Systematic Literature Review: Online Digital Platforms Utilization by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Adopting Digital Diplomacy

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Abstract

Digital diplomacy has become a subject of scrutiny and public interest in recent years. As technology change, so is the functions of diplomats and ministry of foreign affairs (MFA). Most of the countries and MFAs have tried to streamline their services as well as their communicative context by adopting strategies that make them possible to articulate their position in the digital diplomatic sphere. Different scholars have come up with different definitions of digital diplomacy in regards to their context and content of interest. Although this field is on its embryonic state, it is vital in international relations with few studies done in this field. This study aims to provide a systematic analysis of the current literature on digital diplomacy studies. Therefore, this study contributes to a significant gap in research and provides an ongoing reference to digital diplomacy. It argues that most of the previous studies focused on a qualitative methodology to investigate in countries in Europe, America, Asia, and the Middle East with little attention to African countries. Twitter and Facebook were the major online digital platforms that were investigated as a tool for digital diplomacy while there were no specific theories to study digital diplomacy. Finally, based on the study findings, the study suggests key areas of interest for future research on digital diplomacy.
Keywords: Digital diplomacy, Online digital platforms, Public interest, Diplomats, Ministry of foreign affairs, Embassy

Introduction

Currently, the online digital platform has become part of everybody's lives. Individuals and organizations are adopting these platforms to communicate, relate, stay in touch, and even promote different agendas in case of diplomatic missions. There has been a very comprehensive discussion on the term online digital platforms from various scholars. Therefore, this study uses the definition by Dijck, (2018) who defines online platforms as all those technologies that are embedded in digital devices. The devices here could be smartphones, tablets, watches, and others that use the internet. The article also borrows from (Ong'ong'a, 2020), who suggests that online digital platforms include all the applications that work seamlessly with the internet to allow users to receive, create, manipulate, and disseminate information. Common online platforms include social media like Facebook, Twitter, WeChat, Weibo, WhatsApp, and telegram (Harvey, 2014). These platforms are universal, free, and most internationally recognized and tend to reach a broader mass.

Recently, there has been an online digital platform disruption on diplomatic activities and processes as a whole. Scholarly works have proposed a plethora of definitions and terms about digital tools adopted by the diplomats. Moving to the usage of these platforms by foreign missions or affairs, many scholars have come up with different terms to support the adoption of the online platforms.

Scholars such as Adesina, (2017) and Kampf et al., (2015) argue that when diplomats use such a platform, they are practicing what is called digital diplomacy. Scholar such as Almuftah et al., (2016) and Al-Muftah et al., (2018) suggests that e-diplomacy is the term used to describe the overall usage of ICT tools for a diplomatic goal. Barrinha & Renard (2017) opine, that cyber-diplomacy occurs when foreign missions use the internet to propagate their country's agendas in their host countries. In scrutinizing the above arguments from the scholars, there is a universal continuum that can be reached from their discussions. The internet plays a significant part in defining online diplomacy, cyber diplomacy, digital diplomacy, e-diplomacy, ICT-diplomacy, and virtual diplomacy. Therefore, this study defines digital diplomacy as the overall utilization of internet tools and technology by diplomats and foreign affairs missions to achieve their country's agendas both locally and internationally.

Different countries set up departments or sectors within the states to deal with international issues. They also send individuals to represent their missions in foreign countries. The individuals act as the link to the nations, creating a bilateral relationship. Therefore, it is imperative to strengthen such ties and ensure that there is a free flow in communicating diplomatic mission statements. Such a task might include branding a country's image, promoting culture, and developing business ties for the benefit of states involved. Like any other work, they face challenges that need to be addressed to save their country's images (Melissen, 2020). The problems may include not only diplomatic issues but also communication issues. The complications that erupt from communication need to be resolved to ensure that they do not escalate into a significant problem that would destroy their relationship with foreign countries. To mitigate these challenges, some of them have set up Twitter handles, Facebook pages, WhatsApp groups, among others, to ensure that they communicate effectively. These range of platforms have enabled foreign affairs and diplomats to freely interact with foreign populations while establishing global virtual embassies and avoid the gatekeepers such as media.

