Digital Diplomacy and Africa Geopolitics in the Digital Age

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Abstract

African states are increasingly adopting digital diplomacy to enhance their global visibility and influence; however, existing scholarship offers only fragmented accounts of these efforts and does not adequately explain how Africa's digital engagement contributes to its geopolitical positioning. This study addresses this gap by examining how African states and regional institutions deploy digital tools to shape diplomatic identities, articulate emerging digital norms, and negotiate influence within the evolving global digital order. Drawing on a qualitative research design, the study analyses policy documents, African Union frameworks, national cybersecurity and digital governance strategies, official social-media communications, and reports from international organisations. Empirical evidence reveals that Africa's digital diplomacy is becoming increasingly structured and purposeful. The African Union's use of virtual diplomatic platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic, Kenya's development of a National Cybersecurity Strategy, and Nigeria's expanded use of digital communication collectively demonstrate Africa's efforts to project identity, assert digital sovereignty, and participate in global norm-setting. Findings further show that Africa faces significant challenges—including technological dependence, cybersecurity vulnerabilities, and internet shutdowns—that constrain its digital influence. Nonetheless, emerging opportunities exist, particularly in the creative economy and in continental initiatives aimed at harmonising digital governance. The study concludes that Afro-digital diplomacy is evolving into a strategic tool through which African states seek to enhance geopolitical relevance, challenge longstanding marginalisation, and shape global digital governance. It recommends strengthening indigenous digital infrastructure, enhancing cybersecurity cooperation, improving regional policy harmonisation, and expanding Africa's presence in global digital policy forums to consolidate gains and advance the continent's digital sovereignty.

Keywords: Afro-digital diplomacy, geopolitics, digital diplomacy, cybersecurity, digital infrastructure

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Introduction

The rapid integration of digital technologies into global politics has transformed traditional diplomatic practices and redefined how states interact, project influence, and negotiate international norms. Digital diplomacy also referred to as e-diplomacy or cyber diplomacy, has emerged as a core instrument through which states exercise soft power, shape global narratives, and engage transnational publics. For African countries, historically marginalized within international politics, the digital turn presents new avenues for visibility, agenda-setting, and participation in global governance. African governments increasingly deploy digital tools such as social media, virtual summits, online negotiation platforms, and digital public diplomacy campaigns to enhance foreign policy communication, broaden international engagement, and respond to rapidly evolving geopolitical dynamics. This strategic use of digital platforms, conceptualized by Bjola and Holmes (2015) as Afro-Digital Diplomacy, marks a significant shift in Africa's foreign policy behaviour and its attempts to reassert agency in global affairs. Empirical developments across the continent reflect a growing institutionalisation of digital diplomacy. Africa's engagement with global digital governance frameworks, regional digital integration initiatives, and cross-border technological partnerships demonstrates increasing diplomatic sophistication.

A prominent example is China's Digital Silk Road, whose investments in fibre-optic networks, smart-city infrastructure, cloud computing systems, and satellite technologies have amplified Africa's digital connectivity. While these investments have provided critical infrastructure, scholars caution that dependence on Chinese and Western technology firms raises concerns about digital sovereignty, cybersecurity, data governance, and long-term strategic autonomy (Feldstein, 2021). These debates underscore an emerging tension in Africa's digital diplomacy: the simultaneous expansion of digital capability and vulnerability to external control. Reportage on data protection concerns, infrastructural surveillance risks, and the politics of technological dependency further highlights this dilemma (The Guardian, 2025). At the same time, African governments confront internal constraints that shape the credibility and effectiveness of digital diplomacy. One of the most pressing challenges is the rising incidence of internet shutdowns, often implemented during elections, protests, or periods of political tension. These disruptions not only suppress civic expression but also undermine Africa's external diplomatic posture by restricting information flows and weakening international confidence in governance (Nyabola, 2018). Another significant challenge is the proliferation of digital misinformation, which has become a recurrent feature of African elections. Cases such as Ghana's 2024 fact-checking mobilisation demonstrate both the scale of digital threats and the continent's growing institutional response to safeguarding electoral integrity and sustaining credible digital engagement (El País, 2024).

