

The Nature and Scope of Kenya's Digital Diplomatic Communication within the Eastern African Region, 2013- 2025

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ABSTRACT

This research focused on the nature and scope of Kenya's digital diplomatic communication within the Eastern African Region between 2013 and 2024. Kenya's digital diplomacy and diplomatic communication in the Eastern Africa region for the period between 2013 and 2024. The researcher investigated the aspect of Kenya's digitized diplomatic communication. To aid in the study the researcher investigated the following objectives, how the integration of digital technologies reconfigured Kenya's diplomatic communication in the region, challenges occasioned by the relatively new practice. The researcher deployed two complementary theories to aid the study. These are the actor specific grounded theory and the soft power theory. The study adopted an exploratory research design, and used qualitative data collection techniques, interviews and questionnaires for quantitative data. The study was conducted within Kenya, with the target population being staff at the ministry of foreign and diaspora affairs, missions in the region and other key experts in digital diplomacy. The sampling technique deployed was purposive and was aimed at a specific set of participants for the purpose collecting nuanced data related to the study topic. The study findings revealed that digital diplomatic communication in the region is influenced Kenya's digital diplomacy efforts. Despite Kenya's progress the conduct of digital diplomacy is hampered by challenges ranging from institutional gaps to a framework that is evolving but not adequate on the face of a dynamic digital technology environment. The study concludes by suggesting various recommendations that can help improve the conduct of digital diplomacy by Kenya in the Eastern Africa region.

Keywords: Digital diplomacy, Diplomatic communication, Foreign policy

Background to the Study

Diplomacy in international relations is commonly understood as a permanent and effective form of communication between states (Jönsson & Hall, 2003). However, diplomatic engagement predates the modern state system. Early interactions among communities through trade, alliance formation, and peace negotiations constituted forms of classical diplomacy (Voicu, 2020). These engagements relied on emissaries vested with authority, where both verbal and non-verbal communication were central. This historical continuity demonstrates that communication has always been foundational to diplomacy, regardless of institutional form.

The evolution of diplomatic communication has been shaped by changes in the international system and the growth of information flows. Voicu (2020) argues that diplomacy has continually adapted to new mechanisms of information transmission, reflecting historical contingencies rather than a linear progression. One key driver has been the expansion of the Westphalian state system, particularly after decolonization and the end of the Cold War, which increased the number of diplomatic actors, embassies, and information exchanges. As the "eyes and ears" of the state, diplomats rely on timely and efficient communication to transmit intelligence and policy relevant information to their home governments (Jönsson & Hall, 2003). This growing informational burden necessitated more efficient communication systems.

Technological innovation constitutes the second major driver of change in diplomatic communication. The emergence of faster, more secure media capable of transmitting large volumes of information has transformed diplomatic practice. Diplomatic communication now operates across both private and public spheres, depending on strategic objectives and target audiences (Bjola & Holmes, 2015; Sharma, 2021). The integration

of digital technologies such as social media platforms, virtual communication tools, and online environments has given rise to digital diplomacy (Sharma, 2021). Bjola and Holmes (2015) conceptualize digital diplomacy as encompassing public engagement and nation branding, the institutionalization of digital tools within foreign ministries, and the monitoring of international political developments. While digital diplomacy enhances efficiency, responsiveness, and real-time engagement, it also introduces risks related to disinformation and propaganda (Hayden, 2018; Bjola & Manor, 2024).

The rise of digital diplomacy has been marked by several critical developments. Manor (2016) identifies three key moments: efforts to counter Al-Qaeda's online recruitment strategies through initiatives such as U.S. "Diplomacy 2.0"; the Arab Spring of 2011, which revealed the diplomatic value of social media as a source of real-time intelligence; and the emergence of citizen journalism enabled by mobile technologies. Despite persistent anxieties about technology undermining diplomacy—dating back to Lord Palmerston's concerns about the telegraph diplomacy has proven resilient (Sharma, 2021). Contemporary practices such as virtual embassies, pioneered by the Maldives and Sweden, and virtual summits accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrate the institutionalization of digital tools. Across Asia and Africa, countries including China, India, Kenya, Rwanda, Mali, and the Democratic Republic of Congo now actively employ digital diplomacy for soft power projection, diaspora engagement, and consular services, underscoring the centrality of digital platforms in modern diplomatic practice (Manor, 2016; Gichoya, 2016; Onyango, 2020; Sharma, 2021).

Statement of the Problem

It was argued that the area of diplomacy itself was adverse to change; it was characterized by an inbuilt culture of opposition to change and a tendency to defend hierarchies. Nevertheless, it was not an area that had escaped the increased penetration of every area of our society by digital technologies. There was one significant element of disruption in the area of diplomacy: the digitization of communications. Such variations however are not without complexities which have influenced the conduct of international diplomacy. The dynamic nature of digital technology is not without complexities for the state. In the modern digital world, the sharing of information is expedited among a wider population of people, thus eliminating traditional hierarchies. Diplomatic communication has a crucial place as the justification for foreign policies within a given state. States develop digitized strategies of diplomatic communication whereby foreign publics are targeted for influence through variations that are not linguistic in nature but foreign policy-oriented.