The review of the current literature revealed that the field of digital diplomacy has significantly increased in the last five years. Most of the studies conducted in this area are majorly concerned with ICT integration, adoption, functions, and diplomacy tools with little focus on online digital platforms that have taken the world by storm in the 21st century. Therefore, the context and concept of digital diplomacy are still evolving with mixed definitions from different scholars and stakeholders, hence begging for further exploration in this area. Consequently, the study aims to document a comprehensive summary of the current literature in between 2015 to 2020 in relevance to online digital diplomacy. The study utilized a systematic literature review technique to expansively review the existing studies. Finally, the study classified the literature in terms of the study overview and focus, methodology, and theories used as well as the general content and context scope of the study.

Methodology

Khan et al., (2003) argues that for any successful systematic review, the study should identify relevant studies and appraise their quality while focusing to summarize their evidence by using the explicit methodology. Therefore, the systematic approach explicitly distinguishes it from the standard traditional method by evaluating and interpreting the available study in relevance to a particular research topic, question, or interest. Barbosa & Alves (2011) argue that the aim of a systematic literature review is to relatively present and evaluate a research topic with a sense of rigorous, trustworthy, and auditable methodology.

Consequently, the study used this approach to comprehensively summarize the relevant current research literature between 2015 to 2020 to the topic of the study, digital diplomacy, e-diplomacy, internet diplomacy, or social media diplomacy in this situation. The technique involved searching for the relevant literature in the academic database such as Scopus, Research gate, Google scholar, and other related search engines. Different scholars have used the approach in documenting and reviewing the literature on topics that relate to diplomacy (Almuftah et al., 2016; Munir & Purnomo, 2019).

For this study, the following diagram stipulates the stages of a systematic literature review.
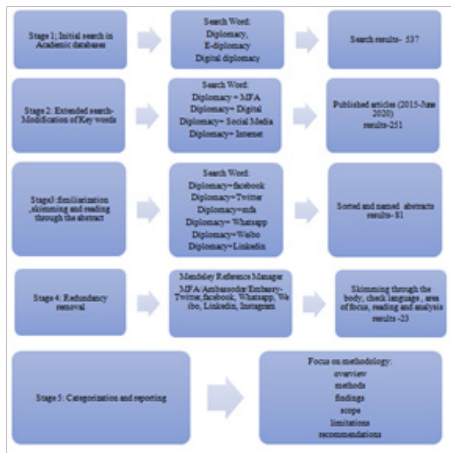
The study conducted an online electronic search on academic electronic databases indexed by Scopus.

Study Methodology

Stage 1 - Initial search in Academic databases: 537 results were identified by using the key terms: Digital diplomacy for the period between 2015-2020, that were relevant to the study and therefore selected for further review.

Stage 2 - Extended search and Modification of Keywords: after the screening in the first stage, it was found that 251 articles were published between 2015-2020 with the modified and combination of key words: (Diplomacy + foreign affairs; Diplomacy + social media; Diplomacy + internet).

Stage 3 - Familiarization, skimming, and reading through the abstract and the contents of the articles: Further, after checking, sorting, and naming abstract, articles that were evaluated to be irrelevant were removed. The sorted materials were 81 with a more narrowed down keywords related to the study topic. The keywords were in a combination of the following with diplomacy (Twitter, Facebook, Foreign affairs, WhatsApp, Weibo, and LinkedIn).

Stage 4 - Redundancy removal and Skimming: After skimming the body of the articles, it was found that some of the articles were written in different languages apart from English, which is the mode of communication for this study. Others had an emphasis on using the words diplomacy but focusing on other areas like culture, branding, and boarders.

The study included keywords such as embassies, ambassadors in combination with keywords in stage 3 above. Therefore, to be more specific, the study used Mendeley reference manager to read, sort out, and extract data. Mendeley is free online software for managing references (www.mendeley.com). As a result, from this strategy, 23 articles were relevant and used as the unit of analysis for this study.

