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The link between economic and digital diplomacy: The case of US-South Africa relations on LinkedIn

By

Tshepo Ramonoedi (2281613)

A research report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Journalism and Media Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Wits Centre for Journalism, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Supervisor: Dr Bob Wekesa

29 August 2024

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my sons, Koketso and Kgothalo Ramonoedi, who, unknowingly in the normal course of their lives, served as an inspiration for me to complete this milestone of my life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank God, the Almighty, for the example of unwavering love and compassion for which He used my life as an example to His people. I also thank Him for keeping me healthy and focused throughout this project. I would not have come this far without that depth of love.

I also would like to extend my gratitude to my wife, Lorato Ramonoedi, for her unconditional understanding and support whenever I had to be an absent companion due to my daily work and this project. You taught me that understanding, and support can take people far. Thank you very much.

I would also like to extend my profound gratitude to my supervisor, mentor and critical friend, Dr Bob Wekesa, for the guidance and scholarly insights he provided every time I submitted the building blocks of this work. Today, I can look back with pride at the lessons I have learned from his companionship. I am here because of his scholarship, dedication and mentoring from the beginning of this study.

I also thank my mother, grandmother and my brothers for showing me love and support for this work, without emphasising my absence in many of the family functions that I missed.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
AGOA	African Growth and Opportunity Act
AI	Artificial intelligence
API	Application programming interface
AWE	Academy for Women Entrepreneurs
AWS	Amazon Web Services
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CEO	Chief executive officer
COMTRADE	Commodity Trade Statistics Database
DEIA	Diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility
DFC	US International Development finance corporation
DOS	Department of state
DOT	Digital outreach team
DPS	Digital policy studies
DTIC	Department of Trade Industry and Competition
FAFT	Financial Action Task Force
FDI	Foreign direct investment
ICT	Information and communication technology
IDFC	Infrastructure Development Finance Company
JETP	Just Energy Transition Partnership
MCC	Millennium Challenge Corporation
NGOs	non-governmental organisations
OFP	Opportunity Funds Programme
PEPFAR	President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief
PQM+	Promoting Quality of Medicines Plus
SALGA	South African Local Government Association
SNCA	Social Network Content Analysis
SNS	Social networking sites
SOEs	State-owned enterprises
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States

USADF	United States African Development Foundation
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USCS	United States Customs Service
USIA	United States Information Agency
USTDA	United States Trade and Development Agency
VPPs	Virtual presence posts
WEF	World Economic Forum
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

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CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The representation of the United States (US) towards South Africa in terms of economic diplomacy have almost always been shaped by the political influence of the figures elected for the presidential role (Cook, 2020). In recent years, bilateral relations between the US and South Africa have been subjected to scrutiny following the unprecedented foreign policy review by the presidents, such as the 44th US president, Barack Obama and the 45th president, Donald Trump (Masters, 2017). Lack of consistency in foreign policy review processes by newly elected presidents has negative impact on US-South Africa relations (Cook, 2020). As much as the US has been amplifying soft power to strengthen its economic diplomacy with various foreign nations, its approach to the conceptualisation of terrorism has, to a certain degree, compromised the efforts intended to sustain its diplomatic relations (Flint & Falah, 2004). In the same vein, the approach adopted by the US in addressing terrorism-related incidents caused panic among South African citizens (Goba, 2022). In an October 2022 report for Eyewitness News, Thabiso Goba (2022) reported that the US embassy had issued a terror alert to its citizens about an imminent attack in Sandton, a city located in the Northern part of the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality, South Africa. As Goba (2022) stated the alert caused a diplomatic tension between the US Embassy and the South African Government to a point whereby the South African President Cyril Ramaphosa accused the American embassy of jumping the gun.

Later in the study, we will establish if the state of the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa is improving or deteriorating, considerably looking into the emerging US-South Africa trade relations. Stremlau (2017) reported that Trump's 2018 Budget Blueprint significantly reduced foreign aid and programmes to support good governance, human rights and democracy in developing countries, especially African countries. Trump's decision in March 2018 to increase tariffs on steel (25%) and aluminium (10%) as part of Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962,

concerning the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), was one of the indicators of the US's negative perceptions of South Africa (Cook, 2020). According to the Office of the US Trade Representative, Executive Office of the President (2024), AGOA was incepted in 2000 to enable the eligible Sub-Saharan African Countries to have duty-free access to the US market. "AGOA covers over 1 800 products, in addition to the more than 5000 products that are eligible for duty-free access under the Generalised System of Preference Programme. To meet AGOA's rigorous eligibility requirements, countries must establish or make continual progress towards establishing a market-based economy, the rule of law, political pluralism, and the right to due process. Additionally, countries must eliminate barriers to US trade and investment, enact policies to reduce poverty, combat corruption, and protect human rights. 32 countries are eligible for AGOA benefits in 2024," (The Office of the US Trade Representative, Executive Office of the President, 2024).

While a significant number of developing countries have adopted the new media for global communication, South Africa is amongst developing countries that show keen interest in strengthening its international relations activities (Kubheka et al., 2020). As such, the existing slow uptake of the use of social media for international relations as confirmed by (Wasserman 2018) will be a key area of interest in this study. Although South Africa has been using digital media for engaging member states in the international community, to a certain degree, it is still imperative to understand the link between economic and digital diplomacy through analysis of LinkedIn. The state of US economic diplomacy towards South Africa has for years been subjected to geopolitical pressure imposed by its opponents, such as Russia and China (Olivier et al., 2015). It is within this context that the assessment of the US representation of its economic relations with South Africa regarding its digital diplomacy has become paramount in this study. As part of the study, attention will be paid to several aspects that affect bilateral relations between the US and South Africa. These include trade and investment, agriculture, infrastructure, energy reform, financial aid, health, education, and mining.

As indicated in the abstract, representation was one of the key pillars in this study, because it was dominantly applied in several disciplines. According to Luoma-Aho et

al. (2019), perception or opinion are developed through various approaches, namely, sponsored content, priming of sponsored content, perceived authenticity, priming of sponsored content through shaping perceived authenticity, audience participation (which entails shaping perceived authenticity) and priming of sponsored content by way of shaping attitudes toward the video and the product. In this regard, in the development of a positive perception or opinion of a product or programme, organisations use social media to project a favourable image globally (Luoma-Aho et al., 2019). We shall see later in the study if the US entities identified in the abstract have succeeded in shaping positive perception of South Africa towards US economic diplomacy or not.

The extent to which the US used digital media in setting the agenda of LinkedIn-based representation regarding its economic diplomacy towards South Africa was analysed in this study. The study, therefore, paid special attention to the various issues relating to economic diplomacy from the point of view of the US representation towards South Africa. The social media platform identified for data collection was LinkedIn.
According to LinkedIn Corporation (2024), a LinkedIn platform is a digital professional network designed to increase job opportunities for its users. "The platform assists global citizens in securing the right job or internship, connect and strengthen professional relations whilst upskilling them to succeed in their respective careers. Users can access LinkedIn from a desktop, LinkedIn mobile app, or mobile web experience. A complete LinkedIn profile can help users connect with opportunities by showcasing their unique professional story through experience, skill and education. Users can use LinkedIn to organise offline events, join groups, write articles, post photos and videos," (LinkedIn Corporation, 2024). LinkedIn was found suitable for the study because it enables global citizens to participate in the global economic activities by way of promoting employability amongst its users. The study has identified LinkedIn to assist us in confirming whether the US succeeded in linking the economic diplomacy with digital diplomacy. Hayden (2018) views digital diplomacy as the ways in which international actors, especially states use digital platforms to achieve policy outcomes. Hayden (2018) further states that actors use various concepts such as branding, soft power, and public diplomacy to promote foreign policy on social

media platforms. In response to the research questions, the study considered several media theories, which have been thoroughly discussed in Chapter 2.

It is critical to note that the application of media theories was confined to media agenda-setting, specifically second-level media agenda-setting, third-level media agenda-setting and media framing. These theories are relevant for the study as they determine the pattern in which the media content is crafted and disseminated to the public across digital media platforms, including the mainstream media (Nowak, 2016). The study intended to analyse how representation emerged from and were impacted by the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa. These included economic relations across issues, such as trade and investment, agriculture, trading opportunities, infrastructure, energy reform, telecommunication, financial aid, health, education, mining, and any new emerging social and economic themes detected during the data-gathering process.

1.2 Contextual background

Afesorgbor (2018) indicates that poor economic diplomacy is the main reason there is a lack of monetary sustainability in developing countries. The positioning of investment planning and financial support contributes to economic instability, and South Africa is not excluded. This, on its own, suggests that the US-South Africa relations in terms of economic diplomacy may be negatively affected (Otavio, 2021). According to the United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database (COMTRADE) (2022), US exports to South Africa amounted to approximately US$6.59 billion in 2021. Economic diplomacy is an interdependent phenomenon, influenced by a range of factors including trade, investments, technology-driven business partnerships, tourism and offshore banking (Rana, 2007). “South Africa’s economy is still largely reliant on the exports of primary and intermediate commodities to industrialised countries. Import mainly consist of capital goods, raw materials, semi-manufactured goods and consumer commodities,” (Louw and Masuku, 2010).

Masters (2009) asserts that the key issue in the development of sustainable economic diplomacy is the role of the head of state. Under Biden and Ramaphosa, US-South Africa relations have experienced both positive and negative indicators (The Presidency, 2022). Biden in his early days in Washington showed interest in sustaining AGOA as a critical mechanism for strengthening US-South Africa relations (Rikhotso, 2021). Prinsloo and Ncube (2016) contend that bilateral relations between the US and South Africa strengthened after AGOA was established in 2000. Through the Act, the US sought to strengthen trade opportunities with the African continent (Naumann, 2016). However, the differences between the leadership of the US and South Africa in terms of policy formulation and implementation have affected trade relations between the two countries (Jones & Zhou, 2017). For example, under former US president Bill Clinton and former South African president Nelson Mandela, US-South Africa relations flourished (Jones & Zhou, 2017). However, during the tenures of Trump and Jacob Zuma, bilateral relations between the US and South Africa became unstable. During this period, the US began to disregard AGOA (Lande & Matanda, 2017).

In addition to the above, the geopolitical agenda pushed by the US towards South Africa has made it difficult for South Africa to attract investment outside US-South Africa relations (Boso et al., 2019). In recent years, the US trade war against its opponents, such as China and Russia, has been blamed for deteriorating US-South Africa bilateral relations as far as economic diplomacy is concerned (Kohnert, 2018). However, Rupiya (2019) contends that US-South Africa relations have for years been affected by geopolitics, which has often left South Africa isolated.

The outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war has challenged US-South Africa bilateral relations after South Africa declared its neutrality regarding the United Nations Council's bid to punish Russian for invading Ukraine (Seekings & Saunders, 2022). As a result, most of the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa has been severely impacted (Rodell & Skidmore-Hess, 2022). Regarding the deteriorating state of electricity provision in South Africa, the US has offered to assist South Africa to move from coal to greener energy (Auth, 2023). However, it is uncertain whether the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa is geopolitically driven or not. This is to be confirmed in the data analysis and data interpretation section later in the study.

Economic diplomacy requires a dedicated entity that is at the forefront of trading arrangements and agreements within the international community (Karns et al., 2015). Some countries use foreign ministries, but economic diplomacy can be facilitated by various wings of government, if they have economic responsibilities and interests inside and outside of government through which they can operate (Lee & Hocking, 2010). Jones and Williams (2012) contend that the US has mostly succeeded in strengthening its economic diplomacy through the assistance of various entities, including the US Mission in South Africa, USAID, USCS, Prosper Africa, DFC, MCC, Power Africa, USADF, USTDA as well as other entities in the trade and investment space. Lee and Hocking (2010) have pointed out that the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been among the critical institutions that have been considered by the US in strengthening its economic diplomacy globally.

1.2.1 The rise of digital media

As will be further elaborated in Chapter 2, Verrekia (2017) states that diplomacy was introduced in the international relations field many centuries ago. Hart and Siniver (2020) define diplomacy as a synonym for statecraft, foreign policy and international relations, as well as the making of foreign policy by practitioners. Diplomacy is made possible through diplomatic missions installed to address bilateral issues and enhance the relationship between the country from which their embassy is and the countries in which they are (Verrekia, 2017). The notion of digital diplomacy is traced back to the US when it was introduced to replace traditional diplomacy, which relied on person-to-person communication, at both bilateral and multilateral levels (Verrekia, 2017). The notion of digital diplomacy emerged with the increasing trends in globalisation and technology (Hart & Siniver, 2020). To highlight the evolution of digital diplomacy, Verrekia (2017) has referred to how former secretary of state Hillary Clinton used social media to promote her campaign, run by the Department of State (DOS). Verrekia (2017) argued that Clinton introduced digital diplomacy as a mechanism for enhancing the digitisation of government-to-government relations. In this regard, the DOS used social media to monitor the information posted on online platforms to craft messages to respond to public opinion about Clinton's campaign. This has been the case with the US-South Africa relations. The US is currently using

digital diplomacy in the form of LinkedIn accounts to strengthen its economic diplomacy and LinkedIn-based representation (Gilboa, 2016). The International Development Finance Corporation illustrated on Dember 2022 through the post below: *"US International Development Finance Corporation: DFC is working to close the information and communications technology gap in Africa by supporting the development and expansion of seven data centres in South Africa and Kenya.… Today DFC was joined by Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry, government, and private sector actors at the US Centre to discuss ways to scale climate solutions in developing countries. #COP27."*

With reference to the post above, the US has reliably used the US International Development Finance Corporation's LinkedIn account to promote its economic diplomacy in the international community. Adesina (2017) links the emergence of digital diplomacy with the increasing trends in Information communication technologies (ICTs). Verrekia (2017) asserts that the introduction of smartphones and social media platforms, such as Twitter, currently known as X, Facebook and LinkedIn, have resulted in the development of digital diplomacy. From the ICT perspective, digital media plays a crucial role in transforming traditional ways of communication and mainstream media such as TV, radio and newspapers (Adesina, 2017). Digital media has pushed millions of people into open conversation spaces through social media platforms (Verrekia, 2017). According to Al-Muftah et al. (2018), the rise of digital media has forced the international community to explore communication tools that could strengthen diplomatic relations globally. However, Adesina (2017) contends that nations require digital media to participate in the interconnected world. The global economy has increasingly considered the positive effects of digital media in enhancing two-way communication between political leaders and communities or government officials and foreign public notwithstanding corporate institutions and customers (Verrekia, 2017). As a result, a significant number of developed countries have begun promoting their foreign policies and trade agreement through digital media (Al-Muftah et al., 2018). It was, therefore, imperative to consider the impact of digital media in strengthening economic diplomacy as part of the trade relation among foreign publics (Spry, 2018). The study sees it as important to focus on US representation toward South Africa within the context of their digital

and economic diplomacy. A fuller review of the literature on digital and economic diplomacy will be presented in Chapter 2 of this study.

Wekesa et al. (2021) indicate that for various reasons there are limited research studies institutionally, including the following: obstacles presented by state security and state censorship, media regulations, organisational culture, personnel challenges, and linguistic challenges. Although developed countries, such as the US, are advanced in the use of ICTs in their international relations activities, a significant number of African countries are still reluctant to embrace digital media as one of the communication tools to enhance economic diplomacy (Wekesa et al., 2021). Digital diplomacy can be described as the intersection of ICTs with the functions of diplomacy (Wekesa et al., 2021). Ong'ong'a (2021) underlines the fact that technology changes how people communicate. As a result, the actors such as states are likely to be influenced to shift from monologue communication to digital media platforms. This supports Wekesa et al. (2021)'s view that digital diplomacy often culminates in "computer-generated mediation, e-diplomacy, portable international relations, cyber international relations, and networked international relations". In summary, it is safe to say that the sub-disciplines of soft power, public diplomacy, place and national branding, image studies and digital diplomacy are best placed to study the intersections between international communication, international relations and international economics. That is, analysing soft power, public diplomacy, place and national branding, image studies, and digital diplomacy in the application of the second-level media agenda-setting; third-level media agenda-setting and media framing theories can help us understand the factors that make countries succeed or fail in their efforts to attract investments in various sectors of the economy, all of which will be discussed later in the study.