The digital technologies have occasioned disruptions within the field of international relations and diplomacy, creating tensions and challenges. The emergence of digital technologies is threatening to reconfigure power distribution, the conduct of diplomacy, and the creation of new actors. These emerging complexities bring about the need for research within the practice and discourse of diplomacy. However, most of the existing scholarly works on digitized diplomatic communication are Eurocentric in nature, with those within the local sphere being concentrated on social network platforms and diplomatic communications. This research seeks to demystify this presumption by investigating Kenya's digitized diplomatic communication in the Eastern Africa region in the last decade. The research explored nature and scope of Kenya's digital diplomatic communication within the Eastern African Region between 2013 and 2025.

Specific Objective

To explore nature and scope of Kenya's digital diplomatic communication within the Eastern African Region between 2013 and 2025

Significance of the Study

Academically, this research will make significant contributions to the discipline of International Relations by examining digital diplomacy in the context of Kenya's foreign policy in the EA region. So far, studies on digital diplomacy have been profoundly Eurocentric, with little focus on case studies in Africa. The focus on case studies in Africa significantly broadens perspectives in the Global South on the future of diplomatic communication. More significantly, this research will make significant contributions to theory development in International Relations by employing theories of soft power theory and actor-specific grounded theory in

examining the dimensions of Kenya's foreign policy in shaping digital diplomacy. The study will significantly contribute to the theoretical discourse in International Relations, particularly in the growing discipline of comparative diplomacy and diplomatic communications studies. The research will contribute immensely to insights into the future of diplomatic authority in Africa.

From a policy point of view, this study will give valuable guidelines to diplomats, policymakers, and entities that deal with issues of foreign affairs in Kenya and in the whole Eastern African region. The lack of appropriate guidelines poses risks to states in terms of reputational and strategic consequences because of the increasing importance of information platforms in diplomatic relations and communications. This study will give valuable and factual findings regarding issues affecting the nation in terms of diplomatic relations and communications within the context of digital diplomacy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The rise in digital technologies has inadvertently influenced the manner in which diplomatic communication is conducted. Although diplomatic communication remains as relevant as ever in the domain of politics, the ways in which it is conceived have undergone radical transformations. According to Pamment, “analyses of history show that diplomatic communication has always adjusted to changes in technology.” For instance, the advent of undersea cables in the 19th century redirected the geospatial structures of diplomacy in such a manner that it influenced the capabilities of diplomats to acquire requisite information. These technological developments necessitated states to transform the manner in which diplomatic communication is practiced—from human envoys to modern forms of technology.

The classical diplomatic literature has, in this case, highlighted the evolutionary process that has seen states advance, over time, from conventional means of diplomatic communication like telegraphy, telephony, print technology, and radio communications, to first-generation forms of digital diplomatic engagements like early computers and satellite technology (Njeri, 2022). The contemporary form of digital diplomacy now relies on the use of the Internet, social network sites like social media, and electronic mail to enhance diplomatic engagements. The advanced states have largely been the vanguard in the adoption of digital diplomacy forms, while states in Africa, like Kenya, have had to cope with digital adoption challenges. The problem is that while the classical literature has significantly emphasized the use of digital diplomacy in the West, very little has been written on the use of digital diplomacy in Africa in terms of practical implementation thereof.

Digital technologies have affected a fundamental change in the nature of diplomatic communication. Among the major changes, one has been the making of transnational audiences. Digital connectivity allows diplomats to address domestic and international stakeholders simultaneously outside borders (Charles 2024). Traditional diplomatic communication, earlier hierarchically structured and restricted to official channels, has become more decentered. The increasing rise of social media and virtual networks has erased the boundaries between the formal diplomatic actors and broader publics, which challenges diplomats to take on new responsibilities—as community managers, storytellers, and moderators of digital conversation—as well as diplomats (Hedling & Bremberg, 2021). While existing literature acknowledges this transformation, few studies have empirically examined how diplomats navigate these dual roles or measure the impact of digital public engagement on policy decisions, thus constituting a significant gap.

Aside from the construction of new boundaries, digital technologies have also improved the strategic power of smaller nations worldwide. For instance, Kenya has utilized social media campaigns to make a global imprint, despite budgetary and infrastructural limited constraints (Charles, 2024). It utilized social media campaigns targeting crucial voters worldwide, besides utilizing teams that make use of data analytics to make an intelligence rudiment during Kenya's campaign to acquire a seat within the United Nations Security Council amidst a global pandemic like COVID-19. All these examples portray an opportunity, through digital technologies, whereby a number of smaller global nations will be motivated to graciously participate in global matters. Despite this, research around strategic digital diplomacy within multiple nations, including the level of resource capacity and outcomes, remains limited.