Stage 5 - Categorization and reporting: finally, the table outlining the results of the findings was created describing the contents of the 23 published articles. The narrative in the table was based on the overview, methods, findings, scope, limitations, and recommendations offered by the research studies analyzed.

Findings

As indicated above, 23 studies out of a poll of 81 were relevant and useful for this study topic that related directly to digital diplomacy. The reviews are categorized into the methodology used, content and context scope, theory adopted by the scholars, and country of the study's focus. When dissecting the 23 studies, 15 of the studies used a qualitative approach by selecting case studies, document analysis and small in-depth interviews as data collection methods. The studies also used content analysis as a method to study social media and online digital platforms. Only one of the studies used social network analysis as a method, while the remaining seven studies used mixed-method.

Out of the 23 resources, 15 of the studies focused on studying digital diplomacy in the context of Twitter and Facebook, while the rest concentrated on websites and other social media platforms. Most of the studies conducted in the digital diplomacy thematic area were from Europe, North America, Australia, and Asia. Few studies focused on African countries but only concentrated on Kenya, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Somalia. Finally, only five studies used theories to support their findings. The theory included the dialogic framework of Kent and Taylor. The communicative framework, communicative action theory, new media theory, agenda-setting, and framing theory. The categorization table below shows the main findings of the study by focusing on each analyzed study:

Table 1: Categorization Table

1	Kampf et al., (2015) focused on whether the Ministry of foreign affairs uses social media in its diplomatic missions. The study aimed to find out how dialogic frameworks of Kent and Taylor are adopted. The scholars selected Twitter and Facebook and performed a content analysis of those social media for eleven countries such as (UK, US, South Korea, Somalia, Rwanda, Kenya, Poland, Ethiopia, Japan, Israel, and India). The six weeks analysis showed that the dialogic communication and engagement in these social media by foreign affairs Ministry was rare. When it happened, it focused on specific diplomatic issues. The contents published were formal communications targeting foreign populations. Their study revealed that although these foreign ministries used these social media, they still failed to have a two-way conversation with the public. The study recommends for the formulation of guidelines on offering training to social media engagements within MFAs.
2	Strauß et al., (2015) have considered using the mixed method by combining manual content and automated network analysis to investigate the extent of communication strategies used by four western countries (Sweden, US, Netherland, and the UK) on Twitter in GCC countries. The scholars conducted a study in two-months and analyzed 4438 tweets and found that even though the ambassadors and their embassies were active on Twitter, they often did not respond and interact with their social media followers. They recommend that embassies adapt a six-effective communicative framework: interaction, information relevance, personalized communication, transparency, broader communication network, and positive sentiments. Besides, they advocate that embassies should emphasize on two-way interactive communication.
3	Cercel & Saftescu, (2015) have tried to conceptualize the concepts of ICT integration in the MFAs. The scholars found that ICTs were majorly used to transform the sharing of information and attract international audiences of Belgium and Romanian MFAs. The study used a case study and interviews. The scholars established that the activities of the MFAs in questions are blended between offline and online. Further, the study exposed that Facebook and Twitter were the primary online platforms utilized by these foreign affairs ministries. Twitter communication was mainly about political events, policies with international impact, or minister's activities that targeted professionals and experts. At the same time, Facebook was used by the MFAs for public diplomacy actions to general audiences. Also, the scholars revealed that Romanian diplomats monitored and provided responses to the user's comments.
4	In an exhaustive study, Hoffmann, (2015) has explored Twitter's use as a social media on how it can facilitate interstate dialogue. The scholar examined Twitter communication during the difficult high-level diplomatic interaction on P5+1 nuclear negotiation between the United States and Iran. The study used content analysis and examined tweets from different actors in this negotiation period between 2013-2015. He found out that Iranian state representatives publicly relayed on social media to reach out to their US counterparts foregoing the traditional formal channel of communication. The study recommends that Twitter offers a platform for dialogue in the situation where physical diplomacy is problematic to achieve or is limited. Therefore, the scholar gives suggestions to examine the effectiveness of online platforms in the development of personal trust among individual diplomats.
5	Lee et al., (2015) have critically assessed the factors that affect the level of interactivity on 50 MFAs websites. The scholars randomly picked the 50 nation-states' sites and performed a content analysis basing on the theory of communicative action theory. The study found that the economic development level was a sole significant factor that affected the level of interactivity in the digital platforms. The more developed economies employed interactive communication and fostered relationships with foreign publics than the less developed ones. Further, their study recommends a potential digital divide in the implementation of digital diplomacy on the web. In conclusion, the authors posited that the narratives that appeared on the web sites were more egocentric and tended to lean towards economic interests. The story lacked interactive dialogue and mutual exchange but exposed the public to the propaganda information and strategic communication.