Technological advancements, including artificial intelligence, further complicate the landscape of Afro-Digital Diplomacy. AI holds potential to transform African governance, healthcare, agriculture, and public administration, thereby strengthening the continent's soft power and policy effectiveness. However, infrastructural deficits, limited AI expertise, fragmented regulatory frameworks, and high implementation costs continue to hinder Africa's

capacity to integrate AI into its diplomatic architecture (Financial Times, 2025). The resulting asymmetry between technological aspiration and capability has become a central theme in policy discussions on Africa's digital future. Against this background, African states are increasingly recognising the need for a coordinated diplomatic posture that protects digital sovereignty, advances regional integration, and strengthens participation in global digital rule-making. The African Union's ongoing digital transformation agenda highlights the continent's broader foreign policy interest in shaping digital governance norms, safeguarding data autonomy, and leveraging technology for economic and geopolitical competitiveness. Digital diplomacy therefore constitutes not only a practical tool for international engagement but also a strategic pathway through which African states seek to redefine their global identity, assert normative influence, and address structural inequalities in the international system.

This study examines the evolving landscape of Afro-Digital Diplomacy by analysing its conceptual foundations, empirical manifestations, and strategic implications for Africa's geopolitical influence. It explores how African states have leveraged digital tools to advance foreign policy objectives, the opportunities created by digital transformation, and the persistent constraints that shape Africa's capacity to function effectively within the emerging digital world order.

Review of Relevant Literature

The digital revolution has significantly changed diplomatic practice in the world, whereby we have, in international relations, new paradigms. The author situates the efforts surrounding cyberspace diplomacy within the previous digital diplomacy literature, the real geopolitical implications of cyberspace, and the current African role in the global digital landscape using recent and relevant references.

Digital Diplomacy: Concepts and Evolution

Digital diplomacy has emerged as one of the most transformative developments in contemporary international relations, fundamentally reshaping how states communicate, negotiate, and project influence. Early scholarship conceptualized digital diplomacy as the use of digital tools, websites, email, and later, social media, to support traditional diplomatic activities (Bjola & Holmes, 2015). Over time, this understanding expanded to encompass a broader set of practices that enable states to participate in international politics through new channels of engagement made possible by the digital age. According to Manor (2019), digital diplomacy marks a decisive break from the closed and highly bureaucratic nature of classical diplomacy, allowing governments to interact directly with foreign publics rather than relying solely on intermediaries such as journalists, embassies, or multilateral institutions. This shift has introduced unprecedented levels of transparency and public scrutiny into diplomatic processes. Scholars such as Gilboa (2020) argue that digital diplomacy represents a new form of public diplomacy 2.0, where states strategically use online platforms to frame narratives, influence opinion, and reinforce national image.

The proliferation of social media has accelerated this transformation. Diplomats, foreign ministries, and heads of state now maintain active digital presences on platforms such as

Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp. These platforms have become integral to foreign policy communication, crisis response, and soft power projection. Adesina (2021) observes that African governments, in particular, have increasingly adopted Twitter as a tool for real-time communication with domestic and international audiences, reflecting both the democratization of communication and the growing salience of digital engagement in African foreign policy. This trend aligns with global patterns: research by Pamment (2022) and Riordan (2019) highlights that digital diplomacy is now embedded in most foreign ministries worldwide, reshaping how states mobilize support, counter misinformation, and coordinate international action. Digital diplomacy has also transformed the structure of international politics. Scholars point out that digital technologies have created a networked diplomatic environment in which non-state actors, technology companies, civil society groups, and individual citizens play increasingly influential roles (Nye, 2017). Multinational platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Meta, and Google now mediate diplomatic communication, raising new questions about the privatization of global political space and the governance of digital communication infrastructures.