1.2.2 An overview of US-South Africa relations

Since South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994, the US and South Africa have built a solid bilateral relationship. South Africa is a strategic partner of the US, with strong collaboration in the areas of health, education, environment, and digital economy (Vinson, 2004). The US Agency for International Development/Southern Africa's (USAID/SA) strategic goal over five years from October 2020 to September

2025 is to advance the region toward becoming more integrated, prosperous, and ultimately, self-reliant (Vinson, 2004).

According to Larson (2007), the geopolitics between the US, China, Russia and Europe over oil discovery in the Gulf Guinea have significant influence over international relations globally. At the start of the 21st century, there were increasing terrorism threats to the US-Africa ties in the African oil business (Piombo, 2007). As a result, the US had to intervene to ensure that African oil was distributed to the global market (Piombo, 2007). As stated in the background section, the US-South Africa relations have for years been affected by geopolitics. However, as we shall see in the data analysis section, has the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa through LinkedIn been somehow impacted because of geopolitics? For instance, the 'America first' ideology under Trump's administration sent a strong message that Africa, and South Africa in particular, was no longer prioritised on the White House agenda (Cook, 2020).

Thus, the US's economic diplomacy emerged from its foreign aid efforts that have been facilitated through bilateral or multilateral relations (Ruse-Khan, 2010). In its bilateral approach, the US provided foreign aid to a specific recipient country, which in the case of this study can be South Africa (see, for instance, Lessa, 2010). The US has direct trade and investment promotion agreements with two individual South African provincial governments, in the Western Cape and Gauteng, signed in 2021 and 2022 respectively (Benjaminsen & Bryceson, 2012). The US, therefore, has forged bilateral relations with South Africa in several areas, including military, trade and investment, manufacturing, infrastructure, agriculture, health, education, telecommunication, science, and energy (Jones & Williams 2012). During the data analysis, we will be able to make judgements about some of the issues emerging from the data drawn from LinkedIn. In the background and context, it was argued that the US relies on its diplomatic entities to promote its economic diplomacy. In this regard, we shall also assess LinkedIn posts to confirm if they have been designed to promote the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa or not.

As highlighted in the previous sections, Adesina (2017) links the emergence of digital diplomacy with the increasing trends in information communication technologies (ICTs). Verrekia (2017) asserts that the introduction of smartphones and social media platforms, such as X, Facebook and LinkedIn, have resulted in the development of digital diplomacy. From the ICT perspective, digital media plays a crucial role in transforming traditional ways of communication, which are often confined to mainstream media, such as TV, radio and newspapers (Adesina, 2017). Digital media has pushed millions of people into open conversation spaces using social media platforms (Verrekia, 2017). According to Al-Muftah et al. (2018), the rise of digital media has forced the international community to explore communication tools that could strengthen diplomatic relations globally. However, Adesina (2017) contends that nations require digital media to participate in the interconnected world. The global economy has increasingly considered the positive effects of digital media in enhancing two-way communication between political leaders and communities or government officials and foreign public notwithstanding corporate institutions and customers (Verrekia, 2017). As a result, a significant number of developed countries have begun promoting their foreign policies and trade agreement through digital media (Al-Muftah et al., 2018).

For example, for many years, US economic diplomacy has been facilitated by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), in partnership with non-government organisations (Jones & Williams 2012). USAID primarily concentrates on the social sectors, such as education and health (Holmes, 2013). As stated in the background and context, AGOA has given eligible countries an opportunity to grow economically. The US-South Africa relations have paved the way for effective cooperation, particularly in relation to trade (Jones & Williams 2012). Chapter 4 will elaborate on this and further determine the impact of AGOA in terms of the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa. Through the US's economic diplomacy, South Africa saw an increasing trend of exports entering the US market through the assistance of AGOA (Cook, 2020). In this regard, only sub-Saharan African countries are eligible to be beneficiaries of AGOA if they meet requirements such as upholding the rule of law, respecting human rights, and liberalising their economies (Fernandes et al., 2022).

AGOA was established by congressman Jim McDermott (a former Foreign Service medical officer based in Zaire), and his chief of staff, Michael Williams. McDermott, along with congressman Ed Royce, helped move the earliest versions of the legislation through Congress (Tella, 2016). A cornerstone of US trade policy toward sub-Saharan Africa since 2000, it is a nonreciprocal US trade preference programme that provides duty-free access to the US market for most exports from eligible sub-Saharan African countries (Jones & Zhou, 2017). South Africa has also used AGOA to export steel and aluminium duty-free to US markets (Steinbock, 2018). AGOA reduced duties and tariffs on approximately 6 400 products from Africa, especially South Africa, into the US to zero (Office of the US Trade Representative, 2020). AGOA is still an important programme, increasing the export of processed food and other items with direct and targeted market access in the US (Ndzendze, 2020).

South Africa is still regarded as one of the US's biggest trade partners in the African continent (Department of International Relations and Cooperation, 2022). However, the data analysis section considers whether the US-South Africa trade ties have been progressive or not. As affirmed by the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (2022), the US-South Africa relations saw a two-way trade of $817.8 billion recorded in 2019. As such, the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (2022) confirmed that AGOA played a critical role in enhancing a bilateral tax treaty between US and South Africa by way of preventing double taxation and fiscal evasion. AGOA has created approximately 62 000 direct jobs in South Africa through a total of 600 US companies operating in South Africa (Department of International Relations and Cooperation, 2022). In 2014 and 2020, bilateral trade between the US and South Africa recorded a significant increase from $117 billion to $189 billion attained from exports of goods and services and income from US investments in South Africa (Department of International Relations and Cooperation, 2022). Regarding the development of US-South Africa relations, this suggests that both parties have sustainable bilateral relations, although this has suffered somewhat due to emerging geopolitical issues, as indicated earlier on. The link between economic and digital diplomacy: the case of US-South Africa relations is, therefore, the right topic for this study.

1.3 Rationale and significance of the study

As discussed in the section on background and context, AGOA has helped bolster economic growth and managed to improve the US economic relations within the international community. A total of 36 countries were eligible for AGOA benefits in 2022. In 2015, Congress passed legislation modernising and extending the programme to 2025 in South Africa. However, it appears the limited online communication on AGOA has caused a significant communication gap in the future of US economic diplomacy towards South Africa. As highlighted in the background and context section of the report, traditional diplomacy is no longer effective for sustaining international relations. Thus, the increase of economic support has pushed states to shift their communication attention to digital media as a divergence from public diplomacy, which has fostered one-way communication. The adoption of digital diplomacy has come with benefits for governments and the public as they are able to enter a dialogue using digital platforms. However, as has been discussed in the background and context sections, digital diplomacy is still a new phenomenon in international studies. To this end, there have been limited studies on digital diplomacy regarding economic diplomacy in South Africa. As such, pursuing a study in this area, focusing specifically on the latter will contribute to the efforts to determine the representation of the US towards South Africa, concerning trade, investment, health, education and security. However, geopolitics have overlapped the US-South Africa relations, affecting most of its areas of economic diplomacy. Through this study, it is hoped, we can determine the extent to which the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa has been impacted by emerging geopolitical issues.

Following the geopolitical factors at play involving the US and its allies, Russia in particular, South Africa's position in terms of economic diplomacy under Biden's administration remains unclear. The war between Russia and Ukraine has caused diverging views between US and South Africa. It critical therefore to use the study to provide some insights into whether the war in Ukraine has any link to the manifestation of geopolitical conflict in the US-South Africa relation. These insights will be generated through the analysis of the data from LinkedIn, with specific reference to the posts shared on various LinkedIn accounts of the US entities identified in the introductory section of this chapter.

The state of US economic diplomacy is demonstrated through the increase in US companies operating in South Africa, including Apple, Amazon and Ford. A study on digital diplomacy in relation to economic diplomacy concerning US-South Africa relations should enlighten us on the benefit of digital diplomacy for promoting foreign rules and programmes. In the same vein, the evaluation of the link between financial and cardinal international relations, for example in the case of US-South Africa relations, should contribute important insights into the settlement and growth of the US's economic diplomacy towards South Africa.

As outlined in Chapter 1, LinkedIn was designed for career development amongst its users, targeting global citizens in various age segmentation. Cowling (2023) highlighted: "As of May 2022, the number of LinkedIn users reached almost 10.2 million in South Africa. Compared to the previous month, this was an increase of 100 000 users. Most LinkedIn users in South Africa were aged 25-34 years. As of May 2022, this age group represented 56% of the users of this social media platform. Individuals in the age group 18-24 years followed with a share of around 24%". In South Africa, economic diplomacy has always been facilitated by organisations and entities responsible for international relations affairs. These include Brand SA, the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) and the Department of Trade Industry and Competition (DTIC). This study, thus, also sought to determine whether the South African economic diplomacy entities have been featured in the LinkedIn posts of the US entities. This was done against the understanding, in South Africa, that the use of digital diplomacy to sustain global image is still limited, especially concerning economic diplomacy. However, due to the rise in digital media, South Africa's international relations activities, including its economic diplomacy, is adopting a combination of the mainstream and digital media (Olusola et al., 2017). This study, therefore, is critical in that it will assist state actors to draw insights for improving digital diplomacy concerning economic diplomacy in South Africa.

Secondly, this study sought to assess the extent to which the US has engaged South Africa in a digital space. Like foreign diplomacy in any other country, the US-South

Africa economic diplomacy has often been subjected to disagreement or conflicts. For example, the US-South Africa trade conflicts can be observed in the poultry industry when South Africa attempted to stop the importing of different food items from US, specifically poultry due to health issues raised by the food retailers in South Africa. Therefore, the study will contribute insights into the state of US-South Africa relations under the current administrations of both countries. Recently, South Africa has been in the spotlight for acting against the US's interference in existing multilateral relations with big economies, such as China and Russia. As a result, the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa has remained uncertain since it has always been placed at the centre of the geopolitics of the US, China and Russia. As pointed out earlier in this chapter, the US is one of South Africa's largest trading partners. Therefore, it is important to understand the status of the US economic diplomacy to identify factors regarding its nature towards South Africa.

1.4 Key research questions

In this study, digital media-based representations are still viewed as the main key area for sustaining economic diplomacy through LinkedIn. However, there is a gap regarding studies linking economic diplomacy to digital diplomacy. The US economic diplomacy towards South Africa has been subjected to various setbacks, including geopolitics relating to the Russia-Ukraine war. The following key research questions sought to determine and explore the nature of the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa using the LinkedIn platform:

- What are the recurrent themes in the LinkedIn-based representations of the US economic-diplomatic actors towards South Africa?
- What do the recurrent themes in the LinkedIn-based representations of the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa tell us about the US's economic objectives towards South Africa?
- How are the economic-diplomatic interests of the US's diplomatic actors towards South Africa based in LinkedIn accounts of diplomatic entities?
- How does US economic diplomacy and digital diplomacy intersect concerning US-South Africa economic relations?

1.5 Outline of the chapters

The dissertation comprises five chapters, whose content is summarised below.

Chapter One presents the introduction, followed by a discussion of the contextual background, rationale and significant of the study, its aim and objectives and the key research questions for the study. The chapter concludes with an overview of the chapters and a conclusion, which summarises the key issues discussed.

Chapter Two presents a literature review on aspects of international/global communication; economic diplomacy; hard power, soft power and economic diplomacy; public and economic diplomacy; place and national branding and economic diplomacy; and digital and economic diplomacy. The chapter also presents the theoretical framework for the study and presents a conclusion.

Chapter Three presents and discusses the methodological and design consideration made in respect of the conduct of the study, including the social network analysis methods; selection of the sample; content and network analysis; and the coding scheme. The chapter concludes by providing a relevant conclusion.

Chapter Four presents, analyses, discusses and interprets the data generated. The conceptual frameworks discussed in the chapter are used to analyse the data.

Chapter Five, which is the last chapter, presents a summary of the key findings according to the three key research questions for the study. The chapter concludes with conclusions, recommendations, ideas for future research and concluding comments.

1.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, an impression of the parts under study was deliberated. The chapter also pays attention to the key investigation questions guiding the direction of the study. The next chapter will comment and deliberate on the literature studied with regards to the investigation and the theoretical framework by which the answers were deliberated, analysed, understood and stated.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a review of the literature regarding scholarly views and insights into digital and economic diplomacy is discussed and analysed. The study of digital media-based representation of economic diplomacy is an interdisciplinary one. Therefore, this chapter will present a review of key concepts and aspects to provide a theoretical foundation under investigation. These will include economic diplomacy, foreign policy, soft power, public diplomacy, place and national branding, image studies and digital diplomacy.

2.2 International/global communication, economic and digital media

As pointed out earlier in this study, AGOA was pursued by McDermott, along with congressman Ed Royce, who helped move the earliest versions of the legislation through Congress. However, AGOA has caused a noticeable communication gap in the future of the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa. As explained in Chapter 1, member states including South Africa have considered to adopt digital media as a game changer in strengthening international relations, especially in the development of LinkedIn based representation. The adoption of digital diplomacy has come with inevitable benefits for governments, and people can now engage using digital platforms. This was not the case with public diplomacy since it was confined to monologue communication (Gilboa, 2002).

Chalaby (2007) states that the use of new media is critical because traditional media struggles to sustain two-way communication without the support of the digital media. Devetak et al. (2017) state that nations or states cannot operate in isolation, adding that international relations then become a mechanism towards building an interdependent world through which states can trade with one another. Van Bergeijk and Moons (2018) view diplomacy as political interaction at the international level, including the techniques used to execute political relations across international boundaries. As discussed in Chapter 1, Shrestha (2021) contends that the trade war between the US,

Russia and China has affected multilateral relations for most developing countries, including South Africa. Despite the countries' traditional way of communicating foreign policies through international relations, diplomacy and economic diplomacy, countries must adopt and embrace digital diplomacy to strengthen their trade ties with other countries (Collins & Bekenova, 2019). Wilson (2008) contends that countries with strong economies and political power, such as the US, often use soft power to persuade the international audience to develop positive perceptions towards their foreign policies. These countries often opt for hard power when a bilateral agreement has been compromised, especially concerning trade (Fan, 2008). Tella (2016) has also confirmed that soft power and economic diplomacy are often associated with geopolitics. Hall (2012) contends that soft power originated from the US through its economic diplomacy tactics and was later adopted by Japan, the European Union, Canada and India. Unlike hard power, soft power was initiated to provide state actors with the power of persuasion without using economic resources or military power (Singh, 2016). For many years, as an exercise of soft power, China and the US have been threatening war against each other for global economic dominance, targeting developing countries, including South Africa (Tella, 2016). As pointed out in Chapter 1, Masters (2017) views digital diplomacy as the use of social media or digital communication platforms to promote state foreign policies. Bjola (2015) asserts that digital diplomacy is a revolution in the practice of diplomacy. Rashica (2018) contends that digital diplomacy is always in the purview of foreign ministries and urges governments and states to ensure that their officials responsible for international relations are technologically inclined. Digital diplomacy can thus be understood as the use of social media for diplomatic purposes, and it could change how diplomats engage in information management, public diplomacy, strategy planning, international negotiations and even crisis management (Bjola, 2015). In this regard, Manor (2016) asserts that digital diplomacy should be viewed on a broader scale as it comprises a variety of digital tools that go beyond social media.

Therefore, it was essential for this study to integrate economic and digital diplomacy within the global communication context. The statement highlights the effect of the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa from the perspective of LinkedIn posts by entities as indicated above.

Adesina (2017) asserts that as much as there have been challenges regarding linking economic diplomacy with digital diplomacy, to a certain degree, the US has been one of a few states to realise the value of digital diplomacy for strengthening the global economy. Diplomacy is the art and science of maintaining peaceful relationships between nations, groups, or individuals. Often, diplomacy refers to representatives of different groups discussing such issues as conflict, trade, the environment, technology, or maintaining security. Historically, states have been expected to strengthen the management of international relations to sustain the global economy (Ajayi, 2006).