6	Manor, (2016) has examined the definition and challenges that MFA face in practicing digital diplomacy at length. The scholar defines digital diplomacy as a conceptual shift in diplomacy, which emphasizes two-way interaction with foreign populations through various technologies. Further, the study points out that MFA technological shift made diplomats adopt such kinds of skills to share information, and because the news organization and the journalists were using these tools. Therefore, the study suggests that digital diplomacy is also social media diplomacy. Most of the practice is done online using applications like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, which enable diplomats to create relationships and interact with the online communities. The author postulates that diplomats' migration to the online platforms has put them in verbal attacks and hate speech, hence causing online controversy. The study advocates that for the MFA's to maintain an online presence, they must create interactive content and follow journalists online. Finally, the scholar argues that the size of MFA's demand for substantive resources to implement digital diplomacy successfully.
7	Pelling, (2016) has discussed the role of digital diplomacy in the outreach campaign by the Swedish MFA. The study indicated that the Swedish embassies were able to develop content and sensitized individuals on political issues that were of priority in line with the project Midwives4all. Further, the scholar points out that digital diplomacy offered both physical and mediated conversation on the need for good-quality maternity care by women. Besides, the author suggests that public diplomacy is an ordinary balance or alternatives to nation-to-nation diplomacy. In contrast, foreign services strategies should be strengthened and integrated into all the policies related areas. The scholar endorses that MFA ensures that there is access to a modern online digital environment for practical communication activities.
8	In an empirical study by Kurbalija, (2017) looked into how Asian-Europe diplomats view the importance of online digital facilitation connection and cooperation in ensuring cybersecurity. The scholar adopted a qualitative method by reviewing literature from reports, statistics, and literacy sources and by examining Diplo Foundation policies and the function of the online technologies in diplomacy. The study revealed that how diplomats' blogged raised concerns about their personal views and institutional expression on the online platforms, which created conflict with the association of individual elements in blogging. The author recommends that the Asian-Europe diplomat use digital technologies to foster interdependence to improve relations and reduce coercion in solving conflicts. He further asserts the two continents should harmonize their policies and regulatory framework to increase the digital connectivity. Lastly, the study suggests that the diplomat should use online platforms efficiently to build comprehension and minimize risks that come with the digital platforms.
9	Adesina, (2017) conducted a content analysis by exploring foreign policy in digital diplomacy. Her research aimed to assess how countries conceptualize digital diplomacy in pursuing their different diplomatic objectives. The study looked at diplomacy through the soft power perspective. The findings from her study revealed that digital diplomacy is intertwined with face-to-face diplomacy, but they co-exist and complement each other. She further claims that the internet has altered and transformed the general diplomatic communication and practice. Consequently, she contends that Facebook and Twitter have bypassed the state and media filters and provided citizens with access to diplomatic missions and foreign audiences to achieve diplomatic objectives. Lastly, she notes that African countries are slowly embracing digital diplomacy to assist them in propagating their policies to international and domestic audiences.
10	The article by Melissen & de Keulenaar, (2017) has discussed how the new media has impacted digital diplomacy. The scholars conducted a qualitative study and aimed to show how South Korea practices digital diplomacy by harmonizing new media theory. The authors argue that the theory of new media backs the analysis of an online environment where the diplomats communicate while articulating digital technology politics. The scholars postulate that MFAs should embrace the genesis of technology, which currently does not separate substance from techniques and language from the instrument. Besides, they argue that digital diplomacy constitutes an engagement with information, relation, and culture. Therefore, the diplomats should realize that they are systematized in software like algorithms that may not favor any one. The study recommends that MFAs that are not able to develop software are disadvantaged since diplomatic missions are critical in real-life that works with the software to achieve their strategic goals. Finally, the scholar advises that MFAs should strive to constitute digital technologies policies and practices that can be operationalized.