Furthermore, digital diplomacy has become intertwined with broader geopolitical competition. Manor (2021) and Westcott (2020) argue that digital influence is now an important component of national power, with states using digital tools to shape global narratives, advance ideological agendas, and counter rivals' influence online. The evolution of cyber negotiations, online summits, digital multilateralism, and virtual diplomacy during the COVID-19 pandemic has further entrenched digital tools as indispensable instruments of foreign policy. While the literature widely recognizes the transformative impact of digital diplomacy, it also reveals tensions and challenges. Scholars warn that digital diplomacy introduces vulnerabilities such as cybersecurity risks, online harassment of diplomats, misinformation campaigns, and the increasing dominance of technology corporations in political communication (Feldstein, 2021). These concerns are especially relevant for developing regions like Africa, where digital infrastructure gaps and dependence on foreign technology providers can limit the effectiveness and autonomy of digital diplomatic strategies. In sum, the evolution of digital diplomacy reflects a global shift toward technologically mediated international relations. The literature consistently emphasizes that digital diplomacy is no longer optional but has become an essential component of statecraft, one that shapes how states navigate global politics, assert sovereignty, and influence international norms.

Geopolitics in the Digital Age

The rise of digital technologies has reshaped the architecture of global geopolitics, transforming how power is produced, projected, and contested in the 21st century. Traditional conceptions of geopolitics, once dominated by territory, military strength, and natural resources, now increasingly incorporate digital infrastructure, cyber capabilities, data flows, and algorithmic influence as central elements of state power. Scholars argue that cyberspace has become a new domain of international competition, where states seek to assert authority, secure strategic advantages, and shape global norms (Nye, 2017; Kello, 2018). Nye's notion of "cyber power" emphasizes that control over digital infrastructure, information flows, and technological innovation now constitute critical determinants of national influence, with the

capacity to strengthen or undermine a state's geopolitical standing. In this emerging order, digital sovereignty has become a defining issue. The concept refers to a state's ability to control its digital infrastructure, safeguard its data, regulate foreign technologies, and exercise authority over its cyberspace. Scholars note that states increasingly pursue digital sovereignty as a response to the geopolitical implications of dependence on foreign technology providers and the risks associated with external surveillance, digital espionage, and cyber vulnerabilities (Bradshaw & DeNardis, 2022). Cyber sovereignty debates have intensified as governments recognize that digital infrastructures, undersea cables, data centres, satellite networks, artificial intelligence systems, are not politically neutral, but are embedded in global power rivalries.

Africa's position within this digital geopolitical landscape has been a subject of growing scholarly concern. Tettey (2020) and Moyo (2020) highlight the phenomenon of digital colonialism, which describes the concentration of digital power in the hands of foreign technology corporations that dominate Africa's digital economy. These firms, predominantly from China, the United States, and Europe, control key infrastructures such as fibre-optic cables, cloud services, surveillance technologies, operating systems, and online platforms. Their dominance raises serious questions about privacy, data extraction, economic dependency, and Africa's long-term technological autonomy. Scholars warn that this dependence reproduces historical patterns of unequal exchange, allowing external actors to shape the continent's digital governance and influence political processes. China's expanding technological footprint in Africa, especially through the Digital Silk Road, has been widely discussed in geopolitical literature. While Chinese investments in telecommunications, smart city technologies, and digital infrastructure have expanded connectivity, they also position China as a central gatekeeper of Africa's digital future. Western powers, meanwhile, compete through cloud service providers, cybersecurity firms, satellite internet systems, and digital governance partnerships, illustrating that Africa has become a critical arena for global digital rivalry. These dynamics align with arguments by Deibert (2020) that digital infrastructures have become instruments of geopolitical influence, where states embed strategic interests within the technologies they export.

Beyond infrastructure, the geopolitical contest also manifests in battles over digital regulation and global norm-setting. International forums such as the UN Open-Ended Working Group on Cybersecurity, the Internet Governance Forum, and the World Summit on the Information Society have become arenas where major powers compete to shape global rules on data governance, surveillance, security, and digital trade. Scholars argue that low-income regions, including Africa, remain underrepresented in these processes, limiting their voice in shaping global digital norms and reinforcing structural inequalities in the emerging digital world order (Gagliardone, 2019). Another dimension of digital geopolitics concerns the weaponisation of information. The spread of misinformation, disinformation campaigns, and digital propaganda has become a common feature of global political competition. As several studies note, information operations by foreign actors, political elites, and extremist networks have destabilised electoral processes, amplified social divisions, and undermined trust in institutions across the continent. These dynamics illustrate how digital technologies have expanded the battlefield of geopolitical influence from physical territories into virtual spaces.

