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‘Digital diplomacy and foreign policy in Kenya, Australia, and the United States’

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A thesis submitted to the Wits Centre of Journalism, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Journalism and Media Studies.

October 2025

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Ihor and Lydia, my wife Judy and my son, Christopher – without your support it wouldn't have been possible.

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Bob Wekesa, for encouraging me to pursue my PhD in the midst of COVID-19 in 2020, and his support and guidance ever since.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work. It is submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Journalism and Media Studies. It has not been submitted for examination at any other university.

Ethics Committee waiver letter number: HRECNMW25/01/11

Candidate: Yaroslav Turianskyi

15 October 2025





Supervisor: Dr Bob Wekesa

15 October 2025

Abbreviations

4IR – Fourth Industrial Revolution

ACSUS – African Centre for the Study of the US

AfCFTA – Africa Continental Free Trade Area

APRM – African Peer Review Mechanism

AI – Artificial intelligence

APEC – Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation

ASEAN – Association of Southeast Asian Nations

AU – African Union

AUKUS – Australia, the UK and the US

CDP – Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy

COVID-19 – Coronavirus Disease 2019

DFAT – Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

DIRCO – Department of International Relations and Cooperation

DRC – Democratic Republic of Congo

EAC – East African Community

FTA – Free Trade Agreement

G7 – Group of 7

G20 – Group of 20

GDP – Gross domestic product

ICC – International Criminal Court

ICT – Information and communication technologies

IMF – International Monetary Fund

MFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

OAU – Organization of African Unity

SAIIA – South African Institute of International Affairs

SAJIA – South African Journal of International Affairs

Quad – Quadrilateral Security Dialogue

UN – United Nations

US – United States of America

UNEP – UN Environmental Programme

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Digital diplomacy is a relatively new concept. While the different definitions and conceptualisations will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2, it is important to provide a brief and clear definition at the outset of this thesis for the benefit of readers who may not be familiar with this term. A useful definition for this purpose is put forward by Bjola (2015: 4), who states that digital diplomacy can be defined as "the use of social media for diplomatic purposes". This can be situated in the context of a broader definition of diplomacy, which, at its core, is the "conduct of relations between sovereign states… by official agents and by peaceful means" (Bull, 1997: 156).

The term digital diplomacy entered the academic lexicon at the onset of the 21st century. In a book titled *Digital Diplomacy: U.S. Foreign Policy in the Information Age* (Dizard Jr, 2001) the author says that "Electronic communications and information resources are influencing foreign policy, not only by raising a new set of strategic issues but also by altering the ways in which we deal with them." In 2001 (when the book was published), this statement was indicative of the emergence of the concept of digital diplomacy rather than the commencement of its practice. Almost a quarter of a century later (2025, at the time of writing), digital diplomacy has evolved into a distinctly different type of relations between nations (Bjola, 2015; Gilboa, 2016). Digital diplomacy furthermore continues to develop, as seen in the increased digitalisation of governmental and societal activities during the COVID-19 pandemic and the continued emergence of new technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI) (Bjola and Manor, 2024; Roumate, 2021). While scholarly discourse on digital diplomacy has steadily increased, especially in recent years, numerous research gaps remain.

One of the main motivations for this study is that digital diplomacy proceeds in different ways in countries with different political and economic profiles, creating asymmetries in the conduct of international affairs. It has been argued that digital diplomacy reflects existing power structures in global politics (Holmes, 2015), and a digital diplomacy actor from a great power will inevitably have more followers on social media than their counterpart from a developing country. However, digital diplomacy can also seemingly reward countries with fewer resources and less status in international relations, provided they have the digital skills to make their content interesting and appealing. The use of digital diplomacy through the affordances of social media is sometimes seen as 'the great equaliser', helping to level the playing field between those with few resources and those with many resources (Manor, 2019). Holmes (2015: 202) points out that "small states in sub-Saharan Africa employ digital diplomacy strategies just as states in the European Union do".

The early-to-late 2000s witnessed the rising prominence of social media and mass messenger networks, including LinkedIn in 2003, Facebook in 2004, YouTube in 2005, Twitter in 2006, WhatsApp in 2009 and TikTok in 2016 (Fuchs, 2021). These allowed instant communication with numerous other users of such platforms, known as 'friends', 'fans' or 'followers'. Instead of sending a 140-character SMS with an update on one's current status or some news, a social media network user could share it with hundreds of individuals simultaneously, complete with a photo or video. As the popularity of these platforms increased, and the number of users grew, so did the potential reach of the most popular accounts, which went from hundreds to thousands to millions. The ability to 'share' posts meant additional reach through a multiplier effect, as every follower could potentially repost on their timeline for others to see. The relative ease of use of social media and the relatively few resources required to use it (a mobile phone and/or a laptop connected to cellular, broadband or wireless internet) meant that any government could communicate its policies to its own citizens, foreign publics and even foreign governments (Turianskyi, 2016). Furthermore, the use of memes and humour on social media and the ability of posts to go 'viral' rewards digitally savvy, creative and innovative actors by giving them a higher competitive advantage than existing status and resources (Manor, 2018). However, existing power structures, global status and resources cannot be discounted (Holmes, 2015). They could be the difference between, on the one hand, a Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) with hundreds of thousands of followers because of the role that country plays in global politics and hundreds of staff working on crafting social media posts and creating accompanying audiovisuals, and, on the other hand, an MFA with a few thousand followers and two or three staff members making occasional social media posts and using their personal mobile phones to take any accompanying photos.

To examine these differences, this thesis adopts status in the international relations hierarchy as the main lens of analysis and uses the case studies of Kenya (a developing country with low internet penetration rates, but one that is nonetheless considered a 'tech hub' in Africa) and Australia (a middle power with high internet penetration rates but a low culture of digital innovation), the United States of America (US) – a great power with high internet penetration rates and digital literacy – to analyse and compare how they conduct digital diplomacy.

Status is a multifaceted term that refers to the shared perceptions about a state's relative position in the international hierarchy, grounded in its resource capabilities, such as economic strength, military power, and natural resources, as well as in its ability to influence others, through diplomatic clout and cultural appeal (Paul, Larson and Wohlforth, 2014). Thus, the term status allows for the broad

categorisation of countries based on their resource endowment and the extent of their ability to influence others. The three case studies selected broadly reflect this, in terms of their roles in the international system, sizes of their economies, levels of internet connectivity and contrasting histories of technological innovation. Geographically, they are also located in different regions of the world: Africa, Asia-Pacific and North America. Socio-economically and politically, Kenya is a part of the Global South, while conceptually, Australia and the US are part of the Global North. The main goal of this thesis is to compare how countries with different a status in international affairs, namely developing countries, middle powers and great powers, use the affordances of social media to practise digital diplomacy in order to achieve their foreign policy goals and objectives. To facilitate a comparison between these countries, a state-centric typology of digital diplomacy is developed as part of this study that focuses on how state actors, as opposed to non-state actors, conduct digital diplomacy. The distinction between the two types of actors in digital diplomacy is explained in the literature review section of this thesis (Chapter 2), along with a justification for why this study focuses on state actors only.

it is also important to recognise that digital diplomacy faces a number of challenges, which are discussed throughout this study, such as the digital divide and misinformation. Digital divide refers to the uneven spread of and access to technology in society. This is particularly relevant in the context of this study as it affects one of the country case studies, Kenya, much more than Australia and the US. The implication for Kenya is two-fold: fewer resources to create engaging content for digital diplomatic purposes and relative lack of digital skills in at least of some its diplomats. With regard to misinformation, it is noteworthy that social media, like any technology, can be used for to achieve positive as well as negative outcomes. While digital diplomacy allows state actors to improve their country's image and reputation abroad and positively influence others to jointly work on common causes, it similarly enables actors acting in bad faith to easily spread misinformation and propaganda to further their narratives. These challenges are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

This thesis is submitted to the Wits Centre for Journalism because digital diplomacy is interdisciplinary in nature, with the 'digital' part falling under the field of communications, which includes journalism and the media, and the 'diplomacy' part being an element of international relations. Specifically, social media is prominent in the study of communications and similarly is an important tool in the conduct of digital diplomacy, whose practitioners (primarily international relations actors, such as diplomats, politicians, state officials, embassies and MFAs utilise it for information sharing and engagement. From an international relations perspective, countries also utilise digital diplomacy to exercise soft power.

While the term soft power is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, at this point it is necessary to briefly define it for readers who may not be familiar with it, as influence built through the attractiveness of a state's culture, political ideas and policies (Nye, 1990). Soft power is thus a non-violent means of influencing others in international relations, making it an ideal tool for diplomacy and by extension for digital diplomacy, which allows states to promote their values, ideas and goals to influence foreign publics. Digital diplomacy, therefore, represents the merging of the fields of communications and international relations, in practice and conceptually. In academia, on the other hand, the two fields are still treated largely in parallel. This thesis merges the two approaches to studying digital diplomacy and is located in the fields of both communications and international relations.

Justification

While scholarly work on digital diplomacy has steadily increased in recent years, particularly post-COVID-19, numerous research gaps remain. Firstly, digital diplomacy is novel and constantly changing as new technologies continue to impact diplomacy (Fasinu, Olaniyan and Afolaranmi, 2024). Secondly, at the conceptual and theoretical levels, there is still no agreement on the exact definition of digital diplomacy or the methodology which should be used to study it (Sotiru, 2015). And thirdly, significant discrepancies exist between how different countries conduct digital diplomacy (Manor, 2019).

These research gaps require a further examination of how the affordances of social media are used by digital diplomacy actors, particularly those with a different status in international relations, as well as a comparative analysis of how they utilise it to further their foreign policy agendas.

It is especially important to conduct additional research and academic work on digital diplomacy in Africa, given that it was previously understudied, and also because there was a significant uptake of both the practice and study of digital diplomacy during COVID-19. From March 2020, digital diplomacy became crucial as most countries started implementing lockdowns, global travel ground to a halt, and traditional and face-to-face diplomacy became all but impossible. Furthermore, digital diplomacy was needed for officials to interact with the digital publics, for instance, to inform citizens in other countries about evacuation flights and provide travel advice. Although previously some diplomats may have struggled to interact with a digital public, given diplomacy's traditional reliance on proximity, the global pandemic meant that even those who were previously reluctant to modify the old ways had to let go of them and enter the digital era. Even countries that previously only experimented with digital diplomacy were forced to accelerate its adoption. A notable example of this is South Africa's President

Cyril Ramaphosa, who was the chairperson of the African Union (AU) in 2020 and conducted continental diplomacy almost entirely online (De Carvalho, 2020).

In terms of the uptake of the study of digital diplomacy in Africa, Wekesa (2020) notes a spike in discussions around digital diplomacy following COVID-19-imposed restrictions. For instance, a major initiative took place soon after the emergence of COVID-19 in South Africa that brought together scholars and practitioners to discuss how the continent's diplomats rapidly adapted to conducting their business at a time of social distancing and travel bans. Between July and August 2020, the African Centre for the Study of the US (ACSUS) at the University of the Witwatersrand, the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), the University of Southern California Center on Public Diplomacy and the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) organised 21 online seminars on digital diplomacy in Africa – the first time such events took place on the continent (Turianskyi and Wekesa, 2021).

Discussions which took place during these seminars produced a wealth of knowledge, which led to an increase in academic work on this topic amongst a multitude of actors: academics from the University of the Witwatersrand, University of Nairobi and the University of Southern California, diplomats from DIRCO, and think tanks such as SAIIA. To increase the body of knowledge on digital diplomacy broadly and on its practice in the African context specifically, the *South African Journal of International Affair*s (SAJIA), a policy-oriented, peer-reviewed and interdisciplinary publication for discussion on international affairs affecting Africa, published a special issue on 'Digital Diplomacy in Africa' in October 2021. In this issue, Turianskyi and Wekesa (2021) examined the emergence, evolution and future of digital diplomacy in Africa, providing a historical overview and analysing current trends, specifically how African countries had to accelerate their digitalisation of diplomatic practices in the immediate aftermath of border closures and travel restrictions as a result of COVID-19.

Masters (2021) examined digital diplomacy on the continent through the lens of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), and how Africa needed to be a participant in the international governance of digital technologies to become a more pertinent player in international knowledge structures. Ayodele (2021) looked at digital diplomacy in Africa at the continental, rather than the state level, by focusing her paper on the AU and how it could use digitalisation to harmonise its policies and instruments. Manor and Adiku (2021) examined digital diplomacy from the perspective of how African countries communicate with diasporas through social media, using case studies of Ethiopian, Kenyan and Rwandan embassies. Mboya (2021) examined the case study of Kenya, but from a broader digital

diplomacy angle. He analysed the Kenyan MFA's posts on Twitter (now X) and Facebook in terms of content and conducted a network analysis of who these accounts were following and by whom they were followed. He concluded that the MFA did not change its strategy or tactics as a result of COVID-19. Endong (2021) looked at how Cameroon and Nigeria counter the propaganda of separatist groups online. Finally, Shumba (2021) examined the so-called 'Wolf Warrior' diplomacy, which is a term for the aggressive style of coercive diplomacy practised by Chinese diplomats in recent years. His paper was concerned with how this type of diplomacy plays out in the African context.

This thesis aims to add to this budding scholarship on digital diplomacy in Africa – and more broadly, by analysing the case studies of Kenya, Australia and the US, three countries with a different status in international affairs that are located in separate geographical regions and include representatives of both the Global North and Global South. Although Kenya is already quite advanced in the practice of digital diplomacy, compared to some of the other countries on the continent, it would nonetheless be representative of other developing countries in Africa, such as Ghana, Nigeria and Ethiopia, to name a few. All these countries are on the wrong side of the digital divide, face low internet penetration levels, have high broadband and mobile data costs, difficulties in accessing the latest technology, and few resources that could be allocated to digital diplomacy. And as other African countries become more adept digital diplomacy practitioners, they are likely to face the same challenges as Kenya. Findings from the case study of Kenya could therefore be extrapolated to other African digital diplomacy practitioners. Similarly, Australia would be representative of other developed middle powers, such as Canada, Japan and the UK. The baseline country, the US, could be compared to China in its attempts to influence global discourse (particularly around framing key issues and challenges, such as COVID-19).

Related to the above, insufficient research has been conducted on digital diplomacy from a comparative perspective. The case studies of Kenya, Australia and the US are suitable candidates for comparison not only because they are representative of a developing country, a middle power and a great power, but also because they all tweet in English but have different approaches to and ways of conducting digital diplomacy and seemingly different intents behind the use of social media to support and their foreign policies. The use of the case study of Kenya, an African country situated in the Global South, furthermore provides an opportunity to compare how its conduct of digital diplomacy differs vis-à-vis actors in the Global North, what some of the lessons are that it could learn and best practices it could adopt, and similarly, if there is anything it can teach others.

This thesis specifically focuses on whether the three countries use digital diplomacy for one- or two-way communication and whether they use digital diplomacy to gain tactical and strategic advantages in international relations. Especially in the case of Kenya, but also Australia to a certain extent, this could help level the playing field across the digital divide. The comparative analysis of these case studies therefore assists in filling in existing research gaps in the study of digital diplomacy in Africa and the lack of comparisons between its practice in the Global South vis-à-vis the Global North. Both the practice of digital diplomacy and academic scholarship on it are mostly embedded in existing Global North power structures. Examining how digital diplomacy is conducted in Kenya (Global South) and Australia and the US (Global North) allows this thesis to unpack how existing concepts, definitions and practices play out in these two different contexts.

Background and context: country case studies of Kenya, Australia and the US

Broadly, international relations literature tends to categorise states into developing countries, middle powers and great powers, in terms of their power projection capabilities. However, there is a lack of a commonly accepted list of such criteria, although most include both tangible and intangible factors. The former usually refers to capabilities, including the economy, size of the population, land mass and military capabilities. The latter refers to influence on international affairs and how members of the international system accept its status (Lee and Smith 2008). A developing country can still play a role in international politics, provided it can gather the necessary domestic support and secure international endorsement (Zhu, 2007). Middle powers often find that the multilateral level is ideally suited to the projection of their foreign policy (Jordan, 2003). Finally, great powers possess vast resources, and their authority and legitimacy are recognised by others in the international system (Hurrell, 2006). Apart from the status of power in international relations, it is also important to note the closely related role of a state's economic power, as it often dictates what a state can allocate in terms of resources to its innovations in the spheres of technology and diplomacy.

Case study of Kenya

Although Kenya is a developing country, its effective foreign policy allows it to punch above its weight in continental politics as well as internationally. Its gross domestic product (GDP) is US$114.68 billion, which places it at position 63 globally (International Monetary Fund, 2023), reflecting its developing country status. Diplomatically, however, Kenya's former president Uhuru Kenyatta was successful in rallying the AU against the International Criminal Court (ICC) (where he was on trial in the early 2010s) (*The Guardian*, 2016), advocated for UN Security Council reform to feature a stronger African voice (*Nation*, 2014), negotiated peace agreements in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Sudan, and chaired the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) (Presidency Kenya, 2015). These

achievements and actions meant that Kenya was a prominent diplomatic actor not only continentally but also internationally, which is an accomplishment for a developing country. Kenyatta also incorporated tech-savvy language and campaigns during his two terms in office. Initially, he presented himself as a 'digital' candidate running against an 'analogue' opponent in the 2013 presidential election, which he won (Turianskyi and Rondreaux, 2017). Subsequently, during the 2017 presidential elections, Kenyatta implemented a digital strategy that used social media to portray him as a progressive leader while maligning his opponent (Maluki and Njagi, 2020). It must be noted that Kenyatta used the services of Cambridge Analytica in his efforts, a company whose use of Facebook users' data without permission brought global attention to the issue of protection of data privacy a year later, in 2018. This thesis focuses on two time periods: 2022, when the Kenyatta administration was in charge of the foreign policy of the country, and 2023, when the Ruto administration took over. Given that Ruto served as the deputy president of Kenya under Uhuru Kenyatta for almost a decade (2013-2022), the broad direction of foreign policy remained similar in the period under analysis.

Kenya as a developing country

Although there is no universally accepted definition of a developing country, this type of actor in the international system is typically characterised by socio-economic factors. Firstly, lower income levels, measured by GDP per capita. Secondly, uneven socio-economic development, such as disparities between urban and rural areas in infrastructure and access to education and healthcare. And thirdly, high poverty rates, meaning that a significant portion of the population lives below the national poverty line (World Bank, 2023a). Despite Kenya making strides in economic growth and socio-economic development (Mose, 2021), challenges remain in a number of areas. Kenya's GDP per capita of US$1,952 places it within the World Bank's classification of a lower-middle-income country. While experiencing economic growth, projected at 5.2% for 2024-2026, Kenya still faces significant challenges and needs to diversify its economy. The agriculture sector, though resilient, employs a large portion of the population. Similarly, Kenya has made strides in social development, with a decrease in poverty rates (projected to be 35.1% in 2023). However, challenges persist, notably in terms of access to quality education and healthcare, particularly in rural areas (World Bank, 2023b). Politically, although its global influence is still developing, Kenya is seen as a regional leader, thanks to it being the economic powerhouse in the East African Community (EAC) and its contributions to peacekeeping missions in Somalia, the DRC and South Sudan, which demonstrates its political influence. This is discussed in greater detail in the subsequent section.

Kenya's foreign policy under different presidential administrations

This section provides a summarised chronological overview of Kenya's foreign policy from independence to the present. For the purposes of this study, the main focus is on Kenya's foreign policy in the past decade, given that it examines how the country is using the affordances of social media to achieve its foreign policy goals.

Jomo Kenyatta (1963-1978)

Kenya became independent from British colonial rule in 1963. Jomo Kenyatta, previously jailed for resistance to colonialism, was released from jail and became the country's first prime minister, and subsequently the first president the following year, when Kenya became a republic (Embassy of the Republic of Kenya in Japan: no date). When Kenya gained independence, it was able to assume control and manage its own foreign policy. The country has subsequently outlined basic norms and principles to guide its foreign policy and relations with other countries. These included: national security and self-interest; respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of other states; non-interference in the internal affairs of other states; peaceful settlement of disputes; non-alignment and national self-interest; and adherence to the charters of the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) (Permanent Mission of the Republic of Kenya to the UN Office in Geneva 2016). At the global level, Kenyatta aligned with a pro-Western and anti-communist approach. He also supported the end of colonisation on the continent and backed the right to self-determination (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kenya: no date). This meant that he was also seen as one of the founders of the Pan-Africanist movement (Mabera, 2016). Regionally, Kenyatta's approach was pragmatic, since he employed a combination of policies of peaceful co-existence with Kenya's neighbours while also entering into military alliances (such as with Ethiopia in 1964 – a pact that continues to the present) for added security (Kisiangani, 2016). In turn, a peaceful existence enabled Kenya to pursue and maximise economic benefits (Wright, 1980).

Kenyatta's pragmatism is further exemplified by his decision that Kenya would not become involved in the war between Ethiopia and Somalia in 1977, despite good relations with and support for Ethiopia (Kisiangani, 2016). Kenyatta also showed restraint when Uganda's Idi Amin threatened claims on Kenya's territory after claiming that the British colonial rule gave away some of his country's territory (Bamuturaki, 2011). Kenyatta deployed the army along the border with Uganda and issued a strongly worded statement, saying that he would not cede "a single inch of territory" (*Daily Nation*, 2013), which led to Amin backing off. Apart from the regional and continental focus, Kenya under Kenyatta has also sought to expand its foreign policy horizons by becoming involved in global affairs. One of its early achievements in this regard was the establishment of the UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) headquarters in its capital, Nairobi, in 1972. At the time, this was the only headquarters of a UN body

in what is now referred to as the Global South. This helped to establish Kenya's aspirations to play an active role in international relations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kenya: no date). It must be noted, however, that before he died in 1978, Kenyatta seemed to have lost interest in foreign affairs and shifted his focus solely to domestic politics (Lippman, 1978).

Daniel arap Moi (1978-2022)

After Jomo Kenyatta's death on 22 August 1978, he was succeeded by his vice-president, Daniel arap Moi, who initially followed a similar line in terms of both regional and international engagement (Ingham, Hongo Ominde & Ntarangwi, 2020). For instance, Moi chose not to become involved in the 1978-79 war between Uganda and Tanzania and remained neutral in the armed conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia despite Kenya being an ally of the former (Kisiangani, 2016). Moi also stayed true to Kenyatta's legacy at the continental level, which culminated in the annual OAU summit being held in Nairobi in 1981, where he was elected chairperson of the continental body, a role he held for two years (Korwa 2000). Apart from that, Moi was also the chairperson of the Preferential Trade Area from 1989-1990, and the Common Market for East and South Africa from 1999-2000. Moi furthermore prioritised bilateral engagements, with the number of foreign visits as well as reception of foreign heads of state between 1983 and 1988 being declared as Kenya's 'golden diplomatic age' by Gachie (2012). Nonetheless, the 1990s witnessed changes in Kenya's foreign policy. Under Moi, just like under Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya was pro-Western, anti-communist and also reliant on the US and other Western countries for development aid (Mabera, 2016). The end of the competition between the US and the Soviet Union, however, meant that Kenya's international partners demanded more in exchange for their aid – specifically economic reforms and liberalisation of the political system (Kisiangani, 2016). The end of the one-party rule in Kenya (where all significant opposition parties had been outlawed since 1969) narrowed the country's foreign policy focus towards economic diplomacy and regional engagement (Mabera, 2016).

Mwai Kibaki (2002-2013)

In 2002, after almost a quarter of a century in power, Moi announced that he would not be running for the presidency again, having served a mandatory two-term stint in line with the constitutional reforms of 1992. He was succeeded by Mwai Kibaki (a previous vice-president in Moi's government), who was to be president for the next decade, including as part of a coalition government in the aftermath of electoral violence in 2007-08. During his inauguration speech, Kibaki pledged to "unite with our sister countries, which are here today to build a new Africa" and pledged that "Kenya would continue to play a leading role in East Africa, Africa and the world and support and facilitate all positive efforts to resolve the conflicts in Somalia, Sudan, Burundi, the DRC and other trouble spots in Africa" (*The East African*, 2014).

Despite these intentions, however, Kibaki did not make a significant mark on regional politics and rarely demonstrated regional leadership. Analysts argued that under his presidency, Kenya was not behaving as a country of its economic standing should, with some going so far as claiming there was a "profligate waste of diplomatic capital by a country with the economic standing of Kenya", attributed to a divided coalition government (Wachira and Onyango-Obbo, 2011). However, Kibaki's government oversaw the adoption of Kenya's 2010 constitution, which prioritised international trade, prompting a renaming of the country's MFA, which became the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (Mabera, 2016). Despite these efforts, Daniel Nanjira, a Kenyan scholar, noted in 2010 that the lack of a formal policy in Kenya was problematic because emerging issues posed challenges to Kenya in the realm of foreign policy and diplomacy. He therefore suggested that the government needed to develop a foreign policy that would "boost Kenya's image and prestige on the global stage at sub-regional, regional, African continental, as well as global levels" (Nanjira, 2016).

Uhuru Kenyatta (2013-2022)

It took another four years before Kenya's government produced its first foreign policy document. This was done by the administration of former president Uhuru Kenyatta. The latter was keen to emphasise a focus on foreign policy in his inaugural speech on 9 April 2013, outlining his priorities as "free movement of goods and people, regional security, strengthening of regional bodies as well as respect to the equality of nations in the international system" (Waithaka: no date). Kenyatta also stressed that his foreign policy's focus would be regional and Afrocentric policy (Capital FM News, 2014), including the need to enhance relations with regional bodies, including the EAC, and continue its partnership with the AU. Kenya became an active contributor to the AU's programmes, including the APRM, the AU Mission in Somalia and the African World Heritage Fund (Nasong'o, 2022).

He furthermore called for African countries to work together to find solutions to African problems and promised that under his leadership, Kenya would continue to deepen relationships with other countries across the globe (Wathaika: no date). Kenyatta's regional and Pan-African emphasis was subsequently underpinned by his first state visits to Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, Nigeria and South Africa (Rosen, 2014). It is important to note that this was done in the context of legal proceedings against him from the ICC. He lobbied other African states, as well as the AU, to support a deferral of all cases against active heads of state (Onyango-Obbo, 2013), succeeding with this goal at an AU Summit in Addis Ababa in October 2013 (Rosen, 2014). Notably, after the ICC dropped its case against him in December 2014, Kenyatta set out to renew relations with Western countries, broadening his initial regional and Afrocentric focus. Regional engagement however remained key, with Kenya seeking to advance its interests by "taking the regional environment as a given and then making pragmatic, but cautious, efforts to ensure its economic and security interests" (Maina, 2013).

In 2014, a year after Kenyatta's inauguration, Kenya launched its first written foreign policy document since independence (Nasong'o, 2022) to "promote public awareness of the country's foreign policy predisposition to ensure consistency and effectiveness in pursuit of our national interests against the background of new opportunities and emerging threats in the modern world" (Republic of Kenya, 2014). According to it, Kenya's foreign policy is anchored on five pillars: Peace, Economic, Diaspora, Environmental and Cultural. The 'Peace' pillar is aimed at continuity: using Kenya's traditional role as a regional power to promote peace within the region. The 'Economic' pillar is about promoting Kenya's socio-economic goals, with the aim of achieving the transformation to middle-income country status by 2030. The 'Environmental' pillar emphasises the shared use of natural resources and responding to common environmental threats. The 'Cultural' pillar aims to use Kenya's cultural resources for soft power, to influence external public opinion and to strengthen its influence abroad. Finally, the 'Diaspora' pillar recognises that Kenya has a large community living abroad, whose skills need to be harnessed to further the country's development agenda (Kisiangani, 2016). Kenya's Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs furthermore outlines that its foreign policy has always had an Afrocentric orientation, which influences the country's commitment to regional and continental organisations and bodies, including the EAC, AU's Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Furthermore, Kenya has also recently developed a focus on emerging issues, such as climate change, oceans and the blue economy, and the reformation of international organisations to ensure equity among member states. The ministry also notes Kenya's commitment to multilateralism as well as a rule-based global system (Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs: no date). The last point is particularly well illustrated by Kenya's election onto the UN's Security Council, as a non-permanent member, in October 2021 (Nasong'o, 2022).

William Ruto (2022-present)

Although in 2022 a new president, William Ruto (who was previously Kenyatta's deputy president), was elected, Kenya's foreign policy priorities and goals do not seem to have changed significantly. This statement is supported by the fact that the 2014 foreign policy document was, until recently, active on the MFA's website. While in December 2024 a new foreign policy document was launched, at this point all data collection for this study was concluded (in April 2022 and April 2023) and the data analysis was completed. Since the new foreign policy only became operational when this research and analysis had already been completed (and was in the process of editing and refinement), it is not applicable to the study period. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge its release.

It is furthermore important to note that prior to Ruto's election in September 2022, his political party's manifesto and electoral commitments did not indicate that there would be any significant foreign policy shifts and promised a stable political environment that would facilitate foreign investment

(Muganda, 2022). Some restructuring, however, has taken place. Ruto renamed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade to the Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs. This involved both introducing a state department of diaspora affairs as well as transferring the international trade function to the Ministry of Trade (*The East African*, 2022).

Throughout his election campaign, Ruto promised that Kenya would remain an "anchor state" with considerable influence within the EAC and AU (Muganda, 2022). Analysts, therefore, expect that Kenya's foreign policy priorities will not be fundamentally different from the ones pursued under the Kenyatta administration and that the economic pillar will "dominate in the prioritisation and execution of Kenya's interests abroad" (Nzomo and Rugutt, 2022) and that even regional relations may be viewed primarily in terms of economic deals (Oxford Analytica, 2022). Notably, during a 20 September 2022 speech at the UN General Assembly, Ruto went beyond Kenya's traditional focus on regionalism and the African continent, speaking of climate change and the war on terror, seemingly indicative of his readiness to embrace important global topics in his foreign policy agenda (Bilali, Muriithi and Miluwi, 2022). At the time, experts questioned whether Ruto would be able to match his predecessor in maintaining a highly visible presence in both regional and international affairs (Oxford Analytica, 2022), exemplified by the 158 foreign trips Uhuru Kenyatta made during his decade in office (Nasong'o 2022). Nonetheless, between September 2022 and November 2023, Ruto undertook 51 trips to 34 countries, averaging about four trips per month. These trips led to public criticism due to the significant expenses incurred, especially considering Kenya's economic challenges at the time (Africa Uncensored, 2023). Although the data analysis conducted for this article examines digital diplomatic efforts of the Ruto administration just over six months after his inauguration, it should nonetheless be indicative of its foreign policy direction and priorities.

Some experts claim that since gaining independence, the fundamentals of Kenya's three core national interests have remained unchanged, being: national security and sovereignty; economic growth and development; and regional and global concerns (Nzomo and Rugutt, 2022). Others note that Kenya's foreign policy has been traditionally underpinned by its economic interests and characterised by regional engagement (Kenyatta, 2013). At the global level, it can be said that historically, Kenya's foreign policy promoted multilateralism, particularly through matters related to trade and investment. More recently, Kenya has also incorporated environmental concerns as part of its environmental outlook, including climate change, greenhouse gas emissions and pollution (Mabera, 2016). Continentally and regionally, the central themes of Kenya's foreign policy have been founded on principles of Pan-Africanism and can thus be described as Afrocentric. Over the years, Kenya's support for the OAU and decolonisation has evolved into backing the AU and a commitment to the socio-developmental goals of the AU's Agenda 2063, as well as a pledge for continental integration in

accordance with the principles of AfCFTA (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kenya: no date). When needed, Kenya's leaders were also able to use continental bodies such as the AU for their own agendas, such as in Uhuru Kenyatta's battle with the ICC. Regionally, the EAC has always been key to Kenya's economic interests, accounting for 53% of its total exports to Africa and 24% of its total exports worldwide in 2010 (Muluvi, Kamau, Githuku and Ikiara, 2016). Apart from this, Kenya also sought to develop and solidify bilateral relations with countries in the region and on the continent, signing trade and economic cooperation agreements with Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe (Kenyatta, 2014). Kenya's foreign policy can thus be described as multifaceted, given its focus on bilateral, regional, continental and global engagements.

Digitalisation and digital diplomacy in Kenya

This section provides an overview of digitalisation in Kenya, from the 1990s to the present. This is done to highlight that Kenya has a history of digital innovation, despite being a developing country. Digital innovation has served Kenya well and has aided it on its digital diplomacy journey, which this section will also discuss.

Kenya is a developing country and, like most of its African counterparts, is on the wrong side of the digital divide, which is defined as 'uneven access to or distribution of information and technology' (Turianskyi, 2020). In 2019, only 23% of Kenya's population had access to the internet via fixed broadband. This was even lower than the sub-Saharan African average of 29% and significantly lower than the global average of 57% (World Bank 2021). Mobile cellular subscriptions in Kenya, however, were far in excess of 100 per 100 inhabitants (which can be explained by one individual having more than one subscription) (International Telecommunications Union, 2021). Such ubiquitous use of mobile internet can explain why academics and practitioners alike often speak of Kenya's digital boom (Nyabola, 2018), given the country's digital innovations and reputation for being one of the tech hubs in Africa (Kusimba, 2021). Kenya's digitalisation journey has been nothing short of remarkable, given that in the 1990s the country's government saw the internet as a challenge to its monopoly on information and communications flows. According to Mureithi (2017), the first efforts to introduce the World Wide Web in Kenya in 1995 were met with a full-page advertisement by the state's monopoly, Kenya Posts and Telecommunications Corporation, which stated that the provision of internet services constituted a resale and was deemed illegal. Until 1999 the internet was banned entirely across the government's civil service and only in that year, after extensive advocacy by non-governmental organisations and the private sector, did the government officially recognise the internet.

Kenya's early digitalisation efforts (2003-2014)

Despite being a late arrival to internet connectivity, Kenya has quickly developed a culture of digital innovation and made immense strides, particularly in digitalising financial services access (Ndung'u, 2018). 2004 can be pinpointed as the year when Kenya's digitalisation took off. That was the year when Kenya adopted an e-government strategy aimed at enabling citizens and businesses to access government services and information quickly and efficiently through the use of the internet and other means of communication (Mboya, 2021). This meant investment in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), training staff and introducing new tech platforms. Furthermore, a culture of digitalisation was implemented, which encouraged digital collaboration between government departments, finding ways to provide state services electronically and involving citizens in government affairs through electronic surveys and polls (Derow, 2019).

This paved the way for the establishment of two major digital projects and what has been described as Kenya's first digital decade (2007-2017) (Nyabola, 2018). Firstly, in 2007, preceding Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies, Kenya launched M-Pesa, a financially inclusive, cross-border mobile phone-based money transfer, financing and microfinancing service (Ndung'u, 2018). Secondly, Kenya was at the forefront of digitising many government services in an attempt to improve service delivery. For instance, the eCitizen initiative was launched in 2014 (Nyabola, 2018), which reduced bureaucracy and improved access to government services, allowing citizens to access them electronically, including marriage certificates, driver's licences, visas and civil registration services (Ndung'u, 2018). The government also introduced an open data platform to make public government databases more accessible. It developed internet portals to improve transparency and accountability by allowing citizens to track public projects and report corruption (Turianskyi, 2018). Since then, Kenya's government has cultivated an image of being pro-digital and fostering a culture of innovation. In fact, Mboya (2021) tracks Kenya's cultivation of digital diplomacy to interactions between the government and the public through social media platforms and initiatives such as eCitizen. Ipu (2013) agrees with this, observing Kenya's attempts to promote its digital diplomacy by encouraging the public and government to interact with each other through various digital platforms, including governmental websites, Twitter (now X), Facebook and other social media platforms.

As Kenya's government embarked on a journey of digitalisation, the MFA was no exception. The earliest mention of efforts in this regard can be traced to 2003 when the ministry adopted an ICT platform to support its mandate and assist in its work (Derow, 2019). Yet it would take over a decade before the MFA would set out to become an accomplished digital diplomacy actor as one of its objectives. This claim is supported by the statement of Amina Mohamed, then-cabinet secretary for foreign affairs (minister of foreign affairs), who in 2014 explicitly said that the ministry's ambition was

to digitise and cultivate "tweeting diplomats" (Ipu, 2013; Mutambo, 2014). The government has backed these statements by investing in ICT infrastructure and software (Mboya, 2021). To build the capacity of diplomats it also established a Foreign Service Institute, which developed a course on information communication technology, focused on using technology for diplomacy, technological impacts on traditional forms of diplomatic communication and the effects of social media on diplomacy (Waithaka, 2012). Because of the importance Kenya's government places on its diaspora and citizens abroad, 2014 also saw the introduction of an interactive web portal aimed at providing online consular services, as well as a database to manage data on Kenyans living abroad to facilitate communication and engagement (Derow, 2019).

Kenya's digital diplomacy efforts under Uhuru Kenyatta (2014-2022)

The election of Uhuru Kenyatta as Kenya's president further propelled the country's digitalisation efforts while helping to solidify its digital image. It is of course important to recognise that there is a distinction between the presidency and the MFA, even though the two actors are connected in terms of conducting and communicating the country's foreign policy. Nonetheless, this section provides an overview of Kenya's digital diplomacy efforts and it is therefore important to include it as part of the context.

Throughout his two terms in office, Kenyatta incorporated tech-savvy language in his speeches and relied on digital campaigns to achieve his goals. Mutiga notes how Kenyatta has consistently associated himself with the paradigm of being 'digital' (Mutiga, no date). Initially, Kenyatta presented himself as a 'digital' candidate running against an 'analogue' opponent in the 2013 presidential election, which he won (Turianskyi and Rondreax, 2017). Subsequently, during the 2017 presidential elections, Kenyatta implemented a digital strategy that used social media to portray him as a progressive leader while maligning his opponent. It must be noted that Kenyatta used the services of Cambridge Analytica in his efforts, a company whose use of Facebook users' data without permission brought global attention to the issue of protection of data privacy a year later, in 2018 (Maluki and Njagi, 2020).

As discussed in the previous section, after being in elected 2013, Kenyatta rallied the AU against the ICC, a campaign in which social media played a major role (*The Guardian*, 2016). Maluki and Njagi (2020) see this as an example of Nye's concept of 'soft power' (this concept will be discussed in Chapter 2). Another example of digital diplomacy, related to branding, was Kenya's digital campaign around the state visit to Nairobi of then-US president Barack Obama in July 2015 (Derow, 2019). The Twitter accounts of Kenya's MFA, cabinet secretary (minister) of foreign affairs and the presidency conducted a digital campaign with the #chooseKenya hashtag to highlight the country as a rising

economic power and promote it as a prime destination for investing, thereby establishing Kenya as a global brand through the use of social media (Manor, 2016).

Kenyatta's use of social media was not without controversy, however. In 2014, Digital Impact Awards described Kenyatta as the most active African head of state on social media, posting at least once daily on Twitter and Facebook (Digital Impact Awards, 2014). Kenyatta also had more than seven million followers combined across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, until he deactivated his accounts in March 2019 (Olubukola 2022). At the time of the deactivation, his chief of staff, Nzioka Waita, claimed unauthorised access to Kenyatta's Twitter account and said that it was temporarily suspended (*The East African*, 2019). Yet the account was never reactivated. Kenyatta later claimed that he deactivated his own account because of insults and name-calling on his timeline. He also stated that he prefers interacting with other leaders in person, does not follow their sentiments online and would rather pursue other activities than keep up with social media. This is in direct contrast to his self-promoted image as a 'digital candidate', which he cultivated in the run-up to the 2016 election, as mentioned earlier. The @UKenyatta account page had the following message: "Account suspended. Twitter suspends accounts that violate the Twitter Rules" (Twitter, no date).

Nonetheless, Kenyatta's efforts in digital diplomacy have helped to institutionalise the practice more broadly in how the state conducts its foreign policy. For instance, Kenya used social media, in particular Twitter, in its COVID-19 diplomacy efforts. These efforts were multifaceted: they were used to highlight Kenya's efforts in dealing with the health pandemic; promote global solidarity; and provide information to citizens who were abroad. Mboya (2021) notes the significant networking between different actors in this regard: diplomats, government individuals and citizens. He furthermore praises synergies among different actors, as a result of which certain stories and topics trended on Twitter because they were retweeted numerous times by different officials, government agencies and followers who were all part of the same network. Indeed, there are also other state actors that play a role in Kenya's digital diplomacy efforts, such as the Kenya Export Promotion and Branding Agency, which is a governmental agency tasked with branding and promoting Kenya, its products and exports (Kenya Export Promotion & Branding Agency: no date) and which boasts over 134,000 followers on Twitter (Twitter, no date b).

In 2020, Kenya also embarked on an advocacy campaign using Twitter and Facebook to gather support for Amina Mohamed, the country's former minister of foreign affairs, who was campaigning to become the director-general of the World Trade Organization. This campaign focused on building up her profile and highlighting her experience, skills and track record on social media (Mboya, 2021). Bjola, Manor and Adiku (2022) furthermore note that Kenya has allocated substantial digital resources

towards digital diaspora engagement, with its MFA formulating digital diaspora policies and even investing in technological solutions, such as applications for sending remittances to families back home.

Challenges to Kenya's digital diplomacy

One challenge with regard to Kenya's digital diplomacy that is however worth noting is that it is neither formalised nor structured. According to Mboya (2021), who conducted interviews with Kenyan government officials in 2020 and 2021, "there are no official policy documents or guidelines on the use of social media diplomacy". This is also supported by information from two of the MFA's recent strategic documents. Firstly, the five-year Strategic Plan (2013/4-2017/8) of (how it was then called) Kenya's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade did not include a road map on the adoption of digital diplomacy (Kenya Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 2018). Secondly, the more recent Strategic Plan (2018/19-2022/23) (Kenya Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 2023) also does not discuss digital diplomacy (by this or any other names mentioned earlier), and while it has a significant focus on ICT, it is discussed in purely technical terms, as infrastructure. Even the description of the functions of the MFA's Information and Communication Technology Division is purely in terms of "IT support": maintenance of systems, management of ICT infrastructure and provision of advice on ICT options and solutions. This is supported by Njoroge (2018), who found that the MFA did not have a specific department dealing with public diplomacy (of which digital diplomacy is a sub-set) and suggested that there is no consistency or structure in managing how public diplomacy (and digital diplomacy) are conducted. The only wording that could be construed as implying digital diplomacy activities is under strategies for ministries, departments and agencies, which proposes "effective use of ICT and new media". Interestingly the same strategy is not listed for Kenyan missions abroad, where the proposal is about communication between the mission and the capital rather than between the mission and foreign publics: "Enhance use of ICT to strengthen communication between the Ministry HQs and missions" (Kenya Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 2023).

Mboya does see some positives in the lack of formal rules and guidelines since the implication is that there are also no restrictions or prohibitions and "thus nothing bars diplomats at any level from engaging in social media diplomacy" (Mboya, 2021). Mboya's (2021) findings furthermore show that "the use of social media is encouraged". Yet, it also seems that junior diplomats are cautious about conducting digital diplomacy on their personal social media accounts "for fear of confusing or contradicting official policy". The lack of structure and formal rules and guidelines also means that, in its current format, Kenya's digital diplomacy will struggle to transition from being tactical to strategic. Bjola and Manor (2018) describe digital tactics as attempts to obtain likes, retweets and followers, in

contrast to digital strategies, which set out to achieve specific diplomatic objectives. The success of digital tactics is measured by simple numbers on social media, whereas the success of a digital strategy is based on a pre-determined outcome, which has to do with furthering one's foreign policy goals.