11	In South Korea, Robertson, (2018) has examined public diplomacy within the context of organizational culture and the adoption of digital diplomacy. The scholar employed a case method and studied South Korea on the disruptiveness of technology on digital diplomacy. The scholar conducted interviews as a data generation technique with the MFAs. The finding from the study indicated that individual elitism reduced the organization's willingness to be supported and advised as well as the culture which discouraged diplomats' use of social media in taking up risks for fear of making mistakes. The scholar recommends that for the adoption of digital diplomacy, the MFAs should strengthen their infrastructure,hardware and adjust to foreign policy management and organization capacity challenges. Further, the study suggests the MFAs should invest in education and personal development in digital diplomacy and also to establish best practice and innovation office.
12	The study of Šimunjak & Caliandro, (2019) have explored how political actors like President Trump use of Twitter in regards to diplomacy. The study looked at diplomacy in the lens of communication while utilizing a qualitative approach, exploratory and digital method. The analysis of a subset of 91 tweets from a dataset of (119,229 tweets) in March 2017 concluded that the language used by Trump on Twitter did not display the characteristics of a diplomatic language. Furthermore, their study revealed that the style of communication was disruptive to the general traditional diplomacy codes. The scholars found that even though the tweets directed to the countries were unfriendly, the countries never used negative, disrespectful, and ineffectual dialectal but stayed ambiguous in responding to the Trump tweets. Finally, the scholars suggest the exploration of Twitter diplomacy from the diplomats to understand why they engage in Twitter.
13	Manor & Crilley, (2019) have conceptualized the mediatization of Israeli Ministry of foreign affairs in the 2014 Gaza war. The scholars utilized a case study as a method and using framing analysis, analyzed 792 tweets that were broadcasted by MFA of Israel from June, 2014, to August, 2014. This study aimed to discover how Israeli Ministry of foreign affairs constructed frames so that online audiences could comprehend the unfolding conflict and the war. The study revealed that MFAs have continued to operate in a complex media ecology that demands them to use new platforms, citizen journalism, real-time event coverage, and attracting audiences using modern methods. Also, from the framing analysis, the study found that Israel MFA adopted the logic of new media actors by disseminating messages directly to the online audiences. In conclusion, the research indicates that MFA mediatization has moved from the traditional broadcasting model to a real-time model that emphasizes on hybrid media system.
14	Spry, (2018) conducted an empirical study on Facebook pages of 8 countries (The United Kingdom, United States, Japan, India, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and Israel) published by the diplomatic missions of 22 host nations. The study utilized a multi-stage mixed-method approach and used both quantitative and qualitative content data. The scholar extracts data from 161 pages using Netvizz. This study aimed to find out the nexus between social media and diplomacy. The findings from content analyzed on Facebook indicated a variation in the function and of the posts. The scholar also exposed that social media diplomacy is only applicable to small and close nations who are weak in terms of both political and or geographical. Finally, the scholar concludes that host nations rely on Facebook of the vast, wealthier country in matters of development funds, job opportunities, and scholarship for higher education.
15	Al-Muftah et al., (2018) have investigated the factors that influence the operationalization of digital diplomacy. The authors used a case study method and qualitative approach by adopting both Interpretive Structural Modeling and interviewing respondents responsible for e-diplomacy in the UK, USA, and Qatar. Their study aimed to assess the inter-organizational and intra-organization use of online diplomacy within embassies and MFAs. The authors highlighted that digital platforms had the ability to simplification of diplomatic managerial process by initiating a face-to-face interaction environment. Their investigation revealed that the obstacles that faced the implementation of e-diplomacy were confidentiality and privacy of data shared on the online platforms. Besides, economic factors affected the implementation of e-diplomacy since some of the MFs, and embassies had poor economic policies that affected diplomats' ability to perform their work. Finally, the scholars pointed out that for effective implementation of e-diplomacy, essential variables such as change management, personal development, and resource were major factors.