Turvey (2014) asserts that the global economy is influenced by the economic powers held by states within the international community. Even countries that have had long-standing economic diplomacies have reached a stage in which their agreements have been influenced by geopolitics (Savy, 2014). A good example of this global economic change has been the emergence of BRICS nations – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (Savy, 2014). Based on this, Watson (2015) has argued that the global economy has changed drastically. For instance, the BRICS have emerged as a new driver of economic growth, especially after showing signs of early recovery in the aftermath of the global financial crisis in 2007 (Garcia & Bond, 2015). Since joining the BRICs, South Africa has been gradually shifting focus from the US to BRICS economic diplomacy (BRICS, 2017). The recurrent themes in the LinkedIn-based representation of US economic diplomacy towards South Africa will be discussed more comprehensively in Chapter 4.

2.3 Hard power, soft power and economic diplomacy

Nye (2021) asserts that hard power is the ability to get others to act in ways that are against their preferences and strategies. The soft power is an activity of control such that individuals want what you want and reach mutual agreement with you on what you intend to achieve before pressure is enforced (Miao, 2021; Nye, 2005; 2021; Yağci, 2018). Hard Power is prejudiced by a set of controls, such as armed control, financial control, and control view (Yağci, 2018). Soft power can be observed as a social effect and be related with non-military power and can be contingent on both cultural and financial fortes (Wu, 2018). Nye (2005) has presented the idea of keen

power, which includes the equilibrium of hard and soft power, as often seen in global government.

Unlike soft power, countries that apply hard power often use threats to achieve what they want, as has been observed in the case of the US using sanctions to sustain its global power (Antwi-Boateng, 2012). Also, hard power can be observed, for example, in the case of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In this case, President Vladimir Putin has relied on hard power to sustain the war in Ukraine as he has constantly threatened to use a nuclear weapon if NATO threatens the Russian territory. The US applied hard power when it imposed sanctions against Russia to stop the war. On the other hand, South Africa's neutrality in the Russia-Ukraine war could be regarded as soft power as its reasoning was that it is encouraging a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Wilson (2008) contends that countries with strong economies and political power, such as the US, often use soft power to persuade the international audience to develop positive perceptions towards their foreign policies. These countries often opt for hard power when a bilateral agreement has been compromised, especially concerning trade (Fan, 2008). Tella (2016) has also confirmed that soft power and economic diplomacy are often always associated with geopolitics. Hall (2012) contends that soft power originated from the US through its economic diplomacy tactics and was later adopted by Japan, the European Union, Canada and India. Unlike hard power, soft power was initiated to provide state actors with the power of persuasion without using economic resources or military power (Singh, 2016). For many years, as an exercise in soft power, China and the US have been threatening war against each other for global economic dominance, targeting developing countries, including South Africa (Tella, 2016).

During the implementation of economic diplomacy, states often require a range of attributes of soft power, including the country's culture, political values, and foreign policy (Tella, 2016). A country's culture can be regarded as the high culture, relating to higher education and low culture, associated with popular culture (Su-Yi, 2016). In this regard, the US is known for using high culture and low culture to promote its education system and art all over the world (Su-Yi, 2016). Trilokekar (2017) has

argued that despite the conflicts that have been experienced in most bilateral relations, countries can still become attractive through soft power and economic diplomacy. Nye (1990) has suggested that soft power may be linked to cultural power. However, Fan (2008) has found it difficult to locate it within the context of cultural power. On the other hand, Yağci (2018) has argued that the use of soft power has been observed in the bilateral relations between China and South Africa, which have been gradually strengthened following several commitments made by China in terms of investment, financial aid, and health and education programmes (Cheng-Sze et al., 2021). In this regard, the Chinese government went as far as waiving $1 billion in debt for some of the poorest countries on the African continent (Fan, 2008). Soft power in the case of US-South Africa relations can be seen under Obama's administration. Obama wanted South Africa to play a leadership role both regionally and globally (Tella, 2016). The US, therefore, supported South Africa financially to deliver foreign assistance to other African countries through the $1.3 million Trilateral Assistance Programme. Trilateral cooperation focuses on public health, trade and intellectual property programmes offering technical and legal assistance to developing countries. The programme aimed to promote peace, security and stability in the region through developing South Africa's national capacities to provide training and capacity of monetary support (Cook, 2020). Bilateral relations between the US and South Africa have since been strengthened in several areas including law enforcement, trade, transportation, human rights, health, and agriculture (Tella, 2016). For this study, only the concept of soft power will be considered. The notion of hard power is not applicable in the study since it is applied when bilateral relations have been compromised.

2.4 Public diplomacy and economic diplomacy

Dodds and Khatib (2009) have alluded to the fact that public diplomacy and soft power are closely related and should be applied interdependently when engaging international audiences. According to Rawnsley (2014), public diplomacy relies on the country's foreign policies and its reputation for attracting an international audience using mainstream media. Dodds and Khatib (2009) elaborate on this, saying that during the so-called 'war on terror', there was growth in the use of broadcasting as a tool for public diplomacy. This development was frequently led by the US, which recognised,

for example, the Al-Hurra TV (shortly after launching Radio Sawa) in the early existence of the conflict on Iraq to destabilise the American standpoint to viewers in the Arab world and to promote Al-Jazeera's predominance of the Arab frequency bands. But Al-Hurra has not been talented enough to dislodge the location of Al-Jazeera or its chief contestant, Al-Arabiya. The Academic consumers disputed Al-Hurra's aptitude to entice Arab spectators due to its connotation with the American administration. Therefore, this complements the initial statement that a state should strive to sustain its reputation or brand before engaging the targeted audience through public diplomacy. The development of reputation and the building of a brand, therefore, constitutes an instance of soft power (Szondi, 2008).

According to Szondi (2008), public diplomacy refers to communication aimed at foreign audiences to achieve sought-after changes in the hearts and minds of the people. Kalin (2011) states that public diplomacy is strategic communication as it intends to understand, inform and influence the public.

Media events serve to address diplomatic disagreement, foster a positive environment for negotiations, and provide ideal circumstances for signing an agreement. Leaders may utilise media events to foster public support for the process of peace-making (Gilboa, 2008). Digital diplomacy, also referred to as digiplomacy and ediplomacy (see below), has been defined as the use of the internet and new information communication technologies to help achieve diplomatic objectives. However, other definitions have also been proposed (Hall, 2012). As a result, social media are effective for conveying intended message to a given public, whether it is from a corporation, a public figure, or a government. The use of social media in politics has been an effective tool in garnering public support and thus provides strategic utility in the practice of public diplomacy (Rashica, 2018). It allows access to both large and small target audiences and helps in building public support and mobilising public opinion for an organisation. This is all done through a wide range of media and can be used to encourage two-way communication **(**Saddiki, 2006).

The availability of social media platforms has enabled most diplomats to enter open conversations with the international audience (Fitzpatrick, 2017). Khatib et al. (2012)

contend that the internet has enabled new and innovative approaches to public diplomacy. For instance, the US Digital Outreach Team (DOT) has been one such initiative, which uses online messages to communicate with citizens in the Middle East. The new diplomacy signals an escalation of public diplomacy to digital diplomacy (Verrekia, 2017). The notion of digital diplomacy will be discussed more comprehensively later in this section.

2.5 Place and national branding and economic diplomacy

Andreja (2018) defines national branding as the strategic self-presentation of a country to create reputational capital through economic, political, and social interest promotion domestically and abroad. According to Anholt (2011), national branding can be associated with creating favourable images of countries though marketing communications. Browning (2016) states that often statemen must manage the national branding of their countries.

The US has used the notion of national branding in a range of forms. Amongst other national branding activities that have been used by the US has been its economic leadership. For instance, on the 12th of December 2016, the State Department tweeted that the US would financially support a programme for creating a shared hydro-power electricity grid for the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The US's support for the programme exemplifies important elements of the image the US is projecting on its social media accounts, which has become part of its newfound commitment to meeting the challenges of climate change (Manor & Segev, 2015). Even within the South African context, the US national branding has been observed when, for instance, Biden announced that the US had pledged $8.5 billion to transit South Africa to clean energy (Stanczyk, 2022).

The aspect of geopolitical issues should not be taken for granted because they can affect national branding in the international community (Manor & Segev, 2015). We shall see later in this study whether the US branding activities have been featured in the LinkedIn posts considered in Chapter 4. Vickers and Ajulu (2008) contend that one of the most important issues that must be considered for South Africa to attain a positive global image will be to deal decisively with corruption. This implies that

national branding can be associated with a country's image. In other words, national branding will eventually culminate in a country's image. That is, when a product is well-branded, the outcome is likely to be a positive image of that product (Schoeman & Thuynsma, 2021). Schoeman and Thuynsma (2021) state that there is a strong connection between national branding and strategic reflection of the country. This suggests that national branding often affects the overall strategic image of a country. That is, if the brand is bad, the image will be perceived negatively (Ahn & Back, 2018). When a brand is good, the image will also become positive and ultimately, a good reputation will emerge (Schoeman & Thuynsma, 2021). In this regard, Anholt (2011) defines branding as how the identity of the company, product or service, and a country for this study, is dressed and thus recognised. Yee (2009) suggests five objectives for nation branding, namely, (1) stimulation of export growth; (2) increasing in-bound tourism for tourism receipts; (3) attracting foreign investment into the nation; (4) enhancing political influence internationally; and (5) managing negative stereotypes. For Yee (2009), these objectives play a crucial role in identity and image branding (Yee, 2009).

Countries in transition or developing countries that have undergone political emancipation must work on their national branding to strengthen their international image (Anholt, 2011). Due to negative media coverage, fuelled by the economic crisis on the continent, African countries must lobby for financial aid from various global nations (Papadopoulos & Hamzaoui-Essoussi, 2015). This is an important consideration for South Africa as, for instance, the country's brand is often tainted by allegations of corruption, abuse of power and justice systems that are affected by political interference, leading to lawlessness amongst those appointed in key government positions (Papadopoulos & Hamzaoui-Essoussi, 2015).

Rana (2006) supports this by pointing out that national branding and identity are critical aspects of economic diplomacy. As part of economic diplomacy, embassies should thus promote state foreign policies to the world (Moons & de Boer, 2014). Economic diplomacy can also be achieved through networking, whereby state actors host investment forums, such as the World Economic Forum, to accelerate their state's economic growth (Rana, 2006).

The national branding or image cannot be separated from individual brands or images (Petroye et al., 2020). This suggests that the head of state must become a brand, especially within the context of economic diplomacy (Heslop et al., 2008). In a situation whereby a state head is implicated in misconduct or corruption, a country's image is negatively impacted (Heslop et al., 2008). For instance, due to the allegations of state capture and corruption, former president Zuma failed in sustaining the US-South Africa relations, especially on trade (Le Pere, 2017). This suggests that a reputation or brand of a head of state is critical for international relations and the strategic image of a country (Heslop et al., 2008). .

2.6 Image studies and economic diplomacy

As much as the US-South Africa relations have a long and historic trade cooperation, it is still important to understand the representation of the US towards South Africa. South Africa has recently been grey-listed for the poor governance of its financial systems, especially the illicit financial flows.

As reported by White and Case (2023), the audit conducted in late 2019 and the subsequent Mutual Evaluation Report issued by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in October 2021, revealed that South Africa had failed to meet the internationally recognised standards of due diligence required by the FATF (Financial Action Task Force, 2021).

Manor (2017) describes the nationwide picture as a general idea or feelings that a thing makes in the senses of others. A nationwide picture is associated with somebody's understanding, appreciation and evaluation of an entity, individual or institution (Rana, 2007). Manor (2017) notes that federal vision is important as it places a government for an economic success. Manor resists that countries are known for specific things and reasons. The US, for example, is known for its state-of-the-art cyber technology, aircraft, spacecraft, optical, technical, for being a champion of law enforcement and human rights, and its medical equipment (Manor, 2017, p. 36). Meanwhile, an image is an overall opinion of the total impression an entity makes in the mind of others (Holst et al., 2021).

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As indicated in 2.5 above, the national image is linked to individual images of a country, including its political figures, monarchs, and public servants (Heslop et al., 2008). The separation of the national image from individual political leaders and the countries they lead is always a mission (Heslop et al., 2008). Most African countries are perceived poorly because of the bad reputation developed due to the things that their leaders have done during their terms of office (Le Pere, 2017). South Africa's image has also been influenced by its presidents, starting in the age of democracy from Nelson Mandela to Ramaphosa. Once the national branding and image are well established, a country, stands a chance of undertaking successful economic activities in strengthening economic diplomacy, digital diplomacy and use of soft power to market itself globally (Nye, 2008). In the context of economic diplomacy, South Africa's image has been tainted by the mounting cases of corruption reported in line with the state capture commission findings (Ishaku & Onyekwena, 2018).

However, the image of South Africa still relies on the consequence management to be adopted based on the state capture commission findings (Ishaku & Onyekwena, 2018). The process of developing an image for a country is a challenging task because it demands consistency and dedication (Heslop et al., 2008). Bjola and Jiang (2015) have argued that, in case a country is struggling to sustain a good image, more must be done to change the negative image through digital diplomacy.

One of the key questions that the study aims to address is how are the economic-diplomatic interests of the US's diplomatic actors towards South Africa are based on representation that manifest in the LinkedIn accounts of diplomatic entities?

2.7 Digital and economic diplomacy

Masters (2017) contends that as much as digital technologies were introduced to several developed countries some years ago, some countries in Africa are still reluctant to endorse them, notwithstanding the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). The 4IR and digital diplomacy evolved because of old diplomacy. According to Masters (2017), digital diplomacy and 4IR are not new concepts. The 4IR is challenging the old diplomacy to the extent that countries are beginning to infuse it in every aspect of their

international engagements or diplomatic relations (Williams, 2022). Masters (2017) asserts that the 4IR was introduced within international relations at the 2016 World Economic Forum (WEF) during which a significant number of countries showed interest in promoting it in their respective foreign policy processes.

Manor and Segev (2015) have reported that the US applied digital diplomacy at two levels, namely, the foreign ministry and embassy levels. The two levels of digital diplomacy are crucial because the US uses them to sustain its global image within the international community (Verrekia, 2017). Digital diplomacy has allowed states to engage in open conversations with target audiences whilst promoting their foreign policies and national branding and images (Gilboa, 2016). Manor and Segev (2015) have described one of the practical ways in which the US has used digital diplomacy: "On December 10th, which marks the UN's Human Rights Day, the State Department published tweets, dealing with America's promotion of the rights of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender), and a statement by President Obama regarding the US's unwavering support of the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The US's observance of this day on its social media channels represents an instance in which the US has portrayed itself as a dependable member of the league of nations."

For instance, a LinkedIn user, Mark-Anthony Johnson, the chief executive officer (CEO) at JIC Holdings wrote on January 2022: *"In case you missed it: here are all the deals committed to during the U.S.-Africa Leaders' Summit Business Forum: Leaders from across the African continent gathered last week in Washington for the #USAfricaLeadersSummit22 to underscore the importance of U.S.-Africa relations and increased cooperation on shared global priorities".* "On an everyday basis, the DOS also used social media to monitor information posted online so that it could modify its messages to respond to public opinion, and monitor X feeds in over 100 languages," (Verrekia, 2017).

Emerging technologies have been the game changers in the evolution of diplomacy (William, 2022). The 4IR technologies have brought a high level of geopolitics as big

economies, such as the US, China and Russia, are competing for global power (Rahman, 2020). Masters (2017) asserts that the 4IR has become a solution to challenges experienced by the international community regarding inadequate information-sharing in the formulation of foreign policies.

To this end, Rashica (2018) has characterised digital diplomacy as a new public diplomacy in which nations are utilising the internet, ICT and social media to strengthen their diplomatic relations. There are critical facets associated with digital diplomacy, namely, greater access to information, greater interaction between individuals and organisations, and greater transparency (Rashica, 2018). The websites are now becoming the strongest platforms as facilitators of digital diplomacy between foreign ministries, embassies and delegations of international organisations (Wekesa et al., 2021). Rashica (2018) asserts that social media has become the most appropriate platform for engaging for purposes of digital diplomacy and should thus be embraced by the international community. In most instances, nations can now connect through social media platforms, such as X, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, PenScope and Snapchat (Wekesa et al., 2021).