Case study of Australia

Australia represents a middle power in international affairs, which is discussed in greater detail below. As a middle power, Australia utilises multilateralism as an avenue to achieve its foreign policy goals. Indeed, Australia is a member of the Group of 20 (G20), which, excluding great powers that are also part of the Group of 7 (G7), consists of middle and emerging powers in global affairs. Australia has also played a major role in promoting the post-World War II global order, specifically through its support of multilateral institutions such as the UN, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Thompson 2015). Australia's GDP is US$2.05 trillion, ranking it in the top 15 economies in the world (IMF, 2023). Australia's economic status helps to underpin its middle-power status. Although not in the same league as the US and China, it is nonetheless one of the countries in the tier just below. For instance, the Lowy Institute 2024 Asia Power Index Key Findings report, which takes into account factors such as defence networks, future resources and diplomatic influence, ranks Australia as fifth (out of 27), behind the US, China, India and Japan (Lowy Institute, 2024).

It is also important to note Australia's changing role in global politics. Previously, it has managed a careful balancing act between China for its economic interests and the US for its political and security interests. This, however, has changed post-COVID-19. Australia's calls for an inquiry into the origins of the pandemic had angered China, which responded by imposing punitive sanctions on Australian trade. Australia subsequently joined AUKUS, a trilateral security pact with the US and the UK, to help it acquire nuclear-powered submarines. Australia is also a member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), together with the US, India and Japan, whose establishment is seen as a response to China's growing military and economic power. While Australia's membership in these groups demonstrates its allegiance to the US, it also highlights its collaborative efforts in the realm of security with other middle powers: Japan and India through geographical proximity, and the UK through historical and cultural ties. This thesis examines the conduct of foreign policy in 2022 (when the Liberal Party was in power) and 2023 (when the Australian Labor Party took over). Australia's foreign policy remains quite consistent, irrespective of which of the major political parties – Labor or Liberal – is in power. Similarly, the upcoming 2025 federal election is expected to be dominated by domestic issues rather than foreign policy ones. Regardless of the government of the day, Australia is concerned about a security threat posed by its main trading partner, China. The differences are in approach, with Liberals

tending to adopt a more hawkish approach and Labor tending to be softer with its statements (Giusto, 2022). This is discussed in greater detail below, in the section on Australia's three-dimensional foreign policy. Given the similarities in foreign policy approaches by successive governments, this section therefore specifically discusses the two most recent administrations of Scott Morrison (Liberal, 2018-2022) and Anthony Albanese (Labour, 2022-present).

Australia as a middle power

As discussed above, Australia represents a middle power in international affairs. The term middle power has been consistently used to define Australia's role in global affairs as an economic and security link between developed and developing states (Warnant, 2020). In fact, Ungerer (2007) went so far as to argue that "the middle power concept itself and the general diplomatic style it conveys have been one of the most durable and consistent elements of Australia's diplomatic practice." Although there is no single accepted definition of a middle power, countries in this category are usually classified through one of two perspectives. The first is a realist perspective, which looks at a country's economic and military strength (Jordaan, 2017). The second is a pluralist perspective, which looks at a country's role in international politics. Middle powers tend to play a significant role in diplomacy and shaping international norms and institutions, and are often seen as bridge-builders, able to cooperate with both larger and smaller states (Robertson, 2017).

Australia qualifies as a middle power from both perspectives. Economically, Australia's GDP of US$2.05 trillion ranks it in the top 15 economies in the world (IMF, 2023), while its 60,000-strong army (Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2024), defence spending of US$44.6 billion (Australian Government, 2021), modern navy and air forces project significant military capabilities (Global Firepower, 2024). From a pluralist perspective, since the end of World War II, Australia has also played a key role in shaping and upholding the international rules-based order by supporting multilateral institutions such as the UN, the World Bank and the IMF (Strating, 2019). Since its founding in 1999, Australia has also been part of the G20, a forum for international cooperation and coordination whose member countries account for 90% of global trade (Downie, 2017). Overall, Australia's military strength allows it to defend its territory and participate in regional security operations. Its economic capabilities make it a significant player in global trade, and its location positions it as a key player in the Indo-Pacific region. Australia's government furthermore understands that, as a middle power, it benefits from the recognition of the global rules-based system because it provides stability, certainty and predictability (Australian Government, 2017).

It is important to recognise and acknowledge that some scholars (Layne, 2012) have argued that, post-2008 (when the global financial crisis took place), the world has become increasingly multipolar and

that the US is no longer the only great power, due to China's rapid rise, and thus the term 'middle power' and is no longer pertinent. Indeed, Australia had to play a careful balancing act between the US, as its main security partner, and China, as its main trading partner, for most of the 20th century (Simmons, 2022). This has since been replaced by a strategic alignment with the US, exemplified through its participation in US-led multilateral initiatives designed to counter China's influence: AUKUS and the Quad (Abbondanza, 2022).

Apart from often being caught between the interests of the US and China, Australia has demonstrated commitment to an international rules-based order. This, combined with its efforts to cooperate with others to uphold this order, is what makes it a perfect example of a middle power. Multilateralism is an important avenue for middle powers to project their power (Jordaan, 2003). Indeed, Australia is a member of the G20, which, excluding great powers that are also part of the G7, consists of middle and emerging powers in global affairs. Australia has also played a major role in promoting the post-World War II global order, specifically through its support of multilateral institutions such as the UN, the World Bank, and the IMF (Thompson, 2005). Indeed, liberal institutionalism has been an important aspect of Australian foreign policy, with Richardson noting that international institutions help to establish "a more predictable, cooperative and thus peaceful environment" which benefits a country like Australia because it means international relations are conducted in accordance with established rules (Richardson, 2007). It can therefore be argued that through its foreign policy, Australia represents an example of a very relevant middle power in the international system, one that is more than a developing country but less than a superpower. Other contemporary studies similarly identify Australia as a middle power (Struye de Swielande, 2019; Taylor, 2020; and Abbondanza, 2022).

Australia's three-dimensional foreign policy

One of the most prominent thinkers on Australia's foreign policy, Dr Michael Fullilove, executive director of the Lowy Institute, a Sydney-based think tank, recently described Australia's foreign policy in terms of three dimensions (Fullilove, 2023), stating that although the balance between these dimensions differed over time, they have remained constant throughout Australia's history. Therefore, rather than discussing Australia's foreign policy under different prime ministers, it is more helpful to examine these dimensions and illustrate them with examples, as relevant.

In Fullilove's explanation, the first part of Australia's three-dimensional foreign policy is height, which refers to a relationship with a long-distance, like-minded ally – the US. Particularly through this dimension and its relationship with the US, Australia was able to assume an active role in global affairs, which it chose despite the opportunity to become isolationist, which would have been enabled by its remote geographical location. Recent examples of this dimension are Australia's joining of the AUKUS

defensive alliance with the US and the UK (Australian Submarine Agency, 2023), as well as Australia being a proud part of the global democratic alliance assisting Ukraine in its fight against the Russian invading force (Wong, 2024). Australia is, furthermore, a member of the Quad, together with the US, India and Japan, whose establishment is seen as a response to China's growing military and economic power. However, while Australia's membership in these groups demonstrates its allegiance to the US, it also highlights its collaborative efforts in the realm of security with other middle powers: Japan and India through geographical proximity, and the UK through historical and cultural ties. This point relates to the second dimension of Australia's foreign policy, explained below.

The second dimension is width (Fullilove, 2023), which is Australia's engagement in the global system with a focus on multilateralism. Australia's emphasis is particularly on global institutions, such as the UN and its various bodies, as well as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), a forum of 21 Pacific Rim countries that promotes free trade in the Asia-Pacific region. A recent example of this is exemplified by Australia's greenhouse gas emission reduction targets, legislated in 2022. The country is planning to reach emission levels of 43% below 2005 levels by 2030 and reach Net Zero by 2050 (Australian Government, 2022). It is furthermore bidding, together with Pacific nations, to co-host the UN's Conference of the Parties climate summit in 2026 (Bowen, 2023).

The third and final dimension is depth, which refers to Australia's deep focus on countries in its near abroad. According to Fullilove (2023), most of Australia's foreign policy efforts are directed towards Asia and the Pacific. The relationship with China, which is Australia's most important trade partner, is an important part of this dimension. As briefly mentioned earlier, in 2020, China, which was the most valuable export destination for many Australian industries (Ferguson, Waldron and Lim, 2023), imposed sanctions on numerous Australian exports, with many analysts agreeing that this was an act of revenge for Australia's call for an international inquiry into the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic (Lim and Attrill, 2021). This incident exemplifies Australia's role as a middle power in the international system: although China was its biggest trading partner, Australia nonetheless acted in a manner that underlined its commitments to democratic principles of the multilateral rules-based order.

Scott Morrison (2018-2022)

It is important to note how Australia's role in global politics has changed recently. As mentioned above, previously, it has managed a careful balancing act between China for its economic interests and the US for its political and security interests. Before 2018, Australia and China enjoyed a largely positive bilateral relationship characterised by flourishing trade ties (Zhou and Laurenceson, 2022). Since the 1990s, trade volume has steadily increased, culminating in the signing of a free trade

agreement in 2015 (Garnaut, 2018). China had become Australia's primary export market for goods and services and a significant source of foreign investment (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, no date). This mutually beneficial relationship was underpinned by Australia's iron ore exports, vital for China's industrial development, while Australian consumers benefited from a wide range of Chinese imports (Hellmer and Ekstrand, 2013).

However, a turning point came in 2018 when Australia, under the government of Scott Morrison, barred Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei from participating in the rollout of its 5G network, citing national security concerns (Mascitelli and Chung, 2021). Tensions escalated further in 2020 when the Morrison government spearheaded calls for an independent investigation into the origins of the COVID-19 virus, a move perceived by China as politically motivated (Zhao, 2020). China vehemently denied any responsibility for the pandemic's emergence (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2020). In retaliation, China imposed a series of coercive trade bans on key Australian exports, including barley, beef, coal, cotton, lamb, lobsters, timber and wine, amounting to approximately $20 billion in potential losses (Xinhua News Agency, 2020).

Otherwise, during his tenure as Australia's prime minister from 2018 to 2022, Morrison adopted a proactive and strategic approach to foreign policy, emphasising national security and reinforcing alliances. A significant achievement was the establishment of the AUKUS security pact with the US and the UK, aimed at enhancing defence capabilities (Australian Submarine Agency, 2023). Morrison also played a pivotal role in revitalising the Quad and fostering cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2021). His administration concluded free trade agreements with Indonesia, the UK and India, bolstering economic ties (Karp, 2021; Buttler, 2022). Apart from that, Morrison's foreign policy was characterised by a commitment to aligning development assistance with strategic interests, as evidenced by initiatives like the Pacific 'step-up', which aimed to increase engagement with Pacific Island nations (Dziedzic, 2020).

Anthony Albanese (2022-2024)

Anthony Albanese inherited the trade war with China from his predecessor. Despite the imposition of trade tariffs by China, however, the volume of trade between Australia and China not only continued but also witnessed growth. Australia's exports to China, encompassing both goods and services, reached a staggering US$203.5 billion in 2022-23, reflecting a remarkable 13% increase from the previous year. Notably, China retained its position as Australia's paramount two-way trading partner, accounting for a significant 26% of Australia's total global trade in 2022-23. This continued strength in trade is largely attributable to Australia's iron ore exports, which constitute a substantial portion of the total exports to China. In 2022-23 alone, iron ore exports to China reached US$104.8 billion,

highlighting China's dependence on Australian iron ore to fuel its industrial development (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2024). However, the Australian government acknowledged that the ongoing trade tensions have demonstrably strained the relationship with China and eroded trust in China's reliability as a predictable trade partner (Australian Financial Review, 2023).

Under Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's leadership, slowly but surely, Australia adopted a more diplomatic and constructive approach towards China, leading to the removal of most trade tariffs previously imposed on Australian goods. This shift was marked by high-level engagements, including Albanese's meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping during the G20 summit in November 2022, which ended a significant diplomatic freeze between the two nations. Subsequently, China lifted its unofficial ban on Australian coal imports in early 2023 and agreed to review tariffs on Australian barley, resulting in the removal of these trade barriers (The Guardian, 2023). Further improvements were seen with the resumption of Australian timber imports by China in May 2023 and the lifting of tariffs on Australian barley in August 2023. Most recently, China has removed all remaining trade sanctions, including those on Australian beef and wine, following continued diplomatic negotiations (Reuters, 2024).

The prime minister inherited AUKUS, a trilateral security pact with the US and the UK intended help the country acquire nuclear-powered submarines. Because AUKUS has the potential to change the military balance of power in the region (Kumar, 2023), joining it was widely interpreted as Australia taking a side in the superpower competition and pledging its allegiance to the US and its attempt to curb China's expansion (Simmons, 2022). The earlier point about similarities in Australia's foreign policy approach irrespective of whether the government of the day is left-leaning or right leaning, is supported by Albanese forging ahead with this project despite the possibility of further angering China. Upon assuming office in 2022, Albanese reaffirmed Australia's commitment to the AUKUS security pact, emphasising the strategic importance of AUKUS in enhancing Australia's defence capabilities, particularly through the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines. In March 2023, he joined then US president Joe Biden and then-UK prime minister Rishi Sunak in San Diego, US, to announce the pathway for Australia to acquire these submarines, underscoring the nation's dedication to the partnership (Prime Minister of Australia, 2023). Additionally, in August 2024, the Albanese government formalised an agreement to facilitate the transfer of submarine-specific materials and equipment from the UK and the US to Australia, a critical step in developing Australia's sovereign nuclear-powered submarine capability (Australia's Minister for Defence, 2024).

Australia's precarious position and careful balancing act between China and Australia was well explained by the Albanese government's Foreign Minister Penny Wong, who, speaking ahead of a UN

summit in New York in September 2023, said: “I think powers like Australia, we’re a middle power, all of the sovereign nations that are represented at the UN have a role, which is to urge and to encourage the great powers to manage their competition wisely” (The Advertiser, 2023). In the balancing game between trade and security, there is only one winner, however. While Australia has often had to balance its interests between China and the US, the relationship with geographically more distance but a culturally closer ally always took precedence. “The United States relationship with Australia is our most important,” said Albanese in 2023, adding that “In today’s turbulent world, it is a relationship that provides security, stability, based upon our common values and our position as great democratic nations. Working together to promote those values throughout the Indo-Pacific and throughout the world” (Australian Financial Review, 2023).

Australia’s Foreign Policy White Paper

The Australian government recognises its role as a middle power and the limitations of this status in the international system. While Australia’s economic status helps to underpin its middle-power status, it is nonetheless not in the same league as the US and China. The Australian government therefore acknowledges that, for countries like Australia, it is difficult to influence an international system that is predominantly shaped by much more powerful nations, even when it works with others. Nonetheless, Australia puts significant efforts into cooperating with others to support a global rules-based order. For instance, the Australian government recognises that: “A rules-based trading system centred on the WTO is fundamental to Australia’s interests. International aviation, shipping, telecommunications, postal services and many other aspects of our world are inconceivable without the certainty and predictability inherent in a system based on rules” (Australian Government, 2017). Indeed, international trade is absolutely crucial to Australia, making up 45% of its GDP (Australian Government, 2020). The significance of international trade to Australia is exemplified in both the name and composition of its MFA, which is the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. This department includes three ministers: a minister for foreign affairs, a minister for trade and tourism, and a minister for international development and the Pacific, which indicates both the breadth of its focus as well as key strategic areas for the Australian government in terms of its international engagement. Trade and foreign policy are furthermore linked in Australia because the country’s values – political, economic and religious freedoms, liberal democracy, the rule of law, racial and gender equality and mutual respect – form a cornerstone of its foreign policy (Australian Government, 2017). Australia, therefore, uses trade sanctions as a tool of its foreign policy (Australian Government, no date).

The DFAT published a Foreign Policy White Paper in 2017, which describes Australia as a “regional power with global interests” and states that the future necessitates “strong partnerships to help

advance a secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific and strengthen the rules-based international order" (Australian Government, 2017). The main pillar of Australia's foreign policy is ensuring the country's security and prosperity. The document lists five objectives that assist Australia in attaining this goal. These objectives are briefly described below, as summarised from the White Paper (Australian Government, 2017).

Australia's foreign policy objectives

'Promote an open, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific region in which the rights of all states are respected': Australia sees a stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific, defined as the region ranging from the eastern Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean and connected by Southeast Asia (including India), North Asia and the US, as key to its security. Here, it is important to note that the term Indo-Pacific was first used in official documents and statements by Australia and the US in 2013, with both countries attaching a strategic connotation to it (Abbondanza, 2022). As per the earlier discussion, this shows Australia's alignment with the US and support for its geopolitical strategy. At the time, however, and as indicated earlier, Australia was still attempting to balance its security interests with the US and trade interests with China. The 2017 foreign policy document, therefore, noted that Australia wants to be able to pursue its interests freely in the region and not be constrained by the use of coercive power by others. At the same time, the Australian government points out that it is committed to a strong and constructive relationship with its Chinese counterpart. The economy also forms a major aspect of Australia's foreign policy interests in the region. According to the foreign policy document, Australia wants to help sustain growth in the region. At the same time, the document places an emphasis on regional trade being inclusive and based on market principles, in line with Australia's priorities of a rules-based order. A document published three years later, the 2020 Defence Strategic Update, was more blunt, stating that "the Indo-Pacific is at the centre of greater strategic competition, making the region more contested" (Australian Ministry for Defence, 2020: 3) and identifying "China's more active pursuit of greater influence in the Indo-Pacific" as one of the core strategic concerns (Australian Ministry for Defence, 2020: 17).

'Deliver more opportunities for our businesses globally and stand against protectionism': The foreign policy document once again underlines Australia's commitment to international rules. In this regard, it outlines the country's commitment to advocate for an open global economy, and firmly states its position against protectionism. It furthermore outlines the road ahead for the next decade: linkages between globalisation, technological change and new forms of production, consumption and trade will have significant impacts on societies and their economies. Against this background, it also puts on record that Australia will continue to pursue Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with other countries.

‘Ensure Australians remain safe, secure and free in the face of threats such as terrorism’: this security-focused objective prioritises the protection of Australia’s people, borders, economy and infrastructure from threats including terrorism, cyberattacks and organised crime. In this regard, Australia’s cooperation with its intelligence partners from the so-called Five-Eyes network (which also includes the US, UK, Canada and New Zealand) is emphasised. Similarly to the previous objective, there is a discussion of the impacts brought about by globalisation and technological change, in the context of digital connectivity, state fragility and environmental stresses.

‘Promote and protect the international rules that support stability and prosperity and enable cooperation to tackle global challenges’: This objective once again stresses the importance Australia places on international rules-based order and cooperation as a means to protect its own interests. It also specifically states that Australia will work with others to protect and promote elements of the international order that enable all states to pursue their interests in a secure manner. In terms of specifics, the foreign policy document mentions stopping the spread of weapons of mass destruction, addressing climate change, promoting the UN 2030 sustainable development goals, and responding to global health and humanitarian crises. It also places on record that Australia will continue to strongly support the US’s global leadership.

‘Step up support for a more resilient Pacific and Timor-Leste’: the last foreign policy objective is focused on Australia’s near abroad and is based on working with its neighbouring countries, including Papua New Guinea, other Pacific Island countries and Timor-Leste, in order to support their governance and economic growth.

Analysis of Australia’s foreign policy objectives

It is noteworthy that most of the foreign policy objectives listed in the above sub-section are consistent with the goals listed in Australia’s Public Diplomacy Strategy 2016-18, such as promoting Australia’s economic credentials and economic diplomacy efforts, underlining the importance of the Indo-Pacific region for Australia, advocating Australia’s vision for the international policy agenda, and promoting the country’s development credentials (Australian Government, 2016). It is also important to acknowledge that this Foreign Policy White Paper was published by the previous government, which was led by the coalition. It is also important to note that in May 2022, the Labor Party won the federal election and formed a new government. While it may have its own foreign policy priorities, these are unlikely to be drastically different from the ones set out in the White Paper under discussion. For instance, one of the key priorities emanating from this document is supporting the international rules-based order, which has been a bipartisan commitment for decades (Simmons, 2022). Illustrating this point is one of the speeches by the new minister of foreign affairs and trade, Penny Wong, who, in

relation to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that Australia's "strategic interest [is] in maintaining a region which is peaceful, stable, prosperous, and where sovereignty is respected" (Wong, 2022). Furthermore, the information contained in the White Paper is sufficient for the purposes of this study, considering that the tweets used in this study were collected between 1 and 30 April 2022, when the Liberal Party was still in power. Wong hopes to find common interests with proximate small and middle powers to help create a "peaceful, prosperous region in which sovereignty is respected" (Wong, 2022).

Digital diplomacy in Australia

The label 'DFAT the Dinosaur' entered the Australian public discourse in 2010, after the Foreign Affairs and Trade developed a reputation for being slow in keeping pace with the digital roll-out and refusing to use the internet in international relations engagements (Cave, 2015). No doubt due to the existence of such public perceptions, in 2012 the Australian Parliament's Foreign Affairs Subcommittee launched an inquiry entitled 'Australia's Overseas Representation – Punching Below our Weight?', which stated that "the internet and social media remained underutilised, particularly as tools for public diplomacy" (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2012:7). Experts agreed: a submission from a prominent Australian international affairs think tank, the Lowy Institute, was scathing, saying that the country had not kept pace with a changing world and that "public diplomacy was lacklustre and new digital platforms almost non-existent" (Shearer et al., 2011). During the inquiry, committee members criticised the slow pace of ICT rollout at DFAT, the perceived risk aversion to social media, the lack of engagement with the Australian community online and failure to keep pace with global leaders in digital diplomacy, specifically the US (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2012: 60).

A lack of funding was at least partially to blame, as for more than two decades DFAT had been "chronically underfunded" (Woodroofe, 2012). During committee hearings, then-DFAT secretary Dennis Richardson admitted that Australia was "not at the forefront of e-diplomacy. We do not have the resources to do it" (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2012: 118). However, a lack of funding was only part of the story. According to Richardson's statements, it seems that in the department's list of priorities, digital diplomacy was not at the top of the list: "If I had additional resources now that is not where I would allocate those additional resources… It is not to say that an office of e-diplomacy is not important, but you have to make choices when you are running an organisation" (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2012: 118).

Challenges in Australia's digital diplomacy

An Australian scholar, Stuart Murray, wrote a book chapter in 2015, in which he used the term 'digital divide', in this instance framed as differences between states that are advanced in the conduct of

digital diplomacy and "e-dinosaur states" (Murray, 2015: 129) to compare the use of ICTs by the US Department of State and Australia's DFAT. According to Murray (2015: 129), advanced states, or "haves", run well-funded and well-resourced ICT operations, include young, tech-savvy professionals, who have a history of innovation, openness, transparency and reform-minded, value diplomacy as a key strategic asset and have pro-digital leaders in charge. On the other hand, the "have-nots" are resistant to change, reluctant to use new technologies and do not have a history of innovation. This results in diplomats relying on historical, traditional and cautious diplomatic strategies for fear of saying the wrong thing online. Here is it worth bringing up an argument made by Medcalf, who said that "diplomats who deem tweeting beneath their dignity… risk becoming the blacksmiths of the information age" (Medcalf, 2013).

Murray however was not overly concerned that this fate would befall Australian diplomacy. Although he concluded that Australia was on the wrong side of the digital divide, he also claimed that this was temporary and, in time, it would modernise its ICT capabilities and catch up with the "haves" (Murray, 2015: 139). Murray (2015) furthermore acknowledged the difficulties that MFAs faced when confronted with a need to change, due to the nature and scale of the operation, the costs involved and the nature of sensitive information they deal with. Indeed, Murray was not the only scholar calling out the Australian government for its digital diplomacy practices, which were not keeping up with the times. Hocking and Melissen (2015) questioned the timing of DFAT posting an explanation on its website, which sought to debunk nine myths about an Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement that Australia was negotiating, along with 36 other countries. According to their assessment, this was "too little, too late", because by this stage a global campaign had been initiated by a global community of activists who framed the issue in a particular manner and were successful in their advocacy effort to establish an opposition to it.

Challenges to Australia's digital diplomacy

The Lowy Institute similarly expressed concerns that the DFAT seemed to have a lack of understanding and was struggling to keep pace with how other actors, including states, organisations and individuals, were using ICTs to "engage, coordinate and influence one another in an increasingly crowded environment of international actors" (Cave, 2015). The institute's specific criticism was that DFAT's social media accounts were performing a marketing function rather than a diplomatic one. They were efficient at posting and amplifying information that was already available on other public channels. However, they did not provide details on policy or additional explanations of why Australia was pursuing one option over another. The Lowy Institute argues that communicating is not the same as influencing. While the government's foreign policy views are made public, there is no attempt to advocate for the importance of these policy positions online. As a result, DFAT's social media accounts

are dominated by photo-ops, consular information, trade facts and tourism branding. This while other countries use digital diplomacy to push their views and attempt to influence foreign publics (Cave, 2015).

These issues clearly needed addressing. Given Australia's middle-power status in the international system, digital diplomacy could potentially provide it with an efficient and cost-effective way of achieving its foreign policy goals, especially taking into account its geographically remote location (Murray, 2015: 136). And all the right ingredients seem to be in place. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Australia had witnessed three decades of economic growth (The Guardian, 2020), meaning it had the necessary human and financial resources as well as the infrastructure. Australia's internet penetration rate is high; in 2020, 88% of Australians had access to the internet (World Bank, 2021).

Back in 2012 the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade made the following two recommendations for DFAT, which are related to digital diplomacy:

> Recommendation 16: "…establish an Office of eDiplomacy, subject to the external review, the Government White Paper and any resource increase."
>
> Recommendation 17 "…make better use of social media platforms to promote Australia's foreign policy, trade opportunities, and the Department's role to the wider Australian public and key audiences in Asia and the Pacific" (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2012: 122-123).

How has Australia's digital diplomacy strategy changed in the past decade, and have the shortcomings identified in 2012 by a Parliamentary Subcommittee been rectified?

Implementation of the first recommendation is relatively simple to assess. Australia's DFAT has not established an office of ediplomacy. However, in the aftermath of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee's report, it has published a Public Diplomacy Strategy for 2014-2016 (Australian Government, 2016). This document outlined Australia's public diplomacy goals: promoting the country's economic credentials, underlining its engagement in the Indo-Pacific region, advocating its vision for the international policy agenda, promoting Australia's development credentials, and championing Australia as an open, innovative, democratic and diverse nation (Australian Government, 2016). In order to achieve these goals, DFAT said it would "make more effective use of communication technologies, including active use of online and social media as public diplomacy tools" (Australian Government, 2016). It also promised to launch a Public Diplomacy Portal, although as of January 2023, this had not been done. Apart from that, the strategy emphasised the importance of partnerships with other Australian departments, such as Austrade, the Australian Trade and Investment Commission.

DFAT's website also states that a revised public diplomacy "will be available in late 2021". However, at the time of writing, in June 2024, this was not yet available.

Australia's digital diplomacy initiatives

DFAT launched a Digital Media Strategy for 2016-18. Interestingly, this document mentions digital diplomacy by name and clarifies that DFAT defines it as "the use of social media for diplomatic purposes" (Australian Government, 2016b). It then goes on to set out an objective of developing practices and building a culture of DFAT staff incorporating digital tools and media in all aspects of their work (Australian Government, 2016b: 3). The document also tacitly admits some of the shortcomings identified in the Parliamentary Sub-Committee's report, stating that although DFAT adopted a measured approach to social media as a public diplomacy tool in 2011, there was a need to "build our internal capabilities and further enhance DFAT's external digital footprint" (Australian Government, 2016b: 6). To achieve this, the strategy lists five types of activities: equip, listen, explain, engage and influence (Australian Government, 2016b: 7). Overall, this document provides a concise, well-thought-out strategy for improving DFAT's social media activities.

There are other initiatives that show that DFAT has stepped up its efforts in cyber space, particularly aimed at the domestic audience. Social media has become an increasingly important tool for DFAT to communicate with Australian citizens (Brown, 2014). For instance, the department developed the Smartraveller website (and later an app). Smartraveller both sensitises travellers to potential dangers abroad and gives information on the consular support they can expect to receive (Hocking and Melissen, 2015: 41). It provides the latest travel updates, warnings and advice about most overseas destinations. During the COVID-19 pandemic it also listsed testing and vaccination requirements for different countries. The department makes sure there is two-way communication with Australians. An example of this was an online forum on DFAT's Smartraveller Facebook page featuring departmental experts who discussed passports, travel advisories and other consular matters and then answered questions from the public (Brown, 2014). Similarly, Australia's High Commission in Papua New Guinea hosted live topical questions and answers sessions on Facebook. Other digital diplomacy initiatives included a blog by Australia's ambassador in Germany, written in German (Cave, 2015).

Therefore, although an office of ediplomacy was not established, as per one of the recommendations, DFAT certainly made an effort to improve its diplomatic activities online systemically and methodologically, which was underpinned by a publicly available strategy and considerable engagement with the domestic publics. The second recommendation, making better use of social media to promote Australia's foreign policy, will be assessed later, in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

Case study of the US

The US is used as a baseline country case study in this thesis. The US is a pioneer of digital diplomacy, a great power and an information superpower, it provides a valuable point of comparison for the case studies of Kenya and Australia, as the US is arguably the most advanced practitioner of digital diplomacy in the world. Insights into how it uses digital diplomacy to further its foreign policy agenda will be invaluable to assess how Kenya and Australia should attempt to do the same. It is also important to note that this study recognises that some scholars (Layne, 2012) argue that post-2008 financial crisis, the world has become increasingly multipolar, and the US is no longer the only great power, due to China's rapid rise. Indeed, although the US is not the only superpower in global affairs, it is nonetheless both a great economic and military power and an information hyperpower (Beckley, 2020). The internet itself originated in the US, as did most of the most prominent social media networks: Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram. A US company, Apple, created the world's first truly mass-adopted smartphone, the iPhone, which spawned numerous imitators. Over one billion iPhones are in existence globally (Apple Inc, 2016). Smartphones (including iPhones) are essential tools for practising digital diplomacy, allowing diplomats to post and tweet from meetings, negotiations and summits in real time (Gilboa, 2016). They furthermore enable the sharing of user-created media, such as photographs and videos, given their built-in cameras and the necessary software to do so. It can be argued, therefore, that US companies facilitated the emergence and rise of digital diplomacy, albeit inadvertently, through the creation of the internet, social media and iPhones. Individuals are products of their societies (Elias, 2001). In the case of US citizens, they are part of an environment that fosters a culture of innovation. They also grow up having access to a high-speed internet connection and the latest technologies. This plays an important part in making them comfortable in cyberspace and making them so-called digital natives (Helsper and Eynon, 2010). With a GDP of US$27 trillion, the US comfortably tops the global rankings, reflecting its great power status (US Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2024). The scope of this thesis focuses on 2022 and 2023 – Biden's administration was in charge of the country's digital diplomacy during both periods. Since then, President Donald Trump has been elected for the second time, and it remains to be seen what changes he will bring. Already, he is using his own social media network – Truth Social – to make foreign policy announcements (BBC, 2025), primarily aimed at a domestic audience – his supporters, who pay a monthly fee to subscribe to this platform.

This section first discusses the US role in the global system as a great power. It then goes on to discuss its foreign policy. Given that the US is more than 200 years old as a country, this section mostly focuses on its foreign policy since the beginning of the 21st century, which is roughly the same time as when digital diplomacy emerged as a concept and soon after, a practice. The period between 2001 and the present (this is being written in 2025) was marked by significant shifts in the global geopolitical

landscape, presenting both challenges and opportunities for the US as a dominant world power. Its foreign policy in the 21st century has been shaped by a complex interplay of domestic politics, international relations and global dynamics. While certain themes and strategies have persisted across administrations, the specific priorities and approaches of each president have varied in response to changing circumstances. This section, therefore, specifically discusses the differences in foreign policy goals of different presidential administrations since the beginning of the 21st century: George W Bush (2001-2009), Barack Obama (2009-2017), Donald Trump (2017-2021) and Joe Biden (2021-2025). It then delves deeper into three foreign policy themes that have emerged during the data analysis of the State Department's social media posts in April 2022. Firstly, the US's approach towards Russia, after it invaded Ukraine in February 2022, with specific reference to how it was informed by the US foreign policy during the Cold War. Secondly, climate change. And thirdly, vaccine diplomacy, which emerged as a key theme during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The US as a great power

The US's position as a great power in international relations is undeniable. Its influence and dominance as an economic, military and digital power in global affairs has solidified since the end of World War II (Calleo, 1999). The US economy remains the world's largest, wielding significant influence in global trade and financial institutions (The Wilson Center, 2019). As of 2023, the IMF estimates the US nominal GDP at roughly US$27 trillion, far exceeding China's US$18.3 trillion (IMF, 2023) although the gap has been narrowing over the years. This translates to significant leverage in global trade. The US remains the world's largest goods exporter, with a value exceeding US$1.7 trillion in 2022 (WTO, 2022) and the dollar serves as the world's primary reserve currency, underpinning global financial markets (Federal Reserve Bank, 2023). Militarily, the US boasts the most powerful and technologically advanced armed forces, projecting its power globally and maintaining a network of both alliances and military bases around the world (Lawfare, 2020). In 2022, its military spending surpassed $800 billion, dwarfing that of its nearest competitor, China, which spent around $293 billion (SIPRI, 2023).

The US has also made great strides in innovation and digitalisation. It consistently ranks high in global innovation indices, attracting a significant share of global research and development investment. In 2021, US research and development expenditures reached a record $845 billion (National Science Foundation, 2022). This fuels a vibrant technology sector, with American companies leading in areas like AI, cloud computing and pharmaceuticals. In the digital realm, US dominance includes tech giants Google, Apple, Microsoft and Amazon, which hold a significant share of the global internet market, shaping online communication, commerce and entertainment (Massa and Anzera, 2023).

However, US dominance is and has been for some time challenged by China, especially because of its burgeoning economy and assertive foreign policy (Brookings, 2020). For much of the 21st century, various US presidential administrations have been trying to manage strategic competition with China: balancing competition with cooperation on issues such as trade, technology, human rights and regional security while also seeking to strengthen alliances in the Indo-Pacific region (Schneider-Petsinger, Wang, Jie and Crabtree, 2019). China's rapid technological advancements are also a significant factor in the competition between the two great powers, although while China is making strides in this domain, the US still enjoys a significant lead in terms of overall internet infrastructure and user base. More broadly, the US also faces questions about its global leadership in the wake of its perceived decline in its commitment to multilateralism (Homolar, 2012). Despite these challenges, the US remains a great power in the international arena and its actions continue to have a profound impact on the global order. The rest of this section discusses US foreign policy under different presidential administrations in the 21st century.

George W Bush (2001-2009)

The presidency of George W Bush, from 2001 to 2009, was marked by significant shifts in US foreign policy, driven by the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks and the pursuit of a transformative vision of global security and democracy promotion. Less than a year after his inauguration, the September 11 terrorist attacks took place on US soil. The scale of these attacks was unprecedented and shocked the US public and the administration. To ensure that this would never happen again, the Bush administration launched a global 'War on Terror'. This began with the toppling of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, which had provided sanctuary for the terror group al-Qaeda, which perpetrated the September 11 attacks (Sands, 2006). Bush and his administration then advocated for pre-emptive action to address perceived threats to US national security, which led to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 under the pretext of removing weapons of mass destruction and promoting regime change (Mann, 2005). The decision to invade Iraq in 2003 remains one of the most controversial aspects of Bush's foreign policy legacy. The war, based on faulty intelligence regarding weapons of mass destruction, resulted in protracted conflict, sectarian violence and instability in the region (Ricks, 2007). Apart from taking military action to deal with real and perceived threats of terrorism, Bush articulated a foreign policy vision of spreading democracy and freedom worldwide as a means of combating extremism and fostering stability, leading to initiatives such as the Freedom Agenda and the promotion of democratic reforms in the Middle East (Fukuyama, 2004). The foreign policy legacy of the George W Bush administration is therefore controversial, to say the least. While supporters credit Bush for advancing US interests and promoting democracy in the face of terrorist threats, critics argue that his policies exacerbated instability, strained alliances and undermined

America's moral authority on the world stage (Pape, 2005). One of the most damaging legacies, which continues to the present, was the Bush administration's preference for unilateral action and its scepticism towards multilateral institutions. This approach to diplomacy strained relations with traditional allies and raised questions about the efficacy of international cooperation in addressing global challenges (Nye, 2002). However, the Bush administration also implemented a number of initiatives to engage foreign publics through digital platforms, laying the groundwork for what is now known as digital diplomacy, through efforts to integrate digital tools into public diplomacy strategies. The US's early steps toward digital diplomacy under Bush included publication of reports on the use of ediplomacy, establishment of virtual consulates and the use of internet pages in local languages to communicate directly with foreign publics (Cull, 2012).

Barack Obama (2009-2017)

The presidency of Barack Obama, who took over after George W Bush had served two terms in office, was marked by significant shifts in US foreign policy and shaped by a complex array of global challenges, strategic imperatives and domestic considerations while maintaining some continuity, nonetheless. In contrast to his predecessor, Obama emphasised the importance of multilateralism and international cooperation, seeking to rebuild US alliances and partnerships while also engaging with emerging powers and global institutions (Homolar, 2012). The Obama administration thus pursued a pragmatic and flexible approach to diplomacy, combining engagement with adversaries, such as Iran and Cuba, with a willingness to use force when deemed necessary, as seen in military interventions in Libya and against the terror group ISIS (Badella, 2015). Obama continued and expanded on counterterrorism efforts that had been initiated under the Bush administration, including drone strikes, special operations and efforts to undermine and defeat al-Qaeda, ISIS and other terror organisations (Jackson and Tsui, 2016)). Obama also continued his predecessor's efforts to promote democracy and freedom worldwide by articulating a vision of US leadership grounded in liberal values such as democracy, human rights and global governance, advocating for initiatives such as the Iran nuclear deal and the Paris Agreement on climate change (Jentleson, 2018). Unlike that of his predecessor, Obama's approach was rooted in multilateralism rather than unilateralism.

Obama's administration furthermore pursued a strategic rebalance with regards to the Asia-Pacific region, seeking to strengthen US alliances, enhance regional security and promote economic integration through initiatives such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (Campbell, 2016). Overall, although the foreign policy legacy of Obama is not as controversial as that of George W Bush, it is nonetheless subject to debate. While supporters credit Obama with advancing diplomacy, promoting liberal values and restoring US credibility on the world stage, critics argue that his approach was characterised by strategic ambiguity, inconsistency and unfulfilled promises (Lieber, 2016). Obama

specifically failed in deterring Russian aggression in Syria and Ukraine. This failure's consequences can be clearly seen in the present (as of 2025). Obama's reluctance to intervene decisively in Syria allowed Russia to deepen its military involvement in support of the Assad regime, exacerbating the conflict and undermining prospects for a political resolution (Cockburn, 2016). Similarly, in Ukraine, Obama's response to Russia's annexation of Crimea and intervention in eastern Ukraine was viewed as insufficient as it failed to uphold the commitments outlined in the Budapest Memorandum, which guaranteed Ukraine's territorial integrity in exchange for relinquishing its nuclear weapons (Mead, 2023). These failures emboldened Russia toward further aggression and marked the loss of US credibility, resolve and leadership in international affairs.

The Obama administration's approach, termed '21st-century statecraft', aimed to complement traditional diplomacy with new digital tools to engage global audiences, promote democratic values and address international challenges (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin and Roselle, 2018). Under the Obama administration, the US expanded its presence on social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, to engage directly with international audiences. This approach facilitated real-time communication and allowed for the dissemination of US policies and values to a broader audience (Ross, 2011). The Obama administration even set up the country's inaugural Office for Digital Diplomacy, which was responsible for communicating and promoting US foreign policy online (Bodoni, 2016). Some of these initiatives built on what was started by the George W Bush administration and solidified the use of digital platforms to enhance diplomatic efforts. One such example was the expansion of the virtual consulates into virtual presence posts – websites presenting US foreign policy and other materials in regional languages (such as Mayan) where there is no physical diplomatic presence (Cull, 2012). Overall, by consistently and successfully integrating a digital component into public diplomacy, the Obama administration embedded digital diplomacy into US foreign policy.

Donald Trump (2017-2021)

The withdrawal of the US from a global leadership role, which began under Obama, continued under the administration of Donald Trump. The period from 2017 to 2021 represented a departure from traditional US foreign policy norms and practices and scepticism towards international institutions, especially the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Trump was also sceptical towards multilateral agreements, withdrawing from or renegotiating several international accords signed by his predecessor, including the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Iran nuclear deal (Walt, 2018). Instead, Trump emphasised transactional diplomacy, seeking to leverage US economic and military power to secure favourable outcomes in international negotiations, trade agreements and

security partnerships (Nye, 2020). Trump's 'America First' doctrine prioritised US national interests over global commitments, leading to a focus on trade protectionism, border security and military disengagement from foreign conflicts (Hathaway & Shapiro, 2017). Trump thus pursued an aggressive trade policy, imposing tariffs on imports from China, Europe and other trading partners while also renegotiating trade agreements such as the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (Zahoor, Wu, Khan, et al., 2023). Overall, Trump's presidency was characterised by inconsistency, unpredictability and damage to US credibility and alliances (Agadjanian and Horiuchi, 2020).

The same can be said of Trump's use of digital diplomacy. His direct engagement on social media allowed him to communicate unfiltered messages to both domestic and international audiences, often bypassing traditional diplomatic channels and media outlets. This approach was characterised by the announcement of policy decisions, the dismissal of officials and the expression of opinions on global events, all conveyed through succinct and often provocative social media posts (Hughes, 2020). Such practices marked a significant departure from conventional diplomatic protocols, introducing a more immediate and personal style of international engagement. While this strategy garnered attention for its virality, it also attracted criticism for its perceived impulsiveness and disregard of established diplomatic norms (Pelcastre, 2020).

Joe Biden (2021-2025)

The presidency of Joe Biden from 2021 until 2024 was marked by efforts to restore US leadership on the world stage, rebuild alliances and address pressing global challenges. He furthermore prioritised diplomacy and dialogue in addressing global challenges and seeking diplomatic solutions to conflicts while also promoting human rights and democracy (Biden, 2021). Biden's decision to withdraw US troops from Afghanistan in 2021, however, marked a significant shift in US foreign policy, ending America's longest war but also raising questions about regional stability and the future of US engagement in the region (Miller, 2023). In this context, Russia's invasion of Ukraine a year later, in 2022, was seen to have taken place partially because of Putin's belief that the US was no longer the superpower it once was, and his violation of international law would go unpunished (Callahan, 2023).

Although the Biden administration did not send troops to Ukraine, it nonetheless provided military assistance to Ukraine in the form of weapons, training and logistical support, signalling a commitment to defend Ukraine's sovereignty and resist Russian aggression (Abutaleb & Alfaro, 2023). The US furthermore worked with its allies to diplomatically isolate Russia, imposing sanctions and diplomatic penalties on Russian officials and entities involved in the invasion. These sanctions targeted key sectors of the Russian economy, including energy, finance and defence, drawing on Cold War-era strategies of economic containment (Jones, 2023). This approach had echoes of Cold War foreign

policy: while avoiding direct confrontation, the US sought to contain Russian influence and defend the principles of democracy and sovereignty by drawing on historical strategies and alliances (Picula & Luša, 2022).