16	Anzera et al., (2019) have evaluated the content obtained from MFAs of Israel, USA, Sweden, and France through twitter posts in a period of three months from September 1st, 2015 to November 30th, 2015. Their study used thematic content analysis to investigate the process of information diffusion on digital platforms by identifying micro and macro-issues and categories. Their research revealed that sovereign states developed self-representations frames to commercialize and brand their tradition to support and promote their policy and identity. Finally, the scholars contend that online content has initiated some regularity in branding vocation of autobiographies.
17	Sevin & Manor, (2019) have investigated the movement of diplomatic networks to online platforms by analyzing twitter through mediatization. Their study presented how physical diplomatic structures are integrated into digital platforms. The scholars used social network analysis and sampled 130 countries' digital systems and embassies from November 2015 to January 2016 to discover the contrast and similarities of network structures. The study revealed that most countries had a less significant twitter network compared to their offline diplomatic presence. Their research also showed that the offline structures and online systems were similar, hence stipulating that the countries have diplomatic relations within the same group of countries. Finally, the scholars suggested that Twitter showed an extension of traditional diplomatic outreach. Hence, diplomats were hesitant to use online platforms for diplomatic activities.
18	Rashica, (2019) has focused on the classification of risks and benefits of digital diplomacy. The scholar used a qualitative content methodology by analyzing different documents and materials. The finding from the study revealed that the primary goal of digital diplomacy included information, knowledge management, and public diplomacy. She further asserts that, majorly, digital diplomacy uses the online digital platforms to strengthen the diplomatic relations between states. The scholar points out that online platform, such as, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Snapchat, Periscope, and Instagram, have emerged to be critical communicative instruments for diplomats. Besides, she proposes 25 points for effective implementation of digital diplomacy and classifies them into six sections, which include; training, hidden resources, maximizing of knowledge, organization, and management, time, security, content, context, and support for the diplomats who are using digital platforms. Lastly, the scholar argues that digital diplomacy favors mostly small states to achieve its mission in the international arena. Digitalization cannot be separated from cybercrime. Hence the need for smart power to maximize the benefits of digitalization through the empowerment of policies that protect online insecurities.
19	In an exhaustive study, Adler-Nissen & Drieschova, (2019) have explored how digital technologies afford the immediacy, share-ability, and visualization of information in temporary shaping power dynamics of international negotiation. The scholars adopted ethnography methodology and integrated participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis in the council of Ministers in the European Union's member states. The scholars argue that diplomats transact with issues of national interests. In some instances, the characteristics of diplomacy that adopt track-change may have an effect on the diplomat not managing negotiation and hence adapt to legislations that were unwarranted. Their study revealed that track change diplomacy had eased complicated negotiation by pushing the mediation in a particular direction with unexpected consequences. The scholars posit that technology shapes international negotiation; therefore, it should be inductively analyzed on how the users employ technology in a specific context. The study recommends that the main characteristic of track-change diplomacy includes shared authorship, visualizing a specific systematized policy, and a sense of speed in diffusion of texts.
20	Tucker Yépez et al., (2019) have analyzed both digital diplomacy and new civil society in the context of internet governance. The scholars used a mixed-method and utilized survey and nine expert interviews as data generation techniques on 10th October 2016. Their study revealed that ICTs were used by e-societies to gain strength in becoming principal decision-making actors. Their study found that the virtual consulate of the Ecuador Foreign affairs Ministry was not conceived to replace the physical embassy but complement the consular activities. The authors also indicated that Ecuador, as one of the developing countries, lacked defined policies in the issues of cybersecurity.

