 |
| **X (Twitter) - Diaspora Affairs** | Dec-22 | 8,507 |
| **Facebook - Foreign Affairs** | - | 48,000 |
| **Facebook - Diaspora Affairs** | - | 6,500 |
| **YouTube - Foreign Affairs** | Nov-12 | 1,048 |
| **YouTube - Diaspora Affairs** | Jan-23 | 1,011 |

**Source: Authors (2024);** Data derived from the official social media accounts held by the State Department for Foreign Affairs and the State Department for Diaspora Affairs respectively.

The findings in table 1.2 above show that the X(Twitter) platform is the most active platform with the account operated by the State Department for Foreign Affairs leading with 426,453 subscribers while the one operated by the State Department for Diaspora Affairs registering 8,507 subscribers. The Facebook platform follows with the account operated by the State Department for Foreign Affairs leading with 48,000 followers and the one operated by the State Department for Diaspora Affairs having 6,500 followers. YouTube comes third with 1,048 and 1,011 subscribers for the accounts operated by the two State departments respectively.

A closer scrutiny of the activities in these digital platforms points to very low traffic amongst the subscribers/followers as seen from the perspective of likes and comments. This points to low engagement between the Ministry and the public following. This is an area that AI can be used to bridge in a bid to increase the subscription/following of the Ministries digital/social media platforms. Gillis (2023) observes the successful utilisation of AI in marketing on social media. He lists the following as some of the positive contributions of AI in the social media space: advertising management, analysing, sorting and tagging data, automatic posting and scheduling of posts, content generation, content moderation, content recommendation and video filtering.

This underscores the fact that AI can be a critical tool in not only growing subscriber numbers but also in creating prompts to like, comment, take polls on certain issues, share content with others as well as receive prompt notifications of specific content posted on the digital platforms. The uptake of digital diplomacy among the sampled Kenyan missions has been impressive. A social media platform search for the 18 missions unearthed the findings as presented in table 1.3 below:

**Table 1.3: Digital Diplomacy Uptake on Sample Population on**

| Social Media Platform | No. of States |
|---|---|
| X (Twitter) | 15 |
| Facebook | 16 |
| YouTube | 0 |

**Source: Authors (2024);** Data derived from the official social media accounts held by the respective Kenya Missions abroad.

The findings above, in line with those presented in table 1.2 point to the fact that X(Twitter) and Facebook are still the leading social media platforms where these missions carry out their digital diplomacy activities. None of the sampled missions had a YouTube channel and the inference made here is that the MFDA operates the official channels as was discussed earlier. A deeper scrutiny of the activities showed that there is limited interactions between the missions and the general public. This finding presents an immense challenge in terms of measuring the impact of digital diplomacy as well as measuring its effectiveness. This finding is significant in line with the first objective as it shows that Kenya's digital diplomacy continues to evolve and has shown key developmental milestones since 2013 when the fist X(Twitter) account was opened. It thus points to the need to ensure that the state and her diplomatic missions abroad ought to enhance their utilisation of the digital platforms to accentuate her digital diplomacy.

Kenya's digital diplomacy is still in its nascent stages. In line with findings from other jurisdictions, there is a lot that needs to be done to grow this cadre of diplomacy. Marzouki and Calderaro (2022) point out the efforts that have been made in growing digital diplomacy with Denmark making a pioneering move in 2017 of becoming the first state to appoint a digital ambassador to address digital diplomacy concerns. Denmark saw this as an opportune moment to enhance her relationship with key tech companies like Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon which were having significant impact in their operations in the country. Bjola and Zaiotti (2020) emphasize the significance of digital diplomacy's use of digital technologies to shape and enhance diplomatic dialogues. This presents the opportunity of widening the actor base of who can be involved in diplomatic exchanges and dialogues by incorporating non-state actors in the diplomatic dialogues.

'Kenyans on X(Twitter)' and 'Kenyans on Facebook' have emerged as key platforms that have been used to address critical issues of governance and public concern. The same energy can be transformed towards addressing diplomatic issues in an age where citizen-led diplomacy is taking root as a concept globally. It can be broadly classified into spontaneous citizen diplomacy and intentional citizen diplomacy. The former entails where citizens act on the spur of the moment to issues that they come across whereas the latter entails citizens making a deliberate intentional effort to be involved in diplomatic concerns (Mueller and Rebstock, 2021). This can be effectively achieved through digital diplomacy which provides a ready space for participating in diplomatic dialogues as well as diplomatic lobbying on core issues.