Biden also sought to undo some of the damage wrought by his predecessor on the international stage, by emphasising the importance of multilateralism and collective action, seeking to strengthen US alliances and partnerships while re-engaging with international institutions. On his first day in office, 20 January 2021, he signed the instrument to bring the US back into the Paris Agreement (Blinken, 2021), after his predecessor, Trump, had announced that the US would cease all participation in this international treaty on climate change. Biden furthermore pledged to make climate action a central pillar of US foreign policy. Key challenges facing US climate diplomacy include rebuilding trust with international partners, mobilising financial support for climate adaptation and mitigation and advancing clean energy technologies (MacNeil & Paterson, 2020). Despite these challenges, there are also opportunities for the US to demonstrate global leadership on climate change through multilateral cooperation, technological innovation and economic incentives (Hovi et al., 2020).

Another key element of the US foreign policy under Biden was global health, exemplified by the efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic through support for global vaccination efforts and specifically through vaccine diplomacy (Johnson, 2022). Historically, the US has played a leading role in global health initiatives, including the fight against HIV/AIDS and the Ebola outbreak (Gostin & Wiley, 2016). The success of these initiatives has been attributed to US scientific innovation, financial resources and leadership in the global system in its role as a great power. In the context of COVID-19, the US sought to build on this legacy by spearheading efforts to develop, manufacture and distribute vaccines on a global scale (Sachs et al., 2021). 'Vaccine diplomacy' helped the US to project soft power, strengthen global health security, enhance diplomatic partnerships and promote scientific collaboration.

Although the scope of this section does not allow for a full discussion of the Biden administration's priorities, it is necessary to list them to indicate their breadth. This list also serves as a reference point: the themes identified through thematic analysis of social media posts (discussed in the data analysis section) can be compared against these priorities to determine whether the US uses digital diplomacy to communicate and further its foreign policy goals. Under the Biden administration, the Department of State (the US MFA), listed a total of 21 foreign policy priorities on its website: Anti-Corruption and Transparency; Arms Control and Nonproliferation; Climate and Environment; Climate Crisis; Combating Drugs and Crime; Countering Terrorism; COVID-19 Response and Recovery; Cyber Issues; Disarming Disinformation; Economic Prosperity and Trade Policy; Energy; Global Health; Global Women's Issues; Holding Russia and Belarus to Account; Human Rights and Democracy; Human

Trafficking; The Ocean and Polar Affairs; Refugee and Humanitarian Assistance; Science, Technology and Innovation; Treaties and International Agreements; and United with Ukraine (Department of State: no date).

While Biden was perhaps not as adept at using social media as Trump and Obama, his administration nonetheless integrated digital diplomacy into its foreign policy strategy, leveraging digital tools and platforms to advance US interests, promote democratic values and address global challenges. From a soft power perspective this was most notable in how cultural events were honoured, like for instance, Nowruz, the Persian New Year. This served to celebrate cultural diversity and strengthen ties with communities worldwide by acknowledging and respecting their traditions (Siddiqua, 2024). In the context of the recent emergence of AI, the administration prioritised the development and deployment of safe and trustworthy AI technologies. An Executive Order was issued on 30 October 2023 outlining a comprehensive approach to promote the secure and ethical use of AI. This not only sought to balance innovation with safety, particularly in areas of national security, but also to maintain the US's leadership in the global AI landscape (Klein, Kerry and Radsch et al., 2024). In addition to this, the Biden administration prioritised countering foreign disinformation on social media through the Global Engagement Center, which collaborated with international partners to analyse and expose disinformation campaigns, particularly those originating from foreign adversaries, and disseminate accurate information to counteract misleading narratives (US Department of State, no date). This initiative has, however, been criticised by some in the context of balancing combating disinformation and upholding free speech (Lucas, 2024).

Digital diplomacy in the US

Firstly, it is necessary to provide the context to the US as a dominant digital diplomacy player. Contemporary research on digital diplomacy has predominantly focused on the American context and its implications for public diplomacy, reflecting a dominance of American scholars in the field (Gilboa, 2016; Kerr et al., 2016). This emphasis is unsurprising given the US's early adoption and extensive utilisation of digital diplomacy, which shaped global discourse and research agendas in this domain. However, it is important to recognise that the US is not only a great power in global affairs but it is also an information hyperpower (Nye, 2016). The internet itself originated in the US, as did most of the most prominent social media networks: Facebook, X and Instagram. A US company, Apple, created the world's first truly mass-adopted smartphone, the iPhone, which spawned numerous imitators. Over one billion iPhones were already in existence globally as of 2016 (Apple Inc, 2016). And iPhones (together with their Samsung and Huawei counterparts as well as lesser-known brands) are essential tools for practising digital diplomacy, allowing diplomats to post and tweet from meetings, negotiations and summits in real time (Manor, 2019). They enable the sharing of user-created media,

such as photographs and videos, given their in-built cameras and the software necessary to do so. It can be argued, therefore, that US companies facilitated the emergence and rise of digital diplomacy, albeit inadvertently, through the creation of the internet, social media and smartphones.

The US's strides in technological innovation have led to an increasingly digitised society. The vast majority of the US population, 89% in 2019, has access to the internet (World Bank, 2021). This helped to ensure that when young professionals, who grew up with social media, entered the US diplomatic service, digital diplomacy became embedded in the country's diplomatic practice. Individuals are products of their societies and being a part of an environment that fosters a culture of innovation, as well as having access to a high-speed internet connection and the latest technology to access the World Wide Web, plays an important part in making them comfortable in the cyberspace, making them so-called digital natives.

Early digital diplomacy initiatives in the US

Of course, the US's successful use of foreign policy using the affordances of social media was helped by the fact that the country is a pioneer of digital diplomacy, having embarked on this journey in 2001. As Manor (2019) notes, "The State Department did not become digital in one day, nor did it embrace digital platforms at one time. Rather, there was a process of digitalisation in which new approaches, methods and definitions of public diplomacy were embraced over the course of a decade." When Colin Powell became secretary of state in 2001, he immediately prioritised funding for ICT. A year later he established a taskforce on diplomacy, which later evolved into the Office of eDiplomacy (Murray, 2015: 132). Powell's successor in the role, Condoleezza Rice, continued with efforts to modernise US diplomatic institutions, advocating for a push towards 'transformational diplomacy', aimed at aligning diplomatic practices with contemporary challenges (Wilson, 2008). The digital diplomacy baton was then passed on to Powell's successor, Hillary Clinton, who argued for more funding so that the Department of State could complement "traditional foreign policy tools with newly innovated and adapted instruments of statecraft that fully leverage the technologies of our interconnected world" (US Department of State, 2013: para 4). Clinton avidly pursued the ediplomacy strategy to mobilise the American public to get busy on the internet and proactively interact with foreign audiences to carry out some of the US's diplomatic strategies (Ross, 2012). Clinton advocated for the use of 'smart power', underscoring the imperative of engaging directly with global audiences to augment traditional diplomatic channels (Clinton, 2012) and was particularly enthusiastic about the potential of digital tools to promote democracy, transparency and accountability in authoritarian regimes, such as China, Iran and Russia (Hallams, 2010). The concept of smart power, discussed as part of the literature review in Chapter 2, emphasises the synergistic utilisation of hard- and soft-power resources, including digital platforms, to advance national interests (Nye, 2023).

Values in US digital diplomacy

The US was always seen as a nation that sought to use soft power to promote its values, the rule of law, democracy and free trade (Farrell and Finnemore, 2013) and Clinton as secretary of state was not the only proponent of using digitalisation to promote American values. In 2009, then US defence secretary Robert Gates proclaimed that social media such as Twitter, which played a critical role in documenting and coordinating the protests in Tehran, Iran, had been a huge strategic asset for the US because it made it extremely difficult for governments to control information, thus representing a huge win for freedom around the world because this monopoly of information was no longer in the hands of the government (Rid & Hecker, 2009). This approach is evident in the findings of a 2015 study by Bjola and Jiang, which compared digital diplomatic strategies of the European Union (EU), the US and Japanese diplomatic representatives in China. They noted that although the US used digital diplomacy primarily as an instrument of information dissemination, its messaging nonetheless reflected the country's long-term strategic objectives. Bjola and Jiang (2015: 86) concluded that the US embassy's social media posts reflected its long-term strategy of facilitating the peaceful rise of China, incorporated the US's core values and institutions, and aimed to provide ideological support to those seeking to steer the Chinese political system into a more democratic direction.

The aspect of engagement furthermore played an important role in promoting US values globally through the use of digital diplomacy. The investment in and prioritisation of digital diplomacy meant that by 2012, the Department of State was able to "effectively operate its own global media empire" (Hanson, 2012: 15). Digital diplomacy provided an opportunity for US diplomats to reach new audiences and do it at scale. Diplomacy has traditionally relied on proximity, and therefore, its reach was limited (Manor, 2019). While US diplomats could reach larger audiences by being interviewed on TV, radio or the press, this was dwarfed by the potential reach on social media. This was understood early on by prominent US diplomats like ambassadors Geoffrey Pyatt and Michael McFaul, who underscored the dual function of social media as both a communication tool and a platform for engaging diverse audiences (Miller, 2013; Freeland, 2012). McFaul, in particular, emphasised the role of social media in circumventing traditional media narratives, providing diplomats with direct access to global conversations and perspectives (Freeland, 2012). With a Twitter or Facebook account, one US diplomat could reach hundreds, thousands, or even hundreds of thousands of people, depending on how many followers he or she had and how popular the content of a specific post was, promoting US values and interests by using the affordances of social media.

The rapid uptake of digital diplomacy in the US

The US took the new practice seriously from early on and by 2012 had over 150 full-time staff working on digital diplomacy (which they referred to as e-diplomacy) and monitoring social media in five

different languages in the Department of State, with over 900 practising it in US diplomatic missions abroad. The proliferation of ediplomacy nodes within the US government and diplomatic missions abroad attests to the institutionalisation of digital diplomacy within traditional diplomatic frameworks (Hanson, 2012). Digital monitoring by US diplomatic entities, which included tracking and analysing of foreign publics, including details from social media, blogs, market data, and other sources, highlighted the evolving nature of information gathering and analysis in diplomatic contexts and signalled a convergence between traditional diplomacy and emerging technologies in US diplomacy (Himelfarb, 2014).

Importantly, this was still during the first wave of digital diplomacy, which occurred between 2007 and 2014 (Bjola, 2017). Having such resources available relatively early on during the digitalisation of diplomacy meant that the US was able to get a head start on many other actors and establish its digital diplomatic presence by regularly posting content before the second stage of digital diplomacy commenced. Furthermore, as evident from comments made by ambassadors Pyatt and McFaul, even during the first stage at least some US diplomats were already ahead of the curve after realising the potential of social media to not only broadcast traditional messaging in a modern digital package but to also use it to engage with other diplomatic actors and foreign publics.

Indeed, US digital diplomacy was one of the first to take the next step and make the shift from tactical to strategic use of social media to achieve its foreign policy goals. Bjola and Manor (2022) note the proliferation of US social media channels between 2012 and 2015, which they claim signified a strategic shift towards leveraging digital tools as integral components of diplomatic engagement and marked the transition from adaptation *to* digital diplomacy to adoption *of* digital diplomacy within the US State Department. The former is defined as an externally driven response to emergent digital trends and the latter as a deliberate integration of digital technologies into diplomatic strategies (Bjola and Manor, 2022). As far back as 2013, then secretary of state John Kerry asserted that digital diplomacy was an inherent aspect of contemporary diplomatic practice, underscoring the normalisation of digital tools in diplomatic activities (Kerry, 2013). The US's increasingly strategic use of digital diplomacy and other digital technologies in the mid-2010s can be illustrated by the establishment of the Global Engagement Center by the State Department in 2016, which was briefly mentioned in the earlier section discussing the Biden administration's digital diplomacy efforts. This centre was established to counteract adversarial propaganda and disinformation campaigns (US State Department: no date). Both of these examples reflect the emergence of an increasingly strategic and proactive approach in US digital diplomacy, as well as one that was more sophisticated and mature. Moving away from Clinton's notion that digital diplomacy can help promote democracy and openness in authoritarian regimes, the US now recognised that other actors can also use digital diplomacy for

propaganda and disinformation (the concept of sharp power is discussed in Chapter 2) and therefore needed to have the means of responding to such actions adequately. It is however also important to note that the Global Engagement Center was wound down in late 2024 by the new Trump administration (Lucas, 2024).

Continued innovation in US digital diplomacy

Although Trump's successor, Joe Biden, adopted a more conventional approach (which included using the @POTUS handle for official communication), the US did not rest on its laurels and continued to modernise and revitalise diplomacy to meet new challenges. Central to this effort was the prioritisation of digital diplomacy as a strategic tool for advancing US national security interests, promoting democratic values and shaping global norms in cyberspace and digital policy (Blinken, 2021; US State Department, 2022). Then Secretary of State Antony Blinken articulated the administration's vision, emphasising the pivotal role of digital technologies in advancing US foreign policy objectives. By prioritising investment in critical areas such as emerging technologies, the US aims to strengthen its diplomatic capabilities and enhance its ability to address evolving threats and challenges in the digital age (Blinken, 2021).

In this regard, the establishment of the Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy (CDP) in April 2022 is worth singling out. It represents a significant milestone in the US's digital diplomacy efforts, given the CDP is tasked with addressing the complex nexus of national security challenges, economic opportunities and values considerations associated with cyberspace and digital technologies. By coordinating the state department's work on cyberspace and digital diplomacy, the CDP aims to promote responsible state behaviour in cyberspace, uphold democratic values and safeguard the integrity and security of the internet infrastructure (US State Department, 2022).

It could even be argued that the US dabbled in the use of sharp power itself during the first presidency of Donald Trump (2017-2021). Although this was certainly not institutionalised in the same manner as 'wolf warrior diplomacy' was in China (Sullivan and Wang, 2023), Trump certainly created considerable controversy and ruffled a lot of feathers with his abrasive and direct style of tweeting. In doing so, he also popularised the personal use of social media by world leaders and changed the norms of diplomatic communication. Rather than using the official President of the United States @POTUS handle (The Verge, 2016) Trump's use of social media as head of state was indeed personal as he chose to mostly tweet from his personal account, @RealDonaldTrump, which had amassed over 88 million followers before it was permanently suspended after the US Capitol building riots on January 6, 2021 (Newsweek, 2021). Despite the controversy, or perhaps because of it, Trump's use of social media had a profound effect on numerous global issues, such as the Paris Climate Agreement,

North Korean and Iranian nuclear proliferation, trade negotiations, immigration and others, during his first term as US president (Šimunjak and Caliandro, 2019).

Global significance of US digital diplomacy accounts

Given the significant effort the US puts into its digital diplomacy, as well as the prominence of the country in global affairs, the accounts of its embassies and diplomatic representatives are some of those that are most followed. In a 2020 study by Twiplomacy, a website dedicated to Twitter (now X) diplomacy, there were three US state actors in the Top 10 Most Listed World Leaders list: Donald J Trump (former president who preferred to use his personal Twitter handle @realDonaldTrump, rather than the US Presidency's handle, @POTUS), who appeared on 114,407 lists or 1.41 lists per 1,000 followers; the US Presidency's official handle @POTUS, which appeared on 25,122 lists or 0.83 lists per 1,000 followers; the US Department of State's (which is the subject of this study and the data analysis in the following section) handle @StateDept, which appeared on 21,290 lists or 3.64 lists per 1,000 followers, and the White House's handle @WhiteHouse, which appeared on 14,330 lists or 0.63 lists per 1,000 followers (Twiplomacy, 2020).

In a more recent study (2022), @POTUS, when used by Biden, was ranked second worldwide in a list of the world's top 50 most influential leaders on Twitter (now X) (Twiplomacy, 2022). This was just behind Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India. At the time, Biden had 27.7 million followers Modi had 84.6 million followers (Twiplomacy, 2022). The population differences (and therefore the size of the domestic audiences) can help put the numbers of followers in context. While the US has 333 million people, India has 1.4 billion people. It is noteworthy that in the two years since the study (at the time of writing in 2024), @POTUS amassed over seven million additional followers and was at 34.8 million in 2024 (Twitter @Potus, 2024).

Research questions

Key research question

This chapter emphasised the importance of the use of social media as an integral part of conducting diplomatic activities and outlined the foreign policy approaches and history of the use of technology, specifically in diplomatic activities, in Kenya, Australia and the US. Given these countries all practise digital diplomacy yet are at different levels of adopting modern technologies, economic prowess and status in the hierarchy of the international system, and taking into account the identified research gaps in the study of digital diplomacy – lack of comparative research on digital diplomacy between developing, middle and great power countries – this thesis sets out to answer the following research question:

How do countries with different status in international affairs, namely developing countries, middle powers and great powers, use the affordances of social media to practise digital diplomacy to achieve their foreign policy goals?

To answer this question, this thesis uses the case studies of Kenya (representing a developing country; Australia (representing a middle power); and the US (as a baseline country representing a great power) and analyse their social media posts against ideal types of the practice of digital diplomacy, framed in terms of strategic vs tactical use of digital diplomacy and one-way vs two-way communication in the conducting of digital diplomacy.

Research sub-questions

Additionally, this thesis also aims to answer the two following sub-questions:

1. **How do Australia and Kenya, representing middle and developing countries respectively, perform in terms of tactical and strategic uses of digital diplomacy?**

2. **How do Australia and Kenya compare to the United States, which represents a great power, in terms of tactical and strategic uses of digital diplomacy?**

Outline of the thesis

This thesis consists of five main chapters followed by a comparative analysis of findings and a conclusion.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The introductory chapter explores country case studies of Kenya, Australia, and the US, examining their roles as developing, middle and great powers, respectively, in international relations. While international relations literature typically categorises states based on tangible factors such as economic and military capabilities, and intangible ones such as international influence, each category uniquely shapes states' foreign policy capabilities and strategies. Kenya, despite its developing status characterised by lower income levels and socio-economic disparities, punches above its weight regionally and internationally due to effective foreign policy strategies, exemplified by diplomatic successes under former president Uhuru Kenyatta, who utilised digital tools and social media strategically to enhance Kenya's global and regional influence. Australia, classified as a middle power due to its significant economic size, strategic diplomatic positioning and active role in multilateral

organisations, leverages multilateralism to extend its influence internationally. Its foreign policy has increasingly balanced economic interests with China and security alliances with the US, particularly through initiatives such as AUKUS (a trilateral security partnership between Australia, the UK and the US) and the Quad, a strategic dialogue involving the US, Japan, India, and Australia. Finally, the US, a great power, stands as an economic and military superpower with advanced digital diplomacy practices, extensively leveraging digital tools and platforms for diplomatic engagement. Its foreign policy approaches have varied under different presidential administrations, but the US consistently maintains its global influence through robust diplomatic and technological infrastructure, setting benchmarks for digital diplomacy worldwide.

Apart from introducing this study, justifying it and discussing the background of the country case studies, this chapter also introduces the key research question, as well as two research sub-questions.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Digital diplomacy has been a concept in academia for more than two decades, yet debates persist regarding its definition, methods of study and even its terminology. The practice is multifaceted, allowing different countries to tailor it to their foreign policy objectives. This thesis examines how digital diplomacy is utilised by developing countries, middle powers and great powers, specifically Kenya, Australia and the US. Chapter 2 provides a literature review, tracing the emergence and evolution of digital diplomacy within the broader practice of public diplomacy.

Historically, diplomacy has relied on proximity, but technological advancements such as the telegraph, radio, TV, and the internet have transformed the field, introducing new diplomatic actors beyond state representatives. Social media has further altered diplomatic practices by enabling direct engagement with foreign publics and increasing transparency. Key academic debates highlight the relationship between public and digital diplomacy, with the latter seen as an extension of the former. Early digital diplomacy efforts focused on broadcasting messages, but as engagement became central, governments started using digital platforms for two-way communication, public engagement and crisis management. However, challenges remain, including misinformation, ethical concerns and the need for strategic adaptation. By reviewing literature that notes the uptake of digital diplomacy by non-state actors, this chapter also helps to focus the level of analysis on states and specifically on how MFAs use digital diplomacy to further the foreign policies of their countries and use social media networks to gain additional reach for their messaging and narratives.

Digital diplomacy's theoretical grounding is similarly still evolving. While there are no universally accepted theories to analyse digital diplomacy, based on the literature review, this chapter proposes the use of soft power theory (which focuses on influence through attraction rather than coercion) and social network theory (which examines how actors leverage online networks for diplomatic purposes) as appropriate for theoretical grounding. These theories provide insight into how digital diplomacy enables states to build influence, engage global audiences and navigate international relations in an increasingly interconnected world. Soft power provides digital diplomats with a wide spectrum of tools, including digital platforms, to enhance their state's image (branding) and influence. Similarly, social network theory helps to analyse networks on social media, making it relevant for understanding digital diplomacy, by seeing how narratives and messages can be strengthened through reposting content. In conclusion, this chapter underscores that digital diplomacy is an evolving field shaped by technological advancements and requiring diplomats to continually adapt strategies for effective engagement.

Chapter 3: Theoretical and conceptual framework

Given the complexity of digital diplomacy and the absence of a singular theoretical framework, this study develops its own state-centric typology of digital diplomacy. This typology refines broad diplomatic concepts into more specific categories, allowing for systematic analysis of how Kenya, Australia and the US use digital diplomacy in practice.

This chapter frames the typology by examining communication styles and approaches. Digital diplomacy can be categorised based on one-way versus two-way communication. One-way communication, also known as broadcasting, involves states using digital tools to disseminate information in a monologic manner, similar to traditional diplomacy but through online platforms. Two-way communication, in contrast, focuses on engagement: interacting with foreign publics, international organisations and other diplomatic actors. Another dimension of the typology is tactical versus strategic digital diplomacy. Tactical digital diplomacy refers to routine digital activities such as announcements, statements and consular assistance, while strategic digital diplomacy involves deliberate efforts to influence outcomes, shape international perceptions and achieve foreign policy goals. Some states primarily use digital diplomacy tactically, maintaining traditional diplomatic communication in a digital format, while others employ digital tools in a more strategic and interactive manner.

Based on these dimensions, four ideal types of digital diplomacy emerge: broadcasting, branding, consular services and influence. Broadcasting, which falls under tactical one-way communication, is

the most basic use of digital diplomacy, where governments use social media to announce events, meetings or official statements without engaging with audiences. Branding, a strategic one-way approach, involves states managing their international image and reputation through digital platforms, often to attract investment, tourism or political support. Consular services represent a tactical two-way approach, where governments use digital tools to assist their citizens abroad, provide crisis communication or facilitate evacuations during emergencies. Finally, influence, the most strategic and interactive type, leverages digital tools to shape diplomatic narratives, persuade international audiences and build alliances in pursuit of foreign policy objectives.

Understanding the relationship between digital diplomacy, public diplomacy, and soft power is crucial to situating this typology within the broader diplomatic landscape. Public diplomacy traditionally involves state-to-public communication to shape perceptions and foreign relations, and digital diplomacy has evolved from this practice by moving these efforts into the digital space. While both public and digital diplomacy contribute to a country's soft power – the ability to influence others through attraction rather than coercion – soft power itself is a much broader concept that extends beyond diplomacy. A country's soft power is not solely dependent on digital diplomacy but also on factors such as economic strength, cultural influence, and global engagement. Digital diplomacy serves as one of the tools through which soft power is exercised, particularly in an era where social media plays a significant role in shaping global discourse.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Given the multi-faceted nature of digital diplomacy, this study employs multiple methods to analyse how case study countries – Kenya, Australia, and the US – use digital diplomacy to advance their foreign policy objectives.

The study uses three primary research methods: social media analytics, thematic analysis, and quality of engagement. Social media analytics, a quantitative method, measures engagement metrics such as likes, reposts and followers to assess the reach of diplomatic messages. Additionally, this method examines the use of audiovisual materials, which can indicate a digital divide between states with varying resources for content creation.

Thematic analysis is a qualitative approach that identifies recurring themes in digital diplomacy content. This method allows for categorisation of diplomatic efforts based on whether they focus on bilateral, multilateral, regional, or issue-specific diplomacy. By analysing the themes emphasised in

each country's digital diplomacy, this study assesses whether their online presence aligns with their broader foreign policy goals. Thematic analysis also provides insights into how digital diplomacy is used to highlight key policy areas, such as climate change, regional cooperation or vaccine diplomacy.

The third method, quality of engagement, blends qualitative and quantitative analysis to examine how diplomatic actors interact with their audiences and peers. Rather than simply measuring numbers, this method assesses the depth of engagement – whether MFAs engage in meaningful dialogue, respond to questions and build networks with other actors. The study also examines whether engagement is personalised or generic and how frequently MFAs interact with other state and non-state actors. Since social media provides opportunities for building alliances and amplifying diplomatic messaging, analysing engagement patterns helps determine how effectively states utilise digital networks for diplomatic influence.

To compare findings across the three case study countries, the study will employ comparative analysis. Firstly, between Kenya and Australia, as a developing country and a middle power, respectively. The comparison extends beyond inter-country differences to intra-country changes, as both countries witnessed a change of government between the two rounds of data collection. Secondly, a comparison will be made between how Kenya and Australia conduct their diplomacy vis-à-vis the US, a great power, in pursuit of their foreign policy goals.

A key component of the analysis is social network theory, which evaluates how effectively MFAs leverage digital networks to amplify their messaging and align with like-minded actors. Social media provides an opportunity to strengthen diplomatic narratives by collaborating with allies, a crucial advantage for smaller states or middle powers that may lack the global influence of great powers. By analysing patterns of reposts and shared messaging, this study assesses whether digital diplomacy is used to build coalitions and shape foreign policy discourse.

This chapter therefore outlines a multi-method approach to studying digital diplomacy, integrating social media analytics, thematic analysis and engagement analysis to provide a nuanced understanding of how states use digital tools to achieve their diplomatic objectives. The application of these methods allows for a structured comparison of how developing countries, middle powers and great powers navigate the digital diplomatic landscape.

Chapter 5: Data analysis

In this chapter, the study conducts a data analysis of the three case study countries. The chapter is divided into three sections, one dedicated to each of the case study countries: Kenya, Australia and the US.

The section on digital diplomacy in Kenya examines the posts made by Kenya's MFA on Twitter (now X) from 1 to 30 April 2022, under the Uhuru Kenyatta administration, as well as from 1 to 30 April 2023, under the William Ruto administration. Because the country's then incumbent president, Uhuru Kenyatta, had served the constitutionally mandated two terms and Kenya was going to have a new administration, with Ruto assuming office in September 2022, this was a good opportunity to compare and contrast how the country's MFA conducted digital diplomacy under two different administrations. Therefore, the same data collection process took place in April 2023.

To analyse social media posts collected, social media analytics, thematic analysis and engagement methods are used. Social media analytics assists with the metrics behind the MFA's posts. Thematic analysis helps to identify patterns of themes in digital diplomacy content which are intended to achieve foreign policy objectives, and whether posts are supplemented with audiovisual content. Engagement methodology determines the level of interactivity and two-way communications with users (both other digital diplomacy actors and the general public).

Findings are then categorised as per the typology developed in Chapter 3 of this study. A discussion of the four main types of social media posts follows for Kenyatta's administration in 2022 and Ruto's administration in 2023. Where possible, specific examples of social media posts are used to illustrate the four idea types of conducting digital diplomacy, as per the state-centric typology of digital diplomacy. The content of tweets and keywords used are also compared to Kenya's stated foreign policy goals and objectives, based on publicly available official documents and speeches, to determine the extent to which the country's MFA utilises digital diplomacy to further these through affordances provided by social media. Finally, this chapter examines whether Kenya's MFA has been successful at creating linkages with other, both state and non-state, digital diplomacy actors on social media.

Similarly to the section dedicated to the case study of Kenya, the chapter then proceeds with data analysis of Australia's digital diplomacy, examining the posts made by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) on Twitter (now X) from 1 to 30 April 2022, under the Liberal/Coalition government's administration, as well as from 1 to 30 April 2023, under the Labor government's administration. The reasons for conducting data collection a year apart under both administrations are

similar to Kenya's case study. Elections were coming up in May 2022 in which the country's Liberal/Coalition government was seeking a fourth consecutive term, having been in power since 2007. However, it was defeated by the opposition Labor Party, led by Anthony Albanese, who became the new prime minister. It is therefore a good opportunity to compare and contrast how the country's MFA has conducted digital diplomacy under two different administrations, and the same data collection was conducted in April 2023.

To analyse social media posts collected, social media analytics, thematic analysis and engagement methods are used. Social media analytics assists with the metrics behind Australia's DFAT posts. Thematic analysis helps to identify patterns of themes in digital diplomacy content that are intended to achieve foreign policy objectives, and whether posts are supplemented with audiovisual content. Engagement methodology determines the level of interactivity and two-way communications with users (both other digital diplomacy actors and the general public).

Findings are then categorised as per the typology developed in Chapter 3. A discussion of the four main types of social media posts follows for the Liberal/Coalition government in 2022 and the Labor government in 2023. Where possible, specific examples of social media posts are used to illustrate the four idea types of conducting digital diplomacy, as per the typology. The content of tweets and keywords used is also compared to Australia's stated foreign policy goals and objectives, based on publicly available official documents and speeches, to determine the extent to which the country's DFAT utilises digital diplomacy to further these through affordances provided by social media. Finally, this section examines whether Australia's DFAT has been successful at creating linkages with other, both state and non-state, digital diplomacy actors on social media.

The third and final section of this chapter is focused on the case study of the US. The data analysis section of this chapter differs somewhat from the case studies of Kenya and Australia. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, in April 2022, the Department of State made 242 posts on Twitter (now X). This was a more than sufficient number of tweets to analyse and use in a typology to determine the main objectives of the US's conducting of digital diplomacy. Secondly, unlike in Kenya and Australia, there was no change of presidential administration while this study was being researched. Former president Joe Biden, from the Democratic Party, was both the head of state and head of government in both 2022 and 2023, and therefore, it was unlikely that the digital diplomatic direction would change.

Therefore, data analysis of the US digital diplomacy in this section examines the posts made by the US Department of State on Twitter (now X) from 1 to 30 April 2022, rather than also for 1 to 30 April 2023, as was the case in Kenya and Australia. Otherwise, the section on the US follows the same methodology, using social media analytics, thematic analysis and engagement methods to analyse social media posts collected, as for the case studies of Kenya and Australia. Social media analytics assists with the metrics behind the Department of State's posts. Thematic analysis helps to identify patterns of themes in digital diplomacy content which are intended to achieve foreign policy objectives, and whether posts are supplemented with audiovisual content. Engagement methodology determines the level of interactivity and two-way communications with users (both other digital diplomacy actors and the general public).

Findings are then categorised as per the typology developed in Chapter 3. A discussion of the four main types of social media posts follows for April 2022. Where possible, specific examples of social media posts are used to illustrate the four idea types of conducting digital diplomacy, as per the typology. The content of tweets and keywords used is also compared to the US's stated foreign policy goals and objectives, based on publicly available official documents and speeches, to determine the extent to which the country's Department of State utilises digital diplomacy to further these through affordances provided by social media. Finally, this section examines whether the US Department of State has been successful at creating linkages with other, both state and non-state, digital diplomacy actors on social media.

This chapter concludes with a summary of the main findings of how Kenya, Australia and the US use the affordances of social media to achieve their foreign policy goals by discussing where they are situated in the state-centric typology of digital diplomacy. Additionally, the conclusion discusses their use of networks on social media to assist with disseminating their messaging and narratives.

Chapter 6: Comparative analysis and conclusion

This chapter compares the data from the three case studies in Chapter 5. Specifically, two comparisons are made. Firstly, data from April 2022 and April 2023 are used to compare how Kenya and Australia conduct digital diplomacy as a developing country and a middle power, respectively. This furthermore enables the comparison of the two countries across two years, under different administrations. Secondly, this chapter compares how Kenya, Australia and the US, a developing country, a middle power and a great power, respectively, practise digital diplomacy in pursuit of their foreign policy goals. The US, an experienced digital diplomacy actor with vast resources, acts as a baseline against which Kenya and Australia would be compared.

Based on this comparative analysis, the study finds that the conduct of digital diplomacy corresponds to a country's status in the international system, reflecting global power structures. Great powers, like the US, leverage their digital influence through strategic engagement and high-quality multimedia content, ensuring their messaging reaches a vast audience. Middle powers, such as Australia, attempt to influence but with fewer resources and a narrower scope, often falling short in content volume and engagement. Developing nations, like Kenya, primarily use digital platforms for broadcasting diplomatic activities rather than exerting influence. Nonetheless, Kenya demonstrates that the successful use of digital diplomacy can help a developing country punch above its weight, and sometimes even surpass middle powers like Australia. This highlights how, despite structural inequalities, digital diplomacy can offer opportunities for smaller states if they effectively utilise the affordances of social media to conduct digital diplomacy.

Conclusion

This introductory chapter to the thesis titled 'Digital diplomacy and foreign policy in Kenya, Australia and the United States' provided a justification for the overall study as well as for the selection of these country case studies. It then provided background and context of three case study countries adopted by this study: Kenya, Australia and the US, which represent a developing country, a middle power and a great power, respectively, in the international system. The context of how differences in status and resources may play into how a country may practise digital diplomacy based on or because of its status led to the introduction of the key research question this thesis attempts to answer: How do countries with different statuses in international affairs, namely developing countries, middle powers and great powers, use the affordances of social media to practise digital diplomacy to achieve their foreign policy goals? It also introduced two sub-questions that this thesis will attempt to answer. Firstly, how do Australia and Kenya, representing middle and developing countries respectively, perform in terms of tactical and strategic uses of digital diplomacy? And secondly, how do Australia and Kenya compare to the US, which represents a great power, in terms of tactical and strategic uses of digital diplomacy? This chapter then concluded with an outline of the thesis and an explanation of how this study will develop a state-centric typology of digital diplomacy which would be used to organise and analyse data from the country case studies.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Introduction

As noted in Chapter 1, despite digital diplomacy having been in existence as a concept in academia and practice for over 20 years, there are still disagreements on its definition, the methods to study it and even the term itself. Undoubtedly, that is because digital diplomacy is so multifaceted, as will be demonstrated throughout this chapter. The practice of digital diplomacy is broad, meaning that different countries can tailor it to suit their purposes. This is the main motivation behind this study: to determine how developing countries, middle powers and great powers, represented by Kenya, Australia and the US, respectively, use digital diplomacy to accomplish their foreign policy goals and objectives. This chapter provides a literature review of key academic debates on the essence, conceptualisations and definition of digital diplomacy. It also uses existing academic literature on the topic to trace its emergence and evolution, place it within the broader context of public diplomacy and examine how it has changed international relations by facilitating the emergence of non-state diplomatic actors and by enabling traditional state actors to exercise new diplomatic functions through the affordances of social media. Throughout this literature review, an attempt is made to identify key themes, concepts and definitions to help frame the typology of digital diplomacy and subsequently populate it with ideal types of practice. This literature review furthermore assists in providing a theoretical grounding to the study because, just like with definitions of digital diplomacy, there are similarly no universally accepted theories in the contested digital diplomacy scholarship sphere. Instead, practice approaches are advocated. Therefore, other theories, such as soft power theory and social network theory, are utilised to ground the purpose and means of the use of digital diplomacy. The literature review presented in this chapter is key to developing a typology of digital diplomacy, which is presented in the following chapter.

Key academic debates on digital diplomacy

Given that digital diplomacy emerged as a concept in the early 20th century, much of the work around it has been done by a digital audience with a sprinkling of what may be referred to as digital experts broadly and digital diplomats specifically. Therefore, in some instances, this literature review refers to non-academic sources, such as thought leadership articles, policy briefs and occasional papers, articles from reputable newspapers and blog posts from policymakers. It is also important to note that much of the existing literature focuses on countries in the Global North, while the conduct of digital diplomacy in the Global South, particularly in Africa, has remained under-researched. This forms part of the rationale for this study – it is important to provide new pathways to the academic discourse on different facets of digital diplomacy by comparing how its practice differs in these contexts and

whether concepts and definitions change accordingly. Interestingly, Australia, a country that is conceptually in the Global North, is also under-researched. This could be explained by its location, as it is geographically far from the digital diplomacy study centres of the Global North, as well as due to Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (the country's MFA) treating digital diplomacy as an optional add-on rather than a core business (Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2019).

From traditional diplomacy to digital diplomacy

Fundamental to this study is the definition of diplomacy itself, since it examine its digital manifestation. A key scholar of international relations, Hedley Bull, states that at its core, diplomacy is the "conduct of relations between sovereign states… by official agents and by peaceful means" (Bull, 1997: 156). This applies to digital diplomacy as well, albeit with one caveat. Although digital diplomacy also refers to official agents conducting relations by peaceful means, it adds new actors to this definition. Digital diplomacy is no longer about the "conduct of relations between sovereign states", as Bull states, but rather the conduct of relations between a multitude of actors, including, but not limited to, sovereign states. This is a point discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, with reference to how new actors and new digital networks can be considered in terms of a typology of digital diplomacy. As noted earlier, despite this study's focus on how digital diplomacy is conducted by state actors, it was not feasible to completely exclude literature on non-state actors from the review. Instead, such literature helped to narrow the typology presented in Chapter 4, to maintain the focus on state actors. Thus, non-state aspects of digital diplomacy are analysed from a state-centric viewpoint, given that states remain the ultimate arbiters of foreign policy and therefore primarily digital diplomatic actors.

It is also necessary to examine definitions of diplomatic processes. In this regard, Berridge (1995: 1) offers that "diplomacy is the conduct of international relations by negotiation rather than by force, propaganda, or recourse to law, and by other peaceful means." White (2001) proposes a similar definition, according to which diplomacy is a process of communications and negotiation between states and other international actors (both state and non-state). Both scholars stress the 'communications' and 'negotiations' aspects of diplomatic processes, in other words, persuasion by peaceful means. This provides a link between diplomacy and the broad communication field as well as the specific disciplines of journalism and media. Similarly, Bjola (2015: 1) emphasises that diplomacy is a "… nonviolent approach to reconciling interests among international actors, especially states". All three authors therefore define diplomatic processes as peaceful and non-violent, in contrast to traditional theories of statecraft, in which authors including Machiavelli, Clausewitz and Weber saw violence as an inherent part of politics (Frazer and Hutchings, 2011). This is relevant in terms of the

theory of soft power, discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, which similarly emphasises influence as a means of achieving a state's goals, as opposed to violence.

After discussing diplomacy broadly, it is necessary to narrow the analysis down to public diplomacy, as scholars (Pelling, 2015) agree that digital diplomacy is a sub-set of public diplomacy (although, as will be demonstrated later, digital diplomacy goes beyond public diplomacy and not all digital diplomacy constitutes public diplomacy). Historically, diplomacy relied on proximity (Manor, 2019), which facilitated the establishment of relationships, and was seen as crucial for negotiations and access to information (Roberts, 2017). The practice of diplomacy has however started to change as new technologies emerged, starting with the telegraph, which diminished the autonomy of diplomats and their decision-making powers since their superiors at foreign ministries were now able to instantly issue instructions and directives (Turianskyi and Wekesa, 2021; US Department of State, no date). Diplomacy then underwent further changes with the invention of radio and TV, which gave diplomats a platform to broadcast their messages to domestic and international audiences. In turn, these technologies introduced new actors in international relations and took away from states the exclusive privilege of setting foreign policy agendas. For the first time in history, non-government actors started to influence foreign policy processes, thereby threatening the influence of foreign ministries (Clarke, 2015: 116). Digital diplomacy differs from its traditional counterpart in part due to states, as traditional diplomatic actors, needed to account for the increased number of other, non-state actors, on the playing field. Over time, different scholars have added to an ever-increasing list of these new actors, listed later in this chapter.

Origins of public diplomacy

Historically, a review of existing literature on the evolution of diplomacy from state-to-state relations to state-to-public relations created a new sub-field: public diplomacy (Olubukola, 2017). The term public diplomacy was coined in 1965 by Edmund Gullion, a former US diplomat who became an academic: "Public diplomacy… deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. It encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is communication, as diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the process of intercultural communications" (Cowan and Cull, 2008: 6-7).

Considering that this definition was written over half a century ago, it is remarkable how applicable it is to the modern era of the internet and social media. However, before the emergence of the World

Wide Web and social media platforms, came TV and radio. This is where public diplomacy made its mark. According to Pamment (2012), public diplomacy is how international actors communicate their foreign policies to publics in other countries. At the outset of public diplomacy, TV and radio thus became particularly useful media for this purpose and the 'CNN effect' became a popular theory in this field, stating that news can make foreign policy (Robinson, 1999), by placing diplomacy under the scrutiny of the media and public opinion (Gilboa, 2008) and forcing policymakers to respond to issues that are being prominently covered by the big media houses (McNulty, 1993). In this regard, Gilboa (2008) lists CNN International, BBC World, Sky News and Al-Jazeera as global networks that are all capable of broadcasting, usually live, almost every major development anywhere in the world, to almost anyone anywhere in the world and influencing public focus and public opinion with their coverage. Given its emphasis on direct communication with foreign publics, interesting debates have arisen among academics, who started comparing public diplomacy to concepts that are opposites in the field of communications: public relations (Signitzer and Coombs, 1992); propaganda (Pamment, 2012); and counter-propaganda (Hoffman, 2002). It is necessary to define these terms for greater clarity. The term public relations refers to the cultivation of a favourable image, often in the media (Gilboa, 2008). Propaganda is defined as spreading information, ideas or allegations in a controlled and systematic way to further one's cause or to damage an opposing cause, by invoking strong feelings or a response in a target audience (Mull and Wallin, 2013). The term counter-propaganda refers to measures adopted to combat such messages and narratives (Hoffman, 2002).

Although Gilboa (2008) cautions against confusing public diplomacy with terms like propaganda and public relations, there is often a fine line to tread. The role of technology makes it especially complex. As with any technological tool, its use depends on the actor who wields it. Here it is worth bringing in a prominent American historian, Melvin Kranzberg, famous for developing the six laws of technology. The first one states that technology is neither good nor bad, nor is it neutral (Kranzberg, 1986). In this context, Kranzberg's first law is also applicable to the practice of diplomacy through the use of technology – it can be used by states to exercise soft power, spread disinformation and sow discord, or counter the efforts of others in any space. The emergence and subsequent mass adoption of the internet in the 1990s brought about an era of digital optimism. This perspective is proximate to sharp power as discussed with respect to Walker and Ludwig's conceptualisation. Early proponents, perhaps naively, claimed that the internet would cause the democratisation of societies, given its potential to share and access information (Hauben and Hauben, 1997). Yet, three decades later the situation has changed and now internet defects dominate the headlines, whether it is online radicalisation, the monopoly power of big tech companies or online surveillance (*The Economist*, 2018), as societies no

longer view cyberspace with rose-tinted glasses. Indeed, there is increasingly an understanding that a more balanced approach to the role of technologies, such as the internet, is required. In that regard Ortega, Pérez and Turianskyi (2018) offer a view of a dialectic relationship between technology and society, noting that technology is part of the solution to societal challenges as well as part of the problem.