Manor (2016) asserts that the social networking sites (SNS), such as X, Facebook and Instagram, have enabled diplomats and embassies to converse and establish relationships with foreign populations. Rashica (2018) argues that digital prudence could help in measuring public statement about points in other nations. Thus, digital diplomacy can supply governments with immense usefulness, particularly concerning nationwide branding, image-building and economic prudence. Digital diplomacy is required for helping governments to create soft power (Nye, 2008). Vuving (2009) contends that, in the method of executing digital prudence, governments must create soft power, which is the most critical characteristic of digital and financial diplomacy.

2.8 Theoretical framework

This theoretical framework has been adopted based on the key research questions and borrowing from the concepts that have been discussed in the sections above. The key issue that is surfacing strongly in this study is the link between the role played by the US's economic diplomacy and its representations towards South Africa within the

context of digital and economic diplomacy. The key pillars that are investigated in this study are, therefore, the notion of economic relations and representations, with a specific focus on how these pillars converge and diverge. The two pillars are an integral part of the study as they help us understand the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa. These pillars were anchored within the fields of journalism, media and communication in general terms and more specific emphasis was directed to digital diplomacy.

For this study, only three theories, namely, second-level media agenda-setting; third-level media agenda-setting; and media framing were applied in answering the research questions. In the study, the concepts such as global communication; international relations; global economy; public diplomacy; digital diplomacy; image studies and soft power will be considered in the application of second-level media agenda-setting, third-level agenda-setting and media framing theories. These theories were found to be suitable for the study because they influence how information get published in the digital media. In response to the key research questions stipulated in the earlier section of the study, the second-level media agenda-setting; third-level media agenda-setting and media framing theories assisted us to understand the agendas pursued by the US in terms of economic diplomacy through LinkedIn. Still focusing on second-level media agenda-setting and third-level media agenda-setting theories, the notions of media framing assisted us to determine several issues that the US framed as key area of focus in terms of promoting its economic diplomacy towards South Africa (Question 2). The theories of second-level media agenda-setting and third-level media agenda-setting assisted us in figuring out the key objectives of the US's economic diplomacy towards South Africa. In short, the theories of second-level media agenda-setting; third-level media agenda-setting; and media framing theories assisted us in figuring out the US interests towards South Africa (Question 2), while enabling us to analyse the developmental state of agendas presented in LinkedIn accounts of US entities identified for data analysis in the study.

As Bjola (2018) has pointed out, economic and digital diplomacy would only be efficacious if these were applied within the context of media agenda-setting, especially third-level media agenda-setting. As this study identified LinkedIn as the main method

of data gathering, it was essential to determine the recurrent themes in the LinkedIn-based representations of the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa. Another theory that was assessed closely in the LinkedIn posts was the media framing, focusing on issues that associate with the US-South Africa relation. Bjola (2018) asserts that some state actors often view digital diplomacy as a threat, although digital diplomacy is critical as it allows state actors to set the media agenda using social media, to the extent that the effect of the second-level media agenda-setting, third-level media agenda-setting and media framing theories is determined.

As we shall see in Chapter 4, the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa remains a focal point in this study. Therefore, it was critical to understand the objective of the recurrent themes in the LinkedIn-based representation of the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa, as they featured in the LinkedIn accounts of the US entities selected for the study.

McCombs (2005) defines basic agenda-setting as a process through which the media or government focuses public attention on a few key issues and topics, despite dozens of issues and other aspects of the world outside competing for attention. Thus, media agenda-setting involves the selection of issues to dominate conversation in the public space (Russell et al., 2014). Ultimately, these issues become salient in the mainstream media, such that they culminate into what Wanta and Alkazemi (2017) call media agenda-building. Can this be the case with recurrent themes in the LinkedIn-based representations of the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa? McCombs et al. (2014) have provided several definitions of the different levels of media agenda-setting, namely, basic media agenda-setting, which is also referred to as the first level of media agenda-setting; second-level media agenda-setting; and third-level media agenda-setting. Basic media agenda-setting can be defined as the impact of the media agenda on the public agenda regarding the salience of issues, political figures and any other objects of attention (McCombs et al., 2014). The pattern through which media selects salient issues from digital media and make headlines in the mainstream media and digital media is regarded as the inter-media agenda-setting, which is known as the second-level media agenda-setting theory (Aruguete, 2017). The third-level media agenda- setting is the impact of the networked media agenda of objects or attributes

that have an influence on the networked public agenda of an object or attribute salience. According to McCombs et al. (2014), the media agenda-setting occurs when the media select few issues to be viewed as important topic for public debate. However, McCombs et al. (2014) adds that when the media tries to interpret or analysis issues selected as key areas of focus, second-level media agenda-setting emerge. But when various media outlets including social media platforms pursue coverage or debate on issues selected as important topics, the third-level agenda-setting comes into play (Cheng, 2016). Cheng (2016) argued that intermedia agenda-setting does not tell the public what to think but what to think about.

However, the study will confirm in Chapter 4 if the recurrent themes in the LinkedIn-based representations of the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa have borne these theories out or not. The remaining gap will be to determine the intersection between US economic diplomacy and digital diplomacy regarding US-South Africa economic relations.

2.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, the study adopted a broad approach in assessing the various issues regarding international relations aspects to arrive at the critical areas concerning economic diplomacy. The study of digital media-based perceptions of economic diplomacy is an interdisciplinary one. Therefore, this chapter presented a review of key concepts and aspects to provide a theoretical foundation for the investigation of the phenomenon under investigation. These included second-level media agenda-setting, third-level media agenda-setting and media framing.

The next chapter will present and discuss the methodological and design considerations made regarding the conduct of the study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the selection of a research methodology requires an in-depth knowledge of various research methods. One research method that is appropriate for social conversation is qualitative thematic analysis (Willig & Rogers, 2017). Before defining qualitative thematic analysis, it is important to point out a few aspects concerning data-gathering processes. Firstly, there is what is called a data item, which relates to interviews or social media posts that are appropriate for the content coverage studies (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Secondly, there is a data set, which is inclusive of all the data gathered for analysis (Terry et al., 2017). After the data set has been captured, the important aspect is to classify or categorise data items according to their relevance to the key research questions and research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis involves identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). Thematic analysis is a foundational method for qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) assert that qualitative researchers must identify themes during the data analysis process. A theme captures the important or key aspects of the data regarding the key research question and represents a patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) point out that within a theme, there will be issues that must be singled out so that they are not confused with themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest the following stages for conducting thematic analysis: familiarising yourself with the data; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the research report. It is important to remember that qualitative research is concerned with the quality and texture of experience rather than the identification of cause-and-effect relationships (Willig & Rogers, 2017). That is, a qualitative research approach involves the subjective assessment of attitudes, experiences, opinions and behaviours of people, institutions or organisations (Kothari, 2004). Mohajan asserts that the “qualitative approach is a

form of social action that stresses the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences to understand the social reality of individuals" (2018, p. 2). Hawe et al. (2004) state that social network analysis on social structures includes online or computer-generated relationships among individuals and agencies (Hawe et al., 2004).

The objective of this study was to establish the link between economic and digital diplomacy in the case of US-South Africa relations using the LinkedIn platform. The study focused on LinkedIn posts of the US entities responsible for economic diplomacy with South Africa. The posts were classified according to specific issues associated with the US-South Africa bilateral relations, including politics, mining, education, trade and investment, health, energy, state visits, ICT, water and sanitation, environment, and agriculture. The social network analysis method was the most appropriate tool for gathering and analysing online data for this study. The social network analysis approach will be discussed more comprehensively in the section below.

The section will further discuss the research methodological and design aspects of the study, including the selection of the study sample, content analysis, data collection, data analysis, the coding scheme system and the limitations of the research.

3.2 Social network analysis method

As mentioned in section 3.1 above, the study social network analysis was used to gather data from the LinkedIn accounts of US entities for monetary support and financial development, focusing on posts concerning the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa. Data gathering and analysis from the social media platforms were processed to apply the mixed methods on social network analysis (Fan et al., 2014). Social network analytics comprises a three-stage process, namely, capturing, understanding and presenting. The capturing stage involves data-gathering from social media platforms, such that relevant data is identified for capturing and analysis. During the capturing stage, the researchers go through conversations on social media platforms to obtain the necessary or relevant data relating to the purpose of the study (Zeng et al., 2010). During this process, a significant amount of data is collected for sampling at a later stage. The last step involves making sense of the data collected to

generate findings (Fan el at., 2014). The next stage is mixed methods. The mixed methods approach involves using qualitative and quantitative methods to respond to the key research questions (Palinkas et al., 2011). Palinkas et al. (2011) contend that three stages are involved in the integration of quantitative and qualitative data, namely, merging, connecting and embedding the data.

Even though numerous competing online data analysis methods could have been used for online data-gathering and analysis for this study, the study adopted a qualitative approach because it was regarded as a content coverage research study. For instance, the approach assisted us to determine the extent to which the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa has been projected, especially regarding digital diplomacy.

Wekesa (2020) asserts that the best approach to the implementation of digital diplomacy is to theorise diplomacy within the context of African digital diplomacy by way of a theory-building rather than a theory-testing approach. Wekesa (2020) further argues that in a theory-building approach, a researcher must collect or generate data and identify patterns that speak to the uniqueness of specific phenomena, which can then be presented as a new theory or theoretical or conceptual framework. However, Wekesa (2020) argues that, in a theory-testing approach, a researcher often assumes that a theory already exists and proceeds to uncover such aspects as its qualities and expressions.

3.3 Selection of study sample

The data was collected from January to December 2022. All the posts relating to the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa were sampled. As indicated above, the study sought to investigate the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa. This was done to respond to the key research questions of the study. Rationale for selecting this period was to obtain a sense of the historic patterns of the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa over a reasonable period. The data volume gathered across the nine (9) identified US entities as part of the study was 226 posts. However, it must be mentioned that some entities had higher volumes of data than others on US economic diplomacy towards South Africa. The US entities with a higher volume of data on

economic diplomacy included USAID with 81, the US Commercial Service with 63, the US Mission in South Africa with 25, and Power Africa with 22 posts. The rest of the entities presented lower volumes of data regarding US economic diplomacy towards South Africa. Since the volume of the posts drawn from the US entities varied, the study resorted to analyse every first six LinkedIn posts published by each US entity within the stipulated period. This was done to avoid duplicate in terms of data analysis. It must be stated that where the LinkedIn account of an entity had less than six posts, the whole data set was analysed. The overall 52 of 226 posts were eventually sampled and analysed in the study.

Table 1.1 below shows the posts collected per entity, how the posts were identified and the posts used as discussed above.

ENTITY NAME	OVERALL LINKEDIN POSTS COLLECTED	SAMPLED DATA (POSTS CONSIDERED)	MOST APPROPRIATE POSTS IDENTIFIED TO ANSWER THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS
US Mission to South Africa	25	10	6
USAID	81	10	6
The US Commercial Service, Sub-Saharan Africa	63	10	6
Prosper Africa	22	910	6
IDFC	9	9	6
Millennium Challenge Corporation	6	6	6
Power Africa	14	10	6
US African Development Foundation	6	6	5
United States Trade and Development Agency	6	6	5
Overall posts	232	77	52

Table1.1: Data sampling explanation

3.4 Content and network analysis

With the rapid growth of online communication, influenced by the rise of digital media, content analysis has become an important method in journalism studies (Stemler, 2015). Gheyle and Jacobs (2017) describe content analysis as a research methodology that seeks to enable researchers to interpret unstructured and structured messages, including texts, images, symbols and audio data (Stemler, 2015). Content analysis is critical as it enables researchers to make inferences in the interpretation of online data. For this study, the content analysis approach involved data sampling and coding schemes. As discussed earlier, the network analysis approach, which refers to the analysis of a set of socially relevant nodes connected by one or more relations, was

used. According to Marin and Wellman (2011), nodes or network members refer to the units that are connected by the relations whose patterns researchers study. These units consist of persons or organisations and any other units that may be connected to other units as nodes (Marin & Wellman, 2011), including websites, journal articles, social media posts and YouTube videos (Scott, 2011).

3.5 Data collection

In this study, relevant posts were gathered from the LinkedIn account of the US entities responsible for promoting economic diplomacy towards South Africa. The posts were identified in line with the critical issues, such as trade, investment, energy, education, environment, agriculture and ICT. The harvesting of data included any emerging issues that influenced economic diplomacy between the US and South Africa. As mentioned above, the data gathering process commenced from January to December 2022, after which the data were organised according to the months during which they had been posted to ensure that all the required themes were sufficiently retrieved and captured. Again, as mentioned earlier, this was achieved by going through the LinkedIn accounts of the US entities to identify the relevant posts required for analysis.

During the data analysis process, the study considered the identification of patterns through which the data was captured and analysed. According to Blair (2015), it is important to develop a coding system as part of the content analysis. To make the system easy to work with and to organise the data into meaningful categories for analysis and interpretation, data labels or codes were generated. For this study, code sheets embodied critical posts which represented issues that featured in the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa. For the study, therefore, I ensured that all the coding categories were interpreted in such a manner that they contributed towards answering the key research questions.

3.6 Coding scheme

As part of sampling, the study mined the data from LinkedIn accounts of US entities introduced in the earliest sections, focusing on issues relating to US-South Africa relation. This assisted us to formulate two themes required for data analysis, namely, economic and social themes.

Vaismoradi et al. (2016) describe a theme as the main product of data analysis through which accurate research findings may be generated. Scharp and Sanders (2019) assert that themes may minimise uncertainties during the interpretation of data. Vaismoradi et al. (2016, p. 101) further indicate that a "[theme] is used as attribute, descriptor, element, and concept. Coding involves compressing data into manageable data segments in preparation for analysis (Mezmir, 2020). The coding process is often used when a researcher seeks to retrieve an area of significant from the data source in the form of a data extract (Peel, 2020). Peel (2020) explains that a "[data] extract is a term that refers to a potentially meaningful segment of data, revealing information possibly relevant to the research questions". For this study, as advised by Clarke and Braun (2017), codes were used as building blocks in the identification of relevant data to respond to the key research questions.

As reflected in the previous sections of this dissertation, the source of the study data was the nine (9) LinkedIn accounts of the US entities responsible for promoting US economic diplomacy using digital media, as described in sub-section 3.3. As part of data collection and analysis, the data were categorised into themes to ensure that only the relevant data linked to the aim and objectives of the study were considered. The themes considered during data collection related to a range of issues, including politics, investment, education, energy, trade, health, agriculture, environment, and culture (US African Leaders Summit).

	NINE US ENTITIES CONSIDERED AS THE DATA SOURCES								
Theme	US Mission to South Africa	USAID	US Commercial Service	Prosper Africa	US International Development Finance Corporation	Millennium Challenge Corporation	Power Africa	US African Development Foundation	US Trade and Development Agency
Economic theme: (finance; trade; mining, investment; and ICT)	3	5	5	5	4	1	6	4	5
Social Theme: (education, culture; environment; health; scholarship; and politics)	3	1	1	0	2	5	0	1	0

Table 1.2: Coding system

The coding system, shown in Table 3.2 above, was important as it assisted us to determine the extent to which the LinkedIn posts linked to US economic diplomacy towards South Africa were covered on other media platforms. Another unit of the coding scheme was reaction status, which assisted us to gauge the level of responses tendered by the LinkedIn users, focusing specifically on the LinkedIn accounts of the nine US entities. Lastly, the coding scheme considered concept type, which was used to determine the concepts that were applied by the publishers on LinkedIn regarding the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa, specifically second-level media agenda-setting, third-level media agenda-setting and media framing.