Furthermore, virtual diplomacy, a dimension of digital diplomacy, has emerged prominently. This has predominantly come in response to and resulted from the experience of the recent health pandemic,

necessitating a shift in holding and promoting diplomatic activities on online platforms (Charles, 2024). For instance, there has been a growing trend and acceptance in holding virtual summits, bilateral, and multilateral negotiations. One of the most important aspects of digital diplomacy has resulted in leaders and representatives narrating and undertaking a level of self-narration on what transpires in various diplomatic happenings. This has resulted in historical events in terms of promoting degrees of transparency in diplomatic negotiations and proceedings not achieved before in traditional forms of diplomacy. For example, in physical and traditional forms of diplomacy, there was a high level of joint public communication on what transpired in various other world leaders' meetings through communiqué. However, with digital diplomacy, there has emerged a real-time communication and promotion of what transpires on various occasions. As discussed by scholars in their respective works by Charles (2024) and Hedling & Bremberg (2021), there has been some level of neglect in researching how effective virtual and physical forms of diplomacy are.

Another profound change that has occurred via the adoption and development of digital technologies is the current decentralization of information. Currently, there is a minimal monopolization of information by the state via its foreign affairs communication, because the public is involved in the dissemination of information or even the critiquing thereof. The foreign affairs ministry, as well as the various embassies around the world and the diplomats themselves, make use of various social media accounts whereby events are critiqued instantly. An illustration of the current nature of foreign communication is the events surrounding the Tanzanian air authority restricting the cargo flights of the Kenya airways. Similarly, there were remarks made via Twitter by the Ugandan military personnel. Even as literature presents the potential for transparency within the foreign services via the adoption of digital technologies, the current impact thereof pertaining to the individual foreign services has yet to be critiqued within the relevant literature.

Despite the now burgeoning scholarship on digital diplomacy, several gaps remain. First, while studies highlight technological adoption, there is a dearth of empirical analysis into the processes through which digital technologies reshape diplomatic hierarchies and power relations. For instance, to what extent do junior diplomats and social media managers shape decision-making processes compared to senior diplomatic actors? A second area pertains to the risks and ethical dimensions of digital diplomacy, including misinformation, cyber threats, and the impact of digital manipulation in multilateral negotiations. Third, literature on Africa's engagement with digital diplomacy remains underdeveloped, from diffuse resource constraints, strategic campaigns on digital platforms, and even regional integration. Fourth, with COVID-19, virtual diplomacy has been discussed far and wide, but longer-term assessments of its sustainability, effectiveness, and how it plays out in supporting physical diplomacy remain limited. Finally, there is limited investigation into the comparative effectiveness of digital diplomacy tools at influencing policy outcomes relative to traditional diplomatic instruments, particularly within small and developing states such as Kenya.

The use of digital technologies has thus redesigned the practice of diplomatic communication through the desecularization of information at the global level, the creation of transnational audiences, the expansion of the professional work of diplomats, and the emergence of virtual diplomatic practice. Digital technologies thus facilitate the efforts of nation-states such as Kenya to engage in global communication while at the same time transcending the constraints of global diplomatic infrastructure. To sum up the status of the literature on the practice of diplomatic communication at the global level through the use of digital technologies, what emerges from the texts are gaps to be filled by empirical work on the de-secularization of information at the global level through the use of the internet in Africa and work on the production of global audiences and the transnational audience space.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was grounded on two theories: The Actor-Specific Ground Theory and The Soft Power Theory. The Actor-Specific Ground Theory creates a guideline through which aspects and dynamics of several actors involved in digital diplomacy in Kenya can be understood and analyzed. Through understanding different perspectives of various actors involved in this emerging form of diplomacy such as politicians and local actors this theory allows salient aspects of this form of diplomacy to be revealed. This theory also allows us to see aspects of micro-level dynamics and understanding of diplomacy conducted through this platform such as

engagement of particular individuals with this form of diplomacy and its macro-level implication and effect—such as national image creation and diplomatic policy development and its implication in global diplomacy.

This study was complemented with Joseph Nye's Soft Power Theory. This theory stressed the significance of influence rather than coercion. Earlier, nation-states used hard power, either military power or economic influence, to attain their objectives and interests in international affairs. However, with 'soft power,' a nationstate is enabled to attain its objectives through persuasion, cultural influence, and ideological attractiveness. In this regard, digital media have enabled nation-states to access unprecedented power with respect to international affairs, especially during this 'information age.' In this respect, to understand digital diplomacy with respect to Kenya, this 'soft power' model is significant.

By fusing concepts of both Actor-Specific Grounded Theory and Soft Power Theory, this study developed a conceptual framework based on effective correlations between actor-level experiences and macro-level objectives of foreign policy. The Grounded Theory method offers insights into specific experiences and difficulties within the case of Kenya and its use of digital diplomacy, and uses this knowledge to situate these phenomena within general principles of international relations as postulated under Soft Power Theory and its role in shaping a powerful and effective communications policy for Kenya and its Eastern Africa diplomacy.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study took the form of an exploratory research design. Both secondary and primary sources of data collection were employed by this study. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who possess the necessary knowledge and information relevant to the aims and intentions of the study. In this regard, the researcher targeted the staff in the media, ICT departments, as well as those dealing with EA and African affairs within the MFDA. Additionally, the study targeted diplomats from the EA and African missions. A total of 64 participants were selected for the study. This included current and past diplomats, as well as current and past ministers and principal secretaries within the ministry, individuals and institutions involved in the usage of technology in diplomacy, individuals are ministry staff from various departments, missions, and consulates in different divisions within the ministry. Also include were diplomats and communication officers within various countries of the eastern region of Africa such as Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Burundi, South Sudan, and Somalia. For secondary data, the researcher used journals, books, government records and newspapers as well as open-source data sources to supplement primary data.