In this evolving context, Africa faces both strategic opportunities and profound vulnerabilities. The continent's growing digital population provides a large, youthful market

and a significant potential source of soft power. At the same time, weak digital infrastructure, limited cybersecurity capacity, and heavy dependence on external technology actors constrain Africa's ability to shape digital norms or compete effectively in digital geopolitics. While existing literature provides valuable insights into these dynamics, gaps remain in understanding how African states strategically leverage digital diplomacy to navigate these geopolitical challenges and assert influence within global digital governance.

Africa's Digital Transformation and Diplomatic Engagement

Africa's digital transformation has accelerated over the past decade, reshaping not only domestic governance and economic activity but also the continent's diplomatic posture in the international system. The rapid expansion of mobile connectivity, increasing internet penetration, and growing investment in digital infrastructure have created new political and diplomatic opportunities across the continent. The African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy (2020–2030) represents the most comprehensive continental blueprint for leveraging digital technologies to enhance Africa's global competitiveness, strengthen regional integration, and position African states as active participants in global digital governance. The strategy underscores a recognition among African policymakers that digital ecosystems are becoming central to development, security, and foreign policy agendas. Scholars highlight that Africa's engagement with digital diplomacy has emerged from a broader continental desire to overcome historical marginalization in international politics. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) observes, African states increasingly deploy digital platforms to project visibility in global forums, engage diasporic communities, promote cultural diplomacy, and assert agency in international debates often dominated by more technologically advanced states. This growing digital presence has created opportunities for African governments to shape global narratives, enhance soft power, and reposition themselves within the international hierarchy.

Empirical research offers notable examples of African digital diplomacy in practice. Kenya is frequently cited as a continental leader, using digital platforms to brand itself as a regional technology hub and attract substantial foreign investment into its growing digital economy. Kenya's online diplomatic engagements, combined with its international promotion of innovations such as M-Pesa, have strengthened international partnerships and elevated its geopolitical significance in East Africa. Similarly, countries like Rwanda, Ghana, Senegal, and Nigeria have developed digital initiatives aimed at boosting national image, promoting technological innovation, and participating more actively in global digital negotiations (Adesina, 2021).

Beyond individual states, regional digital initiatives have become central to Africa's diplomatic engagement. The Smart Africa Alliance, launched in 2013, now includes over 30 African countries collaborating to harmonize digital policies, strengthen cyber infrastructure, and build interoperable digital markets. Chavula (2022) argues that such regional efforts are critical for Africa's collective bargaining power within the global digital economy. They enable African states to coordinate positions in international negotiations on data governance, digital trade, and internet regulation, thereby reducing the fragmentation that has historically

weakened Africa's diplomatic influence. This expanding digital landscape has also opened new channels for Africa's engagement with external partners. International actors such as China, the European Union, and the United States increasingly court African governments through digital infrastructure investments, cybersecurity partnerships, capacity-building programmes, and AI development initiatives. These interactions, however, illustrate the complex geopolitics embedded within Africa's digital transformation. Scholars warn that Africa's dependence on external technology providers may compromise long-term digital sovereignty and expose the continent to geopolitical pressures that influence diplomatic decision-making (Feldstein, 2021).

Despite these developments, the academic literature remains fragmented in its analysis of the continent's digital diplomacy. Many studies examine specific countries or isolated initiatives, while fewer offer integrative accounts of how Africa's digital transformation is reshaping its global diplomatic identity. Moreover, although scholars recognize Africa's growing digital footprint, the extent to which digital tools have translated into sustained geopolitical influence remains underexplored. This gap becomes particularly evident in discussions about Africa's participation in global digital governance institutions, such as the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), and emerging AI regulatory bodies, where African states continue to face challenges of representation, technical capacity, and policy coordination. Within this context, the present study contributes to extant knowledge by providing a comprehensive and analytically coherent examination of Africa's digital transformation through the lens of diplomatic practice. It seeks to bridge existing gaps by linking Africa's domestic digital initiatives, regional frameworks, and global engagements into a unified analysis of how digital technologies reshape Africa's position in international politics.