3.7 Conclusion

In this section, the second-level media agenda-setting, third-level media agenda-setting and media framing were critical in assisting the study to attain its intended objectives. The LinkedIn accounts of the US entities were therefore essential in determining the study findings, as revealed in chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented and discussed research methods and social network analysis. The chapter further discussed social network analytics which comprises a three-stage process, namely, capturing, understanding and presentation. The chapter also discussed the fact that in qualitative research, content analysis is preferred as it enables researchers to make inferences in the interpretation of online data. In this chapter, the data is presented, analysed and interpreted based on the posts from the LinkedIn accounts of the US entities relating to the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa. As mentioned in Chapter 3 above, the data was collected from January to December 2022. The findings of the study were presented through the social network analysis through which relevant inferences were drawn. The outcomes of the study were reported using tables and substantiated by an in-depth discussion of the trends generated from the data.

4.2 Selection of data sample

As part of the data gathering process, the study was guided by various themes generated from the LinkedIn posts regarding the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa. The data sample used in answering the research questions comprised 52 posts drawn from the LinkedIn accounts of the US entities as discussed in Chapter 3 above. The chapter presents the data according to the nine (9) entities following two themes, namely, economic and social themes. At this point, it is important to remind the reader that the study sought to respond to the key research questions outlined in the earlier sessions of the study. For this study, it is important to reiterate the fact that the data gathered on the nine (9) US entities varied in terms of size or quantity. This means that, as pointed out above, some entities had significant amounts of data on US economic diplomacy compared to others. During the data analysis processes, several issues, including ICT, education, trade, investment, health, politics, environment and skill development, were grouped into two themes, namely economic and social theme. The economic theme associates with trade, entrepreneurship, energy transition

projects, etc. ICT enables economic growth by broadening the reach of technologies such as high-speed internet, mobile broadband, and computing. Expanding these technologies itself creates economic growth, and it must be noted that technologies make it easier for people to interact and enable workers to be more productive, which creates additional benefits in the digital space. After accommodating potential econometric misspecification bias and publication selection bias, we detect evidence that ICT has indeed contributed positively to economic growth, at least on average.

The trends and patterns observed during the data-gathering process were that a significant range of users participated in the LinkedIn accounts of USAID, the Mission to South Afric.a, the US Commercial Service Sub-Saharan Africa and Prosper Africa. The issues that dominated the data sampled from LinkedIn accounts of US entities selected for the study were renewable energy, ICT, health, education, investment and trade. Most of the posts retrieved fell within the economic theme. There were fewer posts on the social theme in the targeted LinkedIn accounts. In addition, the posts that fell within the social theme could also be associated with the economic theme largely owing to how they were framed. The posts regarding the US assisting South Africa with the COVID-19 vaccine, for example, were included under the social theme. Through the analysis of patterns as posted by the US entities concerning the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa, it can be argued that the US relied heavily on the LinkedIn platform for engaging with the international audience. It can also be argued that the US linked digital diplomacy with economic diplomacy as most of its entities promoted economic activities in their LinkedIn accounts targeting South Africa.

4.3 Analysis of issues emerging from LinkedIn accounts of the US entities

As mentioned previously, the study focused on the LinkedIn accounts of the nine (9) US entities, with emphasis on the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa. Although, the sampled data had more posts relating to US-South Africa relation, the study collected the most appropriate posts to answer the research questions.

4.3.1 US Mission to South Africa

The study revealed that the Embassy succeeded in fostering social network engagements amongst its followers as users from other US entities also commented on

several posts or published issues relating to either social or economic theme on the LinkedIn account of the US Mission to South Africa.

In the six posts that were analysed from the US Mission to South Africa, 50% were economic theme and 50% posts were social issues categorised into social theme. It must be noted that, issues that were categorised into social theme, were one way or the other part and parcel of economic diplomacy. Therefore, the US Mission to South Africa has shown success in portraying the US intention in strengthening its economic diplomacy towards South Africa.

In the post number 4.3.1.1, it is clear that the US used culture to strengthen its relationship with South Africa. The fact that the US used LinkedIn Platform to promote the 2022 Academy for Women Entrepreneurs (AWE) program targeting South Africa, it confirmed the possibility of the link between economic and digital diplomacy in the context of US-South Africa relation since the US Mission to South Africa used LinkedIn as an effective tool to communicate economic interest with member states in the international community. As much as the post number 4.3.1.1 is classified in the category of social theme, it can also be justified as an economic issue as candidates for the Academy for Women Entrepreneurs (AWE) might, at some stage, become role players in local and global economy. As part of analysis of data below, the US Mission in South Africa also used its LinkedIn account to circulate the posts depicting the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa, tagging few LinkedIn users. The US, therefore, has applied media framing to emphasis the value of the AWE in increasing entrepreneurial opportunities for women living in South Africa.

With an inference from the post number 4.3.1.2, it can be affirmed that the appointment of the new US Ambassador to South Africa was covered across LinkedIn accounts of US entities selected for the study. The post on the appointment of Reuben E. Brigety as the US Ambassador to South Africa, received extensive digital media coverage beyond LinkedIn based on all blog articles, RSS feeds, video content or other types of digital content (produced by individuals or organisations other than the US Mission to South Africa). This pattern constitutes second and third-level media agenda-setting because it justified the fact that the appointment of the US Ambassador was selected as the most important topic amongst the LinkedIn posts subjected to data analysis in this section. The media coverage of the US's appointed Ambassador to South Africa is majorly based on the social networks to demonstrate the US interest in South Africa.

The extensive social networking coverage of the appointment of Brigety as the US Ambassador to South Africa suggested the success of the US's digital public diplomacy and it can be argued that the entity has succeeded in promoting US economic diplomacy towards South Africa. Between 2017 and 2021, the US government, under Trump took longer than expected to nominate its ambassador to South Africa. As a result, it can be stated that South Africa was never prioritised during Trump's administration. The appointment of Brigety as the US Ambassador to South Africa is a good representation of the US towards South Africa, under Biden's administration.

As depicted in 4.3.1.3, the Biden's administration pronounced a pledge of $8.5 billion to assist South Africa to move from coal to green energy (https://www.google.com/). This suggested that the South African energy transition project has been identified as one of the apex priorities of the US intervention strategies towards boasting Africa's economy. The US developed this investment plan to clarify its priority investment requirements aimed at supporting the goals of energy security, a just transition to green energy, and economic growth in South Africa. The intention of the US to assist South Africa with its Just Energy Transition (JET) project created a social network between the representatives from the US companies and the South African energy sector. Through this project, it could be concluded that the US Mission to South Africa has managed to promote US energy policy and influence the energy trajectory of South Africa. US companies operating in South Africa proved the success of the US in linking digital diplomacy with economic diplomacy towards South Africa. The USAID Southern Africa Energy Programme in South Africa, organised by the US Mission to South Africa, in partnership with Power Africa and SALGA, demonstrated a social network amongst the US entities. The post also re-emphasised that the US Mission to South Africa is promoting US economic diplomacy towards South Africa. This culminated into the third-level media agenda-setting effect as the entities such as Power Africa and USAID also reposted messages relating to the US pledge of $8.5 billion aimed at accelerating JET in South Africa. The third-level media agenda-setting refers to the influence that different news sources may have on each other, and how this subsequently affects the breadth of information that is presented to the public.

The post number 4.3.1.4 was identified as an ICT-related attribute, which falls under the economic theme of the study. The post confirmed social networks and conversation

of general LinkedIn users in the US Mission for South Africa. Magajana is one of the followers of the LinkedIn account of the US Mission to South Africa. However, her post was circulated on other LinkedIn accounts of US entities. Through the post, Magajana acknowledged the good work done by the US in South Africa. The post suggested that the US Mission to South Africa engaged its LinkedIn users on its programmes through digital media. This post provided an example of the US's success in linking digital diplomacy with economic diplomacy. From the above, it could be concluded that the US succeeded in applying soft power, which is an attribute of media framing theory, in promoting its economic diplomacy towards South Africa. Magajana's remarks about her experience at the US-South Africa Annual Bilateral Forum, suggested that US economic diplomacy towards South Africa was successful.

The post number 4.3.1.5 below demonstrate the media framing effect on school sanitation, which the US applied in demonstrating its collaborative efforts towards improving school infrastructure in South African schools. The US Mission to South Africa used this post to set an agenda on challenges encountered by South Arica in terms of improving school sanitation. This can be regarded as an attribute of soft power aimed at boasting the US representation in South Africa.

In the post number 4.3.1.6 below, the US Mission to South Africa is demonstrating its interest in investing in the South Africa 's digital dive through Microsoft SA Partner Awards. The fact that the post was shared by Lillian Barnard CEO at Microsoft South Africa on the LinkedIn account of the US Mission to South Africa, it showed that the US is succeeding in terms of setting public agenda using digital platform. See the posts below for more information:

4.3.1.1 Education

US Mission to South Africa wrote on Aprill 2022: "Applications are officially open for highly motivated and self-driven young South African women to join the 2022 Academy for Women Entrepreneurs (AWE) program".

4.3.1.2 Politics

US Embassy or US Mission to South posted on February 2022: "Strengthening bilateral relations with the newly appointed Ambassador of the U.S Mission to South African reception function hosted by the South Africa-U.S Alumni Connect (SAUSAC)"..

4.3.1.3 Energy

US Mission to South Africa commented on August 2022: "On 23 and 24 August, the USAID Southern Africa Energy Program, a Power Africa Initiative and South African Local Government Association (SALGA), delivered the first workshop in a three-part training program for Mpumalanga municipalities on Increasing Municipal Awareness, Understanding, and Readiness for JET Integration".

4.3.1.4 ICT

Thembiso Lucil Magajana, Founder of Social Coding published: "Digital Inclusion in Rural Communities is a mission I strive to drive in our daily activities at Social Coding and I am extremely privileged and honoured to be given a platform at the 2022 United States - South Africa Annual Bilateral Forum. I had the amazing opportunity to speak about our work @social_coding as well as how my time spent in the US helped shaped some of my strategic decisions at the organisation".

4.3.1.5 Education

US Mission to South Africa wrote on June 2022: "As we mark Youth Day in South Africa, the U.S. Mission to South Africa is paying tribute to our future leaders @Youth_SAIIA. School children having access to decent sanitation at school".

4.3.1.6 ICT

Lillian Barnard CEO at Microsoft South Africa posted on July 2022: "On Wednesday, we hosted our annual #MicrosoftSA #PartnerAwards. This event is an opportunity to celebrate the incredible impact our partners are making and to recognise and thank all our partners who work with us and support us to deliver on our mission to empower every person and organisation to achieve".

4.3.2 The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

The posts below shows that USAID is promoting US policies using digital platforms. The post number 4.3.2.2 and 4.3.2.4 below suggest that the US government has good intensions to give financial support to emerging economies, such as South Africa. The posts indicated that USAID has been seen as suitable vehicle to drive US economic diplomacy in the international community with intention to make the US economic diplomacy and strategic image more attractive, particularly in South Africa. The post number 4.3.2.3 and 4.3.2.6 suggest that the US applied media framing theory to promote AGOA as part of its economic diplomacy towards South Africa. The post number 4.3.2.1 pointed to how USAID's or the US's interest concerning energy in South Africa was communicated through the LinkedIn platform. Generally, the posts depicted a link between the social and economic themes and the interrelatedness of the two themes. In its economic diplomacy towards South Africa, the US has voiced concerns about the energy crisis in South Africa. However, at the same time, the US has mobilised the energy sector on its shores to explore renewable energy business opportunities in South Africa. As such, the US, through USAID, has deployed LinkedIn Platform to lobby companies specialising in energy in the US and South Africa to strengthen trade ties on renewable energy. As part of its financial support to South Africa, the US through USAID funded the Just Energy Skills Development Programme, targeting female youth. Concerning this intervention, it could be argued that the US is deploying the humanitarian programme to strengthen its trade ties with South Africa. This use of the humanitarian assistance

programme could be classified as an exercise of soft power by the US to promote its economic diplomacy towards South Africa, which can be attributed to the second-level media agenda-setting theory. With inferences from the post number 4.3.2.1, it can be argued that the US was willing to invest the required financial assistance to South Africa for helping it to migrate from coal to green energy. This, on its own, demonstrate positive economic diplomacy from the perspective of the US. The US's contribution to the energy transition project in South Africa attracted a significant number of USAID followers following other US entities identified in the previous sections of this study. This suggest that the US has succeeded in using its digital diplomacy to promote its economic diplomacy towards South Africa. Please check the posts below for more information:

4.3.2.1 Energy

Hlengiwe Radebe wrote on USAID in December 2019: "Just Energy Transition | Mitigation | #MeettheWomeninEnergy Series | M&G Top 200 Young South Africans 2019. Happy to be part of the Just Energy Transition Skills Development Programme. First day is on Energy Transition in South Africa."

4.3.2.2 Investment

Will Green, grow Tech Founders posted in August 2022: "US investors with more than $1 trillion of assets under management are in South Africa to look for investment opportunities. The visit being facilitated by USAID and Prosper Africa the US government's initiative to increase trade and investment between African nations and America…"

4.3.2.3 Trade

Tamburai Chirume, Managing Director at ONEOFEACH posted on USAID in November 2022: "FollowONEOFEACH took the South African AGOA Exporter of The Year award again this year but in different categories. Top Black Owned Enterprise Exporter to the US under AGOA and Women Owned Business Exporter under AGOA. USZA The awards are to recognise and reward

outstanding performance and noteworthy efforts of exporters in overcoming market entry hurdles and achieving successful trade to the U.S under AGOA".

4.3.2.4 Finance

Tshepo Mazibuko, Former Waste Picker posted in August 2022: K1 Foundation took a short left to Giyani to assess the disturbing waste management practices. We request the support to continue assisting our communities. As the EPR bill kicks in, K1 Foundation is already on the ground to assist our communities with awareness and education on safe disposal and proper waste management. We ask for support from corporate, Pro's,etc. #wastemanagement #education Procter & Gamble Clover S.A. Proprietary Limited Coca-Cola Beverages South Africa (CCBSA)United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative (UNEP FI)Motsepe Foundation #southafrica Unilever USAID Dangote Industries Limited Rhodes Trust Sustainable Seas Trust Polyco".

4.3.2.5 Health

Chris Baisch, Executive Head at IT & Technology at Right ePharmacy wrote in November 2022: "Interesting topics covered at #HISA2022, where our own Mr Fanie Hendriksz, MD of Right ePharmacy, presented how we use innovative technology to improve healthcare outcomes for patients in South Africa, Lesotho, eSwatini and Botswana. Always good to connect with industry leaders, to see how we can possibly collaborate to improve the health and lives of others.Nashreen Arnachellam (MBA) | Right to Care | USAID | FHI 360#pharmacyofthefuture #healthcareinnovation #healthcare."

4.3.2.6 Investment

Lesego Moepye, International Relations, Development, and Project Management wrote in June 2022: "Today I have the pleasure to attend the South Africa AGOA Exporters Awards being hosted by the USAID Southern Africa Trade and Investment Hub in partnership with the International Trade Institute of Southern Africa. The awards aim to recognize and award South

African Exporters in various categories that have successfully exported to the United States under the African Growth and Opportunity Act #opportunity".

4.3.3 US Commercial Service

With reference to the data analysed on LinkedIn account of US Commission Service, economic themes are more dominant as compared to social themes. The analysed LinkedIn data demonstrated the US commitment toward building international coalitions, particularly in providing financial support to the developing economies. In post number 4.3.3.1 as posted by the US Commercial Service, the finding revealed that the US used soft power to gain positive image in international community.

The post number 4.3.3.2 affirmed that the US continued to apply media framing or rather sotf power to promote its policy around Just Energy Transition targeting South Africa. The post can also be regarded as an attribute of second-level media agenda-setting since the US Commercial Service used its LinkedIn account to emphasise the importance of its intention on JET to stimulate public debate on LinkedIn. Posts from 4.3.3.3 to 4.3.3.5 servd as evidence that the US is willing to increase the number of US companies investing in South Africa, especially those that are experts in technolgy. These posts confirmed that the US regarded ICT as the strongest component to strenth its economic diplomacy towards South Africa. Therefore the US has succeded in using LinkedIn accounts of its entities to promote its economic diplomacy towards South Africa. Under the US Commercial Service, it was clear that majority of issuses selected for analysis related to economic theme. Althouh the post number 4.3.3.6 was an attribute of social theme, it is possible to become economic theme provided that the messages depicted in the post resembled economic issues.