The instruments of data collection included structured questionnaires and interview guides. The study ensured validity and reliability by carefully developing research tools to effectively measure the intended components, thereby ensuring that the interview questions and survey instruments accurately represented the objectives of the study. Data collected was analyzed and interpreted both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS through descriptive statistics presented through tables and bar graphs. Qualitative data analysis was undertaken through transcribing the audio-recorded interviews verbatim to create textual dataset and identify recurring themes and patterns and codes related to the impact of Kenya's aviation diplomacy on its multilateral trade relations in the Eastern Africa region.

Analysis, Interpretation And Presentation Of Findings

The Nature of Kenya Digital Diplomatic Communication within the Eastern Africa Region between 2013 And 2025

While this study appreciates that many studies collect demographic data this study departed from this practice primarily due to methodological concerns since the collection of this data raised serious ethical questions particularly the risk anonymity breach on participants. Due to the small sample size, and the diplomatic setting the researcher acknowledged that collection of demographic information would have breached anonymity and potentially influence the responses. Bjola & Pamment (2020) assert that the privacy of participants involved in diplomatic and political settings justifies this data not being collected. Further this study was keen on institutional communication practices thus the omission. As Ong'ong'a (2021) asserts in digital diplomatic communication, demographic information is secondary and can be omitted for methodological reasons since the studies are keen on communication strategies and mechanisms. Existing literature evaluating the conduct of

digital diplomatic communication in Kenya reveals the country has experimented with tech in diplomacy due to developments and disruptions occasioned by technology.

Despite this acknowledgement, Mboya 2021 as cited in Irungu & Kimaita (2024) postulates that digital diplomacy has not meet expectation on growth in terms of strategies and tactics deployed in its roll out and implantation. These thoughts by Mboya cast doubts on the evolution and adaptability of the country’s digital diplomatic communication in a fast-evolving field. Despite these criticisms, Nairobi remains a leader digitized diplomatic communication in the region. The MFDA has operated social network platforms in recent years, accounts on these platforms have been used to communicate (Irungu & Kimaita, 2024). Data sourced from the MFDA accounts on social network platforms, reveal that the ministry has operated X, Facebook and You Tube accounts since 2012; with the established of SDDA having joined X in December 2022 and You Tube January 2023.

Although these accounts have enormous following, Irungu & Kimaita (2024) argue that a scrutiny of like and comments from posts reveal generate low traffic. The criticisms levelled by Mboya (2021) and Irungu & Kimaita (2024) can be attributed to the comparisons between the Kenya and other jurisdictions that would be considered advanced in digital diplomatic communication. This study takes a strict departure from this assertion. It is therefore prudent to understand that Kenya’s practice is only in its nascent stages. Further, the conduct of digitized diplomatic communication does not occur in isolation and is influence by the foreign policy orientation, political dispensation and the top-ranking diplomats. In lieu of this, a review of data on the conduct of digitized diplomatic communication should not be limited to the ministry’s communication but extend to embassies, top ranking diplomats and those operated under state house.

Manor (2016) portends that digitized diplomatic communication extends to the private realms of diplomats. Further, during this period Kenya has witnessed growth in the number of Kenyans who are active on social platform networks (Irungu & Kimaita, 2024). Colloquially referred to as Kenyans on X, Kenyans on Facebook and Kenyans on TikTok, these groups have formed a web of networks by Kenyans who seek not only to understand but also to influence diplomacy through digital diplomacy. These qualitative findings were echoed by the 4th respondent who noted, “Social media has become a power tool on the Kenyan political landscape, whereby Kenyans have grown the reputation of being fierce activists not mere digital consumers. Kenyans will marshal their numbers on social media and shape policies and decision making within government.”

To better elucidate the transformation in Nairobi’s digital diplomatic communication the following section relies on social network platform analysis as well as quantitative data. The analysis extended to official X (formerly Twitter) accounts, Facebook, Instagram, you tube and official government websites. The same also extended to Kenya’s missions, embassies, and consulate and liaison office in the Eastern Africa region. The researcher deployed this approach since the Kenya’s digital diplomacy has been described as multi-platform and dynamic by various scholars. The data was drawn from these sites and analyzed using social media analysis metrics. During data collection, the researcher focused on the number of posts, comments and shares in these specific handles per platform as well as websites since 2013 to 2025. These metrics were then analyzed to generated engagement rates on each of the social network platforms.