In line with the study objectives two and three, it is vital to point out that the evolution that has taken place in technology particularly information communication technologies (ICTs) have necessitated the need to further refine digital diplomacy. These technological developments, including AI present an opportunity for diplomats and diplomatic missions to embrace the opportunities presented to make Kenya's digital diplomacy effective, responsive and transformational (Onyango, 2022; Mboya, 2021; Chimbiru, 2022). AI led developments have the impact of revolutionizing Kenya's digital diplomacy and leading to the emergence of a robust virtual space that helps the state, MFDA and Kenya's diplomatic missions abroad to harness the virtual technological space to engage diplomatically. This is in line with a time when the concept of virtual diplomacy has taken root where even in-person engagements by diplomats are now taking place via technology based platforms and this reduces distance, saves time and permits speedy dialogue and consultations. This has been a key development since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (Mboya, 2021; Gichoya, 2016).

A number of challenges abound with regard to the implementation of digital diplomacy generally and application of AI to digital diplomacy specifically. As pointed out in the findings presented in table 1.2 and table 1.3 respectively, a limited level of engagement on Kenya's digital diplomacy platforms was noted. This was for both the MFDA as well as the Kenyan missions abroad. It points to a lack of awareness among many Kenyans and foreigners of the active digital diplomacy platforms. As pointed out, AI can be a critical tool to be used to 'market' these platforms to potential users of X(Twitter), Facebook and YouTube channels. A critical challenge lies in the acceptance of AI as a tool that can be used to harness digital diplomacy conduct. As the field of AI continues to grow, there is bound to be a change of attitude among diplomats and other practitioners and a shift of focus from looking at it with suspicion and viewing it as a key tool to aid in making the conduct of work easier. In diplomacy circles, there is always the need to ensure that diplomatic dialogues are handled sensitively. AI is able to enhance this capacity.

Secondly, there is a concern on the technological capacity of the MFDA and Kenyan missions abroad in not only rolling out digital diplomacy but also supporting it with AI tools. This touches on two fronts; the human resource capacity and the technological capacity in terms of hardware and software needs. The capacity challenge can be viewed from a policy perspective as well (Gichoya, 2016). A scrutiny of online publicly available information and documentation in the MFDA website for instance did not yield a substantive mention of digital diplomacy as a core component of Kenya's diplomacy nor a policy that guides and regulates digital diplomacy and the use of AI. The growing conversations in AI led diplomacy and its impacts and challenges which are coming up and which further research will unearth in the near future include: policy implications of AI, use of AI as a tool for diplomatic practice, AI capabilities in simulating human language and the human rights dimension of AI and its implications for human-centred actions and diplomatic conduct even in the conduct of digital diplomacy (Diplo,2024).

## CONCLUSION

This paper observed the primacy of Kenya's digital diplomacy as an emerging component of Kenya's wider diplomacy. It observed that Kenya's digital diplomacy is still in its nascent stage and observes that it needs to align itself with key trends that manifest themselves in the contemporary context of diplomacy. First, the need to appreciate how the technological space provided by internet based digital platforms is emerging as a key frontier in diplomacy; second, the emerging technological developments and innovations taking place leading to new AI tools and AI enabled platforms and the impact that they present to Kenya's digital diplomacy; and third, the impact of Kenya's digital diplomacy is viewed from the perspective of its ability to embrace these technological developments and the broader technological space that they provide.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper makes three recommendations towards the conduct of the state's digital diplomacy in the emerging technological space. First, there is the need to enhance Kenya's digital diplomacy footprint by ensuring that the MFDA and Kenyan missions have accounts in leading digital platforms and this should be made standard for all diplomatic missions. Whereas a presence was noted on X(Twitter), Facebook and YouTube, there is a need to explore other digital platforms like LinkedIn and TikTok among others that have a growing usage. Second, the MFDA should come up with a clear policy framework that guides the conduct of Kenya's digital diplomacy. Elements of this should be incorporated in future revisions of Kenya's Foreign Policy Framework. Third, Kenya should incorporate AI fully in digital diplomacy to better structure, order and organise its digital diplomacy reach. This will help her to reap the benefits that digital diplomacy presents in the conduct of contemporary diplomacy.

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