This evolving understanding underscores the necessity of a nuanced approach to technology in diplomacy, one that acknowledges both its potential and its pitfalls. As digital tools continue to shape global discourse, the challenge lies in harnessing their benefits while mitigating their risks, ensuring that technology serves as an enabler of constructive engagement rather than a source of division. As will be discussed later in this chapter, technology, albeit smartphones and social media, rather than analogue TV and radio, also facilitated the rise of digital diplomacy.

Definitions and conceptualisations of public diplomacy

This study has already provided some conceptual definitions of public diplomacy. Yet, it is necessary to have a more in-depth examination of academic debates on public diplomacy, its aims and its intended audiences. This will assist in further understanding the linkages of public diplomacy to digital diplomacy.

There is broad agreement among scholars about what public diplomacy entails. Roberts (2016) offers one of the more commonly accepted definitions, according to which public diplomacy refers to processes aimed at creating a positive climate among foreign publics to facilitate the acceptance of another nation's foreign policy. Instead of debates about the precise definition of public diplomacy as a concept, disagreements arise about its target audience, as not all scholars view foreign publics as the primary target audience of public diplomacy. Entman (2008), for instance, states that public diplomacy is designed to target elites, who are more likely to influence foreign policy. He justifies this viewpoint by noting an important nuance between different societies: in some, public opinion is more influential but in others it holds little sway. Copeland (2013) adds a further dimension to this academic debate by highlighting that the new conduct of public diplomacy, through digital methods, may focus on engaging with both domestic and foreign populations. Gregory (2008: 276) sees public diplomacy as a "term that describes ways and means by which states, associations of states, and nonstate actors understand cultures, attitudes, and behaviour; build and manage relationships; and influence opinions and actions to advance their interests and values". Wang (2006: 46) views public diplomacy in terms of its three main aims: "promoting nation states' goals and policies"; "communicating their values"; and "developing common understanding and mutual trust among countries and peoples." Cull (2006), on

the other hand, looks at public diplomacy as an umbrella term that encompasses a government's international information, cultural relations and broadcasting activities. In reflecting on this, it is important to recognise that different states may have different goals in terms of which primary audience(s) they intend to target, hence the academic debates on this topic. Pamment (2012), for instance, makes a point that for diplomats there was a distinction between publics that could influence (such as politicians and journalists) and publics that could be influenced (the general public). Furthermore, as argued by Hayden (2012), the globalised media ecology led to the fragmentation of the audiences of public diplomacy to "networks of selective exposure", meaning that it is no longer possible to broadly target the foreign publics of a certain country through a specific TV or radio channel.

Another important aspect of public diplomacy is its branding element, specifically state or nation branding. Fan (2010) defines this as "a process by which a nation's image can be created, monitored, evaluated and proactively managed in order to improve or enhance the nation's reputation among a target international audience". Gudjonsson (2005) says that branding may be used as a technique by a government to shape the nation's image and strengthen how it is perceived by others, while Kaneva (2011) adds that branding can also be a tool for reputation management. Arnoczyk (2013) includes achieving fiscal advantage over others, for instance through attracting foreign investment and tourism. Manor (2019) however cautions that branding efforts can win allies and enemies in the same breath, because digital diplomacy amplifies both positive and negative perceptions of a country. This complicates the process and once again necessitates distinguishing between the different types of publics: who are we trying to win over and who are we willing to lose? Duncombe (2017) believes that through the affordances of social media, a country may change how it is perceived, especially if it is recognised in a way that is different from how it represents itself.

In addition, it is important to note that over the years there have been attempts to bring public diplomacy up to date with the digital age. Some scholars have even proposed new terms, such as 'new public diplomacy'. Melissen (2006) provides a useful summary of this term: although there are variances in definitions of new public diplomacy, most scholars place emphasis on greater exchange, dialogue and mutuality. Vickers (2004) sees distinctions falling between international and domestic communication and information, as well as traditional and public diplomacy. However, this observation was made early in the 21st century, when digitalisation was just beginning, and is thus only partially useful for the purposes of this study. A more valuable definition is offered by Murray (2015), who claims that the growth of public diplomacy practices, against the background of continued emergence

of new technologies, created ideal conditions for the emergence of digital diplomacy and this new term entered the lexicon. Additionally, Cull (2013) makes a useful contribution to this debate by observing that the evolution of the internet and public diplomacy are intertwined. More recent attempts to modernise the term added 'digital' to 'public diplomacy'. According to Cull later wok (2019), digital public diplomacy refers to the use of digital technologies, particularly social media and online platforms, by governments and diplomatic actors to engage with foreign publics, shape international perceptions and foster global dialogue. This approach enhances transparency, interactivity and immediacy in diplomatic efforts, making international engagement more accessible and participatory (Manor, 2019).

This sub-section helped to identify ideal types of public diplomacy. Analysis of definitions and conceptualisations of public diplomacy yields three key themes: influence, communication or broadcasting, and promoting a country's image or policies, which can also be described as branding. A similar exercise will be conducted later in this chapter, after a discussion of definitions and conceptualisations of digital diplomacy.

The emergence of digital diplomacy

What, then, are the conditions that enabled the emergence of digital diplomacy? Undoubtedly, the most important one was the emergence and subsequent mass adoption of the internet in the 1990s, which introduced new ways of communicating, sharing, and accessing information. Fletcher (2016) notes that this was the intention of idealistic technology pioneers who developed it as a way to share information freely and without restraint. With the rise of the internet, communication became immediate through email. This went hand-in-hand with cell phones becoming more widely adopted in society and their ability to send SMS messages. However, while email, chat messengers and SMS made communication instant, it took place only between two individuals. As explained in the next paragraph, another decade had to pass before new technologies were developed, which allowed one person to communicate with many.

Smartphones and social media provided a platform for citizens to express their views, coordinate their actions and bring attention to the foreign policy successes and failures of governments worldwide. When compared with traditional mass media, such as newspapers, radio and TV, social media provided a greater advantage in its reach, frequency, usability, immediacy and permanence (Agichtein et al., 2008). Furthermore, the application of social media in diplomatic practice has been viewed as transformative in the conduct of international relations (Stein, 2011). Social media furthermore allows for the reception of feedback indirectly by observing and looking for patterns: for instance, through

analysis of big data of social media platforms, such as Twitter (now X) (Singh, 2015). Bjola (2015), however, notes that governments were late in realising that social media is a potential game changer for conducting foreign policy. Indeed, most of them only started to take Twitter and Facebook seriously after their role in the Arab Spring protests of 2011. Policymakers specifically saw their potential for information-sharing in real time, among other benefits.

Although governments were late in using social media, once the uptake began, it progressed quickly. Since the early 2010s, the internet, smartphones and social media apps have evolved transformed how governments conduct international relations and engage with domestic and foreign publics. An example of this is e-governance, with Heeks (2001) discussing its potential as far back as the early 21st century, noting that it could improve government processes (e-administration), connect citizens (e-citizens and e-services), and build external interactions (e-society). Indeed, the 2010s witnessed the emergence of numerous innovative e-government programmes, often created collaboratively by governments, civil society and the private sector to improve governmental accountability and increase transparency.

Turianskyi (2018) provides examples from the Open Government Partnership, a global multi-stakeholder initiative intended to improve governance, transparency and accountability, particularly through the use of technology. For instance, in Mongolia, citizens could evaluate public services through citizen scorecards, which resulted in the improvement of public services, including water disposal and water supply (ANSA-EAP 2011). Similarly, the Philippines institutionalised citizen feedback in flood control, health facilities, solid waste management and building schools (Open Government Partnership, 2017). In Nigeria, a simple monitoring app, called 'Eyes and Ears', allowed citizens to monitor public infrastructure projects. It allowed users to send GPS coordinates, a picture and comments, which then appear on a dashboard in the governor's office (Abdullahi, 2018). In South Africa, there is the GovChat platform communication channel between citizens and approximately 10,000 local representatives within government (Turianskyi, 2018). More recently, AI has emerged as the latest technological affordance available to diplomats, with embassies around the world now using AI-generated images to frame events (Manor, 2024).

Adoption of technology in society and the role of MFAs

As government departments and services increasingly migrated to the digital realm, MFAs and embassies started to join them. Clarke (2015) observes that as more and more citizens became social media users, they started expecting the same from their foreign ministries. Indeed, in some countries, MFAs were later than most to jump on the digital bandwagon. Murray (2015) explains this by the

following factors: bureaucracy, size of these organisations, costs of updating ICT, and securing sensitive information. When digitalisation did eventually occur, it had two sides for MFAs: although it increased the reach of their messaging and enabled them to directly communicate with foreign publics, it simultaneously diminished their function as a central authority that develops and implements foreign policy. According to Copeland (2013: 6), "Twentieth-century diplomacy was characterised by hierarchical organizations that employed top-down chains of command as their modus operandi." On this point, Manor (2019) notes that the ubiquitous use of smartphones and social media decentralised state monopoly on communication and redistributed it to non-state actors. Wichowski (2015) makes an important contribution to this discussion, arguing that information is a government's most important foreign policy asset. Murray (2015: 129) agrees, stating that "information is the base currency of diplomacy".

Other authors help to further explain and elaborate on these claims. Firstly, Schwab (2016) explains that new technologies make redistribution and decentralisation of power possible. Secondly, according to Sotiru (2015: 36) the number of stakeholders in international diplomacy increased to include international organisations and international non-governmental organisations. Pamment (2013) traces the emergence of new non-actors in international diplomacy as the point where states encountered a loss of monopoly on information. This is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. Thirdly, this required a mind-shift and alteration of the modus operandi by diplomats, as they had to get used to decentralisation and learn how to be part of networks of influence rather than be the sole influencers (Heine, 2016; Slaughter, 2017). The rise of new actors in the international system thus "reshaped traditional diplomatic functions of representation, communication, negotiation and in doing so, the very status of the diplomat" (Hocking et al., 2012).

From public diplomacy to digital diplomacy

Taking the factors outlined earlier, one can ask, how did public diplomacy progress to digital diplomacy? The two have the same aim: promoting a country's foreign policy abroad. The key difference is the means: while public diplomacy can utilise in-person visits, cultural events and traditional media, such as TV, digital diplomacy only uses digital means to do so. Of course, it is important to note that not all digital diplomacy constitutes public diplomacy. For instance, when an embassy uses social media to warn its citizens of a country who are currently abroad about a natural disaster, health outbreak, or political unrest, this is an example of digital diplomacy, but not of public diplomacy. On this note, consular diplomacy as an important aspect of digital diplomacy is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Manor (2019: 18) coined the phrase 'the digitalisation of public diplomacy' to signify how increased digitalisation of society led to progression from traditional public diplomacy to digital diplomacy. According to him, the digitalisation of public diplomacy occurred because diplomats are products of their societies and these societies were changed by the introduction of digital technologies. Since diplomats were influenced by these technologies, in turn they ended up influencing the practice of diplomacy, which in turn has influenced scholarship. This ties back to the earlier argument that practice-based theorisation of digital diplomacy is currently in vogue, as well as the motivation for utilising thought leadership literature and reportage (Hedling and Bremberg, 2021; Andersen and Neumann, 2012). As social media's potential for increased information flows began to play a major role in governmental digitalisation, MFAs lost their monopoly on information and messaging. Apart from facilitating the dissemination of information, Manor (2019) furthermore credits social media with an "immense impact on how opinion is shaped". Some diplomats and diplomatic institutions adapted faster and better than others to the new reality of using social media to disseminate information and influence others. Through this process, digital diplomacy has not only changed the external communications and messaging of MFAs and embassies but their internal dynamics and hierarchies as well.

This change was most famously summarised by Alec Ross, former senior adviser for innovation to the state secretary, who said that "the 21st Century is a really bad time for control freaks" (University of Pennsylvania, 2016). Sotiru (2015: 37) echoes this point of view, stating that "there needs to be an acceptance of an individual and collective loss of control of public messaging and audiences, given the instant dissemination of knowledge that the Internet has brought with it". Fletcher (2016) agrees that governments need to accept that message control is over and they need to recruit, train and trust the right people to deliver their messages, while accepting that mistakes will be inevitable. Indeed, these points also show similarities that international relations and communications disciplines are experiencing with the emergence of social media and related technologies. The loss of control over messaging by diplomats is mirrored by the experience of journalists, who have to compete with purveyors of misinformation online. Turianskyi and Wekesa (2021) found that the term 'information', along with 'misinformation' and 'disinformation', were the most important themes of interest to a group of African diplomats during a series of 21 webinars held between July and August 2020.

Digitalisation has also resulted in the institutional culture of diplomatic organisations changing. Wichowski (2015: 52) makes another contribution to this discussion by claiming that digitalisation results in a cultural shift that encourages sharing rather than secrecy. Fletcher (2016) adds that

digitalisation helped to make policymaking more fluid and flatter (hierarchically), at least in some MFAs. Bjola and Jiang (2015: 71) agree that social media helps to transcend hierarchical chains of diplomatic communication. These discussions are crucial for the purposes of this study as they explain how digitalisation forced the evolution of diplomacy, how digital diplomacy arose and where the practice of diplomacy in the digital arena is presently.

Relating to the discussion above, it is clear that while diplomats continue to be guided by the foreign policies of their countries and directives from their political principals, the modern pace of communications means that it is impossible to defer to the capital every time a question is asked. Decisions need to be made instantly and countries will need to find a balance between setting broad guidelines and behavioural norms and providing their digital diplomats with enough leeway to use their own initiative on social media. Related to earlier points about the loss of control and messaging, the adoption of the digital pace of communications and information in diplomacy, especially at the early stages, often resulted challenges, specifically hasty pronouncements and decisions. According to Sotiru (2015), in early digitalisation efforts there were quite a few errors, with messages reaching unintended audiences. Spry (2018) adds that some diplomats were caught off guard because they were not prepared for the reactions they received online, from a public that disputed, rejected or outright opposed their digital diplomacy campaigns. Indeed, there were early missteps, but judging on the sheer number of diplomats from all corners of the world who now have social media accounts and the amount of posts they make daily, these challenges have largely been overcome.

Emergence and increasing influence of non-state actors

As alluded to earlier, the evolution from public diplomacy to digital diplomacy also spawned the involvement of non-state actors in international affairs. A former diplomat who became a scholar, Yolanda Spies (2019), cites the examples of behaviour and power of multinational corporations, such as Microsoft, Nestlé and Apple, to show that diplomacy which was previously limited to relations between states has now evolved to include corporate actors which engage with traditional actors (states). Jiang (2013: 9) goes further and includes individuals. Another useful addition to this study is offered by Corrie (2015: 147), who states that those "engaging in digital diplomacy include not only governments, but also international organisations, transnational corporations, NGOs, and individuals". The link between these non-state actors and state-centric digital diplomacy is that some of these non-state actors have become so powerful in international relations that they have to be taken into account by governments and MFAs. Elon Musk, for instance, has emerged as a significant non-state actor in digital diplomacy, leveraging his ownership of the social media platform X (formerly Twitter) to influence political discourse and elections globally. His actions include amplifying right-wing voices,

engaging in content moderation favouring certain political figures and intervening in European politics by endorsing far-right parties (Bilton, 2024). Similarly, several non-state organisations working on climate change, such as Greenpeace, 350.org and Connect4Climate, exemplify how non-state actors can wield significant influence in digital diplomacy by leveraging online platforms to advocate for climate action and shape international discourse (Bäckstrand, Kuyper, Linnér & Lövbrand, (2017).

The emergence of new actors, as well as new digital networks, are important points to consider in developing a typology of digital diplomacy. Since this study specifically focuses on developing countries, middle powers and great powers, it helps to narrow down the typology's focus to become state-centric. For the purposes of the typology, it is however important to consider the potential ability for these new non-state actors to form digital networks, including with state actors. Such networks provide an ability to disseminate and amplify messages. Thus, while the state remains the primary digital diplomatic actors, it is nonetheless able to tap into the power wielded by non-state actors, particularly by using digital networks, in order to achieve its foreign policy goals. Digital networks, discussed in greater detail in the section on social network theory, provide digital diplomatic actors (both state and non-state) with means of disseminating their messages, amplifying them through networking with others, and ultimately afford opportunities to influence outcomes in international affairs.

The rise of the internet, social media and e-governance has therefore decentralised information control, allowing diplomatic actors to reach broader audiences while also facing increased competition from civil society, activists and even adversarial entities. This shift has transformed diplomacy from a hierarchical, state-dominated practice to a more networked and interactive model, where influence is distributed across multiple actors and platforms. As technology continues to evolve, digital diplomacy will remain a crucial tool for achieving foreign policy objectives, fostering transparency and navigating the complexities of global governance in an increasingly interconnected world.

The three stages of digital transformation of diplomacy

Once the process of digitalisation had started, it was irreversible. The extent to which digital diplomacy has become embedded in international relations is best illustrated by an article in *The Economist* (2021) which commented that the Taliban are skilled in using social media, just like any half-competent political outfit. This statement signifies the extent to which the world has progressed in its acceptance of social media in politics and international affairs in the past decade, when even the Taliban, who had previously been documented destroying technology, including TVs and CD players, are now seen as skilled social media practitioners. They are using it to legitimise their new regime (following the

takeover of power in Afghanistan) in the eyes of the international community, and to demonstrate that they have become less radical since they were last were in power and send out signals that they intend to be a part of global affairs from now on.

Academic literature identifies three stages in the digital transformation of diplomacy.

First stage of digital transformation of diplomacy

Bjola (2017) asserts that the first stage, which took place between 2007 and 2014, has been a resounding success, as governments understood the importance of the new communication tools at their disposal and "within less than a decade since the launch of the first social media networks, 90% of all UN member states have established a Twitter presence, and 88% have opened a Facebook account". Most African states, although later comers to digital diplomacy, had also established some sort of digital presence by 2015 (Manor, 2019). The first stage was therefore mostly about entering the digital world and establishing a presence. For most diplomats and diplomatic entities, it was also a learning experience in transitioning from engaging with and through traditional media to doing the same on social media, with much more diverse audiences and less formalised rules.

In the first stage of digital transformation of diplomacy the primary goal was jumping on the bandwagon by establishing a social media presence, but some individual and organisational accounts were more effective at consolidating these early gains. The US was already taking the new practice seriously, as demonstrated by the fact that as early as 2012, it had over 150 full-time staff working on digital diplomacy (which they referred to as e-diplomacy) and monitoring social media in five different languages in the Department of State, with over more 900 practising it in US diplomatic missions abroad (Hanson, 2012).

Second stage of digital transformation of diplomacy

According to McNutt (2014), establishing and solidifying online presence put the US and other digital diplomacy pioneers ahead of the competition in the second stage of digital transformation (2014-onwards), during which diplomatic bodies transitioned from one-way broadcasting to two-way communications that focused on mutual interactions, engagement and relationship-building. This allowed diplomats to directly engage foreign publics in a sustained dialogue (Bjola and Jiang, 2015) and adopt more sophisticated methods of communication.

Cowan and Arsenault (2008) note that well-conducted public diplomacy can no longer be monologue-based – it must be dialogue-based, to facilitate multidirectional conversation. Digital diplomacy

became an important tool in furthering a nation's foreign policy since the affordances of social media enabled direct interaction and engagement with foreign publics (Metzgar, 2012; Hayden, 2012). Szondi (2008) adds another angle of analysis, noting that being able to interact and engage directly with foreign audiences also helps with nation branding, since it helps to promote a country's image and reputation and build long-lasting relationships with others.

Manor (2019) identifies three main strategies that became prevalent. Firstly, tailored messaging on different social media platforms. Secondly, using social media algorithms to gain an advantage by posting viral messages, and increasing reach and exposure as a result. Thirdly, starting to employ narratives, which offered their audiences a prism through which to view global events. Such strategies were developed as diplomats became more proficient digital diplomacy practitioners and started to realise that social media users demand more than one-way communication of traditional messages in a digital format. Taylor and Kent (2014: 391), on the other hand, combine the terms 'engagement' and 'dialogue', and employ the term 'dialogic engagement', which they define as "a two-way relational process between organisations and their publics that aims to improve understanding between participants and make decisions that benefit both organisations and their stakeholders". Findings on the importance of engagement as a new and crucial element of digital diplomacy will help to ground the research conducted as part of this study, specifically in terms of how representatives of the US, Australia and Kenya interact with followers online. In turn, this would assist this study in determining at which stage of digital diplomacy the case study countries are at currently.

Another key difference between the first and second stages of digitalisation of diplomacy is the ubiquitous acceptance of digital technologies as tools to conduct diplomacy. In the first stage of digital diplomacy senior diplomats resisted new technologies because of their established modus operandi – face-to-face diplomacy. This hampered the process of digitalisation but eventually using social media to achieve foreign policy aims became entrenched (Vanc, 2012). Taking into account diplomats' old habits and the use of new technologies, Causey and Howard (2013) pose an important question which needs unpacking: Are diplomats' efforts to increase their social media reach genuine attempts to facilitate interactions with digital publics or merely new packaging for traditional public diplomacy goals? The answers to this question are nuanced. At the onset of digital diplomacy becoming prevalent across MFAs and embassies globally, the focus was primarily on merely using social media as a new vehicle for traditional diplomatic messaging, statements and press-releases.

Consequently, Conti (2011) noted that the communications objectives for diplomats had not changed, although the medium had. In terms of the increased uptake in using the affordances of social media to advance foreign policy, Wichowski (2015: 67) notes that quantity does not always translate into quality: "While lots of diplomats use social media, only a handful do it really well." Many MFAs continue to use the affordances of social media as a mere digital vehicle for traditional one-way broadcasting of foreign policy messaging, instead of (or in addition to) media releases or communiqués. However, it is important to recognise that engagement and interaction are becoming increasingly important as a means of establishing linkages with digital publics rather than merely broadcasting. This is certainly the current gold standard of digital diplomacy, a view which is held by prominent academics in this field (Manor, 2019; Manor and Segev, 2015; Pamment, 2013; McNutt, 2014).

Third stage of digital transformation of diplomacy

Recently Bjola and Manor (2022) introduced the third wave of the digital transformation of diplomacy, which they refer to as hybrid diplomacy. The emergence of hybrid diplomacy is attributed to changes in diplomatic practice as a result of social distancing and travel restrictions caused by COVID-19. Indeed, although before the pandemic some diplomats may have struggled to interact with digital publics, given diplomacy's traditional reliance on proximity (Manor, 2019), the global pandemic meant that even those who were previously reluctant to modify the old ways had to let go of them and enter the digital era. For instance, Wekesa (2020) notes an uptake in digital diplomacy in Africa following COVID-19-imposed restrictions; specifically, a spike in discussions around digital diplomacy, both in terms of its professional and academic dimensions. Diplomats around the world became so used to working virtually that even after the end of the pandemic they continued utilising both physical and digital forms of diplomacy, which Bjola and Manor (2022) label as hybrid diplomacy. The categorisation into physical, digital and hybrid diplomacy is less useful for theorising about a typology which is solely focused on how diplomacy is conducted digitally, but important to take note of nevertheless, as it provides a set of ideal types that could be relevant for future studies.

Based on the above discussion of the three stages of digital transformation of diplomacy, as well as the discussion of Kenya as a developing country, Australia as a middle power, and the US as a great power, which took place in Chapter 1, the following observations can be made.

The implications of digital diplomacy vary significantly depending on whether it is conducted by developing countries, middle powers, or great powers. For developing countries, such as Kenya, digital diplomacy presents both opportunities and challenges. Initially, many developing countries entered

digital diplomacy relatively late compared to major powers, which placed them at a disadvantage regarding global visibility and influence. Additionally, these countries often face constraints such as limited resources, infrastructure and skilled personnel, making it difficult to transition effectively from merely establishing an online presence (the first stage) to active two-way engagement (the second stage) or hybrid diplomacy (the third stage). Despite these limitations, digital diplomacy also provides a unique, cost-effective opportunity for developing countries to engage directly with global audiences, enhance their international image, and strengthen nation branding without the traditional, costly diplomatic tools. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic served as an unexpected catalyst, enabling developing countries to accelerate digital diplomacy adoption, leapfrog intermediate stages and embrace digital diplomatic practices quickly, through necessity.

Middle powers, such as Australia, have somewhat different experiences and implications with digital diplomacy, compared to developing countries. For middle powers, digital diplomacy has become a strategic asset to amplify their global voice and increase the exercise of soft power through direct engagement with international audiences. Middle powers typically lack the geopolitical leverage of great powers, making tailored messaging and narrative-building through social media crucial to their diplomatic strategy and furthering of their foreign policy. By effectively employing digital diplomacy techniques such as targeted messaging, interesting content and dialogic engagement, middle powers can significantly boost their global influence and visibility.

Great powers like the US, which pioneered digital diplomacy, have a significant advantage because they were able to establish and consolidate their online diplomatic presence early on, and continuously improve their efforts through allocation of resources. This agility allowed them to quickly move from simple online broadcasting towards sophisticated, interactive engagement and relationship-building with foreign publics. The substantial investment into digital diplomacy infrastructures, such as dedicated staff, multilingual social media monitoring teams, and advanced strategies, further allowed them to solidify their positions and set standards for effective diplomatic communication online. Moreover, with the advent of hybrid diplomacy, a great power will be able to further deepen its digital diplomatic capabilities, leveraging both physical and virtual diplomacy seamlessly and maintaining its competitive edge and diplomatic influence in international affairs.

The future of digital diplomacy

Digital diplomacy is a work in progress (Manor, 2019). The technological dimension will continue to shape diplomacy at a much faster rate than before, given that the ‘digital’ and ‘diplomatic’ aspects are now inextricably linked. As new technologies continue to emerge, diplomats will utilise them for their

own purposes (Holmes, 2015b). The advent of the 4IR has introduced disruptive technologies such as AI, blockchain and big data analytics, which are beginning to reshape the way states conduct diplomacy (Schulze, 2020). AI, in particular, is emerging as a transformative tool and became increasingly integral to digital diplomacy, enhancing how nations conduct international relations and public engagement. Examples of AI in diplomacy include automating diplomatic tasks such as drafting speeches, conducting sentiment analysis and enhancing crisis forecasting (Bjola & Manor, 2023), thereby allowing governments to navigate complex diplomatic landscapes with greater efficiency (Kurbalija, 2021). Chatbots, machine learning algorithms and AI-driven content moderation have also been integrated into diplomatic communication strategies, enabling real-time crisis management and public engagement (Bennett & Livingston, 2020). AI tools are now employed to analyse vast datasets, identify trends and predict future developments, thereby assisting diplomats in formulating informed policy decisions (DiploFoundation, 2025). Furthermore, as Schulze (2020) argues, blockchain technology may play a role in diplomatic communications by ensuring secure, verifiable exchanges of information, particularly in cyber diplomacy and treaty negotiations. In the broader context of 4IR, digital diplomacy will not only be about social media engagement but also about harnessing automation, big data and machine learning to enhance diplomatic effectiveness in a highly interconnected world (Zakaria, 2018). However, when this study commenced (2020) and when the data collection was carried out (April 2022 and April 2023), AI use in digital diplomacy – and even in society more broadly – was not as prominent as it is today and hence it is not the focus of this study.

Despite the continued emergence of new technologies that are expanding the tools available to digital diplomats and the outset of the third stage of digitalisation of diplomacy, a digital divide caused by socio-economic factors, will unfortunately remain for the foreseeable future (Turianskyi, 2020). Some countries will simply not have the necessary resources for conducting diplomacy online, at least not in the same way that great powers do. Olubukola (2017) nonetheless observes that digital diplomacy and digital technologies are likely to be especially useful for countries with limited resources, including African countries, such as Kenya. Creativity will be key for these states in trying to level the playing field. While they may lack the quantity of digital engagement, they will need to focus on the quality and impact of their online activities, particularly in leveraging AI and other 4IR technologies to enhance their diplomatic reach (Mostafaei, 2025). Great powers, like the US, will no doubt be at the forefront of adopting these new technologies through allocating additional financial and human resources and training diplomats to use them effectively. Middle powers, such as Australia, will be somewhere in between. It has been stated in Chapter 1 that Australia has previously found it difficult to allocate the necessary resources to institute digital diplomacy. Much, then, will depend on the priorities of the

government of the day and how much resources it is willing to allocate to incorporate new technologies into its practice of digital diplomacy.

The future of digital diplomacy will be methodologically diverse (Holmes, 2015b). More countries will develop comprehensive and coherent digital diplomacy strategies or, where these already exist, refine and improve them to continue achieving their foreign policy goals with the assistance of digital technologies. The initial reluctance towards digital diplomacy by some has largely been overcome, and diplomats will now more readily implement emerging technological advancements in their work (Manor, 2019). Some scholars have attempted to foresee how digital diplomacy may evolve. Sotiru (2015) claims that as a practice, digital diplomacy will constantly evolve, with new issues and trends arising over time.

These technological advances will continue to influence the values, norms, working routines and structures of embassies and MFAs (Manor, 2019). Because of this, as Bjola and Jiang (2015: 87) point out, individual practitioners will need to constantly update their digital skills and strategies, staying aware of the latest social media developments and technological innovations to make an impact in cyberspace.

Definitions and conceptualisations of digital diplomacy

Thus far in the thesis the conceptualisation of digital diplomacy has been circuitous. At this stage, it is important to pose the question: What is digital diplomacy? To some extent, this question has been addressed in the previous sections and sub-sections. Answering this question in a more explicit manner is still important because it creates the boundaries and contours upon which the study relies for the subsequent analytical work. As noted earlier in this chapter, the lack of consensus is prevalent in discussions and debates about the core of digital diplomacy – its definition and conceptualisation. The status quo is best described by Sotiru (2015: 4), who puts it thus: “There does not seem to be universal agreement on what digital diplomacy stands for, what it represents, its importance and its compromising elements.” Gilboa (2016) concurs with this statement: “Scholars and practitioners haven’t yet found a definition of digital diplomacy that all can agree on.” Manor (2017) talks about the “fractured terminology” of digital diplomacy, with some terms being too narrow and others being too broad.

Even the term itself is not used consistently by different scholars, who refer to it as digital diplomacy (Bjola and Holmes, 2015), cyber diplomacy (Gilboa, 2016), public diplomacy 2.0 (Hallams, 2010), virtual diplomacy, net diplomacy (Wehrenfennig, 2012) and e-diplomacy (Al-Muftah et al., 2018). The most

basic definition available is put forward by Bjola (2015: 4), who describes digital diplomacy as "the use of social media for diplomatic purposes". This is echoed by Hanson (2012), who defines it as the use of the internet and ICTs to carry out diplomatic objectives. Holmes (2015: 4) approaches this definition from another angle and adds "change management" to the equation, arguing that digital diplomacy is "a strategy of managing change through digital tools and virtual collaboration". According to Pelling (2015), "digital diplomacy embeds the use of digital technology in the work of foreign policy". He furthermore states that digital diplomacy deals with the shift in power and influence from hierarchical structures to citizens and grassroots. Sing (2015) approaches the definition of digital diplomacy from an environmental perspective; according to him, "diplomacy practiced through information-rich, highly interactive environments is termed digital diplomacy" (Singh, 2015: 181).

Other scholars conceptualise digital diplomacy by examining its functions and components. Hocking, Melissen et al. (2015) note that digital diplomacy includes a number of perspectives: changing foreign policy agendas, cyber agendas, knowledge management and service delivery (including crisis management and consular work). Olubukola (2017) similarly states that digital diplomacy covers a range of digital platforms and also includes numerous other aspects of foreign policy work, such as knowledge management, public diplomacy, analysis of 'big data', consular services, crisis management, internet governance, mobilisation of external resources and policy planning. Wekesa (2020) conceptualises digital diplomacy by examining its various components and distinguishing between public digital diplomacy – "confidential practices that happen behind closed doors such as administrative matters, inter-ministerial liaison, trade or political negotiations, espionage, and consular services" and public digital diplomacy – "aimed at promoting the images of countries, projecting power, and influencing foreign citizens".

One of the most concise, yet all-encompassing definitions is provided by Manor and Segev (2015), who state that digital diplomacy refers to the growing use of social media platforms by a country to achieve its foreign policy goals and proactively manage its image and reputation while separately identifying digital diplomacy as a useful tool for nation-branding, particularly for altering the widespread perception of a country amongst foreign publics or managing an image of a country during a crisis. These definitions and conceptualisations allow for identification of a number of ideal types, namely self-promotion or branding, influencing global processes or promoting a foreign policy agenda, and provision of services, such as consular assistance.

Interestingly, as far back as 2013, then-US secretary of state John Kerry disputed the need for the term or a separate definition of this concept, saying that "the term digital diplomacy is almost redundant — it's just diplomacy, period" (Kerry, 2013). This statement is indicative of how far ahead the US was in practising digital diplomacy as far back as a decade ago. Perhaps it is also illustrative of the differences between practitioners and scholars of digital diplomacy, given that, as demonstrated above, the latter cohort continued to try to define digital diplomacy and conceptualise what it entails after Kerry's statement, and continue to do so today, as is exemplified in this work. Yet it cannot be disputed that digital diplomacy has become firmly entrenched in the conducting of diplomacy more broadly.

This section on definitions and conceptualisations of digital diplomacy yielded similar themes of digital diplomacy as were identified during the discussion of public diplomacy: influencing global processes, self-promotion or branding, and broadcasting or communicating foreign policy processes and events. One new addition is provision of services, such as consular services (which can also assist during crisis management).

Clarifying the definitions and conceptual boundaries of digital diplomacy is particularly important for the purposes of the study in examining their application among states with a different status in the international system, notably developing countries, middle powers and great powers. For developing countries, digital diplomacy offers a cost-effective platform for enhancing visibility, strengthening national branding and engaging more effectively in international dialogues despite limited resources. Middle powers can leverage digital diplomacy strategically to amplify their international influence, build coalitions and advocate specific policy agendas, thereby compensating for their relative constraints in traditional diplomatic capacities compared to great powers. At the same time, great powers are able to utilise digital diplomacy extensively and comprehensively, integrating sophisticated digital tools to project global influence and shape narratives, thereby reinforcing their dominant positions. Recognising and defining digital diplomacy's multifaceted nature helps this study to understand and clarify how different types of states adopt digital tools to achieve their foreign policy objectives.

Theoretical grounding

Background

As noted earlier, because digital diplomacy, as a new and interdisciplinary field, is in its formative stages, scholars are still attempting to define it, conceptualise it and determine how it links with existing and new theories. Sotiru (2015) supports this statement by saying that:

"There is no widely accepted theoretical framework that covers the concept; instead, digital diplomacy, so far as it is understood currently, has been defined by scholars and journalists independently unfolding their understanding from the ground up from how they perceived digital diplomacy to be implemented in some case studies."

Precisely for this reason, Holmes (2015) was one of the first scholars to advocate using a practice approach to engage with digital diplomacy as a socially meaningful pattern of behaviour in diplomacy. Hedling and Bremberg (2021: 1601) similarly see digital diplomacy as a "set of international practices that develop on the ground". Hedling and Bremberg (2021) furthermore note that although digital diplomacy is fast becoming a set of recognisable practices, it remains an experimental and explorative area of diplomacy. Because norms and behaviours emerging through digital diplomacy need to be understood in the context of the merging of diplomatic practices and the digital society, Hedling and Bremberg (2021) also argue that practice approaches are particularly well-suited for its study and understanding. As Andersen and Neumann (2012) note, practice approaches are suitable for assessing publicly accessible performances, treating them as raw data. Because digital diplomacy takes place on public social media platforms, the statements and interactions are visible and can therefore be observed (2021). However, the all-encompassing nature of digital diplomacy makes it challenging to measure its effectiveness, with Sotiru (2015:43) stating that the "measurability of digital diplomacy is difficult to be carried out and interpreted". Kampf, Manor and Segev (2015) support this point and specifically point out that one cannot measure how effective digital diplomacy is by counting likes on the Facebook profiles of an embassy or MFA.

Due to the lack of accepted theories in this field, the study will therefore utilise existing theories in international relations and communications fields, given the interdisciplinary nature of digital diplomacy. This is in addition to the practice approach in Chapter 5 of this thesis. Two theories have been identified in this regard: soft power, initially developed for the international relations discipline, and network theory, initially rooted in the communications field, including media and journalism. The former, combined with a discussion of conceptualisations of both public diplomacy and digital diplomacy, helps to identify the ultimate goal of all three concepts: influence. The latter assists with understanding the use of networks in digital diplomacy and how these can help to disseminate and amplify key messages, for instance by reposting messages and narratives from other state and non-state digital diplomatic actors.

Soft power

Soft power has transcended from international relations to communications and media studies, making it particularly useful as a theoretical framework. The concept of soft power was pioneered in 1990 by Joseph Nye, an American political scientist, who defined it as influence built through the attractiveness of a state's culture, political ideas and policies (Nye, 1990). He later refined the concept, arguing that a state's soft power depends on the effectiveness of its representatives (diplomats) in projecting its image, goals, values and ideas, and as a result setting and influencing the agenda in global politics (Nye, 2004). This definition is closely related to Gullion's (Snow, 2016) portrayal of public diplomacy as a process of influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. The differences, similarities and relationship between soft power, public diplomacy and digital diplomacy are discussed in the next chapter. Another take on soft power comes from Slaughter (2016), according to whom it enables countries to communicate and promote their narratives, establish global rules and draw on the resources that could make them appealing and attractive to foreign publics. However, scholars like Farrell and Finnemore (2013) caution, specifically in the context of the US, that perceived inconsistencies between professed ideals and actions may undermine the credibility soft power efforts, highlighting the importance of ethical coherence in diplomatic engagements. Of course, it can be argued that this perspective potentially applies to all countries that practise digital diplomacy; actions differing from words is not unique to US foreign policy.

Recently there have been attempts to bring the concept of soft power up to date with the digital age. In 2003 Nye introduced the term 'smart power', defined as the synergistic utilisation of hard and soft power resources, including digital platforms, to advance national interests (Nye, 2023). Nye (2020) furthermore recognised that soft power faces competition from the sheer volume of information available online. He also noted that the prominence or virality of social media messages is not equal to their power of persuasion: although social media messages can help to set the global agenda, they will not produce soft power if they are not attractive. The key of soft power, whether in the digital age or predating it, is still winning the hearts and minds of foreign publics (Nye, 2020). Others agree with Nye: Gosling (2021) sees digital diplomacy as increasingly vital in articulating soft power while Maluki and Njagi (2020) recognise the role of social media as an enabler of building connections that can greatly aid in exercising soft power.

Another recent important contribution is the recognition that soft power has two sides. In the digital age the affordances of social media mean that while some states may choose to utilise soft power to promote their values, ideals and foreign policies, others may use technology for nefarious purposes, such as propaganda and misinformation (Surowiec, 2018). Walker and Ludwig (2017) recently

introduced the concept of sharp power to better distinguish between soft power, used to win hearts and minds by democratic states, and sharp power, used by authoritarian states to poison information and manipulate their target audiences. Sharp power is used to pierce and cut, stoke and amplify existing division in a society, as demonstrated by Russian-led efforts to influence the outcomes of the Brexit vote and the US presidential election in 2016 as well as the Kremlin's attempts in 2022 to paint its invasion of Ukraine as anything but an invasion (Kreko, 2022). While sharp power does not form part of this thesis's conceptual framework, it was nonetheless important to discuss it in the context of a comprehensive literature review on soft power.

The concept of soft power is therefore applicable to digital diplomacy, as it accurately describes what digital diplomacy actors attempt to accomplish: using modern technologies to promote the foreign policy of their states and influence others (both state and non-state actors). It is, however, important to note that while both public diplomacy and digital diplomacy can be used to exercise soft power, this does not happen the other way round (Nye, 2019; Grincheva, 2025). Public diplomacy is generally understood as aiming to promote or communicate a country's foreign policy abroad while digital diplomacy seeks to achieve similar objectives (although not always), specifically through digital channels (Melissen, 2005). By contrast, soft power encompasses a broader spectrum of strategies and approaches aimed at enhancing a state's image and influence internationally (Nye, 2019). These efforts may extend beyond explicit foreign policy promotion or digital platforms, suggesting that the relationship between these concepts warrants further exploration regarding their overlaps, distinctions and interactions (Manor and Segev, 2015; Flew, 2023). The use of soft power as a theory would thus enable an analysis of how countries use digital diplomacy to project their values, goals and objectives.

Social network theory

Social network theory examines how information is transmitted through social relationships, considering both personal interactions and media influence, ultimately facilitating changes in behaviour or attitude (Liu et al., 2017). This theoretical perspective is particularly suitable for analysing networks on social media, making it relevant for understanding digital diplomacy. Consequently, social network theory serves not only as a theoretical construct but also as a methodological framework for investigating the dynamics of digital diplomatic interactions. The mass adoption of social media has created an ever more networked world, leading to, as discussed earlier in this thesis, the emergence of non-state actors. At the same time the ubiquitous use of social media led to the decentralisation of power in shaping foreign policy, thereby establishing non-traditional, non-state-to-state and non-state-to-non-state networks in diplomacy. This view is supported by both Slaughter and Clarke. According to

Slaughter (2009), and as discussed earlier in this chapter, new non-state actors are now able to conduct network diplomacy. Through building sustained connections and using their knowledge and skills to set the global agenda, they achieve a common purpose and accomplish their individual goals through using the network. Clarke (2015) presents a similar view, noting that the rise of social media has significantly transformed traditional state-to-state diplomatic networks. Social media has broadened the diplomatic landscape by enabling diplomats to openly engage and collaborate with non-state actors. These non-state actors, equipped with the same digital tools as state diplomats, have thus become influential participants in diplomatic dialogue and cooperation. Diplomats therefore started developing a focus on online dialogue and subsequent digital relationship-building (Copeland, 2013), with both other state actors as well as non-state actors. The more a digital diplomacy actor would answer questions from followers and participate in discussions and debates with other social media users, the more they would be seen as part of the digital community rather than someone who merely broadcasts to other members of the community without actively engaging.

Hughes (2013) notes that being part of these networks is important because conversations, discussions and debates are increasingly taking place publicly on social networks and those who do not participate risks being left out. Cull (2013: 6) adds that "people around the world obtain ever more information through horizontal peer-to-peer networks rather than through the old vertical process by which information flowed down from the traditional sources of media authority". Importantly, Metzl (2001) speaks about two types of networks: internal and external. Using the former means facilitation information exchange domestically, across government agencies and within departmental hierarchies. The latter, on the other hand, are crucial for building and maintaining relationships with others, including foreign governments, civil society and foreign publics.