Year	Total posts	Total Shares	Total Comments	Activity Index
2013	622	2153	905	1811
2014	745	2312	929	1996
2015	866	2333	1134	2246
2016	981	2670	1158	2477
2017	1050	2759	1282	2647
2018	1168	3031	1244	2824
2019	1318	3290	1345	3112

2020	1432	3512	1578	3432
2021	1476	3731	1743	3641
2022	1565	4121	1895	3938
2023	1773	4123	1848	4119
2024	1872	4290	1878	4286
2025	1974	4511	1898	4466

Table 1.1 Source: MFDA official social media accounts

To better elucidate the digital diplomacy, an analysis was undertaken and the results labelled to arrive activity index. To derive the same the following factors were considered; frequency of posting, consistency, engagement rate and network centrality.

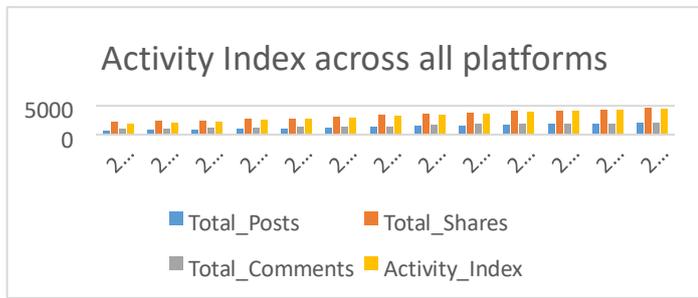


Figure 1.1 Activity Index across Platforms

An analysis of government handles used in digitized diplomatic communications revealed a continuous growth in the engagement rates in each platform. On X, there has been a steady growth, from 1.76% in 2013 to 4.09% in 2024 and 4.4% in 2025. To determine the engagement rate, the engagement per post were divided by the follower count and converted into percentage points.

This growth in the use of X was also reflective on the respondents’ effectiveness score of the platform. Quantitative analysis indicated X (formerly Twitter) is the most effective platform in Kenya’s digital diplomacy with a mean score of 1.75. On a Likert scale of 1 (very effective) and 5 (not sure). The government website was rated as the second most effective platform with a mean score of 2.1. These findings were consistent with various scholarly works, Mwangi (2024) as well as Mutsiya et al (2024) posit that X has been used as strategic tool due to its effectiveness and high engagement rate for the purposes of agenda setting real time engagement while the government website has been deployed more as an authoritative source of digitized diplomatic communication. Open-source data illustrated growth in engagement rate. This is reflective in the high confidence rate in X’s effectiveness.

The table below demonstrates this growth.

Year	Posts	Shares	Comments	Engagement Rate(%)
2013	227	744	312	1.76
2014	229	765	335	2.01
2015	308	735	368	2.18
2016	348	897	400	2.09

2017	311	868	517	2.54
2018	362	1075	420	2.73
2019	433	1076	446	2.97
2020	457	1136	462	3.36
2021	499	1168	564	3.42
2022	513	1381	621	3.75
2023	591	1348	590	3.82
2024	624	1397	584	4.09
2025	641	1473	616	4.4

Table 1.2 Source official MFDA and foreign missions X accounts

On applying a similar metric analysis on Facebook as on X this study found growth in engagement rate, from 1.58% in 2013 to 3.93% in 2024. The same can be attribute to growth in the number of engagements stemming from shares, likes and components. The table below illustrates this growth.

Year	Posts	Shares	Comments	Engagement_Rate(%)
2013	223	839	369	1.58
2014	282	813	349	1.71
2015	308	865	414	2.02
2016	334	1024	385	1.84
2017	373	1005	427	2.12
2018	447	984	453	2.37
2019	418	1055	440	2.67
2020	494	1131	551	3.24
2021	457	1297	530	3.13
2022	521	1330	581	3.49
2023	564	1431	632	4.12
2024	604	1407	657	3.93
2025	637	1511	695	4.42

Table 1.3 Source official MFDA and missions Facebook accounts

On the question of the platform’s effectiveness respondents rated Facebook moderately the platform with an effectiveness mean score of 2.4. Content analysis coupled with social media analytics attributed the use of the platform by the MFDA and missions for diaspora outreach and cultural diplomacy. Further, reduce used for use of the platform in comparison to X explains the moderate rating. The findings confluence with the thoughts of

Onyango and Mungai (2024) who observed that the platform heavy with multimedia presentation that were leaning on cultural diplomacy. An analysis on Instagram provided key insights on the growth in engagement rates. Having grown from 1.6% in 2013 to 4.01% in 2024.

Year	Posts	Shares	Comments	Engagement_Rate(%)
2013	101	361	140	1.67
2014	147	520	128	1.62
2015	164	473	237	1.94
2016	209	490	231	2.11
2017	264	626	209	2.44
2018	245	693	255	2.97
2019	320	825	336	2.96
2020	348	858	385	3.1
2021	364	893	459	3.1
2022	379	1023	524	3.16
2023	441	928	452	3.68
2024	461	1025	424	4.01
2025	508	1072	406	4.68

Table 1.4 Source: Official MFDA and missions Instagram accounts

The MFDA and the foreign missions have mainly used Facebook and Instagram as platforms for the conduct of cultural diplomacy. Content analysis on these two platforms revealed higher efforts at national branding and cultural diplomacy. These platforms are used to advance Kenya's soft power efforts in the region.