Challenges and Opportunities in Afro-Digital Diplomacy

While digital technologies have expanded Africa's diplomatic horizons, scholarship reveals a complex landscape characterised by both structural constraints and emerging opportunities. A major theme in the literature concerns the vulnerability of African states to cybersecurity threats, ranging from cybercrime to digital espionage and attacks on national infrastructure. Scholars argue that Africa's digital infrastructures—many of which remain outdated, inadequately protected, or externally controlled—are increasingly exposed to sophisticated cyberattacks capable of undermining political stability and economic security (Okere, 2021). The lack of robust cybersecurity frameworks in many African countries is consistently identified as a core challenge that threatens the credibility and reliability of African digital diplomacy. Without resilient cyber-protection systems, digital diplomacy initiatives risk being compromised, manipulated, or rendered ineffective. Another prominent challenge discussed in the literature concerns technological dependency. Much of Africa's digital infrastructure, fibre-optic networks, data centres, cloud computing services, satellite systems, and AI platforms, remains owned, financed, or operated by non-African actors, particularly China, the United States, and multinational technology corporations. Moyo (2020) and Tettey (2020) describe this condition as a form of digital dependency or digital colonialism, in which

African states lack meaningful control over their digital ecosystems. This dependency complicates Africa's efforts to assert digital sovereignty, raises concerns about data localisation and privacy, and affects bargaining power within global digital governance institutions. Scholars caution that unless Africa develops indigenous technological capacities and invests in innovation ecosystems, its digital diplomacy will continue to operate within asymmetrical power structures that limit strategic autonomy.

Despite these constraints, the literature also highlights significant opportunities for Africa to harness digital technologies for diplomatic gains. The continent's fast-growing internet penetration, widespread mobile adoption, and expanding tech entrepreneurial sector provide opportunities for states to communicate more effectively, coordinate regional responses, and amplify African perspectives in global debates. Digital platforms have enabled African governments to engage diasporic communities, promote cultural diplomacy, and participate in global norm-shaping processes more actively than in earlier eras of diplomacy. Examples include the growing use of digital tools in regional conflict mediation, virtual emergency summits, and enhanced participation in forums such as the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and the African Union's digital governance mechanisms. Furthermore, scholars point to the dynamism of Africa's digital diplomacy environment. As states adapt to the realities of digital communication, new policy frameworks are emerging, including national digital strategies, cybersecurity laws, and the AU Digital Transformation Strategy (2020–2030). These evolving reforms signal an increasing awareness among African policymakers of the geopolitical importance of digital technologies. The growing role of civil society, fact-checking organisations, digital rights movements, and private-sector innovators further expands the ecosystem in which African digital diplomacy operates.

However, a major gap persists in the existing literature. While scholars acknowledge Africa's challenges and opportunities, research often remains fragmented—focusing on cybersecurity, technological dependency, or digital development in isolation. Few studies provide an integrated analysis connecting these issues directly to Africa's diplomatic behaviour, geopolitical positioning, or participation in global governance structures. Additionally, empirical studies of African digital diplomacy are still limited, with much attention given to Western practices. This gap reduces the visibility of Africa's agency and innovation within the global digital order. The present study contributes to addressing these gaps by offering a holistic examination of Afro-Digital Diplomacy that connects technological challenges, geopolitical constraints, and diplomatic opportunities within a unified analytical framework. It situates Africa's digital diplomacy within broader international relations debates, examines how digital tools shape foreign policy outcomes, and highlights the strategic implications of Africa's push for digital sovereignty and participation in global digital governance.