21	The study of Tsvetkova et al., (2020) has discussed new strategies imperatives, approaches, and concepts introduced during 2009-2016 by the Obama administration. The scholars applied both the discourse and document analysis to examine the documents on the essence of public diplomacy during Obama's tenure. The study also applied statistical and content analysis to evaluate US diplomacy in social media activities. Their research revealed that the Obama administration used the staff of companies like Facebook, Twitter, and Google to offer training to activists and bloggers, which highlighted the affluence of social media diplomacy. The scholars also argued that digital diplomacy had provided US and adversaries space via Twitter and Facebook to exercise influence in other nations. Finally, the study indicated that Obama used online technologies to engage with common people directly, therefore, going against the regulations by the local governments that are dictatorial that transformed a path of diplomacy around the globe.
22	Manor & Segev, (2020) have identified the strategies that diplomats can adopt to improve their networked significance among their colleagues on Twitter. Their study aimed to address the concept of mobility in social media through the analysis of MFAs Twitter account networks of 52 UN missions in New York and 72 MFAs for a period of May 2014; November 2015 and October 2016. The scholars sampled nations from (Asia, Europe, Africa, Oceania, and North America) and adopted the agenda-setting and frame theory to study the diplomat's capability to effect diplomat's discussion. The scholars revealed that the institutions of diplomacy regularly trail each other in social media, and significant means never warrant or restrict influence in case of social media mobility. The study recommended the evaluation of the centrality of MFAs to Twitter networks of their peer and training actors in doing analyses on social media. Finally, the scholars urge the MFAs to adopt tactics and digital strategies to increase mobility in social media by developing information that is relevant and generates real-time online content that triggers discussions on issues of mutual interest to the local diplomatic community.
23	A study by Melissen, (2020) discussed the communicative challenge that consular diplomacy faces in the digital age by analyzing consular policies and practices. The author urged that the consular divisions and MFAs have to gain a greater comprehension of their country's communicating behavior by upholding management capacity. The study suggests that MFA's should not market consular services while framing citizens as customers since this strategy goes against MFA's interests. The article recommends the formation of popular social networks by MFA's by increasing openness and breaking the self-contained long tradition to adapt foreign service culture. Therefore, she posits that diplomats should be consistent in adopting a more citizen-centric approach of communicating in their consular services, which makes them face challenges of becoming digital immature.

Discussion

The study sought to find out online digital diplomacy by looking at research articles published in academic journals. The study shows that there is a mixed definition of the ideology of digital diplomacy. Different scholars have defined digital diplomacy based on the content and context. Other scholars have gone further to relate digital diplomacy with the country/ nation/ state adoption of various technologies to enhance their agendas regarding foreign and domestic diplomacy. Therefore, the study opines that the concept of digital diplomacy is still in its embryonic stages; hence there is no general agreeable definition. Consequently, above finding is supported by the results from (Kampf et al., 2015; Manor & Segev, 2020) who indicated the digital diplomacy is still a growing field in different nations.

In regards to the methodology, most of the researches that were conducted on digital diplomacy were skewed towards qualitative research as the principal method. Most of the studies are utilized a qualitative content analysis. They examined policies, websites, literary materials, as well as crawling for contents online. It is important to note that eighteen studies out of the twenty-three studies reviewed were qualitative. The authors of these studies also employed a case method to observe different MFAs and conducted in-depth interviews. The remaining studies were mixed-method studies. The scholars who used mixed methodologies in their studies focused on quantifying the contents of social media. It is interesting to point out that scholars also adopted social media analysis to conduct digital diplomacy study. Nevertheless, the above finding partially

supports Almuftah et al., (2016) conclusions that most studies done in digital diplomacy focus on qualitative methodology.