From the engagements, it is clear that Kenya has made significant stride in diplomatic communication. These gains are distributed in two phases; from 2013 to 2017 the state house communication team was the node for diplomatic communication particularly on Twitter (X) under the handle @StateHouseKenya. The second phase of growth from 2018 to 2024 was marked by a shift with MFDA led initiatives. These findings are consistent with those of Mwashigadi (2023) whereby her findings established that the MFDA has since taken a lead in diplomatic communication often guiding the state house communication team.

The use of WhatsApp within the MFDA is primarily for internal communication between the staff in various departments. However, it is important to highlight that the Kenyan Mission in Somalia not only uses the platform for internal communication but also for digital public engagement. The researcher noted that the mission had an active WhatsApp number on its official website that helped in direct engagement. Further, the researcher tested the use of the number for external diplomatic communication confirming the use of the platform by the Kenyan mission on Mogadishu.

These findings are congruent with those of Mwashigadi (2023) who note the tool was mainly used for internal use. A qualitative analysis on the effectiveness of WhatsApp revealed that the platform was rated between effective and very effective, with 52.1% of the respondents rating as very effective and 37% as effective, with a mean rating of approximately 1.6 on a Likert Scale of 1 to 5. To understand the growth beyond stats and help demystify the nature of Nairobi digitized diplomatic communication during the period of study. The researcher deployed cross-platform metrics analysis coupled with content analysis to understand sentiments, communication decentralization, responsiveness to public discourse and shifts in thematic focus areas. As earlier established the MFDA and state house remained the key central from 2013 to 2019. From 2019, to 2024

embassy have gained prominence in diplomatic communication signaling the decentralization of digitized diplomatic communication.

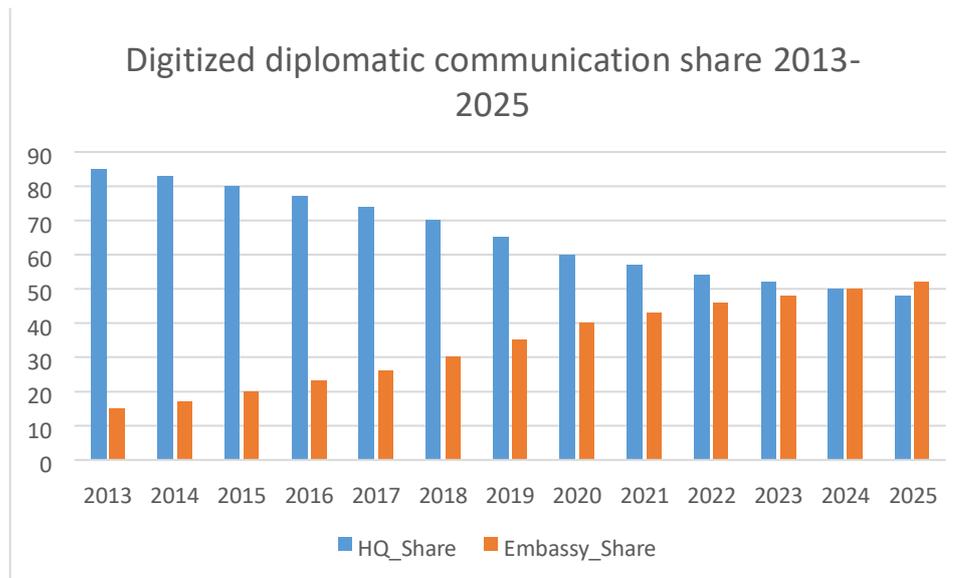


Figure 1.2 Digitized Diplomatic Communications Share, 2013-2025

The decentralized diplomatic communication from Nairobi to embassies in the Eastern Africa region indicates growth not only on Nairobi part but also on teams within the region. In 2013 Nairobi accounted for 85% of all diplomatic communication efforts as the core node of communication. This has changed over time with embassies contribution growing significantly, accounting for 50% as of 2024. The growth in embassies digital footprint has created more distributed communication ecosystem. The expanded footprint points to the adoption of a multi-nodal framework where the embassies serve as local amplifiers of foreign policy objectives in their host countries. With a multi-nodal diplomatic communication system Nairobi has been able to strike a balance between projection of soft power and foreign public engagement. These findings align with the foundational tenets of the actor network theory. This theory views digital diplomacy as a decentralized network that is comprised of multiple active nodes (Mwashigadi, 2023, John, 2012).

Quantitative data analysis revealed variability in response to the question on familiarity with digital diplomacy frameworks. This dispersion points towards independent or semi-independent contributions by the various actors thus indicating decentralization in Kenya’s efforts. A statistical representation indicated a mean response of 2.78 on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, on the question, this indicated mixed levels of awareness ranging from very familiar to not familiar at all, the researcher attributed this dispersion to varying knowledge and policy adoption further reinforcing the decentralized nature of Kenya’s digital diplomacy. In addition, the adoption and use of a variety of social network platforms with scattered effectiveness rating as evidenced point towards decentralized strategies. This confluence illustrates the decentralized nature of Kenya’s digital diplomacy. These findings align with the opinion of the second respondent who noted, “Kenya’s digital diplomacy efforts are seen on various social media platforms, you will note that although Twitter (now X) has higher frequency, communication is still done on the other social media accounts it is also important to note that the ministry and the embassies operate different handles on the same platform. “During the period under study, there has been a significant thematic shift in areas of diplomatic communication.