Theoretical Framework: Constructivism in Afro-Digital Diplomacy

Constructivism provides the most appropriate analytical lens for this study because it explains how states use digital diplomacy to construct identities, shape norms, and influence

global perceptions. Unlike realist and liberal approaches, which focus on material capabilities or institutional arrangements, constructivism emphasises the social dimensions of international politics, arguing that state behaviour is shaped by shared ideas, norms, and meanings rather than by material factors alone. As Wendt (1999) posits, identities and interests are not fixed; they are continuously produced and reproduced through social interaction. This makes constructivism particularly relevant for analysing Afro-Digital Diplomacy, where African states increasingly use digital platforms to redefine how they are seen and how they see themselves within the global order. The core assumptions of constructivism illuminate the dynamics of Africa's digital diplomacy. First, international reality is socially constructed, meaning Africa's digital presence can reshape global understandings of its technological capacity and agency. Second, identities evolve through interaction, enabling African states to challenge historical narratives of marginality by performing modern, innovative identities through official social media communication, virtual summits, and digital public diplomacy campaigns. Third, norms matter: African advocacy for digital sovereignty, ethical AI, and inclusive digital governance represents active participation in global norm construction. These normative claims, articulated digitally, help influence expectations and rules in emerging areas of cyber governance. Constructivism also clarifies how discursive framing shapes Africa's diplomatic choices. The characterisation of foreign technological investments as either partnership or digital dependency illustrates the contestation of meaning that influences policy directions. Through digital diplomacy, African states attempt to project preferred narratives, strengthen regional solidarity, and assert their voice in global debates on data governance and cybersecurity. By foregrounding these ideational processes, constructivism enables a nuanced understanding of how African states use digital diplomacy to renegotiate their geopolitical identity, assert new norms, and reposition themselves within the digital international order.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology to explore how African states employ digital diplomacy to construct geopolitical identities and influence global governance processes. A qualitative approach is most appropriate because the study seeks to interpret diplomatic meanings, narratives, and normative expressions embedded in online engagements rather than to measure numerical trends. The research relies predominantly on documentary analysis, drawing data from official policy documents, regional strategies, digital diplomacy statements, and publicly available online communication from African governments and regional institutions. Key sources include national foreign policy statements, African Union digital transformation documents, United Nations reports, and analyses from reputable international think tanks. These sources offer rich insights into how African states frame digital sovereignty, cybersecurity, and global engagement. Data collection followed a systematic document-gathering procedure. Relevant documents were retrieved from official government websites, AU portals, international organisations, and digital diplomacy archives. Additional data were sourced from verified social media accounts of ministries of foreign affairs and heads of state, focusing on posts that articulate foreign policy positions, respond to geopolitical events, or promote digital governance initiatives. Newspaper publications and expert analyses were included to provide contextual depth and triangulate official narratives. All collected

materials were catalogued by source, date, and thematic relevance to ensure transparency and traceability.

Data analysis was conducted through qualitative content analysis complemented by elements of discourse analysis. Documents and digital texts were read repeatedly to identify patterns, narratives, and emerging themes related to identity performance, norm projection, and digital sovereignty claims. Coding was both deductive, guided by the constructivist framework, and inductive, allowing new insights to emerge from the data. Triangulation across multiple sources strengthened the credibility of the findings, while interpretive rigor was ensured through memoing and reflexive engagement with the data. The methodology therefore provides a robust and coherent basis for analysing how African states use digital platforms to negotiate influence and express their evolving roles in the digital international order.

Results and Discussions

Emerging African Digital Diplomacy Strategies

The empirical findings of this study address the key gap in existing scholarship — namely, the lack of an integrated, evidence-based account of whether and how African states are turning digital diplomacy into a coherent geopolitical strategy. Evidence drawn from continental documents and national practice shows that digital diplomacy in Africa has moved beyond sporadic online engagement to more deliberate institutional and policy forms. The African Union's use of virtual diplomacy during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as convening the continent-level "Silencing the Guns" diplomatic consultations via a virtual conference, exemplifies this shift and signals institutional adaptation to digital platforms (Adesina, 2022). At the national level, states are formalising digital resilience and diplomatic capacity. Kenya's launch of a National Cybersecurity Strategy illustrates an emergent policy orientation that treats cybersecurity as both a domestic security priority and a diplomatic instrument for participating credibly in global digital governance debates (ACCORD, 2022). Likewise, the increased use of presidential and ministerial social media by figures such as President Muhammadu Buhari underscores how states now routinely use digital channels to communicate foreign policy positions, engage diasporas, and shape international narratives (Adesina, 2022). Together, these instances show that African digital diplomacy is purposeful rather than ad hoc: continental institutions and national governments leverage digital platforms to reconstruct diplomatic identity, assert normative positions on issues such as digital sovereignty and cybersecurity, and sustain diplomatic continuity during crises. This pattern fills the literature's prior omission by demonstrating that digital diplomacy in Africa constitutes a growing, coordinated element of foreign policy with measurable implications for visibility and normative influence.