The work of Manuel Castells on the networked society is illustrative in this regard and appropriate for the analysis of digital diplomacy. Castells (2000: 693) eloquently describes how "new information technologies allow the formation of new forms of social organisation and social interaction along electronically based information networks." Using network theory in digital diplomacy therefore means examining the extent to which diplomatic actors utilise networks in their practice of digital diplomacy. For state actors this would entail looking at both internal networks (other diplomatic and non-diplomatic actors from the same country, such as government departments, politicians, the media, think tanks and academics), as well as external networks (MFAs and officials from other countries, international organisations, international non-governmental organisations, media and any opinion-makers who may be supportive of their country's foreign policy). For non-state actors these

networks would include other non-state actors and state actors from both lists identified above, but without the separation into internal and external networks. Practically, this assessment would entail seeing engagement (replying, quoting, retweeting/reposting and liking content posted by others) to determine how successful a diplomatic actor is in using its networks to amplify their messaging using the affordances of social media. Two types of engagements can be identified: actor-to-user and actor-to-actor (Bjola and Jiang, 2015). Networking is another important aspect of engagement in digital diplomacy, as although an MFA "may boast thousands of followers, yet if they are not followed by other foreign ministries and journalists covering diplomatic issues then they are not reaching the right audiences" (Manor, 2015).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the complexity and evolving nature of digital diplomacy continue to generate academic debate over its definition, scope and theoretical foundations. As explored throughout this chapter, digital diplomacy is inherently multifaceted, allowing different nations to adapt and apply it in ways that align with their foreign policy objectives. By reviewing key academic discussions and tracing the emergence of digital diplomacy within the broader field of public diplomacy, this chapter has established a foundation for understanding its conceptualisation and practical applications. Furthermore, given the absence of a universally accepted theoretical framework, the literature review provided insights from soft power theory and social network theory, which will help to analyse the mechanisms and objectives of digital diplomacy. While soft power theory highlights the role of influence in shaping diplomatic outcomes, network theory provides a lens through which to examine the ways digital diplomatic actors leverage online platforms to disseminate and amplify messages. Together, these theories contribute to the development of a typology of digital diplomacy, which is explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Theoretical and conceptual framework

Introduction

This chapter focuses on operationalising key definitions and conceptualisations of digital diplomacy, as presented in the preceding literature review, to develop an analytical framework – a state-centric typology of digital diplomacy. Firstly, this chapter justifies why it was necessary to develop such a typology for the purposes of this study. Secondly, it frames the state-centric typology of digital diplomacy in terms of distinct communication styles and approaches. Third, based on existing definitions and conceptualisations, it identifies ideal types of digital diplomacy to be included within this typology. Notably, the literature review of the evolution of digital diplomacy from public diplomacy

helped to adopt a state-centric approach (Roberts, 2016; Pamment, 2013) to the typology. Amid the emergence of myriad non-state actors with the rise of digital diplomacy, this study is focused on the conduct of digital diplomacy by states. This does not mean that non-state-actor perspectives are any less important; rather, a study of both state and non-state approaches to digital diplomacy would be too lumbering an approach in answering the research questions that inform this thesis. Therefore, discussions of any definitions and conceptualisations in this chapter are approached from a state-centric perspective. This is explained further and justified below.

Up to this stage in the thesis, concepts, theories and practices of digital diplomacy, public diplomacy and soft power have been discussed. To move the resultant perspectives towards empirical analysis, an analytical framework was necessary. Yet, the use of digital diplomacy, public diplomacy and soft power to answer the research questions had to be refined for them to serve as analytical tools that are fit for the purpose of answering the research questions. There were various challenges in operationalising these concepts into an analytical framework. Firstly, digital diplomacy, public diplomacy and soft power function as broad, meta-level frameworks, organising various forms of influence, statecraft and engagement strategies into general categories. This broadness makes them ill-placed for detailed, content-based data analysis. Secondly, the literature review in the preceding chapter has demonstrated the complexity of defining and conceptualising digital diplomacy. Thirdly, digital diplomacy is clearly multifaceted, and the existence of many variations of how scholars understand and interpret digital diplomacy means that broad definitions, which attempt to capture general processes and aims, can exist side-by-side with specific definitions, which focus on distinct functions. Fourthly, the lack of a universally accepted definition of digital diplomacy has similarly posed conceptual challenges. Definitions matter in how they conceptualise their functions. Some definitions specifically allow for theorising about distinct variables that are present in the conduct of digital diplomacy. Based on the literature review in the previous chapter, there are definitions better suited for the processes of digital diplomacy (Snow, 2016; Berridge, 1995; Cowan and Cull, 2008), functions of digital diplomacy (Hocking, Melissen et al., 2015; Olubukola, 2017; Wekesa, 2020; Manor and Segev, 2015) and aims of digital diplomacy (Vanc 2012; Wang, 2006).

It was also not possible to use an existing typology. While several typologies of public diplomacy exist, they often focus on specific aspects, such as monologic versus dialogic engagement, or soft versus sharp power. These perspectives help in understanding different facets of digital diplomacy, but do not provide a comprehensive framework for the purposes of this study. This study focuses on how state actors – specifically MFAs in Kenya, Australia and the US – use the affordances of social media to

exercise digital diplomacy. The approach of this thesis is therefore state-centric. State-centrism refers to the theoretical perspective that treats the state as the primary unit of analysis and the central actor in international relations, assuming that states are sovereign, rational, and unitary entities whose interactions take place in an anarchic international system (Buzan, 1991). The literature review in Chapter 2 discussed the emergence of new diplomatic non-state actors: non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations, activists, bloggers, and even terrorist groups (Pamment 2013), which gained the ability to disseminate information online and therefore threaten the state's monopoly on information dissemination. This broad literature review was necessary to narrow down the existing definitions and conceptualisations of digital diplomacy, limiting them to those that are applicable specifically to state actors. Regardless of the proliferation of non-state actors in digital diplomacy, states remain the ultimate arbiters and executors of foreign policy (Bjola and Holmes 2015). Furthermore, irrespective of the challenges increasingly posed to states by non-state actors, the right of legation rests exclusively with states, granting them sole authority to engage in diplomatic relations (Berridge 2015).

For the purposes of this study, this means that all recognised diplomatic communication, which includes digital diplomacy, must ultimately originate from states. Therefore, due to this study's focus, scope, research question and research sub-questions, and given the limitations of meta-level frameworks and the lack of uniformly accepted theoretical frameworks that could be applied to digital diplomacy, it was necessary to develop a theoretical framework for the purposes of this study – a state-centric typology of digital diplomacy. This typology enables carrying out a practical assessment of how developing countries (represented by Kenya, middle powers (represented by Australia) and great powers (represented by the US) utilise the affordances of social media to pursue their foreign policy goals. This typology draws from the broad frameworks of digital diplomacy, public diplomacy and soft power to develop a more refined, content-based framework that assists with systematically categorising posts made by the MFAs of Kenya, Australia and the US, based on how they use digital platforms to communicate, engage, and influence. Given the varying digital capabilities and geopolitical priorities of different nations, this typology furthermore provides a comparative framework that allows a more structured analysis of digital diplomacy across different countries with a different status in the international relations. This allows the study to carry out a detailed, analytical and systematic analysis of how states use the affordances of social media to further their foreign policies by drawing on the practice approach (Holmes, 2015) and applying the typology to social media content posted by the MFAs of case study countries.

Framing the typology of digital diplomacy: communication style and approach

The preceding literature review helps to frame the typology through one-way vs two-way communication styles (Wichowski, 2015; Manor, 2019; Manor and Segev, 2015; Pamment, 2013; McNutt, 2014) and tactical vs strategic (Manor, 2019; Bjola, Cassidy and Manor, 2020). In terms of communication styles, digital diplomacy may be used for one-way communication or two-way communication (or engagement, as many authors describe it (Manor, 2019; Manor and Segev, 2015; Pamment, 2013; McNutt, 2014) with other digital diplomatic actors or even the digital publics. With one-way commutation the intent is to broadcast a message and inform foreign publics about a policy position or an event that has occurred. Two-way communication extends beyond information provision, as it involves actively listening to and engaging with other actors and publics.

The second framing that emerged is the approach to conducting digital diplomacy: tactical vs strategic (Manor, 2019; Bjola, Cassidy and Manor, 2020). The former entails using digital packaging for traditional diplomatic communication (Causey and Howard, 2013), whereas the latter attempts to use the affordances of social media with the strategic aim of shaping the attitudes of foreign publics and fostering a receptive environment for a state's policies and messaging to further foreign policy goals and objectives (Manor, 2019), for instance, through the use of digital networks (Schwab, 2016).

However, not all use of digital diplomacy is strategic. As evident from the earlier discussion, there is no one-size-fits-all method of conducting digital diplomacy (Manor, 2019). When practicing digital diplomacy, different countries may have different aims, means and methods of conducting it. For instance, there may be considerations of domestic political imperatives, which would then be weighed alongside international goals, leading a change of priorities and approach as a result. Furthermore, some states are more advanced in using digital diplomacy than others, having employed it for longer and having had the possibility to allocate more resources to it (Wichowski, 2015). Nonetheless, because digital diplomacy is so multifaceted, it also provides for traditional diplomatic broadcasting, albeit through digital means, as in the case of video streaming on social media platforms (Cull, 2019). A new function of digital diplomacy, enabled by the use of social media, messengers and even dedicated apps, is the provision of consular services (Olubukola, 2017). This is not something public diplomacy was able to perform, given its reliance on one-way communication systems, such as TV and radio. Most internet-based platforms, utilised by digital diplomacy, however, enable this function as they provide for two-way communication (Manor, 2019).

Ideal types

The developments of a state-centric typology of digital diplomacy is at the core of this study. A typology is a form of ideal type, as well as its opposite. An ideal type is a conceptual construct that serves as a measuring rod for understanding and analysing social phenomena. It does not correspond directly to reality but represents a pure form of a concept, emphasising its most significant characteristics in an exaggerated or abstract manner (Weber, 1949; Swedberg, 2005). The term originates from the work of Max Weber (1864-1920), a German sociologist, and is a methodological tool used in social science (Ritzer and Stepnisky, 2017). Ideal types and typologies are closely related in social science methodology, as both are conceptual tools used to classify and analyse social phenomena. While an ideal type is a pure model that highlights key characteristics of a phenomenon, a typology is a broader classification system that organises multiple ideal types into distinct categories. Weber's ideal types are often used to construct typologies, which are systematic classifications of different forms or variations of a phenomenon. Typologies enable researchers to group cases into categories based on shared characteristics, making complex realities more manageable for comparative analysis (Swedberg, 2005; Ritzer and Stepnisky, 2017). As will be evident in the analysis chapter, digital diplomacy practices, specifically social media content, can be classified into typological or ideal type categories, thereby assisting in drilling down to granular state-centred Kenyan and Australian diplomatic practices.

Relationship between digital diplomacy, public diplomacy and soft power

To identify ideal types for the state-centric typology of digital diplomacy, it is necessary to revisit the concepts of both digital diplomacy and public diplomacy identified in Chapter 2, summarise their key similarities and differences, as well as their relationship vis-à-vis each other and with soft power. Some authors see digital diplomacy as a subset of public diplomacy (Roberts, 2017; Cull, 2013) and it is not hard to see why. A surfeit of communicative aspects of digital diplomacy evolved from public diplomacy and both have the same goals – communicating foreign policy (Wang, 2006), influencing state, not-state actors and foreign publics (Nye, 2004; Gilboa, 2008; Manor, 2019), and promoting the national brand in international relations (Fan, 2010; Gudjonsson, 2005; Arnoczyk, 2013). Digital diplomacy has a narrower approach and aims to achieve these goals purely through digital means, with the affordances of social media being the most prominent (Hanson, 2010). Digital diplomacy also goes above and beyond public diplomacy through functions such as providing services (Olubukola, 2017; Wekesa, 2020), such as consular assistance, on social media.

Here it is necessary to bring in the theory of soft power. Soft power is crucial to understanding the core of both public diplomacy and digital diplomacy given its emphasis on influencing foreign publics

through non-violent means (Bjola, 2015; Gosling, 2021). Indeed, soft power is an inherent aspect of public diplomacy and digital diplomacy (Maluki and Njagi, 2020; Slaughter, 2016). Both can utilise soft power to influence foreign publics and further a country's foreign policy objectives. As discussed earlier, public diplomacy aims to promote a country's foreign policy abroad (Gregory, 2008; Roberts, 2007), and digital diplomacy specifically attempts to promote a country's foreign policy abroad through digital means (Hanson, 2010). Soft power, on the other hand, is a much broader and all-encompassing concept which is concerned with promoting a state's image and influence abroad. It is not necessarily limited to foreign policy promotion or the use of digital technologies, and may involve, for instance, developmental aid and foreign investment (Nye, 1990; Nye, 2004; Slaughter, 2016). Van Staden (2013) nonetheless cautions against oversimplification of the nebulous nature of the concept of soft power and calls for greater nuance in analysing how countries use it to advance their interests. Indeed, this is one of the motivators for this study – examining how countries with a different status in international relations are able to use digital diplomacy to further their foreign policies and agendas (with the concept of soft power being an inherent part of these). The use of soft power in a typology of digital diplomacy is thus represented by 'influence' as an ideal type.

Strategic ideal types: influence and branding

Indeed, it seems that influence is arguably the most important ideal type of digital diplomacy, seen as one of the main strategic functions in the many definitions and conceptualisations of both digital diplomacy and public diplomacy. The key difference between the two is when it comes to influence as a strategic intent, digital diplomacy pursues exclusively through digital means (as opposed to physical, in-person activities and events available to public diplomacy). Based on the literature review in Chapter 2, it is also evident that influence in digital diplomacy is closely related to the quality of engagement, which involves "listening, dialogue, debate and relationship building and increases the amount and effectiveness of public-opinion research" (Pamment, 2013). Here, the strategic intent is not merely to communicate (i.e. giving and receiving information), but to shape attitudes, preferences, and ultimately behaviours of target audiences in ways that support a state's foreign policy goals.

The digital transformation of diplomatic practice is particularly important to consider in discussions about influence through online engagement. Historically, diplomacy relied on proximity (Manor, 2019), which was crucial to establishing and building relationships, which in turn facilitated access to information, a diplomatic currency. Therefore, as noted earlier, in the first stage of digitalisation, most diplomats were adjusting to digitalising their diplomatic practices. According to Vanc (2012), many senior diplomats believed that relationships could only be cultivated in person and not online (Vanc, 2012). Over the years this perception has changed, with diplomats increasingly realising that one of

the benefits of digital diplomacy was to engage audiences whom one could not engage face-to-face, as well as increased connectivity between people (Al-Muftah, Weerakkody, Rana, et al., 2018). Vanc (2012) also identifies another issue – that diplomats may resist new technologies due to well-established working routines and methods. Copeland (2013) similarly comments that scholars have characterised MFAs as organisations that are resistant to change and fear losing control over communications. This highlights that the adoption of digital diplomacy was shaped not only by opportunity but also by institutional capacity and willingness to adapt, leading to the current state of affairs, where digital platforms became a commonly-accepted tool of influencing foreign publics.

Another common theme that emerged in terms of strategic functions of digital diplomacy is self-promotion or branding. The branding of a country is fundamentally about its reputation, the sum total of perceptions that people around the world have about it (Anholt, 2007). Branding as a function of digital diplomacy involves the strategic use of digital platforms by nations to shape and promote their international image, thereby enhancing their soft power and global influence (Fan, 2010; Gudjonsson, 2005; Kaneva, 2011). Through branding, a country can use social media, official websites and other online tools to communicate its values, culture, policies and achievements to a global audience. Kaneva (2011) also adds that branding can be a tool for reputation management. Indeed, if a country makes itself appealing, it could be in a position to influence others, or use this for other purposes, for instance attracting investment, tourism or even building coalitions. From a strategic perspective, branding operates as a foundational strategy that builds reputational capital which can be drawn upon to advance future foreign policy goals.

Both influence and branding can thus be seen as strategic functions of digital diplomacy since they help MFAs further their country's foreign policy broadly, as well as achieve specific foreign policy goals. Influence is strategic and policy-driven, aiming to shift preferences and behaviours in support of defined objectives. Branding is strategic and identity-driven, aiming to build reputational resources that underpin a state's broader ability to act effectively on the global stage.

Tactical ideal types: broadcasting and consular services

Despite the digital dialogue and engagement opportunities offered by social media, there may be instances in which one-way communication is preferred, discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2 as broadcasting (Copeland, 2013). Some diplomats view social media as a new tool to continue practising diplomacy in the way it has always been done and rely on monologue, or one-way communication (Batora, 2008) with publics online. Broadcasting is thus an ideal type of digital diplomacy that emerged during the literature review. Broadcasting as a function of digital diplomacy

involves the use of digital platforms by governments and diplomatic entities to disseminate information, shape public opinion and engage with global audiences (Cull, 2019). This approach leverages tools such as social media, blogs and multimedia content to conduct public diplomacy, moving beyond traditional closed-door meetings to more open and direct communication channels (Wichowski, 2015).

Another ideal type that emerged during the literature review in Chapter 2 is e-services. This function of digital diplomacy refers to the strategic use of digital platforms by diplomatic missions, consulates and foreign ministries to engage with citizens, provide consular services and enhance international relations (Olubukola, 2017). It involves leveraging social media channels to offer real-time updates on travel advisories, crisis response, visa and passport services, and cultural exchange programmes (US Department of State, no date). Broadcasting and provision of e-services can thus be framed as tactical functions of digital diplomacy: using social media to respond to the issues of the day, communicating about meetings of its officials with foreign diplomats, reporting on visits of foreign dignitaries as well as official state-level visits to other countries, communicating with citizens abroad to help them during a pandemic or a war and ultimately helping them get home.

Typologies of public diplomacy applied to digital diplomacy

Several existing typologies of public diplomacy can be applied to better understand digital diplomacy. However, they tend to focus on one aspect of its practice, such as: traditional vs new public diplomacy; monologic vs dialogic vs networked pubic diplomacy; listening vs advocacy vs influence; and, soft power vs sharp power vs smart power approaches. These are briefly summarised below.

Traditional public diplomacy primarily involved government-to-people engagement through state-controlled media and cultural exchanges (Cull, 2009). New public diplomacy, on the other hand, recognises the growing role of non-state actors, transnational networks, and digital platforms in diplomatic engagement (Melissen, 2005). Digital diplomacy exemplifies this shift, as states increasingly rely on social media, online campaigns and digital influencers to communicate with foreign publics. This evolution of diplomatic practices has led scholars to distinguish among various styles and approaches of digital diplomacy. Monologic diplomacy refers to one-way communication from states to foreign audiences, such as official government accounts broadcasting information on platforms like X (formerly Twitter) (Bjola & Holmes, 2015). Dialogic diplomacy involves two-way interactions that foster engagement and trust-building, seen in real-time discussions, online town halls, and interactive digital forums (Zaharna, 2010). Networked diplomacy recognises the decentralised nature of digital

platforms, where multiple actors – including governments, non-governmental organisations, and individuals – participate in shaping diplomatic narratives (Manor 2019).

Building upon these communication styles, governments have also adopted specific strategic approaches within digital diplomacy. Listening diplomacy emphasises governments' efforts to monitor digital conversations, gather insights, and adapt foreign policy messaging accordingly (Cull, 2013b). Advocacy diplomacy, on the other hand, is the strategic promotion of national interests through digital campaigns, hashtags, and targeted messaging (Seib, 2012). Finally, influence diplomacy involves shaping public perceptions through online engagement, influencer partnerships, and strategic information dissemination (Pamment, 2016). Additionally, these diplomatic approaches intersect with broader concepts of power in international relations. Soft power diplomacy leverages cultural narratives and positive engagement to build international goodwill (Nye, 2004). Digital diplomacy channels such as cultural exchanges, virtual summits, and educational content contribute to this effort. In contrast, sharp power diplomacy involves manipulative or coercive digital influence tactics, such as disinformation campaigns and cyber propaganda (Walker & Ludwig, 2017). Finally, smart power diplomacy blends both soft and hard power, using digital tools strategically to balance persuasion and coercion (Nye, 2011).

While these typologies of public diplomacy provide useful frameworks for understanding digital diplomacy, as discussed above, they focus on isolated aspects of its practice, such as the evolution from traditional to new public diplomacy, the shift from monologic to networked engagement, or the balance between soft and sharp power approaches. Each of these perspectives captures important dimensions of digital diplomacy, but they do not offer a holistic framework for analysing how states – particularly developing countries, middle powers, and great powers – strategically leverage social media to advance their foreign policy objectives. Given the distinct digital capabilities, resources and geopolitical constraints, and foreign policy priorities of different states, a new state-centric typology of digital diplomacy was needed for the purposes of this study. Such a typology assists in systematically examining how states utilise digital platforms to engage international audiences, manage diplomatic narratives, and project influence. The development of this typology furthermore contributes new knowledge to the academic study of digital diplomacy by offering a comparative framework that accounts for the varying ways states harness the affordances of social media in pursuit of their foreign policy goals.

State-centric typology of digital diplomacy

The state-centric typology of digital diplomacy, based on the literature review in Chapter 2 and the preceding discussion, is presented below.

Table 1 State-centric typology of digital diplomacy

Approach			
Communication style		Tactical	Strategic
	One-way	**Broadcasting** Definition: The use of social media by state actors to disseminate official diplomatic messages and information in a unidirectional format, to inform foreign and domestic audiences. Example: Posting that a meeting took place between a minister of foreign affairs and their counterpart from another state, i.e. merely conveying information.	**Branding** Definition: The use of social media by state actors to shape and maintain a country's overall image, reputation, and identity in the international arena. Branding is long-term, identity-focused, and primarily concerned with visibility, recognition, and credibility, rather than immediate policy outcomes. Example: Posting the latest GDP figures to highlight their country's booming economy, noting its ranking on the Ease of Doing Business Index and listing specific sectors that welcome foreign investment.
	Two-way	**Providing e-services** Definition: The use of social media by state actors to deliver consular assistance and disseminate critical information to citizens abroad. Example: Using social media to communicate with citizens abroad during a global pandemic, helping them to reach their embassies and assisting with booking evacuation flights. Engagement may also be present here, if an MFA response to queries using social media.	**Influencing** Definition: The strategic use of social media by state actors to persuade, shape preferences, or mobilise specific audiences in support of defined foreign policy objectives. Influencing is goal-oriented and focused on shifting attitudes, behaviours, or decisions. Example: Using social media to influence other states and foreign publics to achieve its foreign policy goal, for instance rules-based trade order. This would entail highlighting the advantages of its goal, communicating successes already achieved and attempting to bring others (state and non-state actors, as well as publics) on board through employing digital networks. This may also entail discussions with either

			state or non-state actors on social media.

Examples of ideal types of digital diplomacy

Some practical examples of ideal types of digital diplomacy from the three case study countries are listed and discussed below.

The US using social media to support Ukraine and its NATO allies in an effort to deter Russian aggression in January 2022 is an example of strategic digital diplomacy. This was a consolidated campaign to attempt to deter Russia from aggression, assure Ukraine that it will not be alone in case of an invasion, and reassure NATO allies that the US would come to their defence in terms of the Treaty's article 5 (Holmes, 2024). Although the deterrence failed, the US persevered with the campaign after the invasion in February 2022, changing its focus to condemn Russia's illegal and unprovoked invasion, support Ukraine and its people, and rally other countries to come to Ukraine's support through humanitarian assistance and the provision of arms.

An example of branding as a strategic type is Kenya's digital efforts around the state visit to Nairobi of then US president Barack Obama in July 2015 (Derow 2019). Twitter (now X) was the preferred social media platform for Kenya's MFA, foreign affairs minister and president, who all acted in unison in conducting a digital campaign with the #chooseKenya hashtag. This campaign sought to portray the country as a rising economic power and a prime destination for investing, which helped establish Kenya as a global brand on social media (Manor, 2016).

In terms of e-services or consular assistance, Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has been effectively using digital technologies to communicate with its citizens (Brown, 2014). DFAT has developed a Smartraveller website (and later an app), which sensitises travellers to potential dangers abroad as well as establishes expectations as to the consular support they can expect to receive. DFAT also makes sure there is two-way communication with Australians through an online forum on DFAT's Smartraveller Facebook page, featuring departmental experts, who discuss passports, travel advisories and other consular matters and then answer questions from the public (Brown, 2014), as well as through engagement on X (formerly Twitter).

Finally, an example of broadcasting would be any MFA posting on social media about a foreign visit from a foreign dignitary that has taken place, thus using modern digital tools for traditional diplomatic communication. Such posts could be more than that and become branding (if the opportunity is used

to promote an aspect of the host country's brand or policies) or strategic (if the post highlights why the relationship between the two countries is important and what benefits its continuation would yield). However, a cursory look at most such posts on X (formerly Twitter) indicates that this is not the case, and proves Wichowski's (2015) earlier point that while most diplomats use social media, only a handful do it really well and rarely go above and beyond the broadcasting function of digital diplomacy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated the necessity of developing a state-centric typology of digital diplomacy to account for the diverse ways in which states leverage digital platforms to engage with international audiences and pursue foreign policy objectives. Notably, this typology can also apply to non-state digital diplomacy, with some variations. Through a thorough literature review, it became evident that digital diplomacy was an extension of public diplomacy, distinguished by its exclusive reliance on digital tools and platforms. Chapter 2 has furthermore helped to frame the typology of digital diplomacy developed in this chapter.

Based on the literature review, communication and approach have emerged as key framings of the typology of digital diplomacy. One-way vs two-way communication, which represents either using digital packaging for traditional diplomatic communication or using the affordances provided by social media to engage with other digital diplomatic actors and publics, is a key theme in theorising about how a typology of digital diplomacy may be framed. In terms of approach, the literature review also allowed for theorising about tactical vs strategic uses of digital diplomacy, with the former being used for announcements, statements and sharing of information, whereas the latter is about influencing outcomes, changing the perceptions of others and ultimately achieving foreign policy goals. Digital tactics are attempts to obtain likes, retweets and followers, in contrast to digital strategies, which set out to achieve specific diplomatic objectives (Bjola, Cassidy and Manor, 2020). The success of digital tactics is measured by simple numbers on social media, whereas the success of a digital strategy is based on a predetermined outcome, which has to do with furthering one's foreign policy goals.

The developed typology, grounded in both theoretical frameworks and practical case studies, categorises digital diplomacy into tactical and strategic approaches, emphasising key functions such as broadcasting, branding, e-services, and influence. It enables categorisation of social media posts by referring to ideal types of the digital diplomacy, in turn facilitating a comparison between different states' approaches. By providing a structured framework for analysing digital diplomacy, this study will contribute to a more systematic understanding of how developing countries, middle powers and great powers navigate the digital diplomatic landscape.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Introduction

This thesis seeks to answer the question of how countries with a different status in international affairs, namely developing countries, middle powers and great powers, use the affordances of social media to practice digital diplomacy to achieve their foreign policy goals. To this end, it uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. Qualitative research is an exploratory approach that seeks to understand human experiences, behaviours, and social phenomena through non-numerical data, such as interviews, observations, and textual analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It emphasises depth, context, and subjective interpretation. In contrast, quantitative research relies on numerical data and statistical techniques to test hypotheses and establish patterns, often using surveys, experiments, or secondary data analysis to ensure objectivity and generalisability (Bryman, 2016). Using both methods provides an opportunity to compare and validate qualitative and quantitative research findings against each other, thereby enhancing research reliability and depth (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

Using both of these methods is important for the purposes of this study, because research findings show that there is no single method or a one-size-fits-all solution for studying and analysing digital diplomacy. Rather, certain methods may be more useful for studying particular aspects of digital diplomacy and specific case studies. Each country adopts its own approach to practising digital diplomacy, based on its foreign policy and perspective on technology (Al-Muftaha, 2018). Similarly, there is no single method or a one-size-fits-all solution for studying and analysing digital diplomacy, given how broad its practice is, as demonstrated in this article's typology. Rather, certain methods may be more useful for studying particular aspects of digital diplomacy and specific country case studies. A 2016 study, which analysed how researchers' dissect and analyse trends in digital diplomacy, found a preference for qualitative methods, such as interviews, case studies, and literature reviews (Al-Muftah & Sivarajah, 2016). This thesis identifies three methods to be used to study and analyse the collected data. These methods – social media analytics, thematic analysis, and quality of engagement – are discussed below, followed by a section which discusses the specific methodological approach of this study.

Method 1: Social media analytics

The first method is social media analytics. This is a quantitative method of counting the number of followers, likes and reposts for diplomatic accounts and the content they produce (Shah, Cappella and Neuman, 2015). Although rudimentary, it is nonetheless indicative of the popularity of accounts and

posts and provides a basis for their comparison. Social media platforms such as Twitter (recently rebranded as X) provide such basic statistics for each account and post. For each account, the number of followers is listed, while for each post, the number of times it has been retweeted and liked is shown. This provides a very basic but nonetheless indicative way of assessing the popularity of accounts and posts. Such analytics are a way for MFAs and embassies to measure the impact of their digital activities (Manor, 2019) and are also applicable for the scholarly study of digital diplomacy.

Kampf, Manor and Segev (2015) argue that one cannot measure how effective digital diplomacy is by counting likes on the Facebook profiles of an embassy or an MFA. Similarly, Manor (2019) cautions that although social media analytics provide MFAs and embassies with a way to measure the impact of their digital activities, this poses the risk of being consumed by 'vanity metrics' and measuring success based on sheer numbers of retweets and likes rather than paying attention to interaction and quality of engagement. Paying attention to these metrics may mean that digital diplomacy players fail to develop relationships with social media users and in promoting their country's foreign policy through dialogue. Pamment (2013) agrees with this line of thinking and suggests that scholars of digital diplomacy should analyse processes of change occurring in the MFA rather than counting their number of followers.

Another dimension is examining whether countries use audiovisual materials to support their digital diplomacy efforts. As social media has evolved, text is no longer sufficient to convey a message. Photographs, pictures, infographics and increasingly, short and concise videos are seen as important to supplement or even replace traditional text-only messages that were the norm in the late 2000s, when social media platforms became prominent. The use of audiovisual materials can also be indicative of a digital divide between countries. Digital divide can be defined as "uneven access to or distribution of information and technology" (Turianskyi 2020). Digital divide is a global issue, but one that is especially pronounced in the developing world to which Kenya belongs. Countries with a different status in the international system are likely to have different resources to allocate to their digital diplomacy efforts. Although in the contemporary day and age anyone can take photographs and videos using their smartphone, producing quality audiovisual materials requires additional resources, such as professional recording equipment, as well as skilled personnel who are dedicated to producing infographics and videos. By contrast, many developing countries, such as Kenya, which are on the wrong side of the digital divide, are much more likely to have one or two people who are simply managing the MFA's social media accounts and are not supported by photographers, videographers

and graphic designers. The use of and quality of audiovisual content in the three country case studies will be examined in the next chapter.

Method 2: Thematic analysis

The second method is thematic analysis. It is a qualitative method that is used to identify, analyse and report on patterns of themes in a specific body of research (Braun and Clarke, 2014). It looks for patterns of themes in digital diplomacy content that are intended to achieve foreign policy objectives. A thematic analysis approach is therefore especially useful in terms of analysing how individual countries practise digital diplomacy as it helps a researcher to identify and analyse patterns of meaning within case studies (Pamment, 2013) and subsequently illustrate which themes are significant in the phenomenon under study (Daly, Kellehear and Gliksman, 1997). Thematic analysis would therefore allow a scholar to identify patterns of themes in digital diplomacy content. For example, is the country under study placing more emphasis on multilateral diplomacy, regional diplomacy or bilateral diplomacy, or does it more or less equally prioritise all these diplomatic levels? What are the key areas of interest for the country, and which issues does it seek to highlight and promote in its digital diplomacy efforts? Thematic analysis can help to answer these questions by identifying patterns of themes that are intended to achieve foreign policy objectives and categorising them. This could help to identify which diplomatic issues are prioritised and compare them with the stated objectives in these countries' foreign policies. In turn, it would then be possible to assess whether these countries are utilising the affordances of social media to achieve their foreign policy goals and objectives. This can also provide a point of comparison between developing countries such as Kenya, middle powers such as Australia, and great powers such as the US. The next chapter analyses to what extent their social media posts reflect the stated foreign policy objectives of the three case studies. For instance, Kenya may be prioritising its near abroad, Australia may have regional priorities, and the US may cast its net globally. This will receive attention when posts are categories and analysed in the next chapter.

Method 3: Quality of engagement

The third method is quality of engagement. This is an approach with both qualitative and quantitative elements. It looks at whether digital diplomacy actors engage with other social media users and whether they engage with their peers, for instance by retweeting or responding to their posts (Khatib, Dutton and Thelwall, 2012). As per Westcott (2008), "As governments have found, simply being present is not enough to influence. Participation in the online debate is the critical factor. Melissen agrees with this, stating that "monologic public diplomacy is… ill-suited for the task for communicating with digital publics" (Melissen, 2006).

The qualitative aspect of this method could be determined by how the MFA is engaging with users: for example, through thought-out and unique answers, the use of humour, the use of audiovisual (such as memes), and detail of the response, whether all responses are generic 'cut-and-paste' answers, or whether they engage and responds to others at all. Another lens would be to study interaction with other state actors through the lenses of networked digital diplomacy, digital diplomatic engagement, and mobilisation of external resources through digital diplomacy. This would entail examining how actors engage with each other and how networks are used to disseminate information, promote narratives and achieve objectives (Sevin, 2017). For instance, given that it has become commonplace for state officials to use social media before, during and after foreign visits, one could look at whether posts are used to highlight certain topics of interest, promote agreements or more broadly attempt to strengthen ties between the two countries. The quantitative aspect of this method would be to examine the metrics of how frequently an MFA retweets other actors and how frequently it retweets posts about certain topics. This would indicate how successfully the MFA is using networked diplomacy to build alliances, support partners, promote certain narratives and highlight certain topics. Given the sheer number of variables available, the quality of engagement method would be challenging to standardise, due to different styles of engagement, sizes of the networks and the difficulty in pinpointing exactly how information travels through a network and how it is amplified and transformed by it. Due to these factors, the quality of the engagement method should be tailored to each study and adapted on a case-by-case basis. Because engagement is seen as the gold standard of digital diplomacy (Manor, 2019; Manor and Segev, 2015; Pamment, 2013; McNutt, 2014), the following chapter carefully examines whether there are differences in how Kenya, Australia and the US use engagement (or not) as well as whether any trends can be observed that can be indicative of the use of digital diplomacy by developing countries, middle powers and great powers.

Comparative analysis

To compare findings from the three case study countries, this study uses comparative analysis, a method to evaluate and contrast two or more entities, including theories, policies, or case studies, to identify similarities, differences and trends (Bryman, 2016). This approach is commonly applied in social sciences to draw meaningful insights from comparisons. While the approaches to digital diplomacy undertaken by MFAs of Kenya and Australia are compared to each other, each one is furthermore compared to the US State Department, which is used as a baseline, given that it is a pioneer of digital diplomacy and is one of the most advanced and active practitioners of digital diplomacy. It is therefore also necessary to define baseline comparative analysis, a specific type of comparative study that establishes an initial point of reference for measuring changes over time (Yin, 2018).

Data collection

In terms of data collection, over the period of one month, from 1 April to 30 April 2022, all social media posts on the then Twitter made by the MFAs from the country case studies, the Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs in Kenya, DFAT in Australia and the US State Department were collected. All posts made on Twitter (now X) by the respective MFAs were collected during these periods to ensure completeness and accuracy. There were three categories of posts: original posts (tweets), reposts (retweets) and replies.

This period was deliberately chosen because it was analytically significant: Russia's invasion of Ukraine was in its early stages (having started at the end of February 2022), reshaping international security discourse, and providing an opportunity to analyse how developing countries, middle powers and great powers respond to this significant event. At the same time, countries worldwide were still managing the social, economic, and diplomatic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, providing further opportunities to analyse themes such as vaccine diplomacy. Capturing MFA activity during this moment of global uncertainty helped to facilitate an analysis of how states with a different status in international affairs digitally engaged in times of global uncertainty.

In addition, supplementary data were collected one year later, in April 2023, for Kenya and Australia. Both countries experienced changes in government during late 2022 and early 2023, respectively. Collecting data at this point therefore allowed for a comparative assessment of how shifts in political leadership may have influenced their Ministries of Foreign Affairs' digital diplomacy practices. This comparison ensures that findings are not merely reflective of one administration's priorities but can be linked to broader questions of continuity and change in digital diplomacy strategies. All social media posts on then Twitter – original posts (tweets), reposts (retweets) and replies – made by the Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs in Kenya and DFAT in Australia were therefore also collected between 1 and 30 April 2023. Because the US remained under the same administration, it was not necessary to collect additional data from the Department of State during this period.

The data collection process was manual. Screenshots (using Microsoft Windows Snip-It program) were taken of each tweet, retweet and reply from the above-mentioned accounts. This allowed for data to be analysed in terms of both the text of the tweets, as well as visual material accompanying them.

Analysis of each tweet was entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. In accordance with the three types of methods discussed earlier in this chapter, this data was categorised in the Excel spreadsheet as follows. First it was analysed quantitatively, in terms of the overall number of posts during the

collection period; average posts per day; the most popular post during the collection period; the least popular post; the average number of likes and reposts; and whether the posts contained audiovisual material. Thematic analysis was then applied to classify the posts as being related to foreign policy or other matters. An additional level of analysis then took place to further categorise into themes such as bilateral diplomacy, multilateral diplomacy, vaccine diplomacy, and others. These themes emerged naturally during the data analysis. Each post was also analysed in terms of whether it contained elements of soft power, as per the theory set out in Chapter 2.

For example, tweets about the meetings of diplomats between two countries were classified as bilateral diplomacy, attendance of meetings with diplomats from a number of countries present was classified as multilateral diplomacy, and the delivery of COVID-19 vaccines to other countries was classified as vaccine diplomacy. An additional level of analysis was then undertaken to identify specific themes, for instance 'support for Ukraine', 'focus on the East African Community', and 'climate change'. These themes too emerged naturally, based on the content, and in some instances, on the hashtags used. The text of all the posts made was also input into WordArt.com software to generate a word cloud of the most frequently used language as an additional level of analysis.

Typology-based data collection and analysis

After the collected data was categorised using an Excel spreadsheet as described in the previous section, it was further categorised using the state-centric typology of digital diplomacy, as well as in accordance with the social network theory. This was done as follows.

Firstly, using the previously identified strategic and tactical ideal types of digital diplomacy, social media posts from the MFAs of Kenya, Australia and the US collected in April 2022 and April 2023 were analysed and categorised as per the state-centric typology of digital diplomacy. Thematic analysis was applied to classify posts based on their digital diplomatic function. Posts were categorised as addressing core foreign policy objectives, aligning with strategic or tactical digital diplomacy: influence, branding, broadcasting and e-services. For instance, posts seeking to further aspects of a country's foreign policy were classified as strategic, while posts notifying digital publics that a certain event or meeting has taken place were classified as tactical. Examples of posts were captured and an explanation was provided as to why they were categorised as representing a certain ideal type of digital diplomacy. By employing the state-centric typology of digital diplomacy, this approach provided a comprehensive understanding of how developing countries, middle powers and great powers leverage the affordances of social media for strategic and tactical purposes. In turn, results from the application

of the typology facilitate comparison between different states' approaches, depending on their status in the international system.

Secondly, social network theory was used to analyse and categorise posts made by other digital diplomacy actors and retweeted by the MFAs of Kenya, Australia and the US in April 2022 and April 2023. As discussed in the discussion of this theory in Chapter 2, through the affordances of social media an ever-more networked world has emerged, in which state and non-state actors are able to use social media to shape foreign policy. It was therefore necessary to examine if the MFAs of case study countries effectively use these networks to ensure that messaging and narratives similar to their own, but posted by others, are disseminated. Social media provides opportunities to strengthen messaging, find common causes and establish linkages through like-minded actors. This can help a country achieve its foreign policy goals through collaboration with others – which is an especially useful function for developing countries and middle powers that otherwise may not have the ability to shape the global agenda or mount large advocacy campaigns in pursuit of a certain goal by themselves.

Ethical considerations

Because the data comprised only publicly available posts, they were considered open-source information and thus did not raise ethical concerns. In line with standard research ethics protocols, no attempt was made to access private accounts, direct messages, or content that was not explicitly placed in the public domain by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs. The posts analysed were official communications made by official accounts of state institutions and state officials (rather than personal accounts) which further minimised risks related to data privacy or inadvertent disclosure of sensitive information. As the posts by state institutions and state officials were created with the intention of being consumed by a broad public audience, issues of consent were not applicable in the same way as they would be for private individuals. Nevertheless, care was taken to handle the data responsibly: this thesis does not alter, misrepresent, or decontextualise the content, and the presentation of findings avoids reproducing any personal identifiers beyond what is already publicly attributable to the institutional accounts studied.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the methodological framework for this study, which employs a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches to analyse digital diplomacy. By integrating social media analytics, thematic analysis and quality of engagement, this research ensures a comprehensive examination of how Kenya, Australia and the US leverage digital platforms to achieve their foreign policy objectives. Social media analytics provide measurable insights into the reach and visibility of

digital diplomacy efforts while thematic analysis allows for a deeper understanding of the underlying narratives and priorities shaping diplomatic communication. The quality of engagement method further contextualises digital diplomacy by assessing the level and nature of interaction between the MFAs of the case study countries and their audiences.

Additionally, the use of comparative analysis enhances the study's ability to evaluate digital diplomacy across different geopolitical contexts. By comparing the use of social media in diplomacy, firstly between Kenya and Australia, and secondly comparing Kenya, a developing country, and Australia, a middle power, to the US, a great power, pioneer and established leader in digital diplomacy, this study identifies how countries with a different status in the international system use the affordances of social media to achieve their foreign policy goals. A longitudinal element is included in the cases of Australia and Kenya, comparing data from April 2022 and April 2023, and different governments, which enables an assessment of whether shifts in government leadership influence digital diplomacy strategies.

The application of a typology-based approach and social network theory provides further analytical depth, categorising digital diplomacy posts into strategic and tactical functions, use of one-way vs two-way communication, and assessing the extent to which state actors effectively utilise social digital networks to amplify their messaging. Together, these methodological choices allow for a holistic and multidimensional understanding of digital diplomacy, ensuring that both quantitative reach and qualitative impact are considered in the analysis. By employing this rigorous and multifaceted methodological approach, this study contributes to the growing body of research on digital diplomacy.

Chapter 5: Data analysis

Introduction

This chapter analyses data – social media posts on Twitter (now X) – collected throughout April 2022 and 2023, from the MFAs of Kenya, Australia and the US. There are three sections: Kenya data analysis, Australia data analysis, and the US data analysis. All three sections follow a similar structure. Firstly, the data collected is analysed in terms of social media metrics. Data collected is also categorised into broad themes and then into sub-themes. These themes and sub-themes emerged naturally during the categorisation, as demonstrated below. To facilitate the understanding of foreign policy priorities of the case study countries, the text content of their social media posts is put into a word cloud, after which the top terms used are discussed. This is followed by the application of the state-centric typology of diplomacy, developed in Chapter 3, to the social media posts. The posts are categorised as per the ideal types identified – influence, branding, e-services and broadcasting, as well as along the two axes: one-way vs two-way communication and strategic vs tactical approaches to digital diplomacy. Examples of social media posts categorised under each ideal type (where applicable) are discussed to explain the rationale for including them under one ideal type, as opposed to another. Soft power theory is used throughout to determine whether and how MFAs of the case study apply it to achieve their foreign policy goals. This is followed by the application of social network theory to posts retweeted by the MFAs of case study countries. Afterwards, the data is interpretated and recommendations are put forward on how the use of the affordances provided by social media can be improved by the MFA of each country's case study to enhance their practice of digital diplomacy. This chapter is then concluded with a summary of findings for each of the country case studies – Kenya, Australia, and the US.