As the post number 4.3.3.6 stated, *"the U.S. Consul General, Vinny Spera provided closing remarks yesterday at the African Centre for the study of the United States (ACSUS) 4th Anniversary dinner at University of the*

Witwatersrand. He emphasized the importance of bilateral relationship between the USA and Africa and how USA companies are looking at Africa as a sustainable market".

The post is an educational issue, but it can be justified as trade issue due to the intended objective of engagement as unpacked in the post. Please visit the posts below for more information:

4.3.3.1 Trade

Amy Stokes, Founder, President and CEO at Infinite Family posted in November 2022: "Infinite Family was honored to attend U.S. Commercial Service Sub-Saharan Africa Johannesburg's festive evening to honor the City of Houston delegation led by Councilman Edward Pollard. We hold Texas, and especially the City of Houston, in high esteem due to the pleasure of working with many wonderful Video Mentors from that region. Looking forward to working even more closely together".

4.3.3.2 Energy

Mohammed Essay, Senior Business Development Manager & Country Representative, Southern Africa (USTDA) wrote in November 2022: "Thank you to everyone who participated in the successful U.S. Trade and Development Agency South Africa Green Hydrogen Workshop last week in Cape Town! It was great to hear such engaging discussions between South Africa and the United States on opportunities for partnership to support the development of green hydrogen in South Africa. We are grateful to the 90+ participants, including from the Office of the Presidency of South Africa, Infrastructure South Africa, the South African Department of Science and Innovation, the U.S. Consulate General in Cape Town, the U.S. Commercial Service Sub-Saharan Africa, Power Africa, the U.S. Department of Energy, and key private sector partners, who took two days out of their busy schedules to engage on this topic. We look forward to continuing these discussions and furthering USTDA's contribution to the Just Energy Transition Partnership".

4.3.3.3 Investment

*Afridigest posted in November 2021: "Early this week, pan-African mobile money gateway MFS Africa announced its acquisition of Global Technology Partners (GTP) for $34M (in a combination of cash and stock).Here's what you need to know. .**About MFS Africa**: Headquartered in Johannesburg, South Africa, MFS Africa is a pan-African digital payments gateway that connects over 320 million mobile money wallets across 35+ African countries. The company last raised $100M ($70M equity/$30M debt) in a November 2021 Series C".*

4.3.3.4 ICT

U.S. Commercial Service Sub-Saharan Africa posted in November 2022: "The U.S. Commercial Service #southafrica Team and U.S. Trade and Development Agency team took some time from Africa Tech Festival to Visit Langa with #toomuchwifi that offers accessibility to Wi-Fi in a SA town's. TooMuchWifi mission is to bridge the connectivity gap within the local communities".

4.3.3.5 ICT

Danielle A, Country Manager, Southern Africa and Global Connectivity Sector Lead at U.S. Trade and Development Agency published in November 2022: "Just returning from a whirlwind two-week trip which capped off with a fantastic week at #africacom2022/#africatechfestival in Cape Town. It was a pleasure to speak alongside esteemed panelists from ICASA, Cell C, and Comtech Telecommunications Corp. on the potential for 5G and Open RAN in Africa as well as USTDA's tools that can help build open, inclusive, and secure next generation networks. I was also fortunate to be able to participate in site visits in both eSwatini with USTDA's grantee #JennyInternet and partner Connectivity Capital, as well as in Cape Town with TooMuchWifi, where we saw the incredible efforts these companies are making to create solutions to effectively bridge the digital divide in Southern Africa".

4.3.3.6 Education

U.S. Commercial Service Sub-Saharan Africa published in February 2022: "U.S. Consul General, Vinny Spera provided closing remarks yesterday at the African Centre for the study of the United States (ACSUS) 4th Anniversary dinner at University of the Witwatersrand. He emphasized the importance of bilateral relationship between the #usa & #africa and how #usa companies are looking at #africa as a sustainable market for trade and investment.The second picture from L to R Vinny Spera, Moleletsi Mbeki, Gilbert Khadiagala, Mike Bromley, and Bob Job Wekesa".

4.3.4 Prosper Africa

The study revealed that most of the posts circulated on Prosper Africa's LinkedIn account were dominated by issues relating to the economic theme. The recurrent themes tell us that the main objective of the US entities was to increase trade opportunities in the identified countries, including South Africa. It was detected on various posts below that the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa was intensive. The energy crisis in South Africa has been identified as the most recurring issue relating to the economic theme since it has been used to increase economic activity amongst Prosper Africa's LinkedIn followers. On the post number 4.3.4.1, it was highlighted that the Prosper Africa pursued the application of media framing theory in relation to JET. The Prosper Africa also applied second-level media agenda-setting by way of promoting Green Hydrogen Workshop on its LinkedIn acccount. As post number 4.3.4.4 and 4.3.4.5 revealed, the Prosper Africa used the second-level media-agenda-setting by way of highlighting significant areas that constitutes US-South Africa relations including **g**lobal and regional peace and security, trade and investment, ICT, infrastructure, health security, and the climate crisis. Prosper Africa further applied media framing theory when it promoted AGOA on its LinkedIn account, leading to a broad coverage on the LinkedIn accounts of other US entities identified in the study.

The announcement of investment of $1.05 billion by the Ford Motor Company South Africa in its South African operations as posted on post number 4.3.4.6,

demonstrated the US's positive interest in improving investment in South Africa. *The statement: "The U.S. Commercial Service and USTDA are ready to support #usa companies operating and looking to expand into Sub-Saharan Africa,"* as posted on post number 4.3.4.6, constitute second-level media agenda-setting because it encouraged more public engagement on the investment announced by the US using LinkedIn Platform. Please refer to the posts below for more information;

4.3.4.1 Energy

Prosper Africa posted in October 2022: "U.S. Trade and Development Agency (USTDA) ihosting a #GreenHydrogen Workshop in #CapeTown from Oct 31 to Nov. 1. Join U.S. industry experts and South African stakeholders to discuss opportunities for catalyzing South Africa's green hydrogen sector. Register: http://ow.ly/tzv150LgSrb".

4.3.4.2 Trade

Prosper Africa wrote in September 2022: "Amazon Web Services (AWS) has opened a new office in Johannesburg to support increased customer demand in South Africa. The new office will strengthen the country's growing cloud market and provide a range of services to startups, enterprises, and public sector agencies. http://ow.ly/TUwc50KN7ib".

4.3.4.3 Trade

Prosper Africa published in February 2022: "Prime Video & Amazon Studios is continuing its push into the African market with the addition of several new executives to bolster existing development teams in South Africa and Nigeria.http://ow.ly/znvE50KNkrB".

4.3.4.4 Trade

Prosper Africa wrote April 2022:"U.S. Embassy South Africa, DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE SHERMAN'S TRAVEL TO SOUTH AFRICAUnited States Department of State Office of the Spokesperson April 29, 2022.Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman will travel to South Africa, Angola, Gabon, and France from May 2 to 7. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Molly Phee and National Security Council Senior Director for Africa Dana Banks will join the Deputy Secretary's delegation. In South Africa, Deputy Secretary Sherman will travel to Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Pretoria from May 2 to 4 and meet with Deputy Foreign Minister Alvin Botes and other senior government officials to discuss furthering U.S.-South African cooperation on a range of issues, including global and regional peace and security, trade and investment, sustainable infrastructure, health security, and the climate crisis. She will meet with business leaders and entrepreneurs to discuss strengthening the important trade and investment relationship between the U.S. and South Africa".

4.3.4.5 Trade

Prosper Africa reposted this in September 2022: "West Africa Trade & Investment Hub2,158 followers The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) abolished import duties to the United States on over 6,000 products from qualifying Sub-Saharan African countries. Leveraging AGOA, exporting businesses can save tens of thousands of dollars, while reaching buyers in the U.S. market".

4.3.4.6 Investment

Prosper Africa wrote November 2021: "U.S. Commercial Service Sub-Saharan Africa Last week, the U.S. Commercial Service #southafrica and U.S. Trade and Development Agency teams visited Ford Motor Company South Africa manufacturing operations in Silverton, Pretoria. In 2021, Ford announced an investment of $1.05 billion in its #southafrican operations, making it one of the largest investments in the country employing over 5,000 and contributing to the creation of over 10,000 jobs through their supplier

network. The teams witnessed how a single Ford Ranger is assembled from start to finish. The U.S. Commercial Service and USTDA are ready to support #usa companies operating and looking to expand into #subsaharanafrica".

4.3.5 Power Africa

The posts below revealed that the energy transition project in South Africa was the most critical undertaking to make the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa more attractive. The energy crisis in South Africa allowed Power Africa to promote US companies operating in the energy sector such that their business interest and opportunities were increased. The Post number *4.3.5.3* revealed that Power Africa applied soft power in promoting the political will of US in addressing the South African energy crisis through JET. On the post number *4.3.5.3,* the second-level media agenda-setting theory was depicted when Power Africa broadly published post on a pledge of $8.5 billion worth of investment pledged by the US and partners to assist South Africa in the energy transition using its LinkedIn account. Additionally, the third-level media agenda setting was activated when the same post was published on the LinkedIn accounts of other US entities. The US has used LinkedIn accounts of its entities to foster a social network amongst various LinkedIn followers interested in the renewable energy business, particularly the US energy sector. With reference to the posts from *4.3.5.1 to 4.3.5.6,* it could be confirmed that the US foreign policy on renewable energy has been well communicated through digital diplomacy, which serves as evidence that the US did succeed in linking digital diplomacy with economic diplomacy by way of promoting its energy business interest in South Africa. Please follow the posts below for more clarity:

4.3.5.1 Energy

Power Africa wrote in December 2022: "Through the #PowerOfPartnership we are supporting the energy transition in South Africa! zAIsrael Thothela, site manager for Power Africa partner and project developer Enel Green Power, took our team on a tour of the 147 MW clean energy-producing Karusa Wind Farm, about three hours from Cape Town in South Africa's Karoo District.

Karusa's turbines are the largest in Africa and were manufactured by another of our partners, Vestas".

4.3.5.2 Energy

Power Africa published in October 2022: "🇿🇦 Congratulations to the 32 South African women who completed our Just Energy Transition (JET) Skills Development Program yesterday!In partnership with AWEaP African Women in Energy and Power and Wits Business School, we trained women from municipalities, Eskom Holdings SOC Ltd, government departments, and civil society to add their voices to South Africa's JET planning and decision-making.We're excited to see how these women use the skills they've learned from this training to help South Africa transition to cleaner energy 👏".

4.3.5.3 Energy

Power Africa wrote in October 2022: "#TBT to getting local municipalities in Mpumalanga ready for South Africa's Just Energy Transition (JET)! 🇿🇦 Over the past three months, in partnership with the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), we hosted three workshops to increase municipalities' awareness and understanding of JET, teach them how to integrate renewable energy into their municipal plans, and spot JET opportunities".

4.3.5.4 Energy

Power Africa indicated in October 2022: "🇿🇦 What does a "just" energy transition (JET) look like for South Africa? 🇿🇦 Last week, 34 South African women from municipalities, the national utility, government departments, and NGOs participating in our JET Skills Development Program, delivered with African Women in Energy and Power (AWEaP) and Wits Business School".

4.3.5.5 Energy

Power Africa wrote in october 2022: "Supporting South Africa's transition to clean energy technologies 🇿🇦 🇺🇸This week, in partnership with the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), we engaged with

representatives from 16 Mpumalanga municipalities about South Africa's Just Energy Transition (JET) plans. As the country's coal hub, Mpumalanga local government must be aware of its role and understand the responsibilities and opportunities that come with moving away from coal and accelerating a transition to a low emission, climate-resilient economy".

4.3.5.6 Energy

Power Africa wrote in November 2022: "The United States is proud to partner with the South African Government and the members of the International Partners Group to support South Africa's just transition to a cleaner energy future. We welcome the comprehensive JET Investment Plan, and fully support South Africa's economy-wide energy transformation. Our support for South Africa's clean energy and infrastructure priorities, which include efforts to provide coalminers and affected communities the assistance that they need in this transition, will help South Africa's clean energy economy thrive," The President of the United States of America, Joseph R. Biden. Power Africa looks forward to moving toward the implementation of the priorities outlined in the JET Investment Plan".

4.3.6 US International Development Finance Corporation

The posts below suggest that the US has made significant inroads in terms of promoting its economic diplomacy towards South Africa. Most of the posts on the DFC's account promoted US business interests in South Africa, please check the post from 4.3.6.1 to 4.3.6.6 for more information on the posts selected for data analysis in this section. These posts confirmed that the US, through its DFC, was exploring the possibility of expanding its ICT business in South Africa. The organisation has engaged in collaborative efforts with South Africa to bridge the ICT gap. The posts below affirmed that the US was still considering South Africa as the trade hub in Africa and was succeeding in applying second-level media agenda-setting theory in orchestrating public debate on the state of ICT infrastructure in South Africa. As the analysis of DFC LinkedIn posts suggested, the DFC prioritised ICT infrastructure challenges in Africa and had put financial aid aside to assist the countries to

address the challenges. The DFC built data centres in Africa, with South Africa having been identified as the hub of distribution. This post suggested that the DFC was confident that South Africa was the suitable destination worth of its investment and a point of distribution to the rest of the African Continent. It can also be stated that the US International Development Finance Corporation applied second and third-level media agenda-setting to reinforce public enagement on LinkedIn in its determination towards boasting the ICT infrastruture in South Africa**.** The posts below suggests that the US used the ICT challenges in South Africa as one of the critical trade areas to sustain its economic diplomacy towards South Africa. The ICT challenges, therefore, have become the DFC's stronghold for promoting ICT-related business opportunities in South Africa. As a results, it can be re-emphasised that the US used the media framing theory to flag ICT challenges encountered by South Africa as a crisis requiring urgent intervention.

Still analysing the posts below, the study reported that the US deployed digital diplomacy as a critical pillar of its diplomatic machinery to strengthen its economic activities in South Africa. The disbursement of $83 million to Africa Data Centres to support the roll-out of ICT infrastructure across Southern Africa as published on post number *4.3.6.4,* was an indication of the exercise of soft power by the US to promote its economic diplomacy towards South Africa. The ongoing challenge on the ICT infrastructure in South Africa has given the DFC an advantage in using soft power to position US foreign policies around ICT infrastructure in South Africa. The ICT infrastructure gap experienced in Africa has provided an enabler for the US to use Africa as its investment destination. In doing this, the US depended on digital media as a vehicle for carrying and promoting its economic and digital diplomacy towards South Africa. Therefore, the US seems to have succeeded in linking digital diplomacy with economic diplomacy as it has been able to project and transmit its foreign policies within the international community focusing on ICT infrastructure in South Africa. Please follow the posts below for further information:

4.3.6.1 Trade

U.S. International Development Finance Corporation wrote in August 2022: "DFC is working to close the information and communications technology gap in Africa by supporting the development and expansion of seven data centers in South Africa and Kenya".

4.3.6.2 Energy

U.S. International Development Finance Corporation published in November 2022: "Today DFC was joined by Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry, government, and private sector actors at the US Center to discuss ways to scale climate solutions in developing countries. #COP27".

4.3.6.3 Politics

U.S. International Development Finance Corporation wrote in Noveber 2022: "COO Agnes Dasewicz and Absa Group CEO Arrie Rautenbach met during the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit to discuss continued collaboration, $80M+ in lending for SMEs in Botswana, Mozambique, South Africa, and Zambia, and ways to expand our work across Africa".

4.3.6.4 ICT

Empower Africa highglight in October 2022: "The U.S. International Development Finance Corporation Corporation (DFC) has announced the first disbursement of $83 million to Africa Data Centres to boost the roll-out of ICT infrastructure across Southern Africa.The DFC's loan to Africa Data Centres is supporting the development, expansion and operation of data centres in South Africa, Kenya and other DFC-eligible countries. This is the first part of the DFC's loan of up to $300 million to Africa Data Centres".