The theory is a hypothesis that has been tested for long and proved that it could hold water. The finding from this study revealed that there is no specific theory that was used to study digital diplomacy. Different scholars used different theories even though they were investigating the same concept in different study environments. Therefore, the study exposed that the conventional theories used in studying digital diplomacy included, agenda setting, framing theory, information diffusion, and communicative action theory. Further, the study confirmed that the actor's network theory and other models like interpretive structural models were used to examine various facets of digital diplomacy. Thus, the study is aligned with the findings of (Lee et al., 2015; Manor & Crilley, 2018, 2019) that digital diplomacy could be studied using different communication studies theories.

The study also disclosed the scope of examining digital diplomacy is shifting. In regards to content scope, the research indicates that most of the studies done in this field focused on Twitter and Facebook as online digital platforms. Other studies have also looked at social media such as YouTube, LinkedIn, snapchat, and Instagram utilization by the MFAs and diplomats. Although the situation of digital diplomacy is in the ambit of social media and ICTs, the study exposed that most of the study done on this area targeted twitter. In the context scope, few studies have diverted from the routine investigation of digital diplomacy in either MFAs or embassies. The study shows that only a single study out of the twenty-three reviews focused on checking how digital diplomacy is conducted to promote domestic engagement. For instance, the study conducted by (Pelling, 2016) showed the role of digital diplomacy in the outreach campaign within the local context in Sweden.

Most of the studies done on digital diplomacy were in countries of Europe and America with few from Asia and the Middle East. The study also revealed that there are limited published empirical research articles that concern with digital diplomacy with the African countries focus. For instance, the

study by Kampf et al., (2015) looked at a few samples of African countries like Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Rwanda. The study only focused on examining social media. Still, it failed to conduct empirical research by involving participants to find their views on the role of social media in promoting MFAs activities in and outside their countries. Therefore, the study narrowly supports the review done by (Al-Muftah et al., 2018; Almuftah et al., 2016) that most of the digital diplomacy study focused on Europe and America, with few conducted in Asia and the Middle East. Following the above argument, it can be noted that studies have focused on big nations like the UK, the US, and others alike, leaving out smaller countries but arguing that digital diplomacy works well with the states, which are small geographically and MFAs which have tiny structures and resources.

Finally, the study has exposed that when investigating digital diplomacy, technical tools are useful in mining data from the digital social media platforms. Data from such platforms should be supported by empirical studies since there has been a rise in bots shaping online conversations. Therefore, this calls for an integrated method that will ensure that data is triangulated for adequate reliability and dependability of the study. Thus, mixed methodology with the pragmatic paradigm is proposed for digital diplomacy studies but bearing in mind the context and content scope of the study. Besides, the study indicated that the significant findings of MFAs using digital platforms were to publish formal information targeting their audiences, and the activities of the ambassadors on social media did not have an effect on the social media followers. MFAs used digital platforms such as twitter to advance their policies and political agenda to foreign professionals and experts, limiting the interaction with the domestic individuals in their countries.

Study Contribution to Digital Diplomacy Discourse

This study aims to provide a comprehensive summary of studies conducted on digital diplomacy recently. Based on the literature reviewed, it is imperative to note that the digital diplomacy field is at its embryonic stage with minimal studies hence the contribution of this study from this end.

Consequently, this study is among the few studies that contribute to a systematic review of digital diplomacy which has become an area of public interest. In terms of looking at the definition of the digital diplomacy, methodologies used, theories and models in studying digital diplomacy, country of focus as well the scope in terms of content and context while giving recommendations basing from the literature reviewed to the adoption of pragmatic paradigm in dealing with digital diplomacy studies among others. The systematic review is vital to scholars interested in digital diplomacy aspects by providing them with a current useful reference, knowledge, and suggestions on such research. The findings presented in the categorization table offer the first step for scholars who wish to dive into this promising field. In conclusion, this study shall form part of the Ph.D. study in the literature review section in which the research will focus on how diplomatic institutions and diplomats overcome obstacles while utilizing online digital platforms in the overall implementation of digital diplomacy to achieve their strategic goals.

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