Challenges of Digital Sovereignty

The findings of this study reinforce the major gap identified in the literature concerning Africa's limited capacity to secure digital sovereignty in the face of deep structural dependence on foreign technological infrastructure. Although existing scholarship recognises that African states increasingly adopt digital diplomacy tools, the empirical evidence presented here

confirms that their ability to exercise autonomous digital authority remains constrained by reliance on external providers. This study fills that gap by demonstrating how technological dependency manifests concretely in Africa's digital ecosystem and how this affects the continent's geopolitical agency. Empirical evidence shows that reliance on foreign-owned fiber-optic networks and satellite systems continues to undermine Africa's efforts to build sovereign digital domains. For example, calls by Google urging African governments to classify fiber-optic cables as critical infrastructure highlight persistent vulnerabilities in the continent's ability to control its data flows and protect strategic communication channels (Reuters, 2024). The fact that such appeals originate from foreign technology companies itself underscores the limits of African oversight and the asymmetrical power relations shaping the continent's digital environment. Similarly, the approval and rapid expansion of satellite internet services such as Starlink in countries like Chad illustrate the dual reality of Africa's digital progress: while these services improve connectivity, they simultaneously entrench dependence on external actors for essential digital functions (Reuters, 2024). This study's analysis shows that this type of dependency inhibits Africa's ability to negotiate from a position of strength in global digital governance forums and restricts the continent's capacity to define its own standards on data governance, cybersecurity, and digital regulation. By demonstrating these dynamics, the empirical section contributes new knowledge to the literature by showing that digital diplomacy in Africa is advancing, yet its transformative potential is limited by unresolved sovereignty challenges. This reinforces the need for strengthened indigenous infrastructure and coordinated continental strategies to reduce dependence on foreign digital systems and enhance Africa's geopolitical leverage.

Cybersecurity and Digital Geopolitics

The findings of this study further address a critical gap identified in the literature concerning the intersection of Africa's digital vulnerabilities and the continent's geopolitical positioning in the global digital order. While previous scholarship recognises Africa's growing digital footprint, little empirical work has examined how the rise of cybersecurity threats and external geopolitical interests shape Africa's ability to leverage digital diplomacy effectively. The present study fills this gap by showing that Africa's cybersecurity environment is not only a technical challenge but also a geopolitical constraint with direct implications for diplomatic agency. Empirical evidence reveals that internet shutdowns, often implemented during elections, civil unrest, and political contestations, have become a recurrent feature of Africa's digital landscape. In 2024 alone, the continent recorded 21 shutdowns across 15 countries, marking the highest number in its history (The Guardian, 2025). These shutdowns undermine digital rights, erode trust in state institutions, and interrupt the very channels through which digital diplomacy is conducted. This study demonstrates that such practices weaken Africa's credibility in global digital governance forums, reinforcing the literature's concern that internal digital instability limits Africa's ability to present itself as a dependable diplomatic actor.

In addition, the empirical analysis shows that Africa's cybersecurity challenges are compounded by the continent's growing entanglement with external powers, particularly China. China's expansion of space and satellite alliances, including the establishment of

satellite laboratories and the provision of space technology, raises important questions about data sovereignty and geopolitical leverage (Reuters, 2025). While these partnerships enhance technological capability, they also deepen Africa's dependency on foreign digital infrastructure, giving external actors disproportionate influence over the continent's digital future. Through these findings, the study contributes new empirical insight by demonstrating that cybersecurity vulnerabilities and external geopolitical engagements directly shape the scope, credibility, and strategic effectiveness of Africa's digital diplomacy. This fills a major gap left in earlier literature by revealing how internal digital instability and external technological dependency jointly limit Africa's capacity to assert meaningful influence in the global digital sphere.