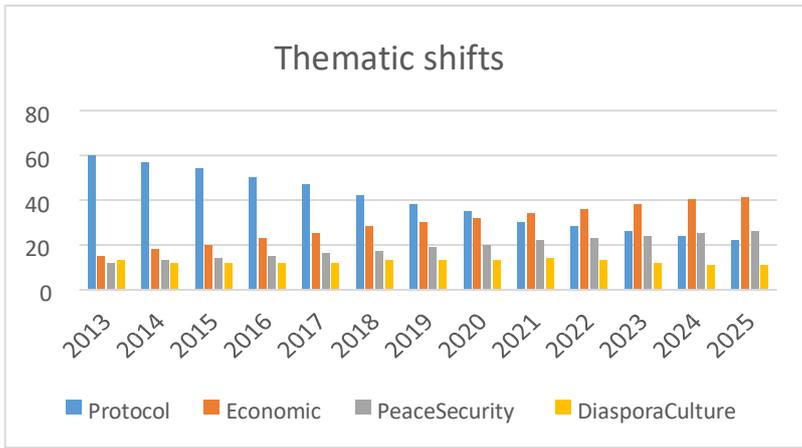


Figure 1.3 Thematic Shifts 2013-2025

From 2013 to 2024, diplomatic communication from Nairobi has undergone an evolution over the themes. During this time, the most prominent themes in digitized diplomatic communication have been diplomatic protocol. Economic diplomacy, peace and security as well as diaspora and culture. These themes are reflective of foreign policy objectives. From 2013 to 2016, the diplomatic communication reflected heavy diplomatic protocol. Most of it was centered on state visits, courtesy calls and handshake. It is important to note that during this period the Nairobi was at its early stages of diplomatic communication. From 2017, there has been a clear evolution in themes with an increase of efforts centered on economic diplomacy, peace and security and diaspora engagement and culture. Economic themes have been anchored on trade negotiations, infrastructure development and shared economic gains. During the period of study, Nairobi has asserted its regional dominance in regards to peace and security as a leader in peace efforts and negotiations. It is important to note that security was main issue due to the Kenya Somalia border dispute, the conflict in Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo and Tigray region in Ethiopia and finally in Sudan and South Sudan.

During the same time, Nairobi has made concrete gains in diaspora engagement and cultural diplomacy. These changes and growth indicate Nairobi has maximized its digital footprint reinforcing its soft power overtures in the region. In the region Nairobi and Addis Ababa were the first to formulate national diaspora policies in 2013 and 2014 respectively (Manor & Adiku, 2021) in 2024, Kenya revised its national diaspora policy that was in line with the country’s vision 2030. This policy situates the MFDA as the apex institution in its implementation. The centrality of the MFDA buttresses the importance of the policy as a key pillar in the country’s foreign policy. It is important to elucidate that in 2022, the Kenyan government through a presidential directive established the state department of diaspora affairs (SDDA). This department is pegged in law under the Executive Order number 1 of 2023 on the organization of government. This illustrates concise efforts by Nairobi to capitalize on diaspora diplomacy.

The nature of Kenya’s digitized diplomatic communication during the period of study was also investigated through sentiment analysis. To achieve this the researcher deployed content analysis and metric analysis. The researcher outlined negative, positive and neutral comments on the comment share under posts in social network platforms. The table and graph below help elucidate this.

Year	Positive	Neutral	Negative
2013	42	40	18
2014	44	38	18
2015	45	36	19
2016	48	35	17
2017	50	33	17

2018	55	30	15
2019	58	28	14
2020	60	29	11
2021	63	27	10
2022	65	25	10
2023	66	28	6
2024	67	30	3
2025	68	29	3