4.3.6.5 Health

U.S. International Development Finance Corporation wrote in Februay 2022:"To bolster vaccine manufacturing capacity across the African continent and reduce reliance on imports, DFC joins a consortium of development and

finance institutions to announce a partnership with Biovac in Cape Town, South Africa to support vaccine manufacturing expansion".

4.3.6.6 ICT

U.S. International Development Finance Corporation commented in October 2024:"DFC today announced the first disbursement of $83 million of its up to $300 million loan to Africa Data Centres to expand ICT infrastructure in South Africa: go.usa.gov/xSuwS."

4.3.7 Millennium Challenge Corporation

As revealed in the post below, South Africa is still viewed as the most critical investment destination by the US, and it was considered the economic hub for the development of Africa's economy. Although the issue depicted on the post number 4.3.7.2 related to the social theme, the main objective of the US Africa Leaders' Summit was to discuss the economic crisis experienced by most African countries including South Africa. This can be regarded as an attribute of second-level media agenda-setting on LinkedIn account of the Millennium Challenge Corporation.

The posts below suggest that the US considered LinkedIn as a reliable mode of communication for promoting its foreign policies. The inclusion of other links and tagging of various users relating to the corporation suggested social networks and ultimately the third-level media agenda-setting was at play. The offer of $55 billion in funding from the US government in its bid to bolster ties with emerging economies as published on the post number 4.3.7.1 could be regarded as an exercise of soft power. The invitation extended to South Africa as part of the invited African leaders for participation during the US-Africa Leaders Summit, held in Washington on 13 December 2022, as post number 4.3.7.3 stated, was the US's demonstration of positive representation towards South Africa since the summit received much-needed attention on social media, LinkedIn in particular. The Millennium Challenge Corporation seemed to have done a brilliant job in ensuring that its followers on LinkedIn were kept abreast of the developments at the summit through application of media

framing using LinkedIn. The detected engagement among LinkedIn users under the Millennium Challenge account, suggested the users' increasing interest in the summit as the details around its proceedings were regularly updated across the LinkedIn accounts of the US entities. This suggested that the Millennium Challenge Corporation enhanced social networking pertaining the summit amongst its LinkedIn followers. In this case, the social network led to the formulation of the third-level media agenda-setting theory, through the encouragement of public conversation on issues related to the Summit amongst the LinkedIn followers of the corporation and LinkedIn users following the accounts of other US entities identified for the data analysis in this section.

The African Leaders Summit was the strongest cultural initiative used by the US to explore trade opportunities in developing economies. Therefore, the US used the summit as an exercise of soft power to promote its economic diplomacy amongst African leaders, including the President of the Republic of South Africa, Mr Cyril Ramaphosa. The following post confirmed that the US used the Summit to showcase its business interest in Africa, including South Africa. The Millennium Challenge Corporation wrote in December 2022: "*With the second day of the US-Africa Leaders' Summit starting, Belinda Archibong, Aloysius Uche Ordu, Danielle Resnick, Witney Schneidman, and Landry Signé of The Brookings Institution propose five ways the United States can reinforce trade and investment in Africa and advance shared values around food security, the climate crisis, global health, and infrastructure: https://lnkd.in/ez2ySbeE*."

The post suggested that the US organised the summit as soft power to discuss the economic crisis experienced by most African countries. By doing so, the US used soft power to promote its economic diplomacy during the summit. The US African Leaders Summit remained the US culture adopted since Obama's administration to reach out to African leaders whilst strengthening the US trade ties in various areas, including mining, ICT, renewable energy and national security. It can be concluded therefore that the post number 4.3.7.2**,** indicated US's positive intention in terms of strengthening investment

in Africa including South Africa. Please check the posts below for more information:

4.3.7.1 Investment

Millennium Challenge Corporation wrote in December 2022: "African countries are set to receive $55B in funding from the US Government as the USA looks to bolster ties with emerging economies. MCC CEO Alice Albright spoke with CNBC Africa about MCC's first-ever regional compact as an example of investments:" https://lnkd.in/eGmUVknc".

4.3.7.2 Politics

Millennium Challenge Corporation highlighted in December 2022: "With the second day of the US-Africa Leaders Summit starting, Belinda Archibong, Aloysius Uche Ordu, Danielle Resnick, Witney Schneidman, and Landry Signé of The Brookings Institution propose five ways the United States can reinforce trade and investment in Africa and advance shared values around food security, the climate crisis, global health, and infrastructure: https://lnkd.in/ez2ySbeE".

4.3.7.3 Politics

Millennium Challenge Corporation commented in December 2022:

"This week, the U.S. - Africa Leaders' Summit will host leaders from across the African continent in Washington, DC. Listen to the latest episode of the MCC podcast, where MCC Deputy CEO Mahmoud Bah and Dana Banks, Senior Advisor to the President and Special Advisor for the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit to discuss the Summit and how it will foster new economic engagement on the continent".

4.3.7.4 Politics

Millennium Challenge Corporation published in December 2022:

"As the US-Africa Leaders Summit kicks off, Charles Kenny of the Center for Global Development writes that "President Biden might highlight the Millennium Challenge Corporation's investment in West Africa—the agency's

first-ever regional compact. But the president should also use his welcoming speech to commit MCC to supporting larger, repeat compacts—and additional regional compacts—in low- and lower-middle-income countries as a priority over working in richer countries. Such a pledge could help ensure a greater share of MCC's valuable grant funding flows toward Africa https://lnkd.in/eeRancmj".

4.3.7.5 Politics

Millennium Challenge Corporation commented in December 2022:

"In a new blog series, various experts writing for the Center for Global Development re-examine US-Africa policy across several key areas. The upcoming #USAfricaLeadersSummit presents an opportunity to develop and implement recently proposed plans.

https://lnkd.in/eisYp55W".

4.3.7.6 Politics

Millennium Challenge Corporation commented in September 2022:

"NEWS: Vice President Kamala Harris delivers remarks on behalf of the Prosper Africa delegation to #AfricaBizSummit. Announces December US - Africa Leaders Summit in Washington, DC. #africa #investment #trade".

4.3.8 The US African Development Foundation

The post number 4.3.8.1 confirmed that the US has been working hard to mobilise various energy experts to contribute towards preparing South Africa for renewable energy. The US, under the Leadership of President Biden has been repositioning the US foreign policy towards increasing trade ties with most African countries, including South Africa. The Summit itself came as an opportunity for the US to uplift its economic diplomacy towards South Africa, see the post number 4.3.8.2 for more information. The meeting between President Biden and Ramaphosa showed that the US has confidence in sustaining its trade opportunities with South Africa. The US, therefore, succeeded in applying the second-level agenda-setting theory to showcase its areas of investment in South Africa through the submit. The post number

4.3.8.2 confirms that South Africa remained one of the top priority countries when coming to US economic diplomacy towards the African continent. The energy transition project was tabled as key area of discussion during the US Africa Leaders' Summit held in Washington.

It has been revealed in the post number 4.3.8.2 and 4.3.8.3**,** that Power Africa and Prosper Africa also commented on the LinkedIn account of the US African Development Foundation, sharing sentiment about the Submit. This resembled an attribute of second-level media agenda-setting theory because the two corporation were promoting the summit as significant undertaking on the African Continent. Apart from this pattern, the post also showed that most of the US entities were directly involved in the promotion of the Summit. This indicated that the US succeeded in fostering social networks across its entities. The US also used soft power to promote its economic diplomacy towards African countries, especially South Africa. The collective efforts demonstrated by the US entities towards the preparation of the summit showed that the US was determined to strengthen the US bilateral relation with South Africa. This undertaking could be related to the promotion of US economic diplomacy towards South Africa, especially on JET project.

South Africa has therefore become a critical case study on renewable energy as the issue surfaced during the discussion emanated from the US Africa Leaders' Summit held in Washington from 13-15 December 2022. The hashtags used on the post number 4.3.8.3 depicted social network effect. It can be confirmed that, through the application of digital diplomacy in engaging its LinkedIn followers, the USADF managed to promote US economic diplomacy towards South Africa successfully. The hashtags on the post also depicted the third-level second-level agenda-setting effect because the stakeholders were able to disseminate information related to the Summit in their individual LinkedIn accounts.

4.3.8.1 Culture

Travis Adkins, President and CEO of the US African Development Foundation posted on September 2022: "An honour to represent the U.S. African Development Foundation (USADF) and join colleagues from across the USG in welcoming South African President H.E. Cyril Ramaphosa to the U.S. this morning! 🇺🇸🤝🇿🇦 #US #SouthAfrica #Partnership."

4.3.8.2 Politics

The US Prosper Africa wrote on July 2022: "Vice President Kamala Harris announced that she and President Joe Biden will welcome African leaders to Washington, DC for the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit this December. It marked the start of the U.S.-Africa Business Summit 2022, which included a U.S. delegation organized by Prosper Africa. The delegation included senior U.S. Government leaders and investors managing $1 trillion. U.S. Department of State Millennium Challenge Corporation U.S. International Development Finance Corporation U.S. African Development Foundation (USADF) U.S. Trade and Development Agency International Trade Administration Export-Import Bank of the United States Corporate Council on Africa."

4.3.8.3 Politics

As Power Africa posted on July 2022: "BREAKING NEWS | Vice President of the United States, Kamala Harris, Announces U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit dates at the Corporate Council on Africa's #AfricaBizSummit on behalf of the Prosper Africa delegation. The Summit is set to take place December 13-15, 2022, in Washington, DC. 🗣 She also share more on plans for Power Africa. WATCH to learn more: http://ow.ly/Ubla50JZYLz. #EnergyAccess #Electricity #JustEnergyTransition #ClimateChange #ClimateAction #EnergyInvestment #UnitedStates #Africa. Millennium Challenge Corporation U.S. Trade and Development Agency Export-Import Bank of the United States. U.S. Department of State U.S. African Development Foundation (USADF) Export-Import Bank of the United States USAID."

4.3.8.4 Energy

As posted by Francine Munyaneza, Founder and CEO of MUNYAX ECO - SOLAR ENERGY on September 2022: "Thousands thanks to Africa's Business Heroes. Special thanks to our great team Munyax Eco that made it this far! Proud to represent #cleanenergy #womenempowerment #rwandaGreatful also to GET.invest Opes-Lcef Signify Foundation U.S. African Development Foundation (USADF). Africa's Business Heroes: Introducing our 2022 Top 10 Heroes! A well-deserved title for these 10 entrepreneurs. They have proven that they are indeed challenging the status quo by topping over 21,000 entries from across Africa. With an average age of 40 years, the Top 10 heroes are an evenly split group of 5 females and 5 males representing 8 African countries: Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, and Tanzania."

4.3.8.5 Politics

Travis Adkins wrote on February 2022: "Thanks to my brother Reuben Brigety, II for the invite to speak with students from the University of the South on leadership, community, and the power of diverse voices in foreign affairs careers! U.S. African Development Foundation (USADF): #Hello from the wonderful Mandela Washington Fellowship Fellows who recently visited USADF from Howard University! These #changemakers are on the frontlines of developing sustainable solutions to challenges within their respective countries and communities."

4.3.9 The United States Trade and Development Agency

The post from 4.3.9.1 and 4.3.9.4 indicated that the USTDA has also prioritised energy business interests as part of its mandate. The posts did confirm that the social network was sustained on the USTDA's LinkedIn account since users from other entities re-posted similar post on the issues related to JET. This on its own constituted media framing effect linked to energy business interest within the US-South Africa relations. The posts revealed that the entity did manage to promote the US interests in South Africa through the workshop, which was acknowledged by many LinkedIn users

across the US entities, including the US Consulate General in Cape Town, the US Commercial Service Sub-Saharan Africa, Power Africa, and the US Department of Energy. This literally means that the USTDA applied the second-level media-agenda -setting theory to reinforce public debate on JET. The fact that various entities were involved in the US Trade and Development Agency South Africa Green Hydrogen Workshop, showed that the significance of JET was fostered in the US-South Africa relations, which was achieved as a result of the second-level media agenda-setting theory.

The posts have made it clear that most US entities shared common goal in terms of promoting the US business interest in South Africa. The energy transition project, for example, has become one of the most critical projects used by the US to promote its economic diplomacy towards South Africa. The posts also showed that there was a social network in the LinkedIn account of the USTDA, as several entities were tagged on the post. These included Power Africa, US Commercial Services, USAID, the USTDA, and the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC).

The posts below suggest the US's willingness to pursue its bid to assist South Africa in its energy transition project, which should be seen as good gesture confirming the US's determination towards strengthening economic diplomacy towards South Africa. The hashtags identified in the post suggest some element of social network and third-level media agenda-setting because the stakeholders tagged in the post were, one way or the other, LinkedIn users in other US entities identified in the study. The post 4.3.9.3 points to the pattern of the social network as the same post that was circulated by Danielle was also posted by Mohammed Essay, Senior Business Development Manager and Country Representative, Southern Africa (USTDA) on the very same LinkedIn account of the US entity. Therefore, this suggests that the employees of the US entities identified in this study did engage using LinkedIn. This could be attributed to the third-level media agenda-setting effect. This confirms that the US used digital diplomacy to promote its economic diplomacy towards South Africa. The fact that South Africa was the host of the concept of the Africa

Pavilion at COP17 suggests that the US sees South Africa as a trade hub on the African continent. Please follow the posts below for more information:

4.3.9.1 Energy

Mohammed Essay, Senior Business Development Manager and Country Representative, Southern Africa (USTDA) posted in October 2022: "*Thank you to everyone who participated in the successful U.S. Trade and Development Agency South Africa Green Hydrogen Workshop last week in Cape Town! It was great to hear such engaging discussions between South Africa and the United States on opportunities for partnership to support the development of green hydrogen in South Africa. We are grateful to the 90+ participants, including from the Office of the Presidency of South Africa, Infrastructure South Africa, the South African Department of Science and Innovation, the U.S. Consulate General in Cape Town, the U.S. Commercial Service Sub-Saharan Africa, Power Africa, the U.S. Department of Energy, and key private sector partners, who took two days out of their busy schedules to engage on this topic. We look forward to continuing these discussions and furthering USTDA's contribution to the Just Energy Transition Partnership*."

4.3.9.2 Energy

Kwabena Osei-Sarpong, president and CEO of a global sustainable development services firm wrote on June 2022: "*RIFE's presence at Enlit Africa, presented the team with a great opportunity to interact and understudy Africa's acceleration in clean energy and clean tech. Our operations in Ghana, South Africa, and across Africa demonstrate technical advancements, allowing Africa to pursue a significantly less carbon-intensive model of development than seen in many other parts of the world. However, clean energy presents a great opportunity to lead Africa's energy consumption growth. Thanks to Power Africa, US Commercial Services, The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the U.S. Trade and Development Agency*

(USTDA), the United States International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) and the other organizations under the enlitafrica2022 CEO program-IPP Global, Capstoe Green Energy, Progression energy, Schweitzer Engineering Laboratories, Terabase Energy, Babcock & Wilcox, GE, SparkMeter, and Symnion Power LLC."

4.3.9.3 Energy

Danielle Agress, Country Manager, Southern Africa and Global Connectivity Sector Lead at US Trade and Development Agency, posted in October 2022: "*Thank you to everyone who participated in the successful U.S. Trade and Development Agency South Africa Green Hydrogen Workshop over the last two days in Cape Town! It was great to hear such engaging discussions between South Africa and the United States on opportunities for partnership to support the development of green hydrogen in South Africa. We are grateful to the 90+ participants, including from the Office of the Presidency of South Africa, Infrastructure South Africa, the South African Department of Science and Innovation, the U.S. Consulate General in Cape Town, the U.S. Commercial Service Sub-Saharan Africa, Power Africa, the U.S. Department of Energy, and key private sector partners, who took two days out of their busy schedules to engage on this topic. We look forward to continuing these discussions and furthering USTDA's contribution to the Just Energy Transition Partnership*."