Opportunities for Global Influence

The findings of this study also address the literature's identified gap regarding the underexplored potential of digital diplomacy to enhance Africa's global influence beyond traditional state-to-state engagement. While previous scholarship notes Africa's growing digital presence, it does not sufficiently demonstrate how digital platforms create concrete opportunities for the continent to reshape global narratives, strengthen soft power, and participate more effectively in global digital governance. This study fills that gap by providing empirical evidence of Africa's emerging capacity to leverage digital tools for global cultural, economic, and diplomatic visibility. A key insight from the data is that Africa's rich cultural heritage and expanding creative economy place the continent in a favourable position to use digital platforms as instruments of soft power. Digital streaming services, social media networks, and online collaborations have amplified African cultural products, particularly in film, music, and fashion, facilitating global visibility and reshaping longstanding perceptions about the continent. As the Financial Times (2024) reports, the creative economy's digital expansion provides African states with an opportunity to harness culture as a diplomatic asset, thereby strengthening their global presence through non-traditional means. The study also shows that regional digital governance initiatives, notably the African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy, create new collective avenues for Africa to assert influence in global digital policy debates. These initiatives aim to harmonise digital regulations, expand connectivity, and strengthen institutional collaboration among member states, thereby reducing fragmentation in Africa's digital governance landscape (CSSR Africa, 2020). Such coordinated efforts enhance Africa's participation in global forums, improve negotiating power, and contribute to reducing the digital divide, an area underexplored in previous literature. By demonstrating these emerging opportunities, the study contributes new empirical understanding of how Africa can leverage digital tools not only for communication but as strategic instruments of global influence. This insight fills the literature's gap by showing that Africa's digital diplomacy is evolving into a platform for cultural projection, normative engagement, and strengthened geopolitical relevance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As digital technologies, social media platforms and cyber innovations have risen in Africa in the digital age, so too is Africa evolving differently in its approach to global influence and influence. Afro Digital Diplomacy marks a special event for the continent's foreign relations strategy since it offers African states and institutions to interact with world population, project soft power and express the geopolitical interests of the continent through digital platforms. Nevertheless, Afro Digital Diplomacy opens up a lot of promise, but at the same time comes with challenges that must be overcome in order for Africa to derive the advantages it can achieve in this new framework. More and more African nations are turning to digital tools to do their diplomatic business. The scope includes running tasks such as using social media for public diplomacy, engaging in cyber negotiations, promotion of national interests on the global digital platforms. Digital spaces are seen by African leaders and diplomats as a key instrument of global narratives, public opinion, and international cooperation towards issues of climate change, trade, and peacekeeping. The most pressing issue for Afro-Digital Diplomacy is dependence on foreign digital infrastructure. Foreign technology companies based in the United States and China still play an outsized role in selling their telecommunications networks, cloud computing and cybersecurity services to African nations. This reliance undermines the digital freedom of Africa and sets off red flags regarding the matter of data sovereignty, privacy and risks of digital colonialism. Cyber attacks on the continent are getting more and increasingly with hacks, cyber crime, digital espionage and disinformation campaigns that are interfering with the political processes, including elections. The security risks to the integrity of African states' digital diplomacy and wide geopolitical interests are a serious threat. While the challenges are a lot, there are many opportunities for Africa to destabilize its place in the world's geopolitical landscape through digital diplomacy. This paves way for Africa's digital infrastructure development, Economic integration, and inclusion of its population in digital governance act. They are essential to lift up Africa's voice in setting international digital standards and regulations.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed to use Africa's increased global influence in the digital age.

1. To build and fund digital infrastructure projects at the regional level under the regional HIPs within the African Union to create a pan African Digital Ecosystem. It can be anything from Pan African Data center network that will guarantee data storage and data processing facilities in Africa.

2. Train African diplomats and foreign policy experts in appropriate digital tools, data security, and global digital regulations using establishment of training programs and workshops. In conjunction with the fact that what is learnt through the course adheres strictly to the UNDG Principles of Digital Diplomacy (as identified by UNITAR) for instance, or applicable digital diplomacy norms and practice (as raised by DiploFoundation), these existing institutions could offer us excellent insights into the practice of digital diplomacy.

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