Kenya data analysis

This section focuses on how Kenya, a developing country in Africa, uses digital diplomacy to achieve its foreign policy objectives through Twitter. Its main aim is to determine whether Kenya utilises the affordances of social media to promote its foreign policy. This section examines Kenya's digital diplomacy practices by conducting a thematic analysis of all tweets and retweets posted from the official account of Kenya's Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs (MFA), @ForeignOfficeKE, for two time periods: 1 to 30 April 2022, when Uhuru Kenyatta was president of the country, and 1 to 30 April 2023, when William Ruto succeeded him. Twitter (now X) was chosen for this analysis as it has become the *de facto* platform of choice for digital diplomacy (Bloodgood and Masson, 2018). The tweets are then categorised in accordance with a typology of digital diplomacy developed specifically for this study. This section also uses the theory of soft power to analyse how Kenya's MFA attempts to

influence foreign publics and other actors through its social media posts, and social network theory to analyse the networking aspect of Kenya's digital diplomacy, by examining the posts it retweets. Practical examples of tweets posted and retweeted are included and discussed, where applicable. Where relevant, this article also refers back to Kenya's 2014 foreign policy document to see if the MFA uses digital diplomacy to further its stated objectives.

Kenya's digital diplomacy metrics: April 2022 and April 2023

In accordance with the three types of methods for studying digital diplomacy discussed earlier, data from April 2022 and April 2023 was first analysed quantitatively, in terms of the overall number of posts during the collection period, average posts per day, most popular post during the collection period, least popular post, as well as the average number of likes and reposts, and whether the posts contained audiovisual material. Secondly, thematic analysis was applied to classify the posts as being related to digital diplomacy or other matters, such as condolence messages. An additional level of analysis then took place to further categorise the data into themes such as bilateral diplomacy, trade and investment. These themes emerged naturally during the data analysis, either as patterns (where a common theme was identified in multiple posts) or as outliers (as single instances of a post on a specific theme/topic).

Table 2 Kenya's tweets April 2022: broad themes

Broad theme	Number of tweets	Percentage of tweets
Digital diplomacy	39	71%
Condolences	10	18%
Road safety campaign	4	7%
MFA budget	1	2%
Happy Easter	1	2%

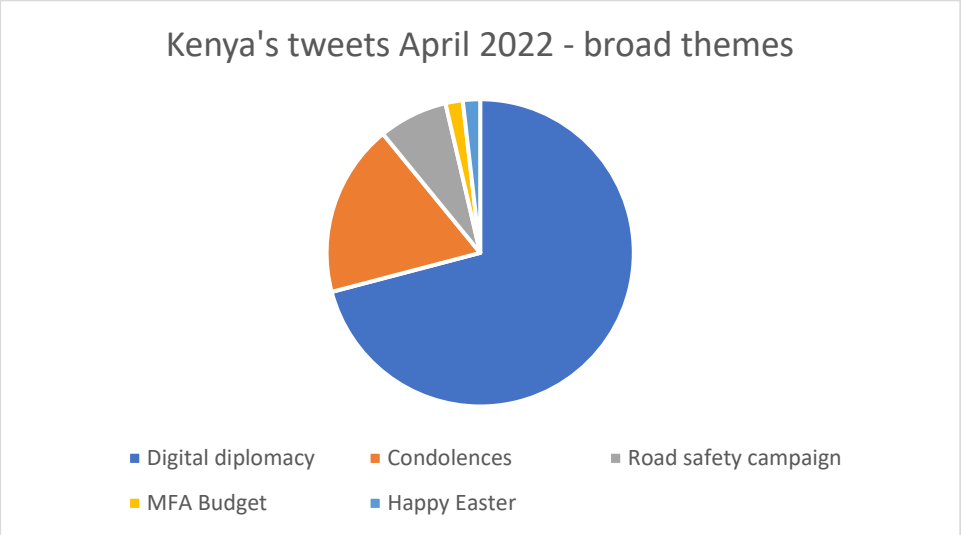


Figure 1 Kenya's tweets April 2022: broad themes

Table 3 Kenya's tweets April 2023: broad themes

Broad theme	Number of tweets	Percentage of tweets
Digital diplomacy	16	80%
Environment: Tree-planting day	1	5%
Wellness and team-building exercise	1	5%
Digitisation of services	1	5%
Happy Easter	1	5%

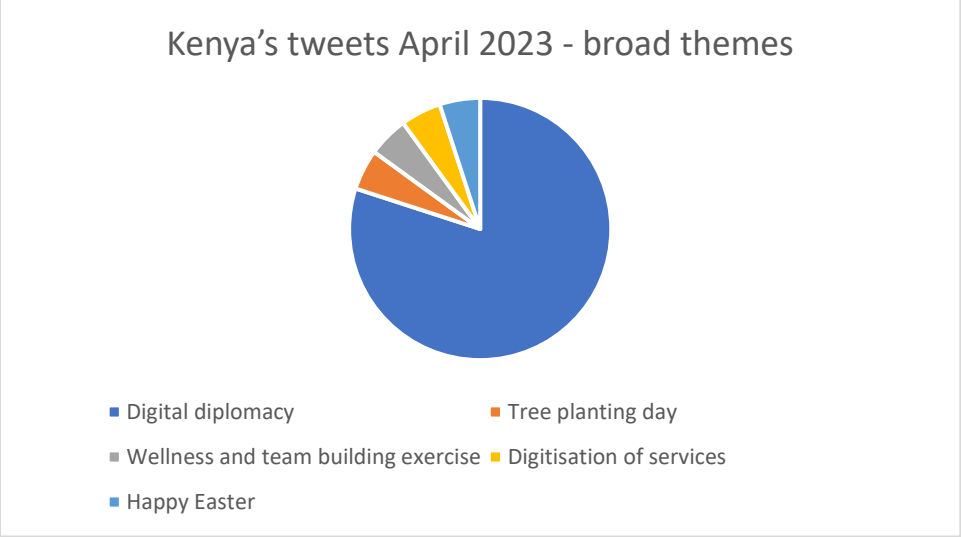


Figure 2 Kenya's tweets April 2023: broad themes

During both periods under review, the majority of posts were categorised under the digital diplomacy category. In 2022, this was 71% or 39 out of 55 tweets. This means the MFA posted an average of 1.83 tweets per day. A year later, the volume of tweets decreased quite significantly. The MFA went from posting 55 tweets in April 2022 to 20 tweets in April 2023, averaging 0.66 tweets per day. This is likely because the new administration placed less emphasis on the use of digital diplomacy as part of its foreign policy efforts. Proportionally, however, the number of tweets categorised under digital diplomacy remained similar: 80% or 16 out of 20 tweets. Tweets placed under other categories in 2022 included condolences. During the period under analysis, Kenya's ambassador to Qatar passed away, as did the former president, Mwai Kibaki. In the first instance, the ministry tweeted a press release, and in the second instance, a message of condolence from the cabinet secretary was published. This was also followed by one tweet with photographs of the ambassador's coffin arriving in Kenya and seven tweets related to the death of the former president. These included the cabinet secretary signing the condolences book and her tribute to the former head of state, as well as photographs from

the state funeral with officials from other countries. A further four tweets, which represented 7% of the total, were dedicated to the country's road safety campaign. While one could argue that the MFA was distracted by a domestic issue that was clearly unrelated to international affairs and foreign policy, the wording of the post suggests that the promotion of road safety was a nationwide effort in which all governmental bodies participated. Additionally, there was a tweet with a picture of the cabinet secretary discussing the budget estimates for 2022/23 and one wishing the ministry's Twitter followers a happy Easter.

In 2022, the MFA's tweets attracted an average of 14.7 retweets and 40.1 likes per tweet. The most popular tweet, by far, was one stating that "Kenya stand (sic) in solidarity with the people of Somaliland", followed by a picture of a press release with a message of solidarity from the ministry after a fire in a market in Somaliland. This tweet attracted 237 retweets and 541 likes – significantly above the averages noted above. The least popular tweet was a 'quoted response' where the ministry quoted a tweet by the principal secretary of Kenya's Ministry of Environment and Forestry, in which he posted about a planning meeting ahead of Stockholm+50, a global environmental UN event that was co-hosted by Kenya and Sweden. The quoted response merely contained the hashtag Stockholm+50 and therefore attracted little interest or engagement from followers. These variances could perhaps be explained by Kenya's close proximity to Somaliland and social media users wishing to express support and solidarity with its people following a tragic incident. On the other hand, the ministry clearly put little effort into explaining the significance of an upcoming event when reposting and quoting it, hence the lukewarm response from users.

In 2023, the attractiveness of Kenya's tweets dropped in one metric but increased in another. They attracted an average of 9.1 retweets and 61.5 likes. This is fewer retweets than in 2022 (14.7) but more likes (40.1). Perhaps this is because the new MFA was settling in after the 2022 elections. The most popular tweet was about assistance to Kenyans in Sudan, attracting 44 retweets and 222 likes. The least popular tweet was on bilateral diplomacy – relations between Kenya and Thailand, attracting no retweets and only three likes. This might be because Thailand is geographically far off and is therefore of less interest to Kenya's Twitter users. Kenya's MFA has significantly improved on the use of tags in tweets in the following year, but not on hashtags.

In terms of hashtags, only 17 out of 55 tweets contained hashtags in 2022. This was surprising as hashtags are popular on Twitter and their use can help to popularise certain topics, resulting in these topics trending. The same goes for 'tagging' or using Twitter to mention the handles of a person or

persons mentioned in the tweet. This is a common practice on Twitter (now X). Yet in April 2022, only 24 out of 55 tweets, or less than half, contained a tag. The use of hashtags worsened further in April 2023. Only one out of 20 tweets contained a hashtag, a tweet about bilateral relations with Japan. The use of tags, however, improved significantly. 17 out of 20 tweets tagged Twitter users featured in them, such as the (then) cabinet secretary, Alfred Mutua. Mutua was an active Twitter user, unlike his predecessor, Raychelle Omamo, and this undoubtedly made tagging easier for the MFA's digital diplomacy team. This suggests that the MFA's digital diplomacy unit has room for improvement, specifically in using the affordances of social media to be strategic in promoting the country's foreign policy. The distinction between the two cabinet secretaries, Mutua and Omamo, further suggests the impact of individual diplomats and their skill in using social media. Mutua comes from a media background, having served as government spokesperson in the past (Kenyans, no date).

On a positive note, Kenya's MFA has clearly embraced the use of visuals in its online communication. In April 2022, almost all – 54 out of 55 tweets – contained some sort of visual. The only instance where a tweet was posted without visuals was the quoted tweet mentioned earlier, which only contained a hashtag. Most of the visuals were photographs. 44 tweets had one or more (up to four) photographs. There were also instances of press releases attached as images. The use of audiovisuals remained consistent in April 2023, with 19 out of 20 featuring these (compared to 54 out of 55 in the previous year). The type of audiovisuals utilised also remained the same, with mostly photographs from meetings being posted. In a few instances, a picture was posted, for instance, on providing consular information to Kenyans in Sudan or wishing followers a happy Easter. As discussed earlier, the digital divide means that developing countries are less likely to have resources for advanced audiovisual uses in digital diplomacy. While it is easy to take a photograph with a smartphone, pictures and infographics require more resources, such as graphic design. Therefore, it seems that while Kenya's MFA is doing its best to enhance its posts with photographs, more advanced audiovisuals mostly remain out of reach.

Finally, looking at tweets categorised under digital diplomacy in 2022, it is noteworthy that in 17 instances tweets on a certain topic were 'threads', i.e. a tweet followed by and linked to other tweets on the same topic. In all instances, there were two or a maximum of three tweets in a single thread. Where this occurred, these threads were counted as a single tweet on the same topic, extended due to the social media platform's limitation on the number of characters. This is because not all users would see all tweets. In most instances, only the first or the first two tweets would appear in a user's timeline and would require clicking on the tweet to expand a thread. In 2023, 17 out of 20 tweets

were also threads, but proportionally, this was far more than the 17 out of 55 tweets the year before. The threads were quite long – some contained five or six tweets, and the longest one contained eight.

Table 4 Kenya's tweets April 2022: Specific themes

Specific theme	Number of tweets	Percentage of tweets
Bilateral relations	27	69%
Regional relations	4	10%
Trade and investment	2	5%
Climate change	2	5%
Diaspora affairs	2	5%
Continental relations	1	3%
Multilateral diplomacy	1	3%

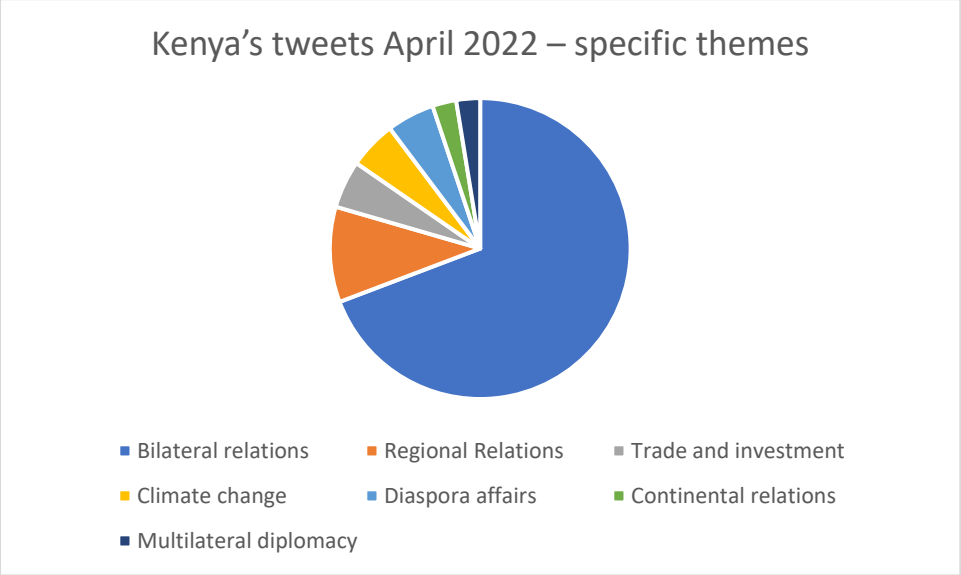


Figure 3 Kenya's tweets April 2022: Specific themes

Table 5 Kenya's tweets April 2023: Specific themes

Specific theme	Number of tweets	Percentage of tweets
Bilateral relations	9	69%
Kenya's foreign policy	2	15%
Multilateral diplomacy	1	8%
Peace mediation training	1	8%

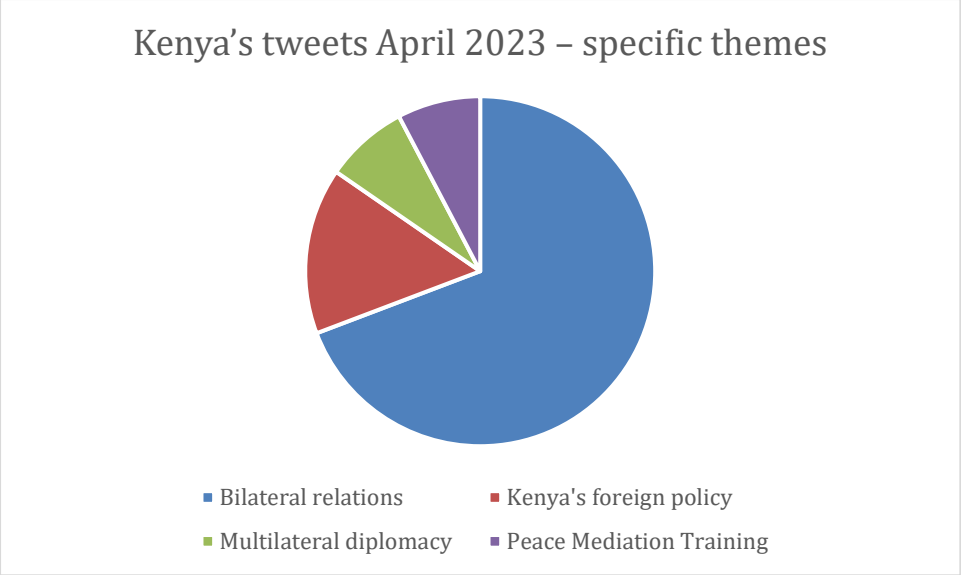


Figure 4 Kenya's tweets April 2023: Specific themes

In April 2022, a further sub-categorisation of tweets labelled as digital diplomacy (39 tweets in total), showed that the majority, 69% or 27 out of 39 tweets, were about Kenya's bilateral relations with other countries. Kenya is very active in this space, and the abovementioned tweets presented information about the country's officials meeting with their counterparts from Bangladesh, DRC, Ethiopia, Ireland, Jamaica, Japan, Malaysia, Mozambique, Netherlands, Oman, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Sweden and Ukraine. This is a wide geographical reach, and included meetings in Nairobi with ambassadors from these countries, as well as trips abroad by Kenyan officials. This focus on bilateral relations is also consistent with former president Uhuru Kenyatta's promise to continue deepening relationships with other countries across the globe, which he made in his inaugural speech in 2014. In April 2023, the vast majority of tweets were on Kenya's bilateral relations with other countries. The same trend persisted in April 2023, with 69% or nine out of 13 tweets classified under the topic of bilateral relations. In 2023, Kenya's MFA posted about meetings with representatives from Belarus, Rwanda, Thailand, Japan, Brazil, the US and Spain. This remains a wide geographical reach and included meetings in Nairobi, as well as abroad. Therefore, in both periods under review, there was both a continental as well as a global reach, showing that Kenya attempts to develop and maintain relationships with countries across a wide geographical scope.

Word cloud: Case study of Kenya

To further determine whether Kenya's foreign policy goals, which were discussed earlier, were communicated and promoted through digital diplomacy in April 2022, a word cloud was generated. The text of all tweets classified under 'foreign affairs and policy' was inserted into the WordArt.com website, and the following word cloud was generated.



Figure 5 Word cloud of Kenya's tweets in April 2022

Table 6 Kenya's tweets in April 2022: top 10 words

Rank	Word	Count
1	Kenya	37
2	Amb	33
3	PS	20
4	Foreign	18
5	Omamo	16
6	Affairs	15
7	Raychelle	15
8	CS	15
9	Ocean	12
10	Republic	12

The table above shows the word count for the top 10 most commonly used words in Kenya's MFA tweets.

As can be seen from the word cloud and the table, the word 'Kenya' appeared most often in the ministry's tweets – a total of 37 times. This shows that the communication put out by the ministry is Kenya-centric, as it should be. As noted earlier, the majority of the tweets were about bilateral diplomacy. As such, they mention meetings between Kenya and Portugal, Kenya and Japan and Kenya and Ireland, to name a few. Therefore, the word 'Kenya' is most frequently used. The ministry, however, does not use this opportunity to put its views and opinions on record, shape the discourse

or establish narratives around topics. Most other words in the top 10 refer to positions of officials, including Amb (ambassador), PS (principal secretary), the words 'foreign' and 'affairs', as well as the first and last names of the minister (cabinet secretary Rachelle Omamo). This is indicative of the style in which the ministry tweets about meetings: "Foreign Affairs CS Amb Raychelle Omamo today met…" This is an official way to approach this and reads more like a press-release rather than a tweet. As a result, the focus is on the person and their position and title rather than on the content of the meetings. This indicates that there is little, if any, strategic use of the affordances of social media to further Kenya's foreign policy through digital diplomacy, and the country's efforts, more often than not, represent modern digital packaging of traditional diplomatic communication.

The only word in the top 10 that is content-related is 'ocean'. Indeed, the environment is one of Kenya's foreign policy pillars, and the ocean falls under this category. Kenya's foreign policy document underscores the country's commitment to the sustainable management of its environmental and natural resources. It also specifically states that: "As a country, we will also continue to contribute to sustainable management of the environment by confronting the impact of contemporary environmental challenges such as… ocean and air pollution" (Republic of Kenya, 2014: 6).

The same exercise was conducted for all tweets collected in April 2023 and classified under 'foreign affairs and policy'. The text of these tweets was inserted into the WordArt.com website and the following word cloud was generated.



Figure 6 Word cloud of Kenya's tweets in April 2023

Table 7 Kenya's tweets in April 2023: top 10 words

Rank	Word	Count
1	Kenya	33
2	CS	23
3	Dr Alfred Mutua	19
4	Presided	15
5	Foreign	14
6	Country	14
7	Peace	12
8	Enhance	10
9	Bilateral	10
10	Investment	10

In both 2022 and 2023, the most commonly used word was 'Kenya'. Cabinet Secretary Mutua was an active Twitter user, unlike his predecessor, his position was the second most commonly used, and his name was third. The style of tweets in 2023 remained exactly the same as in 2022, despite a new administration being in place, exemplified by the following: "In extending his gratitude to the host for the warm hospitality, CS Mutua…" Although the word 'Peace' features prominently, it is not in the context of Kenya's diplomatic efforts. Rather, it is about peace mediation training hosted by the MFA and about a committee meeting in which the cabinet secretary highlighted the importance Kenya places on how its foreign policy can help secure the country's peace and security architecture. The

word ‘investment’ features prominently in tweets about Kenya-US and Kenya-Spain relations. No other content or foreign policy-related words feature in the top 10.

Typology categorisation: April 2022 and April 2023

Tweets categorised as ‘digital diplomacy’ were then categorised further, in accordance with the typology presented earlier.

Table 8 Kenya’s digital diplomacy tweets in April 2022 (39 tweets)

		Approach	
Communication style		Tactical	Strategic
	One-way	**Broadcasting** 35 posts	**Branding** 2 posts
	Two-way	**Providing e-services** No posts	**Influencing** 2 posts

Table 9 Kenya’s digital diplomacy tweets in April 2023 (16 tweets)

		Approach	
Communication style		Tactical	Strategic
	One-way	**Broadcasting** 13 posts	**Branding** No posts
	Two-way	**Providing e-services** 1 post	**Influencing** 2 posts

Broadcasting

In 2022, the vast majority of Kenya’s digital diplomacy tweets, 27 out of 39 tweets, were about bilateral relations with other countries. Kenya is very active in this space, and these tweets presented information about the country’s officials meeting with their counterparts from Bangladesh, DRC, Ethiopia, Ireland, Jamaica, Japan, Malaysia, Mozambique, Netherlands, Oman, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Sweden and Ukraine. This is a very wide geographical reach, and included meetings with ambassadors from these countries in Nairobi, as well as trips abroad by Kenyan officials. This focus on

bilateral relations is also consistent with the former president Kenyatta's promise to continue to deepen relationships with other countries across the globe, which he made in his inaugural speech in 2014. Most of these tweets were categorised as 'broadcasting', as per the typology, since they usually contained the names of the officials from the two countries who met, as well as a few lines on what they discussed, accompanied by a few photographs. This was tactical, one-way communication on a digital platform, but nothing more.

Similarly, in April 2023, the vast majority of tweets were on Kenya's bilateral relations with other countries: 69% or nine out of 13 tweets in 2023 compared to 69% or 27 out of 39 tweets in 2022. In 2023, Kenya's MFA posted about meetings with representatives from Belarus, Rwanda, Thailand, Japan, Brazil, the US and Spain. This remained a wide geographical reach and included meetings in Nairobi, as well as abroad. Although there were improvements in the use of tags for people mentioned in the tweets, the content of the tweets meant that they were also classified as 'broadcasting'.
A few illustrative examples from April 2022 and April 2023 are discussed below.



Figure 7 Kenya's tweet 5 April 2022, Netherlands meeting

This tweet is about the meeting on 5 April 2022 between the cabinet secretary for foreign affairs and her Dutch counterpart, Liesje Schreinemacher. Although the Dutch minister was on Twitter, she was not tagged. As mentioned earlier, Kenya's cabinet secretary for foreign affairs is not on Twitter and therefore could not be tagged. Although the tweet outlined that discussions centred on agriculture and food security, these were not used as hashtags, and neither was something along the lines of

#KenyaNetherlandsCooperation. Because of this, the tweet communicates and broadcasts information in an old-fashioned manner. Kenya's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora informed its followers on social media about this meeting, the topics which were discussed at this meeting, and even included photographs. However, due to the lack of tags and hashtags, it would be difficult to describe this tweet as an example of digital diplomacy. Rather, it was using modern technologies for disseminating traditional diplomatic messaging. This is an example of one-way communication, rather than digital engagement.



Figure 8 Kenya's tweet April 20 2022, Ukraine meeting

Another example is a meeting of Kenya's principal secretary to the MFAs with the Ukrainian ambassador. Since the principal secretary was on Twitter, he was tagged, as was Ukraine's Embassy to Kenya. Once again, no hashtags were used. More interesting was the fact that the information about the tweeting is so scant, merely saying that the two officials "discussed bilateral issues of mutual benefit to Kenya and Ukraine". The meeting took place on 20 April, less than two months after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. At the time this was the most prominent topic on the news and in international affairs. Yet the tweet did not mention Kenya's support for Ukraine or even mention the war. Kenya's voting in the UN General Assembly was consistent in supporting Ukraine. Prior to this meeting, Kenya voted in favour of Resolution ES-11/1 on 2 March 2022 (which deplored Russia's invasion of Ukraine and demanded a full withdrawal of Russian forces) and Resolution ES11/2 on 22 March 2022 (which reiterated the demand that Russia withdraw its troops from Ukraine and condemned attacks

on the civilian population and infrastructure). Kenya's ambassador to the UN, Martin Kimani, also delivered a strong speech at a 22 February Security Council meeting (just prior to the invasion), in which he compared Ukraine's plight to the colonial legacy in Africa and reaffirmed Kenya's respect for the territorial integrity of Ukraine (Chappell, 2022). However, none of this was mentioned in the MFA's tweet, which was a bland description of a meeting which took place in this context. Kenya's support for Ukraine was strong in international forums, but this did not translate into its digital diplomacy, even though the opportunity was there, given the meeting with the Ukrainian ambassador.

In 2022, Kenya's regional focus was also evident, with 'EAC' (East African Community) featuring none of the time during the month of April. The EAC is a regional intergovernmental organisation that works on deepening economic, political, social and cultural ties and integration in East Africa. As discussed in Chapter 1, Kenya's enhanced cooperation with the EAC was one of the foreign policy priorities outlined in Kenyatta's inauguration speech in 2014. Furthermore, the EAC features prominently in Kenya's 2014 foreign policy document, under the headline 'Regional integration'. Regional integration is one of the cornerstones of Kenya's foreign policy because it promotes regional stability and increases trade. The EAC is the first organisation listed under this heading (Republic of Kenya, 2014: 29). The document adds that "Kenya will continue to strengthen ties with the EAC countries" (Republic of Kenya, 2014: 30).

In April 2022, Kenya hosted the signing ceremony by which the DRC acceded to the EAC. While Kenya's MFA did well to communicate this on its Twitter account, it did miss an opportunity for effective digital diplomacy, as can be seen in the tweet below.



Figure 9 Kenya's tweet 8 April 2022, President Museveni part 1



Figure 10 Kenya's tweet 8 April 2022, President Museveni part 2

On 8 April 2022, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni arrived in Kenya on a state visit to attend a ceremony in which the DRC would join the EAC. This was a significant regional diplomatic event and

hosting it highlighted Kenya's status as an important regional player. However, Kenya's MFA missed an opportunity for digital diplomatic engagement, merely communicating or broadcasting information about this. Museveni had 2.9 million followers on Twitter, yet he was not tagged. Had he been tagged, he could have retweeted this post, further widening the reach of the tweet, or even responded, for example thanking his Kenyan hosts for their hospitality. The opportunity for further dissemination through networking and engagement was therefore lost. It is also surprising that the only hashtag in this tweet is #JKIA, which is Jomo Kenyatta International Airport. In terms of foreign affairs, hashtags such as #EAC, #regionalcooperation, or #KenyaUganda could have been used. Rwanda's President Paul Kagame similarly attended the signing ceremony and was mentioned in tweets and photographs. He too had 2.9 million followers, but was not tagged in these tweets, as can be seen above. Similarly, no hashtags were used.



Figure 11 Kenya's tweet April 4 2023, Rwanda meeting

The tweet above is representative of Kenya's reporting on bilateral diplomacy through Twitter in April 2023. It contains photographs and tags of relevant diplomats, and states what the meeting was about. It is similar to the MFA's efforts in April 2022. The key difference is, as noted earlier, a much more extensive use of tags for people who are mentioned in the tweet. The content of the tweet still allows it to be categorised as 'broadcasting' as it does not provide any information about what was discussed at the meeting and attempts to reinforce key messages through digital diplomacy.



Figure 12 Kenya's tweet 25 April 2023, US meeting part 1



Figure 13 Kenya's tweet 25 April 2023, US meeting part 2



Figure 14 Kenya's tweet 25 April 2023, US meeting part 3



Figure 15 Kenya's tweet 25 April 2023, US meeting part 4



Figure 16 Kenya's tweet 25 April 2023, US meeting part 5



Figure 17 Kenya's tweet 25 April 2023, US meeting part 6



Figure 18 Kenya's tweet 25 April 2023, US meeting part 7



Figure 19 Kenya's tweet 25 April 2023, US meeting part 8

The above thread, posted in April 2023, is also illustrative. It features eight tweets on Mutua's visit to the US and meeting with his counterpart, US Secretary of State Blinken. It reads like a media release and is therefore more representative of new packaging for traditional one-way diplomatic broadcasting rather than conducting digital diplomacy. The tweets do tag both ministers of foreign affairs as well as presidents of the two countries, but that's as far as the digital component goes. There are no hashtags, such as #KenyaUS, to try to get the topic trending and encourage discussion on the relationship between the two countries. The thread starts by providing information that is vague and formulaic, mentioning the existing cooperation, trust and friendship between the two countries. In other words, these are the type of exchanges that take place at any meeting between diplomatic representatives of any given two countries. Pertinent information about outcomes of this meeting only starts to emerge from the fourth tweet in this thread, which states a commitment to increase two-way trade between the two countries. Perhaps an opportunity was lost here to provide some context about the current levels of trade between Kenya and US, as well as the products they import from each other. Similarly, information on a concrete agreement about a five-year security

cooperation agreement to help Kenya combat violent extremist organisations is only mentioned in tweets six and seven.

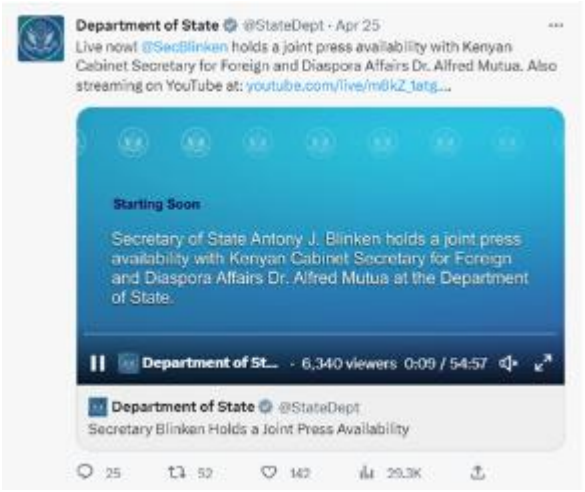


Figure 20 US's tweet 25 April 2023, Kenya meeting part 1



Figure 21 US's tweet 25 April 2023, Kenya meeting part 2

In contrast, when the US State Department Twitter account covered the meeting, it posted a video of the press conference and then only highlighted one key message: suspension of the US embassy in Sudan, a country neighbouring Kenya, in which an armed conflict erupted in April 2023. In the second tweet, the US also used an opportunity to highlight its soft power by emphasising it would work with regional and international partners to bring about an end to the conflict. Kenya's MFA did not address the conflict in its tweets, although it could have also utilised soft power to highlight its efforts to bring about peace to its neighbouring country in its role as a regional leader. In fact, throughout April 2023, Kenya's MFA mentioned the conflict in Sudan in only three tweets (all part of the same thread), in which it highlighted its evacuation efforts of Kenyan nationals. To be fair to Kenya's diplomatic efforts, it did in fact make an effort to cease hostilities in Sudan, through President Ruto's offer to mediate (The East African, 2023). Both President Ruto and Secretary Mutua tweeted about the conflict in Sudan, with the former stating his readiness to contribute to the resolution of the crisis and

highlighting discussions with regional and international leaders (such as UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres) (Twitter, 2023), and the latter calling for a peaceful resolution and providing information to Kenyans who need to be evacuated. Yet one would have expected an effort from all diplomatic actors in Kenya in this regard, and the MFA in particular, as the institution that is responsible for communicating the country's foreign policy stance. Also, while the MFA did retweet Secretary Mutua's statement, for some reason it did not retweet the president's posts, thereby forgoing an opportunity to amplify his messages through digital networking on Twitter.

Providing e-services



Figure 22 Kenya's tweet 19 April 2023, e-services

There were no tweets about 'provision of e-services' in April 2022. In 2023, a war erupted in Sudan on 15 April that had implications for Kenya's citizens living in that country. Kenya's MFA is actually the Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs and therefore the bulk of the tweeting about whom Kenyans stranded in Sudan should contact and information about evacuation efforts was posted by the account of the State Department for Diaspora Affairs. The account of the State Department for Foreign Affairs duly retweeted these. The only tweet posted by the MFA that was directly related to e-services or consular assistance is presented above. It provides emergency numbers, both in Sudan and in Kenya, which Kenyans in Sudan should use to register for evacuation. Kenya's MFA however did not use

Twitter to engage with citizens stranded in Sudan, provide them with information or assist in their evacuation efforts. This suggests misalignment between the MFA state departments, as well as a lack of a coherent crisis communication strategy.

Branding



Figure 23 Kenya's tweet 29 April 2023, branding

The above tweet is an example of a branding exercise done by the MFA in April 2023. It promotes Konza Technopolis, which is being developed as "a world-class technology hub and a major economic driver for the nation" (Konza Technopolis: no date) and is a flagship project of Kenya's Vision 2030 developmental blueprint (Kenya Vision 2030: no date). It is also consistent with promoting Kenya as a hub for technology and innovation in Africa. Once again, however, the messaging is let down by a lack of hashtags and tags, as well as more information on the Technopolis. No branding tweets were posted in April 2023.

Influencing



Figure 24 Kenya's tweet 22 April 2022, influencing

There were two tweets categorised as 'influencing' in April 2022, both designed to promote the 2022 UN Oceans Conference. The tweet above uses two strong statements that are consistent with Kenya's foreign policy on the environmental theme: "Climate change is devastating the Ocean" and "The Ocean is our greatest ally in stabilising the earth's climate". It then uses a hashtag, #SaveOurOceans, and tags Kenya's Ministry of Environment and Forestry, as well as two UN bodies: UN Environment Programme and UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. It furthermore includes a visual – an infographic in Swahili. This post was made during a time period when Kenya and Sweden were co-hosting the Stockholm+50 international meeting, which focused on environmental action to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. This further underlines its strategic intent, as it helps to further the broader agenda through its messaging. The only criticism which could be labelled is that it does not include the date of the conference and provide further information to those interested, for instance, a website with more information. Nonetheless, it effectively uses digital diplomacy to promote Kenya's foreign policy objectives, hence its categorisation as 'influencing'.



Figure 25 Kenya's tweet 12 April 2023, Japan meeting part 1



Figure 26 Kenya's tweet 12 April 2023, Japan meeting part 2



Figure 27 Kenya's tweet 12 April 2023, Japan meeting part 3



Figure 28 Kenya's tweet 12 April 2023, Japan meeting part 4



Figure 29 Kenya's tweet 12 April 2023, Japan meeting part 5

The above thread is an example of a post categorised as 'influencing' in April 2023. The series of five tweets is about a meeting between Cabinet Secretary Mutua and the ambassador of Japan. Although the thread contains photographs of the two diplomats in action, as well as tags and one hashtag, there is relatively little informative content about the relations between the two countries, and most of it is buried towards the end of the thread, which most people will not see unless they click to unravel it. The first two tweets are about who met whom. The third tweet provides some information on areas of discussion, but the listing of "matters of trade & investment, infrastructural development, academia, as well as increased collaborations on matters of regional peace & security" is overly broad, generic and unlikely to be of interest to the majority of Twitter users. The content due to which this message was categorised as influencing comes at the end, in the last two tweets, that refer to the cabinet secretary noting Japan's current roles in high-profile global bodies, namely presidency of the G7 and membership of the UN Security Council, and appealing to Japan to intervene in matters of importance to the Global South, of which Kenya is part. This appeal is consistent with Kenya's leadership ambitions, which were discussed earlier in Chapter 1. However, this tweet also represents a missed opportunity in this regard, as it does not specify what these "matters of importance" are. It could have been used as a starting point for a digital advocacy campaign on one of the issues discussed, for instance. The final, fifth tweet in the thread is also a much stronger example of strategic digital diplomacy. In it, the cabinet secretary goes on record to seek Japan's support for the Africa Climate Summit, to be presided over by Kenya's president, William Ruto. This is digital diplomacy in action, using modern communications platforms to seek support for policies and actions from foreign leaders and publics. Furthermore, it demonstrates Kenya's focus on climate change as a foreign policy issue. Unfortunately, because this tweet was buried under the first four, fewer people saw it than the

first one, as indicated by the number of views (7,370 for the first one compared to 1,260 for the fifth one).

Social network analysis: Case study of Kenya

What follows is an examination of topics and actors retweeted by Kenya's MFA in April 2022 and April 2023. This section examines the networking aspects of Kenya's digital diplomacy. As stated in Chapter 2, according to social network theory, through the affordances of social media, an ever-more networked world has emerged in which state and non-state actors are able to use social media to shape foreign policy.

Thematic analysis was applied to retweets to firstly identify broad categories under which they fall, such as foreign affairs and policy, and condolences messages. An additional level of analysis was then carried out to further categorise retweets into specific themes, such as regional diplomacy and sustainable development. During both levels of analysis, themes and sub-themes emerged naturally, either as patterns (where a common theme was identified in multiple posts) or as outliers (as single instances of a post on a specific theme/topic). In terms of the approach used to identify types of actors retweeted by Kenya's MFA, the following actor types emerged naturally: Kenyan state actor, Kenyan not-state-actor, international state actor, and international non-state actor. The second level of analysis sought to further categorise these actors, for instance Kenyan Embassy or Kenyan media. Sub-categories emerged naturally, either as patterns (where the same account was retweeted) or as outliers (where an account was only retweeted once).

April 2022

Table 10 Kenya's retweets in April 2022: Broad themes

Broad themes	**Number of retweets**	**Percentage**
Foreign affairs and policy	39	58%
Condolences	27	40%
Internal diplomatic affairs	1	1%

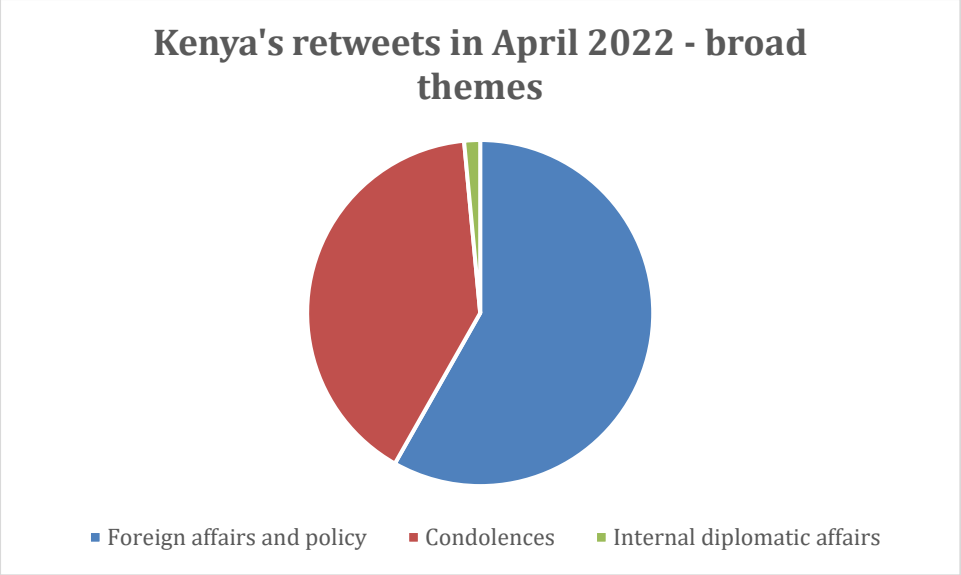


Figure 30 Kenya's retweets in April 2022: Broad themes

As already mentioned, in April 2022 Kenya's MFA did not often tag foreign officials, or even its own, in tweets. There were also no replies to other users' tweets and, as discussed earlier, there was only one instance of a quoted tweet. This shows that the MFA is not engaging with its followers or other digital diplomacy actors. The MFA did, however, retweet numerous tweets sent by others. There were a total of 67 retweets between 1 and 30 April 2022, and their thematic breakdown shows consistency with what the ministry tweeted about at that time. The vast majority, 58%, were broadly on the topic of foreign affairs and policy, while 40% were retweets of messages of condolence about the death of its former president, Mwai Kibaki.

Table 11 Kenya's retweets in April 2022: Specific themes

Specific theme	**Number of retweets**	**Percentage**
Bilateral diplomacy	16	41%
Regional diplomacy	8	21%
Sustainable development	8	21%
Climate change	3	8%
African development	2	5%
Trade and Investment	1	3%
Multilateral diplomacy	1	3%

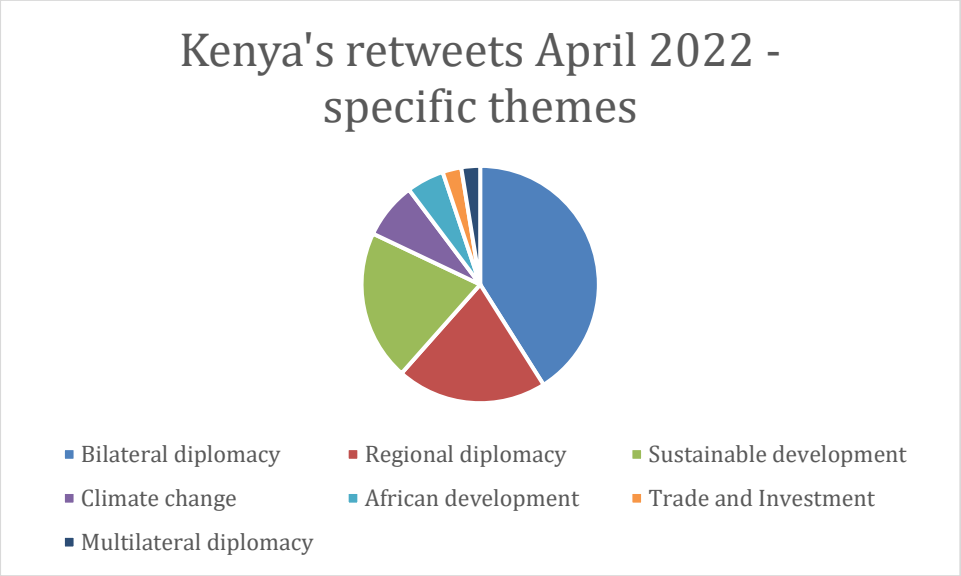


Figure 31 Kenya's retweets in April 2022: Specific themes

Tweets classified under 'foreign affairs and policy' were then further unpacked into sub-categories. The table above shows the results. At this level of analysis, there were once again similarities between the thematic content of the tweets posted by the MFA and their retweets. In both instances, the majority were about bilateral relations, followed by content about regional diplomacy. Bilateral diplomacy represented 69% of tweets and 41% of retweets. This was followed by regional diplomacy, with 10% of tweets and 21% of retweets. Climate change was the fourth most tweeted and retweeted topic, although the numbers were not overly significant, with 5% of tweets and 8% of retweets. However, it is still indicative of the broad trends and consistent with Kenya's foreign policy focus on the environment.

