Chapter 3
COVID−19, Social Media Adoption, and the Future of Digital Diplomacy in Africa

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ABSTRACT

The challenges brought by COVID-19 challenged all sectors of society, including public diplomacy. Public diplomacy through the adoption of social media and other digital platforms was transformed into mainstream digital diplomacy. The chapter sought to understand how social media use by diplomats during COVID-19 forced or allowed the introduction of digital diplomacy as a necessary intervention. Using the desktop review of literature, adjoining on systematic literature review was adopted as the research method. The objectives were to investigate how the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic affected digital diplomacy in Africa, and what are the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for the practice of digital diplomacy in Africa. The research identified four themes, these were: the state of African digital diplomacy; social media adoption during COVID-19 in Africa; corona virus and vaccine diplomacy; and anti-corruption public digital diplomacy. The study revealed that African digital diplomacy, however, is closely comparable to its developed countries counterparts.

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation, (WHO) in March 2020 after the detection of the spread of COVID-19 cases in many parts of the world. What followed were lockdowns, with countries locking their citizens in their houses and closing all borders of entry (Gwala R.S; Mashau P., 2022). Social media came to the fore with live recordings of small events to the broader audience. Videos calls became another space to connect with family friends and families, and similar platforms for business meetings took off. The relations between nations is natured by advanced diplomacy. Diplomacy infused with latest social media technology brings about digital diplomacy (DD). The study sought to understand the intersection of social media, the impact of COVID-19 and digital diplomacy using technology acceptance model, (TAM). Diplomacy has been disrupted by the digital era. In fact, some scholars have argued that the term "digitalisation of diplomacy" should be used to highlight the implications of ICTs or the use of digital tools for diplomacy, and the practise has been referred to by a variety of names, including e-diplomacy, digi-plomacy, twi-plomacy, networked diplomacy, mobile diplomacy, virtual diplomacy, digital public diplomacy, cyber diplomacy, and digital diplomacy is the most common.

Digital diplomacy scholars contend that when social media is utilized skilfully, there is a propensity for these institutions to reach a wider public, establish new networks, define agendas, and develop relationships with the online public (Willers, 2022; Zaharna, 2022). The worldwide media serve as diplomatic instruments for foreign governments since they disseminate a range of messages and information that could influence public perception of those nations (Saliu, 2020; Sheludiakova et al., 2021). Despite the fact that traditional diplomats and other international stakeholders, such as business executives and representatives of civil society, engage in digital diplomacy in Africa, the practice is still in its infancy compared to other continents. The use of ICTs in foreign policy on the continent is also frequently accidental rather than deliberate and systematic, which means that digital diplomatic practices are not always seen as digital diplomacy in the real sense (Wekesa et al., 2021). As a result, one of the goals of this topic is to give knowledge that will stimulate not only the practical adoption of digital diplomacy but also the creation of digital diplomacy policies and strategies among African foreign policy practitioners.

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