Table 1.5

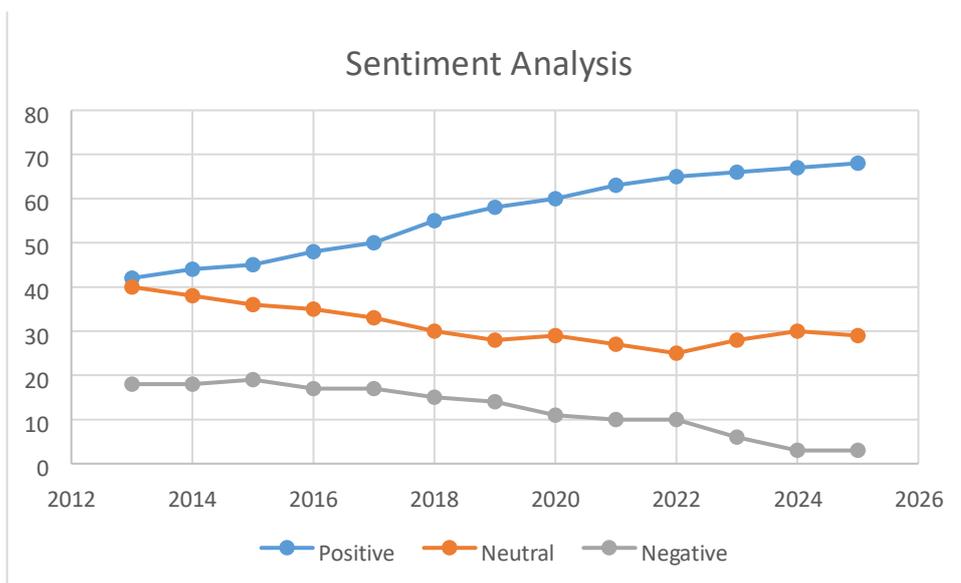


Figure 1.4 Sentiment Analysis

Since 2013, Kenya has witnessed a growth in positive sentiment and a decline in negative sentiment. Neutral sentiments have been on a decline and seem to have stabilized since 2018. This point to greater appreciation of Nairobi’s efforts in diplomatic communication. However, the analysis point to vulnerabilities when Nairobi has faced internal political contestation. This was particularly characteristic in the 2017 and 2022 general elections. These findings are aligned with the revelations of the first respondent who noted, “During the political campaigns season, the digital environment is very rough. During this time political mobilizations takes center stage and political opinions and loyalties become louder than national discourse and interests.” The respondent went further to highlight that amplifying diplomatic matters at a times of political disquiet gets one labelled a government sympathizer.

From 2013 to 2024, Nairobi has made a significant leap in the conduct of diaspora affairs. With growing diaspora populations, African states such as Kenya have sought to tap into the benefits associated with the diaspora communities. Since the last century, states have come to appreciate diaspora communities as diplomatic assets a shift from the traditional perspective where diaspora communities were viewed as traitors (Manor & Adiku, 2021). These changes led to the emergence of diaspora diplomacy (Manor & Adiku, 2021). In the region Nairobi and Addis Ababa were the first to formulate national diaspora policies in 2013 and 2014 respectively (Manor & Adiku, 2021) in 2024, Kenya revised its national diaspora policy that was in line with the country’s vision 2030.

This policy situates the MFDA as the apex institution in its implementation. The centrality of the MFDA buttresses the importance of the policy as a key pillar in the country's foreign policy. It is important to elucidate that in 2022, the Kenyan government through a presidential directive established the state department of diaspora affairs (SDDA). This department is pegged in law under the Executive Order number 1 of 2023 on the organization of government. This illustrates concise efforts by Nairobi to capitalize on diaspora diplomacy.

The policy encapsulates the use of information communication technology in a bid to enhance communication with the diaspora community. The use of social network platforms such as X, Facebook and Instagram helps to establish channels through which citizens in the diaspora can help maintain emotional connection to their country of origin (Manor & Adiku, 2021). Through digital technologies, governments are able to establish diplomatic engagement with diaspora communities. The dialogic nature of social network platforms particularly enables engagement between diplomats and online publics abroad helping to advance a country's foreign policy goals (Manor & Adiku, 2021). Within the last decade the phenomenon of digital diaspora diplomacy has witnessed growth within Kenyan missions abroad. Manor & Adiku, 2021 postulate digital diaspora diplomacy primary focus is to build, strengthen and leverage on online relationships with digital publics. In this regard, Nairobi targets not only Kenyans abroad but also non-citizens abroad (Kenya Diaspora Policy, 2024). This policy position by Nairobi is particularly important in understanding how foreign governments seek to influence foreign public in a bid to enhance bilateral ties between destination countries and Nairobi. According to the International Organization for Migration (2021), Kenya witnessed a growth in international migrants between 2016 and 2020 with an increase 77,000 Kenyans moving abroad Out of these figures 22,582 moved to countries within the SubSaharan Africa (IOM, 2021).

CONCLUSION

This study noted that Kenya's digital diplomacy has thus been transformed into an important element in its foreign policy, making Nairobi the diplomatic hub in the region since 2013. Building on traditional notions and practices of diplomacy through protocol, Kenya has embraced technological tools, its narratives, and its agenda setters to enhance its soft power diplomacy, peace and security, and its economic diplomacy through trade, investment, and infrastructure development while fostering its diaspora and its image in the world. It was observed that digital diplomacy is facing challenges such as those related to policies and institutional bottlenecks that make meaningful communication hard to come by, there is an understanding that, as informed by actor network theory, digital diplomacy is promoted through interdependencies with social actors and technologies. This emphasizes the imperative of folding digital diplomacy into mainstream diplomacy.

The study further observed that Nairobi's strategy not only cements regional position and influence but aligns itself with cutting-edge scholarship on "digital diplomacy" and states' approaches to it. Vulnerable to home and global politics, Nairobi's current position demands an analysis and adaptation of relevant strategies to mobilize and align efforts towards collective sectoral and multi-sectoral responses through the lens of the Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs. Expanding beyond social media platforms to incorporate relevant approaches to cultural interaction and making the most of Kenya's own tech revolution will actually propel the nation to an even stronger position globally and regionally.

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