The following table classifies retweets into four categories: international state actor, international non-state actor, Kenyan state actor, and Kenyan non-state actor.

Table 12 Kenya's retweets April 2022: Broad actors

Broad actor	**Number of retweets**	**Percentage**
International state actor	2	5
International non-state actor	11	28%
Kenyan state actor	24	61%

Kenyan non-state actor	2	5%

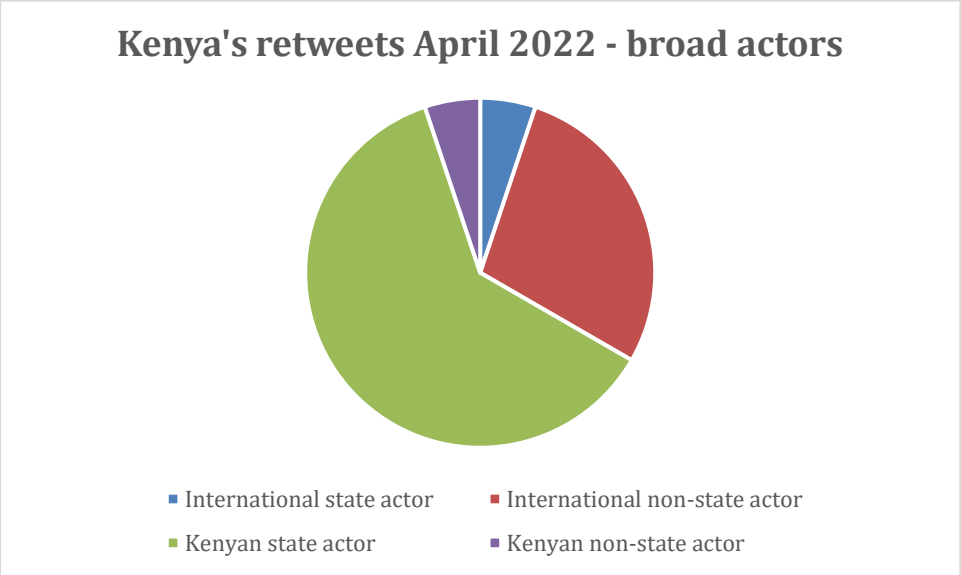


Figure 32 Kenya's retweets April 2022: Broad actors

Table 13 Kenya's retweets April 2022: Specific actors

Specific actor	**Number of retweets**	**Percentage**
StockholmPlus50	8	20%
Fijian diplomat	2	5%
Africities	1	3%
EAC official	1	3%
Global Goals UN	1	3%
State House Kenya	13	33%
Other Kenyan Ministry	4	10%
Kenyan embassy	4	10%
Kenyan non-MFA official	3	8%
Kenyan media	2	5%

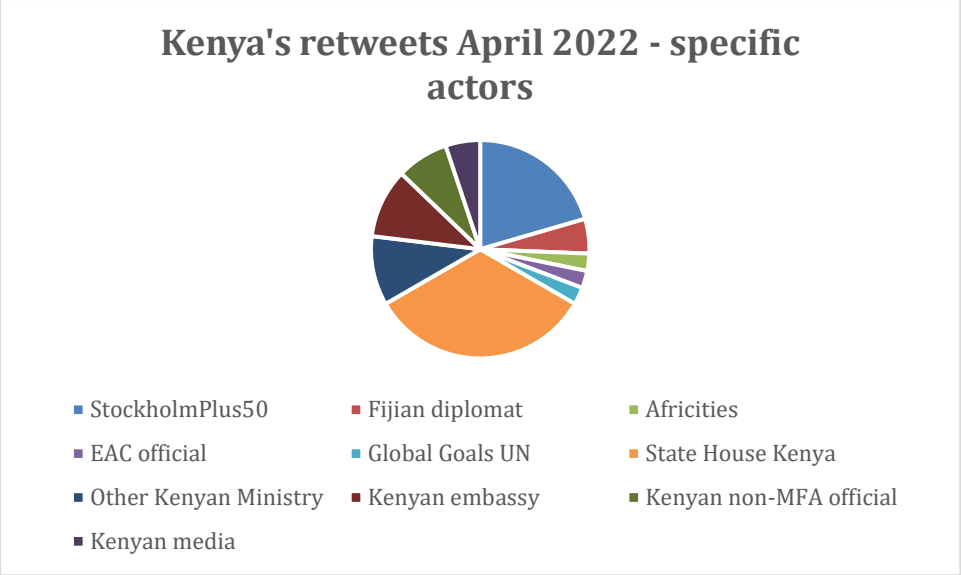


Figure 33 Kenya's retweets April 2022: Specific actors

The tables above show the number of retweets posted by state and non-state, both international and Kenyan actors, that the MFA chose to retweet in April 2022.

Domestically, Kenya's MFA focused on the official account of the Presidency, @StateHouseKenya. As discussed earlier in Chapter 1, the president Uhuru Kenyatta, once an avid Twitter user, was no longer active on the platform by the time the data collection was done. One-third of the MFA's retweets on the topic of foreign affairs and policy were from the Presidency's account. This shows support, cooperation and synergy in this realm. However, the fact that there were mere retweets, rather than quoted tweets, also indicates that there is further work to be done to achieve synergies in messaging.

Internationally, the vast majority of retweets were from the handle of Stockholm+50, a global event focused on the environment which was being jointly organised by Kenya and Sweden. Given the magnitude of this event and the diplomatic prestige associated with being a co-host, it is no wonder that this was an account the MFA retweeted eight times, which represented 20% of all tweets by international actors retweeted.



Figure 34 Kenya's retweet 13 April 2022, Saudi Arabia meeting

For instance, in this tweet, @StateHouseKenya actually tagged the MFA. Rather than merely retweeting, the Ministry could have quoted the tweet and provided information on areas of cooperation between Kenya and Saudi Arabia, provided background to the visit, or outlined the next steps after this meeting.



Figure 35 Kenya's retweet 8 April 2022, EAC meeting

Given the earlier criticism of Kenya's MFA not tagging officials in its posts, it is also worth using the example of this tweet by @StateHouseKenya, which tagged both presidents of Uganda and Rwanda who undertook trips to Nairobi. The fact that the presidency's account does this, but the ministry's account does not, shows a lack of a broader digital diplomacy strategy at the state level, which results in a lack of consistency (perhaps due to the absence of official guidelines and procedures) or inadequate training of officials who are responsible for posting social media content.

April 2023

Table 14 Kenya's retweets April 2023: Broad themes

Broad theme	Number of tweets	Percentage of tweets
Foreign affairs and policy	72	64%
Consular services	12	11%
Diaspora	6	5%
Diaspora affairs	5	4%
Happy Ramadan	3	3%
Converter station trip	3	3%
Condolences	2	2%
Committee meeting	2	2%
Tree planting day	1	>1%
Wellness Day	1	>1%
Repatriation of illicit funds	1	>1%
Space Bill	1	>1%
Event with former CS	1	>1%
Environment	1	>1%
Boston Marathon	1	>1%
Digitisation of services	1	>1%

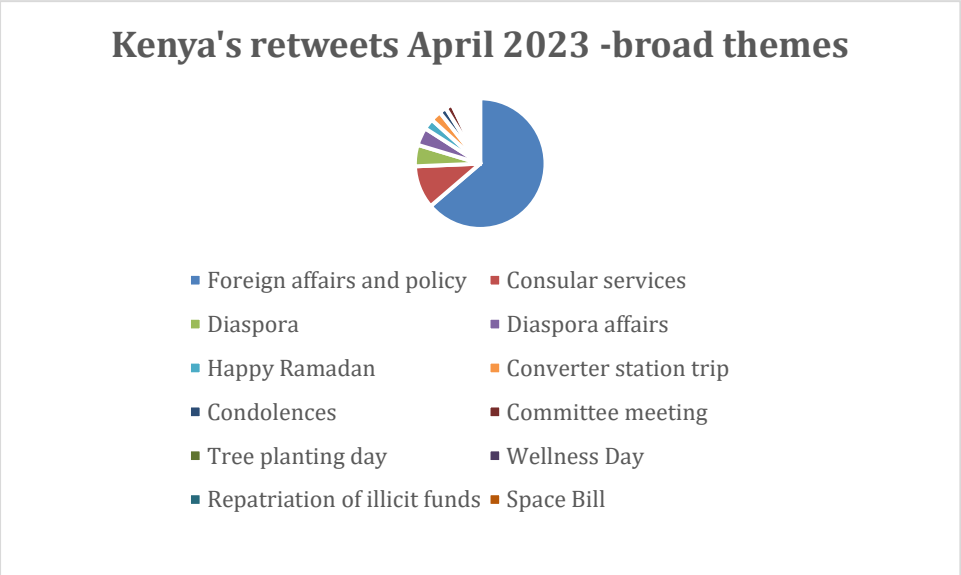


Figure 36 Kenya's retweets April 2023: Broad themes

Table 15 Kenya's retweets April 2023: Specific themes

Specific theme	Number of retweets	Percentage of retweets
Bilateral diplomacy	27	38%
Climate Change	7	10%

Situation in Sudan	7	10%
Regional diplomacy	5	7%
Cultural diplomacy	4	6%
Foreign investment	4	6%
Kenyan Foreign Policy	4	6%
Children's rights	3	4%
Development	3	4%
Multilateral diplomacy	3	4%
International vaccine treaty	2	3%
Communications	1	1%
Foreign policy	1	1%
Mo Ibrahim	1	1%

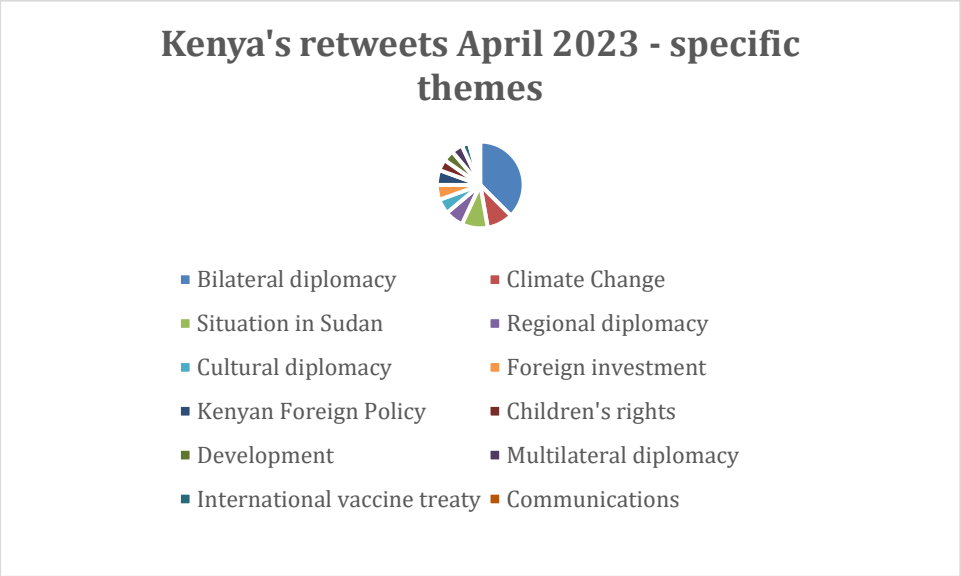


Figure 37 Kenya's retweets April 2023: Specific themes

Kenya's MFA retweeted significantly more tweets than it posted its own original content. There were 112 retweets, compared to 20 tweets (albeit, as discussed above, many were multi-tweet threads). This was almost double what the MFA retweeted in April 2022, which was a total of 67 retweets. In both years, the majority of tweets were on foreign affairs and policy: 39 retweets or 58% in 2022 and 72 retweets or 64% in 2023. The second-most prominent category in 2023 was on the topic of consular services, due to retweeting of Kenya's State Department on Diaspora Affairs following the evacuation efforts of Kenyan nationals from Sudan. Kenya's MFA is actually the Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs, and therefore, the bulk of the tweeting about whom Kenyans stranded in Sudan should contact and information about evacuation efforts was posted by the account of the State Department for Diaspora Affairs.

Going down one level into sub-categories in terms of the 72 retweets on foreign affairs and policy, the majority were on 'bilateral diplomacy', similar to the year before. In April 2022, 16 or 41% of retweets

were on 'bilateral diplomacy', and in April 2023, there were 27 or 31% of retweets on this topic. This shows that Kenya, under both previous and current administrations, places a high emphasis on bilateral relations with other countries. The account of the State Department for Foreign Affairs duly retweeted these. There were two themes that shared the rank of being the third most popular: 'Climate Change' and 'Situation in Sudan'. The former received more retweets than the year before, seven compared to eight, and was consistent with Kenya's foreign policy focus on the environment. The latter theme was, as mentioned earlier, covered by the cabinet secretary, which the MFA account retweeted on seven occasions.

Table 16 Kenya's retweets April 2023: Broad actors

Broad actors	**Number of retweets**	**Percentage of retweets**
International state actor	2	2%
International non-state actor	4	4%
Kenyan state actor	101	90%
Kenyan non-state actor	5	4%

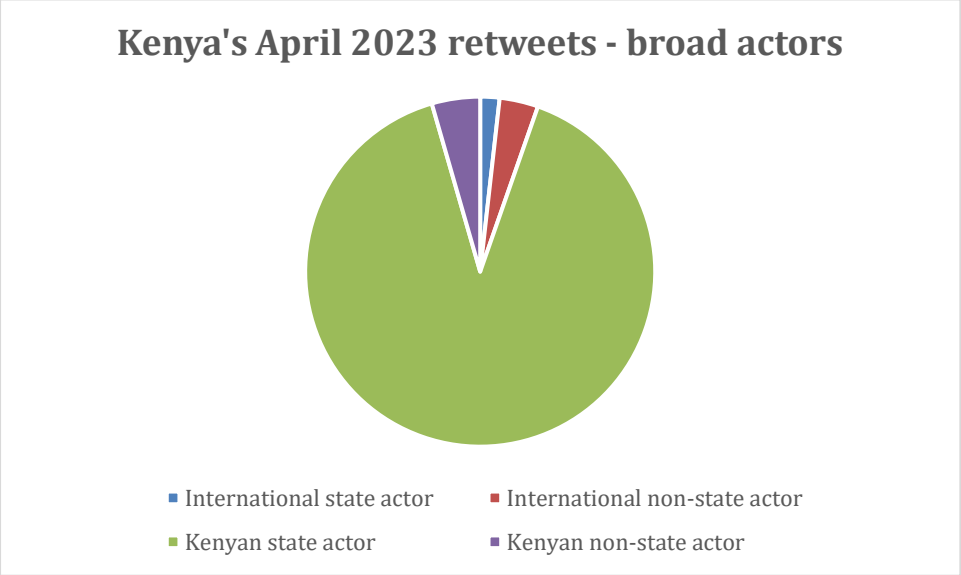


Figure 38 Kenya's retweets April 2023: Broad actors

Table 17 Kenya's retweets April 2023: Specific actors

Specific actor	Number of retweets	Percentage of retweets
Belarus MFA	2	2%
EAC	1	1%
IOM	1	1%
UNOOSA	1	1%
International vaccine institute	1	1%
Kenya's Cabinet Secretary	40	36%
Kenya's Principal Secretaries	35	31%
Diaspora Affairs Dept	5	4%
State House Kenya (Presidency)	5	4%
State Department for Diaspora Affairs	4	4%
Kenya's President	2	2%
Kenya Consulate Los Angeles	2	2%
Kenyan infrastructure agency	2	2%
Banking group	1	1%
Communications consultancy	1	1%
Kenya's Embassy in in Djibouti	1	1%
Kenya Revenue Authority	1	1%
Kenyan Electricity company	1	1%
Kenya's Embassy in Beijing	1	1%
Kenyan media	1	1%
Kenyan MP	1	1%
Population agency	1	1%
Tourism Cabinet Secretary	1	1%
A youth leader	1	1%

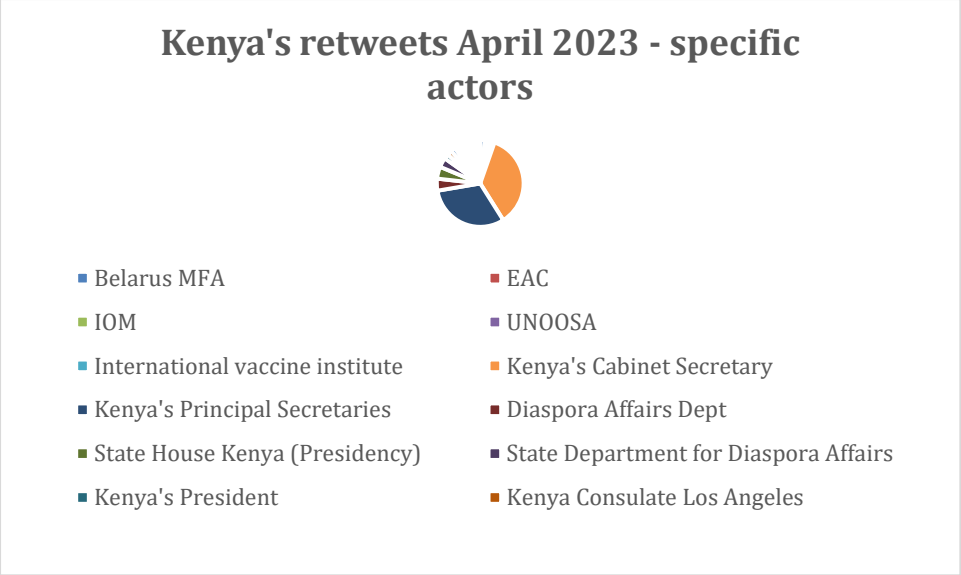


Figure 39 Kenya's retweets April 2023: Specific actors

In terms of the networking aspect in April 2023, there was a clear effort to amplify other Kenyan voices, specifically Kenyan state actors. Out of a total of 112 retweets, 106 were retweets of diplomats, officials, government departments and other actors. Only six were retweets of international actors. The cabinet secretary for foreign affairs was most frequently retweeted, 40 times or 36%, closely followed by his deputies: the principal secretaries on foreign and diaspora affairs, who were retweeted 35 times or 31%. Therefore, a clear attempt to amplify the voices and strengthen the messaging within the Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs could be observed. For the rest, though, the approach could best be described as a scattergun approach, given the lack of any observable system in retweeting other actors. Even Kenya's president was only retweeted twice, although the State House account (the Presidency) fared better, being retweeted five times. There was also no engagement from the MFA or responses to any of the replies to its tweets.

Data interpretation: Case study of Kenya

Analysis of the tweets posted by Kenya's MFA between 1 and 30 April 2022 suggests that its focus was primarily on using social media as a vehicle for traditional diplomatic messaging, statements and press-releases. 35 out of 39 tweets were categorised as 'broadcasting', two as 'branding' and a further two as 'influencing'. Although the style of messaging changed a year later, with more tags and long threads utilised, the content remained similar, as 13 out of 16 tweets were categorised as 'broadcasting', one as 'e-services provision', and two more as 'influencing'. Therefore, it is evident that, for the most part, Kenya's digital diplomacy is 'broadcasting', and can be described as one-way and tactical, rather than two-way and strategic.

Apart from categorisation of the MFA's tweets in accordance with the typology, it is also useful to examine engagement and networking aspects of its digital diplomacy in April 2022 and April 2023. In neither period under review were there replies to other users' tweets, and there was only one instance of a quoted tweet. This shows that the MFA is not engaging with its followers or other digital diplomacy actors. During both periods the MFA did, however, retweet numerous tweets sent by others.

There was a total of 67 retweets between 1 and 30 April 2022, and their thematic breakdown shows consistency with what the ministry tweeted about at that time. The vast majority, 58%, were categorised as 'digital diplomacy' retweets due to their focus on matters of foreign affairs and policy, while 40% were retweets of messages of condolence about Kibaki's death. In terms of specific accounts, in April 2022, Kenya's MFA focused on the official account of the Presidency, @StateHouseKenya. Half of the MFA's retweets on the topic of foreign affairs and policy were from the Presidency's account. This shows support, cooperation and synergy in this realm. However, the fact that these were mere retweets rather than quoted tweets also means that there is further work to be done. Internationally, the vast majority of retweets were from the handle of Stockholm+50, a global event focused on the environment, which was being jointly organised by Kenya and Sweden. Given the magnitude of this event and the diplomatic prestige associated with being a co-host, it is no wonder that this was an account the MFA retweeted 8 times, which represented 62% of all tweets by international actors it retweeted.

In April 2023, Kenya's MFA retweeted significantly more tweets than it posted its own original content. There were 113 retweets, compared to 20 tweets (albeit, as discussed above, many were multi-tweet threads). This was also almost more than the MFA retweeted in April 2022 (as mentioned above, 67 retweets). In 2023, there was a clear effort to amplify other Kenyan voices from a networking perspective. Out of a total of 112 retweets, 106 were retweets of diplomats, officials, government departments and other actors. Only six were retweets of international actors. The cabinet secretary for foreign affairs was most frequently retweeted, 40 times or 36%, closely followed by his deputies: the principal secretaries on foreign and diaspora affairs, who were retweeted 35 times or 31%. By comparison, the other retweets were not systematic. Even Kenya's president was only retweeted twice, although the State House account (Presidency) fared better, being retweeted five times. A prominent category of retweets in 2023 was 'provision of e-services' or consular diplomacy, due to retweeting of Kenya's State Department on Diaspora Affairs after evacuation efforts of Kenyan nationals from Sudan. As noted earlier, there was only one such original tweet that was posted by the MFA's account. However, the MFA also duly retweeted 12 tweets on this topic from the diaspora

affairs and Kenya's principal secretary responsible for diaspora affairs. This demonstrates interdepartmental collaboration and amplifying messages through digital networks.

Australia data analysis

In this section, Australia is used as a case study to conduct thematic analysis of how a middle power in the international system uses social media for digital diplomacy. The main aim is to determine whether Australia's MFA utilises the affordances of social media to promote its foreign policy. To accomplish this aim, this section examines Australia's digital diplomacy practices by conducting a thematic analysis of all tweets and retweets posted from the official account of Australia's DFAT, @dfat, for two time periods: 1 to 30 April 2022, when the Coalition (consisting of the Liberal Party of Australia and the National Party of Australia) were in power and 1 to 30 April 2023, when the Labor Party was the governing party after winning the May 2022 election. This section follows an almost identical structure to the previous case study of Kenya. As in the previous section, Twitter (now X) was chosen for analysis as it has become the de facto platform of choice for digital diplomacy. Using Twitter (X) for this case study will also facilitate comparison with Kenya and the US later in this study. Social media posts made during the two time periods (April 2022 and April 2023) are analysed and categorised in terms of content, use of audiovisuals, engagement and networking. The typology presented in Chapter 3 is used to categorise all the tweets and thereby determine how Australia practises its digital diplomacy. As in the previous section, social network theory is additionally used to determine the extent to which Australia's DFAT utilises the networking opportunities of social media to further promote its messages and foreign policy objectives, through engaging with others. Examples of tweets and retweets are used for illustrative purposes. Where relevant, this section also refers back to Australia's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper to see if the MFA uses digital diplomacy to accomplish its stated objectives.

Australia's digital diplomacy metrics: April 2022 and April 2023

In accordance with the three types of methods for studying digital diplomacy discussed earlier in Chapter 4, data from April 2022 and April 202s were first analysed quantitatively, in terms of the overall number of posts during the collection period, average posts per day, most popular post during the collection period and least popular post, as well as the average number of likes and reposts, and whether the posts contained audiovisual material. Secondly, thematic analysis was applied to classify the posts as being related to digital diplomacy or other matters, such as the federal election. An additional level of analysis then took place to further categorise into themes such as bilateral relations, trade or voting overseas. These themes emerged naturally during the data analysis, either as patterns

(where a common theme was identified in multiple posts) or as outliers (as single instances of a post on a specific theme/topic).

Table 18 Australia's tweets April 2022: Broad themes

Broad theme	Number of tweets	Percentage of tweets
Digital diplomacy	15	75%
Anzac Day	2	10%
Federal election	1	5%
Happy Easter	1	5%
Ramadan	1	5%

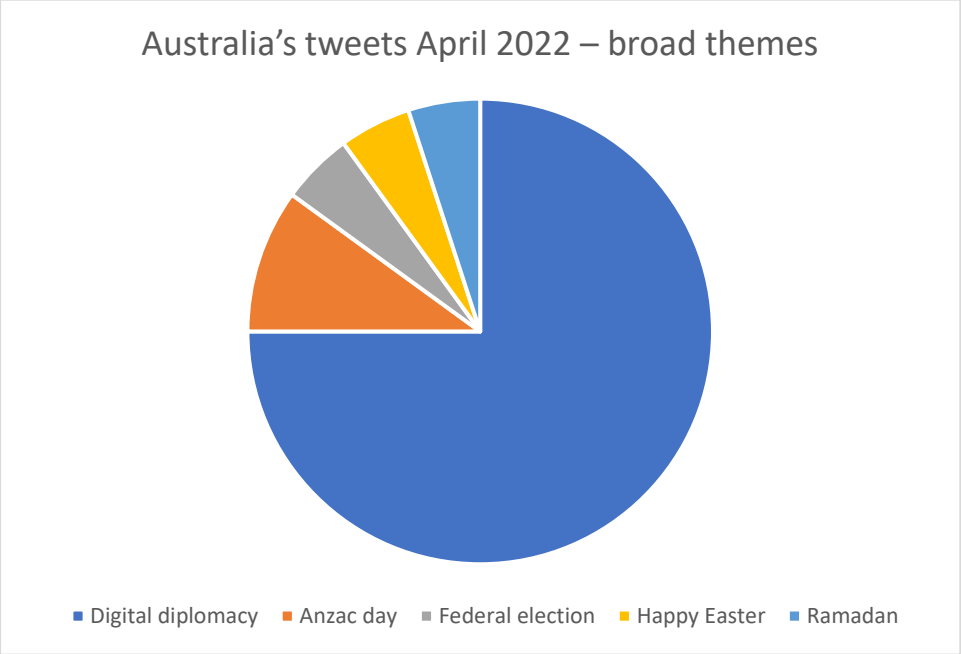


Figure 40 Australia's tweets April 2022: Broad themes

Table 19 Australia's tweets April 2023: Broad themes

Broad theme	Number of tweets	Percentage of tweets
Digital diplomacy	13	65%
First Nations	2	10%
Happy Ramadan	1	5%
World Health Day	1	5%

Young Australians in International Affairs	1	5%
Anzac Day	1	5%
Happy Easter	1	5%

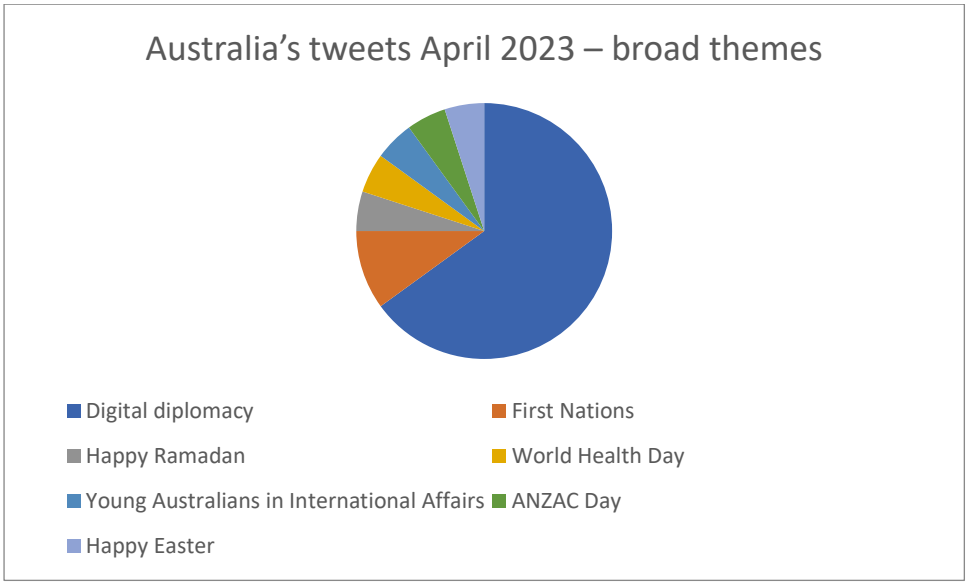


Figure 41 Australia's tweets April 2023: Broad themes

During both periods under review, the vast majority of Australia DFAT's tweets were classified as digital diplomacy. In April 2022 there were 15 such tweets, or 75% of total tweets, while in April 2023 this number diminished slightly, to 13 tweets or 65% of the total. In both years there was a total of 20 tweets posted during the month, which is approximately 0.66 tweets per day. In both years, DFAT also wished its followers a Happy Easter and a Happy Ramadan and tweeted about Anzac Day (an important day of commemoration in Australia and New Zealand dedicated to those who served and died in wars, conflicts and peacekeeping operations), so there was consistency in what the social media team posted in both years. In April 2022, given that Australia's federal election was looming on 21 May, there was a notification that the Australian Government had begun to operate in caretaker mode pending the outcome of the vote. In April 2023, the remaining tweets covered a number of topics: First Nations Australians, World Health Day, and young Australians in international affairs.

In April 2022, two of the posts were threads, i.e. containing more than one tweet to include additional information. Over a quarter, or six out of 20 tweets, were quoted tweets. The ministry's social media team would take a tweet from someone else, quote it and provide additional information. This will be discussed later in further detail. Half of the tweets, or 10 out of 20, contained links to further information on DFAT's website. Just over half, 11 out of 20, tagged other Twitter users, and 13 out of

20 contained hashtags. DFAT's tweets attracted an average of 8.5 retweets and 17.9 likes per tweet. The most popular tweet was about Australia and India's trade ministers signing a Cooperation and Economic Trade Agreement between the two countries, attracting 23 retweets and 50 likes. On that note, DFAT incorporated visuals into most, but not all, of its tweets. 12 out of 20 tweets featured some sort of visual materials. In most instances, these were photographs, although there were cases (such as in the tweet above) where a picture or an infographic was used. Twitter provides an opportunity to use images or short videos, so the choice of photographs, pictures and infographics was an appropriate one. There were no videos in any of the posts made in April 2022, however.

In April 2023, three of the posts were threads, albeit not overly long ones. In all instances, threads consisted of two tweets, with the second tweet usually providing a website link for additional information. On average, DFAT's tweets in April 2023 gathered 9.3 retweets and 25.3 likes, which is slightly higher than in 2022 (8.5 and 17.9, respectively). In seven tweets, other users were tagged and two contained hashtags, which is lower (especially in terms of hashtags) than in the previous year (11 and 13, respectively). Only one tweet was a quoted tweet, compared to the year before, when more than a quarter of the tweets were quoted. The most popular tweet, by far, stated that Minister of Foreign Affairs Penny Wong had visited all 17 of Australia's Pacific Island Forum members. It also included a short video address from Minister Wong herself. It garnered 45 retweets and 196 likes, which is substantially more than the most popular tweet the year before. It is likely that the use of a video in the tweet helped to boost its popularity. 17 out of 20 tweets contained audiovisual material in April 2023, although the abovementioned tweet with Minister Wong was the only one that contained video. The rest were photographs, pictures and infographics. It is important to note that Minister Wong is an active Twitter/X user and her account (@SenatorWong) is used to communicate her diplomatic engagements and express Australia's position on international matters.

Table 20 Australia's tweets April 2022: Specific themes

Specific theme	**Number of tweets**	**Percentage of tweets**
Bilateral relations	9	60%
Trade	3	20%
Voting overseas	1	7%
Caretaker mode	1	7%
Regional relations	1	7%

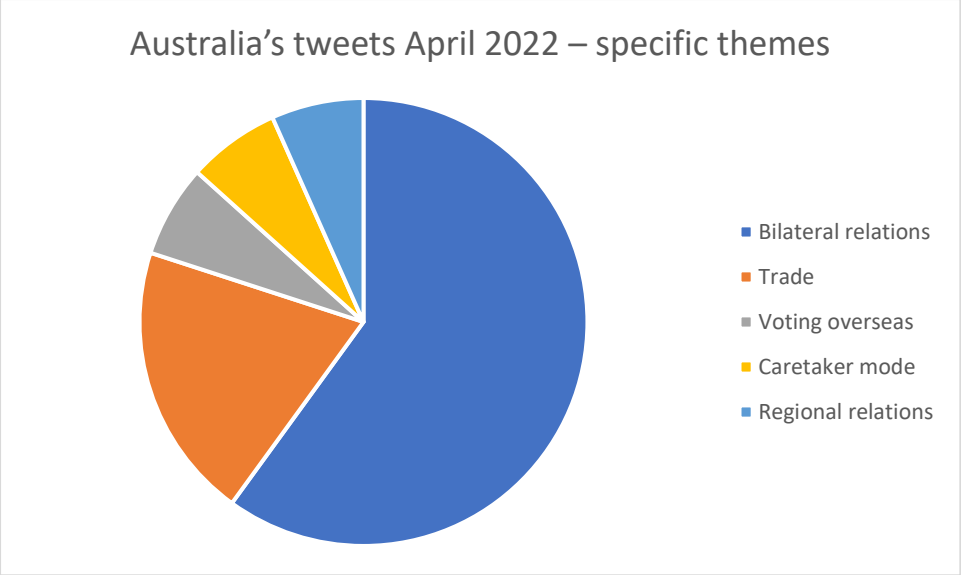


Figure 42 Australia's tweets April 2022: Specific themes

Table 21 Australia's tweets April 2023: Specific themes

Specific theme	**Number of tweets**	**Percentage of tweets**
Bilateral relations	5	38%
Consular diplomacy	3	23%
Regional diplomacy	2	15%
Climate change	1	8%
Multilateral diplomacy	1	8%

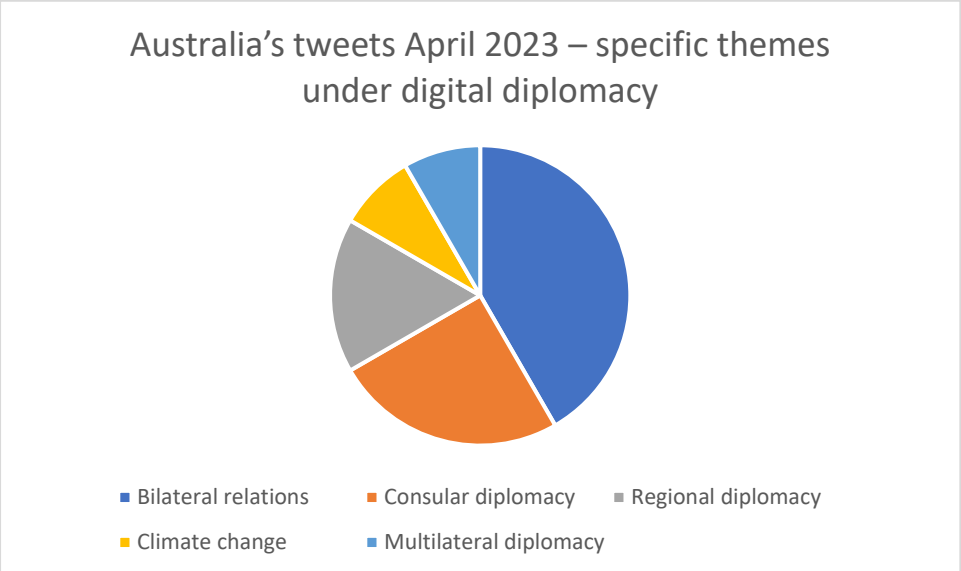


Figure 43 Australia's tweets April 2023: Specific themes

In April 2022, a further sub-categorisation of tweets labelled as digital diplomacy (13 tweets in total) showed that the majority, 9 out of 13 or 60%, were on Australia's bilateral relations with other countries. This included Hungary, India, Japan, the United Kingdom (UK), the US and Ukraine. This shows the importance placed on relationships with historically traditional partners, such as the UK and the US, as well as with countries in the region, such as India and Japan, with which Australia has been developing strong economic ties in the past few decades. The focus on India and Japan in these tweets is consistent with Australia's foreign policy and the importance it places on the Indo-Pacific region. Japan was mentioned 52 times in the 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper, and India was mentioned 70 times. The US, which is widely seen as Australia's main ally, was mentioned 74 times in the document. The tweet about Hungary was to commemorate 50 years since the two countries established diplomatic relations. The tweet about Ukraine was to indicate support for the country and its people as the Russian invasion continued. In April 2023, the trend was similar. Most tweets, five out of 13 or 38%, were on bilateral relations with other countries. In 2023, these countries were China, India, Peru, Singapore, and Uganda. As in the previous year, this is a wide geographical spread, but there is also a clear focus on the Indo-Pacific region, which is consistent with Australia's foreign policy. In terms of the countries mentioned in tweets classified under 'bilateral relations', Australia's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper mentioned China 112 times, India 70 times and Singapore 11 times. The second-most popular category was consular diplomacy. The DFAT tweeted three times, which represented 23% of the tweets, about the outbreak of the conflict in Sudan in April of that year.

Word cloud: Case study of Australia

To further determine whether Australia's foreign policy goals, which were discussed earlier in Chapter 1, were communicated and promoted through digital diplomacy in April 2022, the text of all tweets classified under 'digital diplomacy' was inserted into the WordArt.com website, and the following word cloud was generated.



Figure 44 Word cloud of Australia's tweets in April 2022

Table 22 Australia's tweets in April 2022: top 10 words

Rank	Word	Count
1	Australia	24
2	Trade	11
3	DFAT	9
4	Gov	6
5	Au	6
6	Strengthen	5
7	More	5
8	Support	5
9	India	5
10	Region	5

The word cloud and the table with the ranking of the words used most often are telling. The word 'Australia' was used the most by far – 24 times in 12 tweets, or twice in every tweet. This is not surprising, as one of DFAT's objectives is to market Australia, its foreign policy and soft power to the foreign publics as well as domestic ones. Mentioning Australia, on average, twice in every tweet means that the ministry is doing this successfully and is making sure to communicate what Australia is doing

and what it is committed to. The second most-used word is 'trade', used 11 times in 12 tweets or almost once in every tweet. Given that this is Australia's foreign affairs and trade ministry, this focus is also not surprising. Furthermore, as already discussed previously, international trade is a major aspect of the country's foreign policy, as per its White Paper. Two other words on the list – 'strengthen' and 'support' – are indicative of the DFAT's use of digital diplomacy to communicate about bilateral relations and project soft power. The word 'strengthen' was used in tweets about diplomatic relations between Australia-Japan, Australia-UK, Australia-Hungary, Australia-India, as well as in tweets about help for Sri Lanka. The word 'support' was in the context of how Australia provides assistance to Sri Lanka and Ukraine. Other noteworthy mentions include 'India' and 'region', both used five times. The former stresses the importance of the relationship with this partner, and the latter refers to the Indo-Pacific region, which, as discussed earlier in Chapter 1, is key for Australia's foreign policy focus. It is also worthwhile to mention that the words 'ties' and 'cooperation' were both mentioned four times. They indicate the importance that Australia places on collaboration and working with others, which are frequent themes in its Foreign Policy White Paper.

The same exercise was conducted for all tweets collected in April 2023 and classified under 'digital diplomacy'. The text of these tweets was inserted into the WordArt.com website, and the following word cloud was generated.



Figure 45 Word cloud of Australia's tweets in April 2023

Table 23 Australia's tweets in April 2023: top 10 words

Rank	Word	Count
1	Australia	13
2	DFAT	13
3	Australian	9
4	Sudan	7
5	First	6
6	Gov	6
7	Au	6
8	Foreign Minister	5
9	Climate	4
10	Pacific	4

In both 2022 and 2023, the most commonly used word was 'Australia', appearing 24 times and 13 times, respectively. The fact that it was used less in the same number of tweets could be explained by the fact that in 2023, the word 'Australian' was used nine times, which would mean the two similar words appeared 22 times in total (this is likely due to how the software is set up to process data). This means that under the new government, DFAT continued to tweet in a manner best described as Australia-centric. Interestingly, the word 'trade', which was the second-most commonly used in 2022, appearing 11 times, did not even make the top 10 a year later. The word 'Sudan' featured seven times, placing it in the fourth position, due to an emphasis on providing e-services – information to Australian citizens stranded in the conflict zone. The words 'Pacific' and 'climate' were each mentioned four times, rounding up the top 10. The importance of the Indo-Pacific to Australia was already discussed earlier in Chapter 1, and mention was also made of the country's foreign policy document discussing the importance of addressing climate change.

Typology categorisation: April 2022 and April 2023

Tweets categorised as 'digital diplomacy' were then categorised further, in accordance with the typology presented earlier in Chapter 3.

Table 24 Australia's digital diplomacy tweets in April 2022 (15 tweets)

Approach			
Communication style		Tactical	Strategic
	One-way	**Broadcasting** 3	**Branding** 2
	Two-way	**Providing e-services** 3	**Influencing** 7

Table 25 Australia's digital diplomacy tweets in April 2023 (13 tweets)

Approach			
Communication style		Tactical	Strategic
	One-way	**Broadcasting** 4	**Branding** 0
	Two-way	**Providing e-services** 3	**Influencing** 6

Broadcasting



Figure 46 Australia's tweet 3 April 2022, India trade agreement

This tweet from April 2022 was classified as 'broadcasting' because it certainly has all the necessary elements of digital diplomatic broadcasting and excellent broadcasting at that. All relevant information is communicated in a succinct manner, and the tweet fully utilises the affordances of social media and digital packaging to deliver the message. Australia and India are both represented by their flags (which also helps to shorten the wording, given the character limit on Twitter), both trade ministers are tagged, and the Tweet establishes a hashtag for others to join the conversation about the new trade agreement: #IndAusECTA. It also contains a link to the minister's website, with more information about the new agreement, and even a visual. Furthermore, the post explains why the new agreement is important for Australian businesses and, most importantly, even communicates that this deal helps with one of Australia's foreign policy objectives – bringing the country closer to an important Indo-Pacific partner.