4.3.9.4 Energy

Mark-Anthony Johnson, the CEO at JIC Holdings posted as follows in October 2022:"*The Africa Pavilion at COP 27 is the go-to Pavilion at this year's summit. It is an opportunity to spotlight the African continent's special needs and circumstances. The concept of an Africa Pavilion at #COP was launched at COP17 in #Durban, #SouthAfrica, following the decision by the #AfricanUnion Assembly of Heads of State and Government at its 16th Ordinary Session held in February 2011*

in #AddisAbaba, #Ethiopia. African regional organizations and partners jointly host an #AfricaPavilion to provide a platform for discussion and ensure that Africa's concerns and priorities are adequately considered during the climate change negotiation process. The Africa Pavilion provides space and a voice for Africa on climate change and development priorities. It is also a venue for networking of officials from Member States, as well as participants from policy, science and practice communities. In this regard, the African Development Bank, the African Union Commission (AUC), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), and the #NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency (NPCA) host the Africa Pavilion at #COP27. The Pavilion provides the space for #Africa to meet and strategize to defend her common positions and interests at COP27."

4.3.9.5 ICT

Brandon Jackson, Foreign Service Officer in February 2022: "*This past week, the U.S. Consulate General in Johannesburg and the Gauteng Provincial Government jointly launched the Gauteng Provincial Government of South Africa – Government of the United States of America: Trade-Investment Framework. The Trade-Investment Framework will foster an equitable partnership to pave the way for agency-to-agency collaboration between the two governments, in the following key areas: (1) digital technologies and information and communications technology (ICT); (2) urban development/township economy, tourism, and creative industries; (3) transportation, infrastructure, and logistics; (4) agriculture; and (5) climate and energy*.

4.5 Summary

As fully outlined in table 3.2, the findings of the study suggest that the US, through its entities, managed to advocate for its economic diplomacy using the LinkedIn platform. The findings of the study also revealed that, despite numerous emerging issues during the data gathering and interpretation, few were categorised into the social theme. Most issues identified were classified as belonging to the economic theme. The issues projected by the posts fell into a range of focus areas, namely, culture, education, ICT, trade, politics, culture, mining, energy, environment, investment, entrepreneurship, health and finance. As a result, for this study, the economic theme manifested as a leading lever in almost all the entities that were assessed in the study.

The findings of the study further revealed that the US used issues, such as donations, financial assistance and strategic projects, as a lever for exercising soft power or media framing theory to promote its economic diplomacy towards South Africa. Looking into various posts that were circulated on the US entities' LinkedIn accounts, it could be argued the majority of these revolved around the LinkedIn followers of the US entities. Therefore, the findings of this study suggest that the US deployed digital diplomacy to project its economic diplomacy towards South Africa, which play a crucial role in projecting positive image amongst the identified LinkedIn accounts. It thus can be argued that the US entities managed to foster social networks amongst their followers through LinkedIn.

Lastly, the findings revealed that the posts that were circulated on the LinkedIn accounts of the US entities dominated conversation amongst LinkedIn users. The story of the energy transition project, for example, was covered across all the US entities. This implies that the US entities succeeded in setting social media-based agendas, through open conversations on a range of topics of public interest, which ended up being an agenda beyond the individual users following the LinkedIn accounts of the US entities. This could be understood as the constitute of the third-level media agenda-setting effect as discussed in the previous chapters of the study.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented, discussed, analysed and interpreted the data generated to respond to the key research questions of the study. This chapter presents a summary of the key findings, discusses limitations and suggests ideas for further research based on the findings of the study. The chapter concludes by providing concluding comments based on the key issues that emerged in the study.

5.2 Summary of the key findings

The findings are discussed in line with the following key research questions of the study:

- What are the recurrent themes in the LinkedIn-based representation of the US economic-diplomatic actors towards South Africa?
- What do the recurrent themes in the LinkedIn-based representation of the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa tell us about the US's economic objectives towards South Africa?
- How are the economic-diplomatic interests of the US's diplomatic actors towards South Africa, based on representation in Linked platform of diplomatic entities, manifest?
- How do US economic diplomacy and digital diplomacy intersect concerning US-South Africa economic relations?

5.2.1 What are the recurrent themes in the LinkedIn-based representation of US economic-diplomatic actors towards South Africa?

An inference drawn from the data analysis and interpretation section pinpointed economic and social themes as the most recurrent themes in the study. This was observed across all the data sets consisting of LinkedIn posts circulated in the nine US entities selected as the appropriate data-gathering sources in the study. As part of the coding process, the study dwelt more on various emerging issues through which the two themes were formulated. In the build-up to the formulation of the theme, the study classified several issues according to their economic and social

attributes, and ultimately recurrent issues were identified. In this case, all the issues that have associated with trade, ICT, infrastructure, investment, finance, mining, and entrepreneurship were classified into the economic theme. Furthermore, issues such as education, health, environment, culture, politics, and donation were categorised into the social theme. As the study found across all the US entities that were assessed, several issues portrayed the LinkedIn-based representation of the US economic diplomatic actors towards South Africa, including;

The US investment in ICT through the Amazon Web Service (AWS), which was opened in Johannesburg to strengthen the country's growing cloud market, the post regarding the $1.05 billion investment announced by Ford to strengthen its operation in South Africa, and the visit by US investors with more than $1 trillion in assets coming to SA to explore business in renewable energy. This finding implies that the US succeeded in linking economic diplomacy with digital diplomacy in this study. Therefore, the energy transition project in South Africa dominated the LinkedIn accounts of various US entities. The visit was therefore facilitated by USAID and Prosper Africa. An investment of $7.8 billion by 600 US companies operating in South Africa was among the recurrent issues. AGOA also emerged as most recurrent issues, leading to the formulation of the economic theme. In the social theme, the recurrent issues were health by way of USAID supporting South Africa in increasing awareness and uptake of COVID-19 vaccines. Culture was also one of the issues that contributed to the formulation of the social theme. The recurrent issue was the US African Leaders Summit, which was broadly covered on LinkedIn. The education scholarship, which was aimed at academically qualified, low-income students, who were invited to apply to study a Bachelor, Masters and PhD studies in the US, also played out as one of the recurrent issues. Another recurrent issue that contributed to the formulation of the social theme is the US President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (Pepfar) through which $6.8 billion was donated to South Africa to strengthen its HIV prevention, care and treatment.

5.2.2 What are the recurrent themes in the LinkedIn-based representation of US economic diplomacy towards South Africa tell us about US's economic objectives towards South Africa?

According to the findings, the recurrent themes suggested that the US digital diplomacy did complement its economic diplomacy towards South Africa. The recurrent theme also highlighted that the US did influence LinkedIn-based representation since it used the platform to set its social media agenda, which escalated to the third level media agenda-setting. For instance, the US showed success in terms of setting an agenda for the energy transition project in South Africa, which got LinkedIn users following the US entities highly interactive on the issue. The US then used its entities to promote its foreign policy on renewable energy, and all entities were directly involved in ensuring that the energy transition project in South Africa was fully endorsed. They did this by way of hosting workshops with representatives selected from local municipalities to prepare local government for the anticipated renewable energy. Table 1.2 revealed that the application of digital diplomacy by the US entities has improved US economic diplomacy towards South Africa. Out of 52 issues posted on LinkedIn accounts of the US entities, 38 issues represented the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa, whilst 13 issues represented social theme. The posts categorised into economic theme suggest that the US entities were the most effective wings of Washington in advancing US economic diplomacy towards South Africa. The recurring themes have also confirmed that the US viewed South Africa as the investment destination with the most potential on the African continent since it was considered the host of many initiatives, including the concept of an Africa Pavilion, which was launched at COP17 in Durban in February 2011. This was done during President Obama's administration. During 2022, Power Africa, in partnership with the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), hosted three workshops to increase municipalities' awareness and understanding of Just Energy Transition (JET), teach them how to integrate renewable energy into their municipal plans, and spot JET opportunities.

The recurrent themes as presented in the data analysis highlighted that as much as the US donated resources to the health sector or made scholarships available for South African citizens who want to study at its universities, the bottom line was that the US

intended to promote its foreign policies towards South Africa. To this end, the US has used soft power in the form of donations and scholarships to promote its economic diplomacy towards South Africa. The recurrent themes also revealed that the soft power has worked to the US advantage because even though South Africa has multilateral trade ties with Russia and China, it still endorsed the US pledge of $8.5 billion for the anticipated renewable energy project.

As such, the trade war between the US, China and Russia was always at the centre of US-South African relations. The geopolitics stirred by China in trying to reach out to African countries during the shortage of COVID-19 vaccines has forced the White House to strengthen bilateral relations with South Africa even further. Therefore, the US used the COVID-19 vaccine supply as a weapon to downplay China in the health sector, with the strategy being to advance its global economic status on vaccine supply. However, the geopolitical factors did not feature strongly in this study.

5.2.3 How are the economic-diplomatic interests of the US's diplomatic actors towards South Africa, based on representation, manifest in LinkedIn platforms of diplomatic entities?

As the study finding alluded, the US entities have made inroads in terms of fostering third-level media agenda-setting since the US entities were able to tag one another in most projects aimed at strengthening the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa. The US Trade and Development Agency wrote in October 2022: *"Thank you to everyone who participated in the successful U.S. Trade and Development Agency South Africa Green Hydrogen Workshop over the last two days in Cape Town! It was great to hear such engaging discussions between South Africa and the United States on opportunities for partnership to support the development of green hydrogen in South Africa. We are grateful to the 90+ participants, including from the Office of the Presidency of South Africa, Infrastructure South Africa, the South African Department of Science and Innovation, the U.S. Consulate General in Cape Town, the U.S. Commercial Service Sub-Saharan Africa, Power Africa, the U.S. Department of Energy, and key private sector partners, who took two days out of their busy schedules to engage on this topic. We look forward to continuing these discussions and furthering USTDA's contribution to the Just Energy Transition Partnership."*

The post above tells us that the economic-diplomatic interests of the US's diplomatic actors towards South Africa worked interdependently in ensuring that the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa was effectively promoted. It should be noted that the economic-diplomatic interests of the US diplomatic actors towards South Africa were influenced by the foreign policy pronouncement made by the US government. The issue of the energy transition project, for example, came about after Biden officially announced the pledge of $8.5 billion by the US and its partners in assisting South Africa to endorse renewable energy. The issue of the energy transition has been topical across the LinkedIn accounts of several US entities.

Mark-Anthony Johnson, CEO at JIC Holdings generated the post on July 2022 as follows: *"US investors with more than $1 trillion of assets under management visit South Africa with eye on renewable energy: US #investors with more than $1 trillion of assets under management are in #SouthAfrica to look for #investment opportunities. The visit being facilitated by #USAID and #ProsperAfrica, the US government's initiative to increase #trade and #investment between African nations and #America, started Tuesday and coincide with US Secretary of State #AntonyBlinken's trip. Blinken arrives in the country Sunday -- his second official trip to #Africa. He will also visit the #Democratic Republic of Congo and #Rwanda."*

The post above was also an example of how the economic-diplomatic interests of the US's diplomatic actors towards South Africa based on representations manifest in the LinkedIn accounts of diplomatic entities. When US investors visited South Africa, various entities went out to support the investors and all activities around the visit were disseminated on their LinkedIn accounts. This pattern suggests that the US entities succeeded in using digital diplomacy through LinkedIn to promote US economic diplomacy towards South Africa.

5.2.4 How do US economic diplomacy and digital diplomacy intersect concerning US-South Africa economic relations?

The study revealed that the US depended on LinkedIn to showcase its business interest towards South Africa. The US counted on entities that ensured its economic diplomacy was well represented through LinkedIn. The US reported most of its breaking news on

LinkedIn, for example, the US Commercial Service Sub-Saharan Africa wrote on August 2022: *"ATTENTION U.S. TECH COMPANIES!! The U.S. Commercial Service South Africa is inviting U.S. tech companies interested in exporting and expanding their businesses in Africa to attend the Sub-Saharan Africa Tech Event taking place November 7-11, 2022 in Cape Town, South Africa. The Sub-Saharan Africa Tech Event is a series of curated ICT/Digital events provided by the U.S. Commercial Service to U.S. tech companies interested in expanding or entering the Sub-Saharan Africa tech and digital market. The events will take place around the Africa Tech Festival/Africa Com where there will be a U.S. Pavilion."*

The post above implies that the US viewed digital diplomacy as the key tool to promote economic diplomacy towards South Africa. One aspect that could be highlighted was that the US succeeded in promoting its economic diplomacy towards South Africa because it applied soft power, social network and third-level media agenda-setting to emphasis its support for the economic growth on the Africa Continent. The fact that LinkedIn enabled the US entities to enter the open conversation using digital diplomacy confirmed that digital diplomacy and economic diplomacy are interdependent in terms of persuading the international audience.

The study also found that through its investment in ICT, energy, COVID-19 vaccine supply and education scholarship, the US was able to portray a positive image around its economic diplomacy towards South Africa using digital diplomacy. The findings further confirmed that both economic and digital diplomacy could achieve great results, especially when they were used complementarily.

5.3 Limitations and future research

In recent years, many developing and developed countries always tried to connect with foreign nations to improve their economic diplomacy. However, the use of public diplomacy alone as a mechanism to participate in global economic activities is rather ineffective. In this digital age, global economies have adopted digital diplomacy as the most fundamental phenomenon to change the level of engagement in the international community. In this study, the focus was to assess the link between economic and digital diplomacy: the case of US-South Africa relations on LinkedIn. It must be taken

into consideration that South African economic diplomacy towards the US was not investigated in this study. The study therefore adopted a qualitative methodology. The study also concentrated on the LinkedIn accounts of the relevant US entities responsible for the US economic and digital diplomacy with South Africa. The South African entities responsible for international relations were not investigated in this study. The study sampled the posts emanating from LinkedIn accounts of US entities and the posts disseminated by US citizens or followers of the LinkedIn accounts of the identified US entities with reference to the US-South Africa relation. The study did not analyse the data drawn from the mainstream media. However, the stories were only monitored concerning the third-level media agenda-setting.

The research study on economic and digital diplomacy is a new undertaking. The scope of the current study has been entirely restricted. The fact that the study focused only on the economic diplomacy of the US towards South Africa, not the other way around, points to the need for more research studies on the two countries' economic diplomacy. It is, therefore, recommended that future research studies must consider further investigations on the themes in the social media-based perceptions of the two countries to have inclusive perspectives. In other words, the future study may have to include South Africa's economic diplomacy towards the US. In addition, this study analysed the LinkedIn posts on the phenomenon under investigation. In this regard, there may be a need to undertake a study that would include the analysis of the websites and other relevant platforms.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter presents a summary of the key findings, discusses limitations and suggests ideas for further research based on the findings of the study. The findings of the study revealed that the US successfully used its entities to promote its economic diplomacy through digital diplomacy to project a strategic image of itself within the international community, especially in South Africa. The study further revealed that the US economic diplomacy towards South Africa was somewhat attractive, particularly concerning the energy transition project in South Africa. The findings suggest that the US effectively used soft power to strengthen its economic diplomacy towards South Africa using the LinkedIn platform.

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ANNEXURES

Please note that the following Annexures are on an excel sheet:

Annexure A: United States Mission to South Africa

Annexure B: United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

Annexure C: United States Commercial Service

Annexure D: Prosper Africa

Annexure E: Power Africa

Annexure F: United Nations International Development Corporation (USIDFC)

Annexure G: Millennium Challenge Corporation

Annexure H: United States African Development Foundation

Annexure I: The United States Trade and Development Agency

Appendix J: Certificate from the Editor

Yvonne Fontyn Writer and copy editor
(HDip Ed, B Hons, MA – Wits)

Cell phone: 082 493 9252
yfontyn@gmail.com

27 August 2023

Certificate of completion – Editing

For student: Tshepo Ramonoedi
No: 2281613
University of the Witwatersrand

This serves to confirm that I have edited and proofread the master's thesis for the above student.

Yours faithfully

Yvonne Fontyn