Figure 47 Australia's tweet 12 April 2023, China meeting part 1



Figure 48 Figure 48 Australia's tweet 12 April 2023, China meeting part 2

In stark contrast, the thread above is an example of 'broadcasting' from April 2023 and how DFAT communicates about bilateral diplomacy with other countries. As noted earlier, Australia has had a tumultuous relationship with China since 2020, after the Morrison government called for an international inquiry into the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic, much to the ire of China (The Guardian, 2020b), which in turn informally imposed economic sanctions on numerous Australian

exports, including coal, cotton, wine, lobster, timber logs, copper ores and concentrates (Ferguson, Waldron & Lim, 2022). Signs of a diplomatic détente began emerging after the Labor government, headed by Prime Minister Albanese, won the May 2022 election (Australian Financial Review, 2023b), with the meeting between the two diplomats – Australia's DFAT secretary Jan Adams and China's executive vice-minister of foreign affairs Ma Zhaoxu – shown in the tweet above being a case in point. The tweet does not tag either of the officials present although this can be explained by the fact that neither seem to have a Twitter account. However, it also does not use hashtags. This is in stark contrast to the tweet from April 2022, discussed earlier, on Australia: India bilateral relations which tagged officials, contained hashtags and even used Australia and India's flags in emoji form. The earlier tweet appeared much more modern as it embraced a digital style of communication, with the later one being more conservative in style. The digital publics seemingly prefer the former way of communicating, as the 2022 tweet attracted 23 retweets and 50 likes, whereas the 2023 one only gathered 5 retweets and 11 likes. Both tweets however provided links to an official statement and further information. The tweet is rather vague: it refers to 'regional' and 'international' issues and 'shared interests' in taking forward the bilateral relationship. Given the available background, one could give DFAT the benefit of the doubt, that it sought to highlight that its diplomats were talking to their Chinese counterparts once again, without mentioning sensitive issues, such as trade sanctions, for fear of jeopardising the improving relations. However, the tweet pictured below indicates that this vagueness was not reserved for China alone.



Figure 49 Australia's tweet 14 April 2023, Uganda meeting

This tweet is about bilateral relations between Australia and Uganda, which certainly do not have the same diplomatic baggage as Sino-Australian ones. On its website, DFAT describes trade between the two countries as "modest", at AU$65.6 million in 2021, with Australia mainly exporting wheat to Uganda and importing coffee and spices. Australia does not even have an embassy or high commission in Kampala, and is represented in Uganda by a high commission in Nairobi, Kenya. Uganda, on the other hand, does have a high commission in Canberra (Australian Government, no date). However, this tweet above does not include information about trade between the two countries or areas of interest through which the relationship could be expanded. Similar to the above tweet about relations with China, it vaguely refers to discussions about "bilateral", "regional" and "multilateral" issues. Given that the two countries are far away geographically – about 11,000 kilometres – DFAT could have used this opportunity to educate the Australian digital publics about Uganda and its relationship with Australia. The tweet does not tag users or use hashtags, but it did utilise Australia's and Uganda's flags as emojis. Together with the tweet about China discussed earlier, and other tweets about Australia's bilateral relations with other countries posted, it is representative of how DFAT communicates about relations with other countries using digital diplomacy.

Providing e-services



Figure 50 Australia's tweet 5 April 2022, e-services



Figure 51 Australia's tweet 13 April 2022, e-services

As briefly mentioned earlier, in April 2022, Australia was heading into a general election that took place on 21 May. In both tweets above, DFAT retweeted posts from the country's Electoral Commission and Smartraveler (which, as mentioned earlier, is a service provided by DFAT). Both provide information for Australians who find themselves overseas but wish to participate in the elections. There was no need for DFAT to create its own tweets, since other governmental agencies were responsible for providing this information. It nonetheless contributed to disseminating this information by reposting it. Even though its commentary, "For information on how to vote overseas" and "Are you registered as an overseas voter? The deadline for registration is 18 April 2022", did not add much practical value, it was a gesture that helped to personalise the retweets rather than simply reposting them.



Figure 52 Australia's tweet 28 April 2023, e-services



Figure 53 Australia's tweet 29 April 2023, e-services

The tweets above were posted within a day of each other during the data collection in April 2023. Halfway through the month, on 15 April, fighting between Sudan's army and Rapid Support Forces, a paramilitary group, broke out in the capital Khartoum and quickly spread across the country (Human Rights Watch, 2024). The two tweets include infographics about the Australian government's evacuation of citizens who had been stranded in Sudan to date, suggest that Australian citizens still in Sudan consider leaving as soon as possible, provide information on how to register with the DFAT for evacuation purposes and list phone numbers to call for consular assistance. In today's digital world, social media is undoubtedly the most effective way to disseminate information, including during crises such as the one that was unfolding in Sudan. This tweet is highly effective as it provides short, factual sentences with an update of the current situation as well as the necessary information for Australian citizens who are still in Sudan and wish to leave.

Branding



Figure 54 Australia's tweet 7 April 2022, branding

The tweet above is an example of the DFAT's branding efforts in April 2022. It refers to Australia's presence at the 2020 Dubai Expo, a World Expo held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, from 1 October 2021 to 31 March 2022 (Expo 2020 Dubai, no date). This branding message notes the presence of the Australian delegation at the Expo for a period of six months at the expo, and mentions that the Australian Pavilion hosted over 3,000 events which promoted Australia as a destination for tourism,

studying, investment and business. The photographs showcase a variety of activities that the Australian Pavilion hosted. Apart from showing Australia's mascot, there is a photograph of an Australian soccer team, which promotes sports credentials; First Nations performers, showcasing culture and diversity; and of an official meeting, which supports the message about Australia as a destination for investment and business. The use of visuals is therefore effective in supporting the content of the social media post. There were no 'branding' tweets in April 2023.

Influencing

Seven tweets were classified as 'influencing' in April 2022 – just under half of the 15 tweets categorised under 'digital diplomacy'.



Figure 55 Australia's tweet 1 April 2022, influencing

Australia's Foreign Policy White Paper sets out an open global economy and rules-based international trade as its main objectives. It furthermore mentions technological change and its impact on trade. This tweet, posted on 1 April 2022 and classified as 'influencing', can be broken down into two parts. The first part states that digital trade rules can be beneficial to international trade, through lowering barriers to trade, improving trade efficiencies and creating new possibilities. The second part promotes Australia's own digital trade strategy, which aims at facilitating digital trade and supporting the rules-based trading system, thereby reiterating Australia's commitment to the international rules-based trade. This is a projection of one of its main foreign policy goals, effectively communicated in a

tweet. DFAT is using digital diplomacy to exercise soft power by promoting the country's digital trade strategy and foreign policy objectives through its tweets, hence the categorisation of this post as 'influencing'.



Figure 56 Australia's tweet 6 April 2022, influencing

Another tweet classified as 'influencing' was made on 6 April 2022. It includes an infographic which listed support for Ukraine, as well as sanctions on Russia and Belarus. This is a tweet that was most likely aimed at a domestic audience, providing information in an open and transparent manner about how taxpayer money is being spent on humanitarian and defensive assistance for Ukraine. Yet this tweet was also relevant to publics in other countries, given that it outlined Australia's support for Ukraine in a succinct and accessible manner. The infographic also specifically emphasises that Australia is coordinating these efforts with other international partners. This is consistent with its foreign policy, which states that Australia will work with others to protect and promote elements of the international order. This tweet could also be seen as an example of Australia projecting its values and soft power: it is helping a country under attack, both in a humanitarian and military manner, and

is closely working with other international partners to ensure that countries that break international law are punished.



Figure 57 Australia's tweet 8 April 2022, influencing

This is another tweet from April 2022 that illustrates how Australia uses digital diplomacy to project its soft power and communicate its foreign policy goals. It states that the country is providing funding through global governance bodies – the World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization – for humanitarian purposes, namely to support child nutrition and strengthen agricultural productivity in Sri Lanka. This post also emphasises partnership with Sri Lanka – "working together" – and mentions the importance of economic resilience in the Indo-Pacific, a region identified as key in Australia's foreign policy document.

In April 2023 there were slightly fewer 'influencing' tweets – six out of 13. However, there were still more 'influencing' tweets classified as 'broadcasting' – four – and 'providing e-services' – three.



Figure 58 Australia's tweet 24 April 2023, influencing

As noted earlier, the most popular tweet during that time period was the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Penny Wong, visiting all 17 of Australia's Pacific Island Forum members and underlining "the importance of our longstanding partnerships and is part of our commitment to listening and responding to Pacific priorities". It also included a short video address from Minister Wong herself. This tweet, categorised as 'influencing', is an excellent example of the DFAT's practice of digital diplomacy to further Australia's foreign policy priorities. As discussed earlier, focus on the Indo-Pacific is one of the five key objectives identified in the country's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper. As a new foreign affairs minister, Minister Wong clearly prioritised making personal visits to all of Australia's neighbouring Pacific Islands. DFAT, highlighting this in a tweet, shows the importance Australia places on the region. Although this was the only tweet that featured video content in April 2023, it was done in a highly effective manner that undoubtedly contributed to its popularity. In turn, the digital publics appreciated this, giving this tweet far more retweets (45) and likes (196) than any other in April 2023.



Figure 59 Australia's tweet 10 April 2023, influencing

Another tweet classified as 'influencing' in April 2023 talks about the DFAT hosting foreign journalists through a programme called International Media Visits. This programme itself, as well as DFAT posting about it on social media, is an example of Australia's public diplomacy through digital means and its incorporation of soft power. Hosting foreign journalists and showcasing Australia's efforts in climate change, renewable technology and the extraction of critical minerals are likely to serve two purposes. Firstly, ensuring that foreign journalists understand Australia better and are therefore going to produce well-informed coverage of the country. Secondly, through these visits, they develop a personal connection to Australia and are likely to be more favourable in their coverage, which in turn could cause their audiences – foreign publics – to also view Australia in a more favourable light. Further showing the strategic intent behind this programme, DFAT specifically invited journalists from India, one of the key countries as per Australia's foreign policy, and potentially an important partner in the Indo-Pacific. Posting about this visit and including photographs from the field trips undertaken by the journalists helps to promote the programme and its intent to both domestic and foreign publics.



Figure 60 Australia's tweet 29 April 2023, influencing

The above tweet, classified as 'influencing' in April 2023, concerns one of Australia's foreign policy priorities – climate change. It starts off with a statement of how mangroves can mitigate the effects of climate change in coastal areas, thereby educating readers on this topic – a worthy endeavour in itself. It then briefly reports on a visit by Australia's ambassador for climate change, Kristin Tilley, to Papua New Guinea. Support for a more resilient Pacific, a region that includes Papua New Guinea, is also one of Australia's foreign policy objectives. This tweet therefore combines two of Australia's foreign policy goals by promoting Tilley's visit to Papua New Guinea to support a climate resilience project. The use of two photographs, in which the ambassador is dressed casually and is seen talking to project participants, also helps to make the tweet more personal.

Engagement

Unlike in the section on Kenya data analysis, this section examines replies, because DFAT replied to other Twitter users in both periods under examination. The methodology of the quality of engagement, discussed in Chapter 3, will be used to examine these replies.

In April 2022, DFAT responded to other Twitter users on 66 occasions in the period under analysis. Considering it only posted 20 original tweets, this means that DFAT's social media team would respond

to others three times more often than it posted original content. Out of the 66 replies, 62 could be categorised under 'consular assistance', with the other four being on the topic of 'Australia Awards', which are scholarships and short courses offered to emerging leaders from developing countries. The intention is for these leaders to study in Australia and then return home and contribute to the development of their country (Australian Government, no date). In April 2022, there was a delay with the issuing of new passports for Australian citizens, most likely due to a backlog as a result of Australia's borders being closed between March 2020 and December 2021 on account of COVID-19. Most of the tweets that could be categorised under 'consular assistance' were posted on this topic. Although it is commendable that DFAT seemingly answered every single tweet with a consular query directed to it, its responses were generic and merely provided an email address where users could send their queries about the delayed issuing of passports or directed users to a website with advice and frequently asked questions. Examples of such responses are below, and they are virtually identical to all other responses to such queries.



Figure 61 Australia's tweet 5 April 2023, engagement part 1



Figure 62 Australia's tweet 5 April 2023 engagement part 2

In April 2023, there were significantly fewer replies than in the previous year – only two, compared to 66. Their content has not changed from the previous year, with DFAT's social media team merely providing a generic response and a phone number, similarly to how similar situations were handled in April 2023. For instance, on 25 April, a user complained about the quality of plastic on his new passport, which had started curling after a day. Another user said he received an SMS, allegedly from DFAT, saying his passport was about to expire, and queried its legitimacy. The response was exactly

the same: “Hi, for passport queries, please phone us on 131 232.” Arguably, the person managing the Twitter account could not have done much about the plastic on a new passport. Yet, the response to the second query is unhelpful, as at least the social media manager could have confirmed whether DFAT indeed sends out SMS messages about passports about to expire, or if it was a spam or phishing message that the user should be wary of.



Figure 63 Australia's tweet 25 April 2023, engagement

Social network analysis: Case study of Australia

The following section examines the networking aspects of Australia’s digital diplomacy. The structure of the section is similar to the previous case study of Kenya, with social network theory used to analyse which state and non-state actors the DFAT retweeted in April 2022 and April 2023.

Thematic analysis was applied to retweets to firstly identify broad categories under which they fall, such as foreign affairs and policy, and the federal election. An additional level of analysis was then carried out to further categorise retweets into specific themes, such as those related to humanitarian matters or international trade. During both levels of analysis, themes and sub-themes emerged naturally, either as patterns (where a common theme was identified in multiple posts) or as outliers (as single instances of a post on a specific theme/topic). In terms of the approach used to identify types of actors retweeted by Australia’s DFAT, all retweets during both periods of analysis were by Australian state actors. Nonetheless, to ensure consistency and comparison with the case study of Kenya, the same four types of actors – Australian state actor, Australian non-state actor, international state actor, and international non-state actor – were listed as a way of showing that 100% of retweets were of accounts belonging to Australian state actors. The second level of analysis sought to further categorise these actors, for instance, ‘DFAT minister’ or ‘Australian ambassador’. These sub-categories

emerged naturally, either as patterns (where the same account was retweeted) or as outliers (where an account was only retweeted once).

Table 26 Australia's retweets in April 2022: Broad themes

Broad theme	Number of retweets	Percentage
Foreign affairs and policy	12	92%
Federal election	1	8%

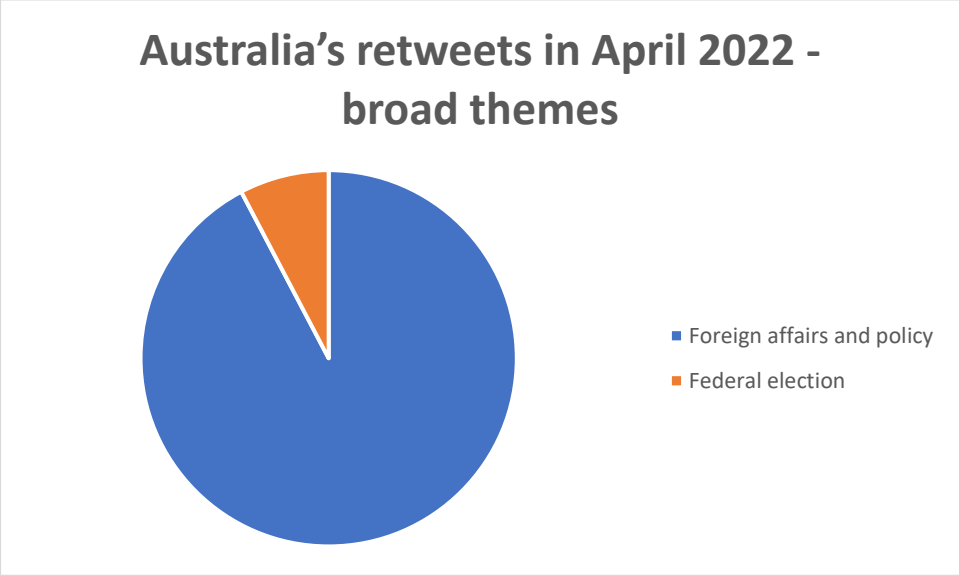


Figure 64 Australia's retweets in April 2022: Broad themes

Table 27 Australia's retweets in April 2022: Specific themes

Specific theme	Number of retweets	Percentage
Humanitarian	4	36%
Sanctions	2	18%
International trade	2	18%
Global and regional security	1	9%
Bilateral relations	1	9%
Regional security	1	9%

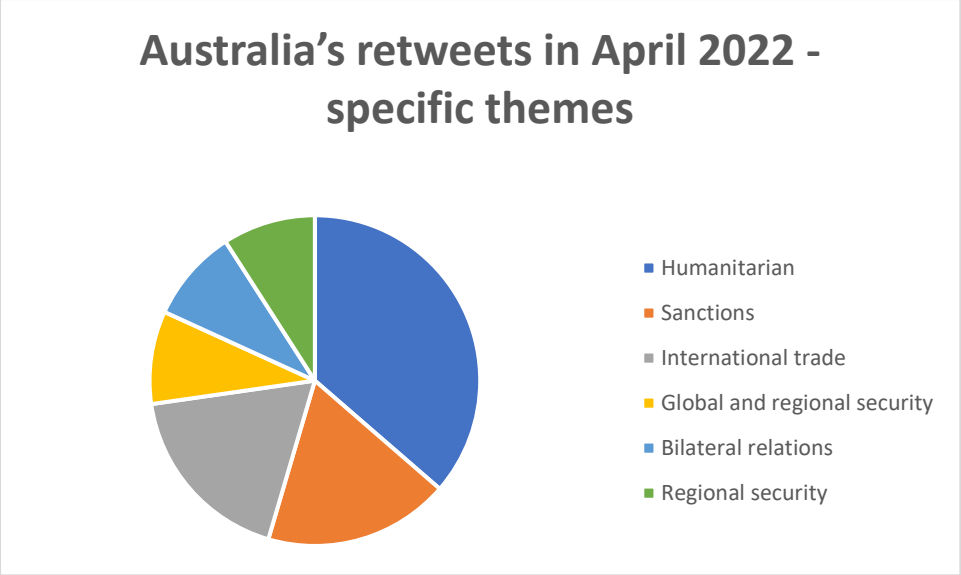


Figure 65 Australia's retweets in April 2022: Specific themes

DFAT retweeted tweets posted by others on 13 occasions during the period under review. 12 out of 13 retweets were on the topic of foreign affairs and policy, while the remaining one was about the upcoming federal election. Broken down into sub-categories, retweets show a range of topics. Four retweets, or a quarter of the total, were on humanitarian topics. Two retweets were made regarding sanctions and international trade, which is consistent with the importance Australia places on supporting the rules-based international order. There were also retweets about global security and regional security, another priority area of Australia's foreign policy that was discussed in its Foreign Policy White Paper.

Table 28 Australia's retweets April 2022: Broad actors

Broad actor	**Number of retweets**	**Percentage**
International state actor	0	0%
International non-state actor	0	0%
Australian state actor	13	100%
Australian non-state actor	0	0%

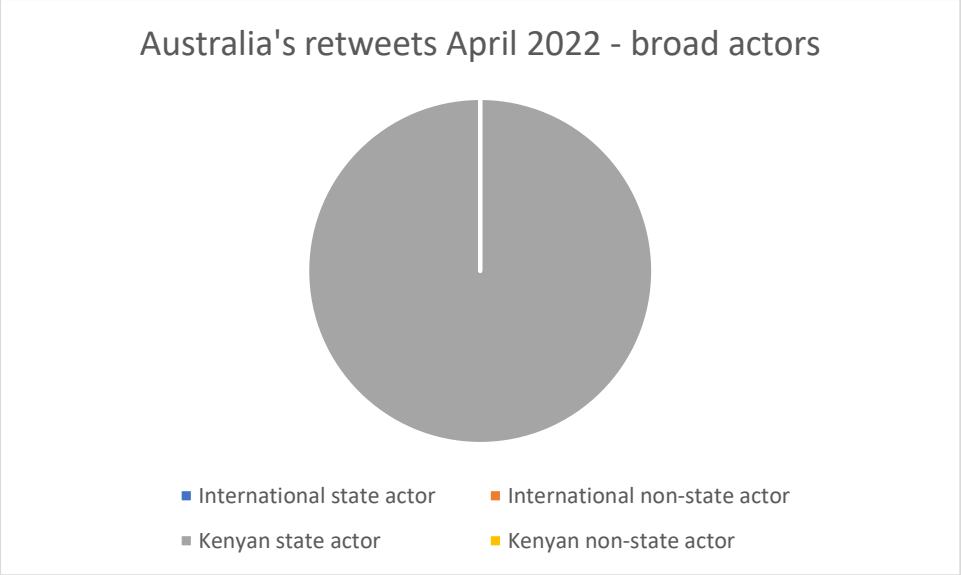


Figure 66 Australia's retweets April 2022: Broad actors

Table 29 Australia's retweets April 2022: Specific actors

Specific actor	**Number of retweets**	**Percentage**
Australian Agency	6	46%
DFAT Minister	4	31%
Australian Ambassador	2	15%
Australian Embassy	1	8%

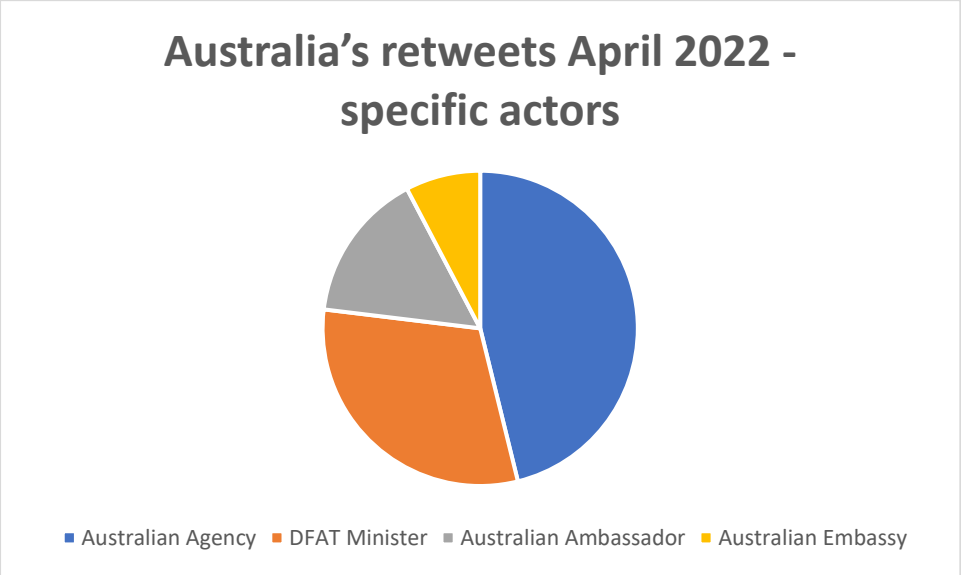


Figure 67 Australia's retweets April 2022: Specific actors

Interestingly, DFAT only retweeted posts made by other Australian state actors in April 2022. The breakdown above shows that in almost half of the cases (six out of 13), it retweeted other Australian agencies, such as Australian Aid and the Office of the Australian Humanitarian Coordinator. Almost a third (four out of 13) were retweets from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the rest were retweets of posts by Australian ambassadors as well as the country's embassy in China. Combined with the findings from the previous section, about topics of retweeted posts, during the period under review, DFAT seems to have adopted a strategy of amplifying messages about the country's foreign policy objectives from other state actors. This is an effective strategy as it means that DFAT is operating under parameters that focus on both specific types of content (relevant to Australia's foreign policy), as well as the type of actor (Australian state actors, including both agencies and officials).

April 2023

Table 30 Australia's retweets in April 2023: Broad themes

Broad theme	Number of retweets	Percentage
Consular services	15	58%
Foreign affairs and policy	8	30%
QUAD cyber challenge	1	1%
Condolences	1	1%
First Nations	1	1%

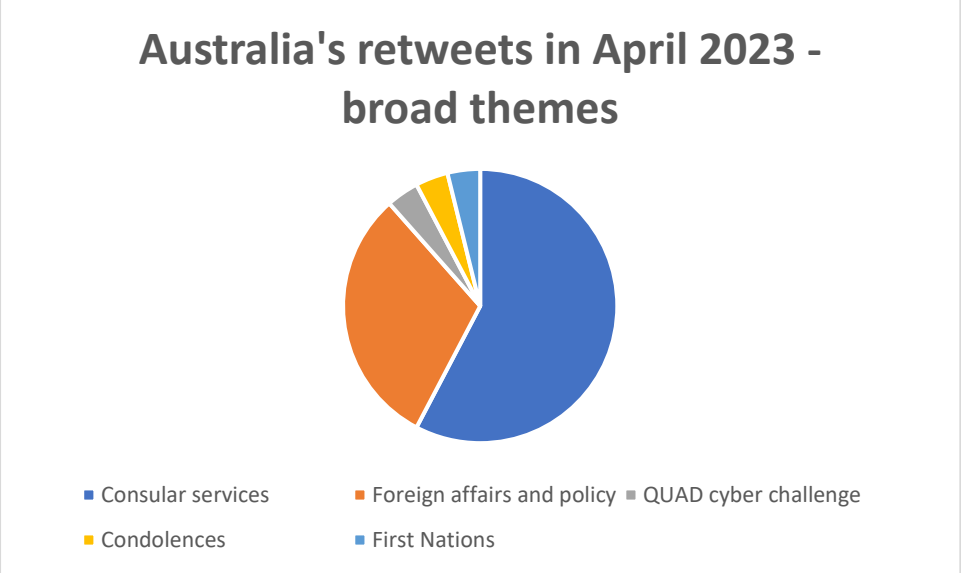


Figure 68 Australia's retweets in April 2023: Broad themes

Table 31 Australia's retweets in April 2023: Specific themes

Specific theme	Number of retweets	Percentage
Conflict in Sudan	3	38%
Quad Summit	2	25%
Arrest of a Russian opposition figure	1	12%
Relations with Samoa	1	12%
Australia – UNHCR	1	12%

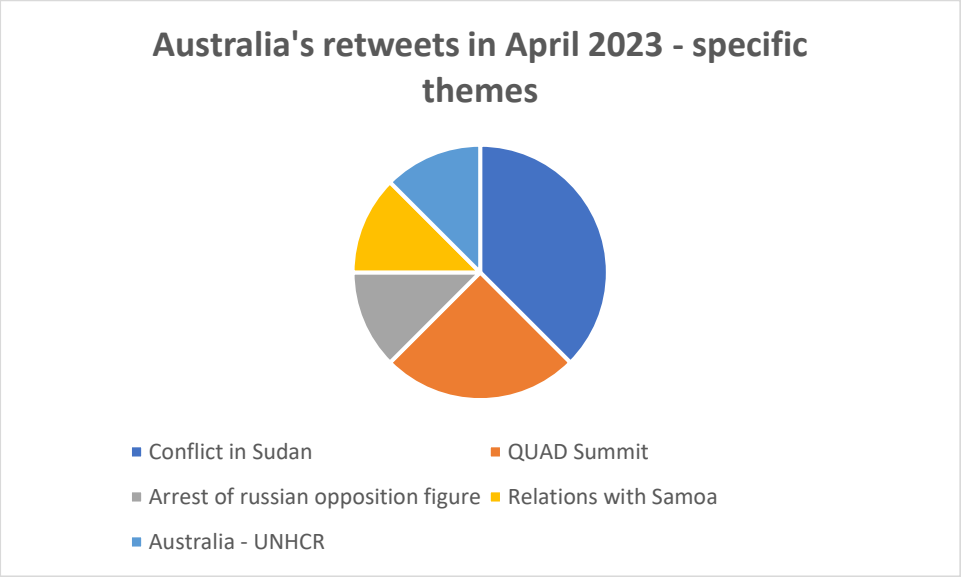


Figure 69 Australia's retweets in April 2023: Specific themes

DFAT retweeted others 26 times in April 2023, or exactly twice the amount the year before (13). Most of them, 15 or 58%, were on the topic of provision of e-services, because Australian citizens were stranded in Sudan during the conflict in that country. Breaking down the eight tweets on foreign policy and affairs into sub-categories, three were about the conflict in Sudan (from a foreign policy, rather than a consular diplomacy perspective), and two were about the Quad summit. This is consistent with DFAT's retweets from April 2022, which focused on global as well as regional security – priority areas of Australia's foreign policies, which were given due attention by the previous political administration and are accorded the same attention by the current one.

Table 32 Australia's retweets April 2023 – broad actors

Broad actor	Number of retweets	Percentage
International state actor	0	0%
International non-state actor	0	0%
Australian state actor	26	100%
Australian non-state actor	0	0%

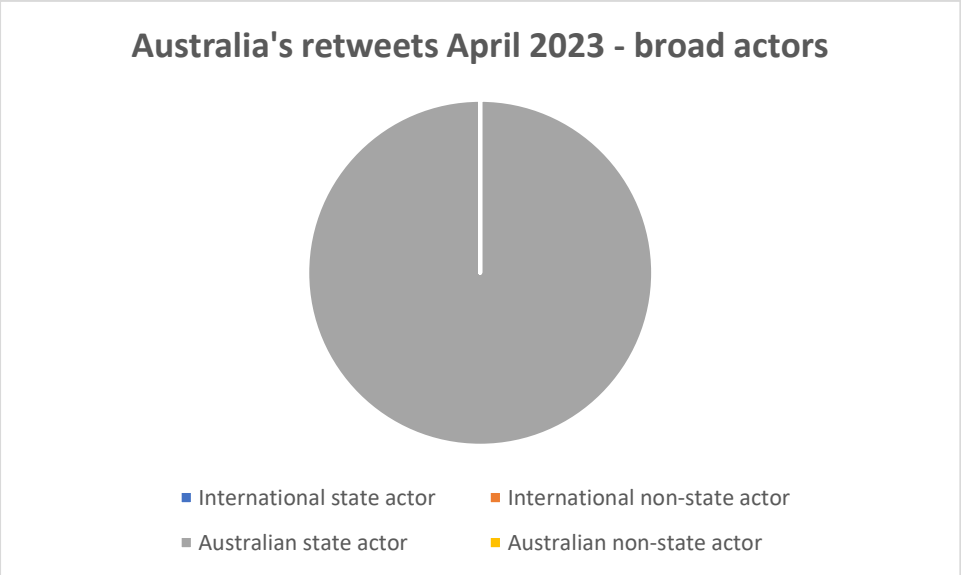


Figure 70 Australia's retweets April 2023 – broad actors

Table 33 Australia's retweets April 2023: Specific actors

Specific actor	Number of retweets	Percentage
DFAT Minister	18	69%
Smartraveller	4	15%
Prime Minister	2	7%
Minister Home Affairs	1	4%
Minister for International Development	1	4%

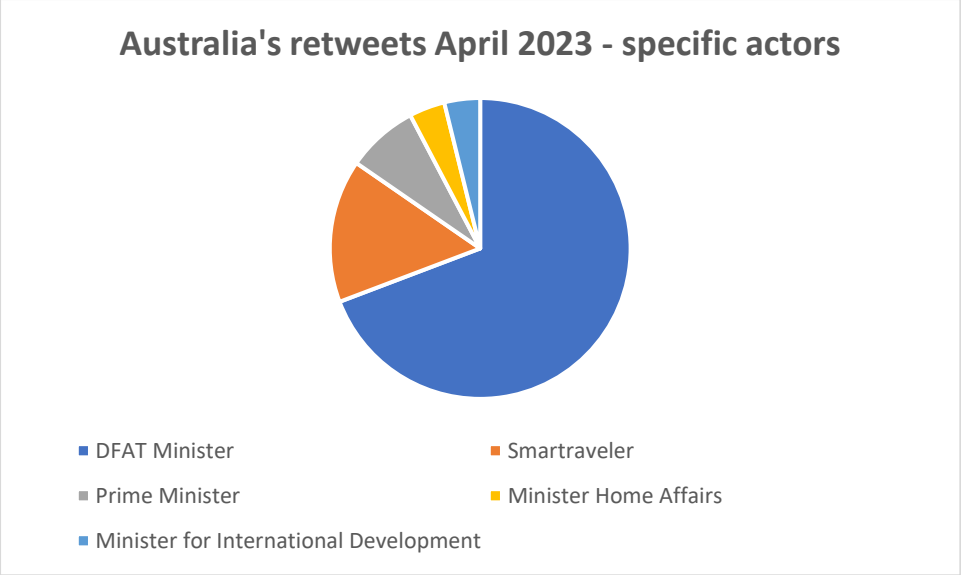


Figure 71 Australia's retweets April 2023: Specific actors

Just like the year before, DFAT only retweeted posts made by other Australian Twitter users in April 2023. This continued to be an effective strategy under the new administration, as DFAT's Twitter account successfully amplified messages made by other Australian state actors. The difference between the two years is that in April 2022 DFAT prioritised Australian governmental agencies, whereas in April 2023 the focus was firmly on the Minister of Foreign Affairs' account, which could be the difference in approaches of Liberal/Coalition and Labor governments. Minister Wong's tweets were retweeted the most – 18 times or 69%. In a distant second place was the Smartraveller account, which provides travel advice – in this instance that Australians still in Sudan should leave as soon as possible. This shows consistency in approach under the different administrations in 2022 and 2023: a focus on retweeting posts on foreign policy (and in 2023 consular issues, due to the conflict in Sudan) made by Australian state-actors.

Data interpretation: Case study of Australia

In assessing progress in terms of one of the recommendations made by the Parliamentary sub-committee over a decade ago, "make better use of social media platforms to promote Australia's foreign policy, trade opportunities, and the Department's role to the wider Australian public and key audiences in Asia and the Pacific", both positive and negative observations can be made.

On a positive note, Australia has clearly come a long way since the Parliamentary Enquiry in 2012. A decade later, it is evident that DFAT effectively uses various functions of digital diplomacy that were identified during the literature review in Chapter 2 and synthesised into a state-centric typology of digital diplomacy. When DFAT uses the broadcasting function of digital diplomacy, it often uses the

modern communication style provided by the affordances of social media, including relevant tags, hashtags and visual aids on Twitter. The majority of its tweets under both the coalition government in 2022 and the Labor government in 2023 were classified as influencing, as they have demonstrated the use of soft power to make Australia more attractive to foreign publics and have also been used to communicate and promote Australia's foreign policy goals and objectives. In 2022, DFAT's tweets projected soft power in the humanitarian and cultural realms and in 2023 they did so in terms of regional diplomacy and climate change. DFAT's tweets in both years furthermore project Australia's commitment to an international rules-based order and highlight its status as a middle power. This also addresses at least some of the Lowy Institute's criticisms, which were discussed earlier in Chapter 1. DFAT has evidently become much more adept at communicating the importance of Australia's foreign policy goals, especially humanitarian aid, commitment to an international rules-based order and promotion of regional stability.

In terms of criticisms, two can be made. Firstly, engagement is limited, in spite of being listed as one of the key activities in the Digital Media Strategy 2016-18. During the two periods under review, DFAT's replies were exclusively about provision of e-services. Australia clearly places emphasis on the role of digital technologies in providing its citizens abroad with the necessary information, as discussed in Chapter 1, with the example of the launch of the Smartraveller website. While the posts categorised as 'consular diplomacy' successfully conveyed infographics to communicate the necessary information to Australians abroad, and at other times retweeted relevant information from other Australian agencies, the responses to digital publics about e-services matters were not particularly useful – they merely redirected queries to a publicly available phone number or an email address. Secondly, the DFAT has made very limited efforts to brand Australia. Only two tweets in April 2022 were classified as branding and none in April 2023. Perhaps the projection of soft power is deemed sufficient to project Australia's values, culture and international commitments to the outside world.

The US data analysis

This section focuses on how the US, a great power in global affairs, uses digital diplomacy through social media. As stated in the introductory chapter of this thesis, the theoretical framework and the methodology, the US is intended to serve as a baseline case against which Australia and Kenya will be compared. The main aim of this section is to determine whether the US utilises the affordances of social media to promote its foreign policy. The data analysis section differs somewhat to the preceding case studies of Kenya and Australia, due to two reasons. The first reason is the sheer amount of data available from April 2022, when the Department of State (which is the name of the US MFA) made 242 posts on Twitter (now X). This was a more than sufficient number of tweets to analyse and use in

the typology to determine the main objectives of the US's conduct of digital diplomacy in comparison to Kenya and Australia, which posted relatively little during the same time period (especially Australia's DFAT). The second reason is because the US had the same presidential administration in April 2023 as it did in April 2023. In the cases of Kenya and Australia, both countries had a new head of state and administration in place a year after the initial data collection and analysis was conducted. This provided an opportunity to compare and contrast the approaches of the two administrations. In the US, however, then-president Joe Biden, from the Democratic Party, was both the head of state and head of government in April 2022 and April 2023 and therefore the country's foreign policy goals remained consistent. Coupled with the fact that the US, as a pioneer of digital diplomacy, is a far more experienced digital diplomacy actor, it was unlikely that its social media approach to communicating its foreign policy goals and attempting to influence foreign publics and other actors would change significantly in one year under the same administration.

The following section therefore analyses tweets and retweets from the state department's Twitter (now X) account posted between 1 and 30 April 2022, under the Biden administration. The typology presented in Chapter 3 is applied to the data analysis. This section also uses the theory of soft power to analyse how the state department attempts to influence foreign publics and other actors through its social media posts, and the theory of digital social networks to analyse its retweets.

The US's digital diplomacy metrics: April 2022

In accordance with the three types of methods for studying digital diplomacy discussed earlier in Chapter 3, data from April 2022 and April 2023 was first analysed quantitatively, in terms of the overall number of posts during the collection period, average posts per day, most popular post during the collection period, least popular post, as well as the average number of likes and reposts, and whether the posts contained audiovisual material. Secondly, thematic analysis was applied to classify the posts as being related to digital diplomacy or other matters, such as issuing condolence messages. An additional level of analysis then took place to further categorise the data into themes such as 'bilateral diplomacy', 'multilateral diplomacy', and 'vaccine diplomacy'. These themes emerged naturally during the data analysis, either as patterns (where a common theme was identified in multiple posts) or as outliers (as single instances of a post on a specific theme/topic).

Table 34 US's tweets April 2022: Broad themes

Broad theme	**Number of tweets**	**Percentage of tweets**
Digital diplomacy	178	74%

Announcements (not related to foreign policy)	25	10%
Condolences	6	3%
Transgender rights	4	2%
Earth Day	3	2%
Women's History Month	2	1%
World Health Day	2	1%
World Immunization Week	2	1%
World IP Day	2	1%
Fulbright Prize	2	1%
National Arab American Heritage month	2	1%
Secretary Blinken's birthday	1	>1%
World Heritage Day	1	>1%
World Malaria Day	1	>1%
Deaf History Month	1	>1%
Model UN	1	>1%
Jazz Day	1	>1%
#GirlsInIT Day	1	>1%
Happy Easter	1	>1%
Happy Passover	1	>1%
Happy Ramadan	1	>1%
Holocaust Remembrance Day	1	>1%
Arbor Day	1	>1%
History of NATO	1	>1%

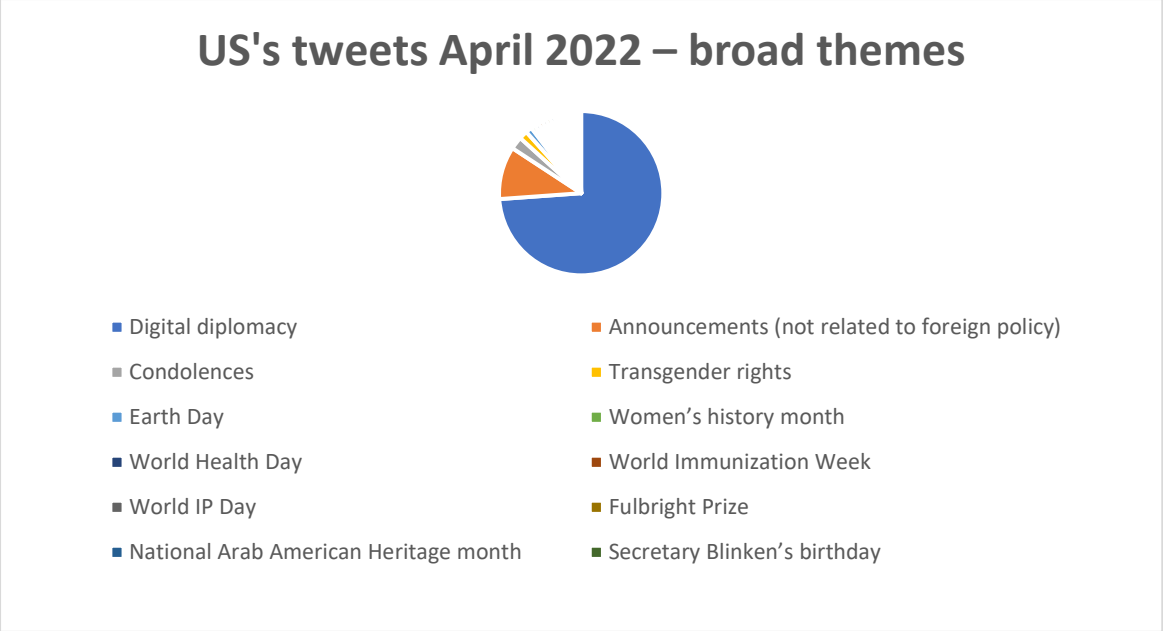


Figure 72 US's tweets April 2022: Broad themes

During the period under review, the majority of posts were categorised under the digital diplomacy category – 178 out of 241, or 74% of the total. The state department's posting of 241 between 1 and 30 April 2022 equates to an average of 8.03 tweets per day. The remaining one-quarter of tweets covered a broad range of categories. Many of these (25 posts or 10%) were classified as announcements made by the Department of State that were unrelated to foreign policy matters, such as internship opportunities, unveiling of a bronze bust in honour of former state secretary James Baker, and a visit from U2 lead vocalist Bono to meet the state department staff (these are excellent examples of public diplomacy in a digital era). Six tweets were dedicated to condolences when former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright passed away. These were sent out both in the immediate aftermath of her death as well as during her funeral, which took place a few days later and at which current state secretary Blinken spoke. The rest covered a wide array of topics. Many were dedicated to commemorating religious holidays, with the Department of State's social media team wishing their followers Happy Easter, Happy Passover and Happy Ramadan. There was also recognition of special themed days, such as Jazz Day, Malaria Day, Holocaust Remembrance Day, International Girls in ICT Day, World Heritage Day and World Malaria Day. One post was dedicated to each of these. More than one post was dedicated to World Health Day (two posts), World Intellectual Property Day (two posts), and Earth Day (three posts). Posts about Earth Day in particular highlighted the US's diplomatic efforts on climate change.

On average, the Department of State's posts attracted 87.0 retweets and 235.3 likes. The most retweeted post, with 672 retweets, was about the safety of US citizens. It was from a daily press

briefing by the Department of State, with spokesperson Ned Price warning US citizens to leave Russia and Ukraine, as they may be singled out by Russian authorities. The post was accompanied by a short video of Mr Price delivering the same message. The most liked tweet, by far, with 2,898 likes, expressed condolences on the passing away of former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. The most liked tweet classified under 'digital diplomacy', with 1,871 likes, was about US unity with its allies and with Ukraine, in the context of Russia's war of aggression against its neighbouring state. The least popular tweet was about multilateral governance of the internet, attracting 13 retweets and 37 likes.

228 out of 241, or 95% of posts, contained audiovisuals. These included 18 infographics, while 31 posts contained single or multiple photographs, 13 contained photographs with quotes by US officials, 57 contained pictures, 17 contained pictures with quotes from US officials, 91 contained videos, and one included a proclamation document. If one tallies up all the posts containing pictures, infographics and photographs in one category (containing static images), then there would be a preference, albeit not a massive one, for posts with images – 136 in total, versus posts with videos – 91 in total. Considering that all but 5% of posts contained either images or video and 37% of posts were accompanied by video, these are impressive metrics.

160 tweets tagged officials and 79 contained hashtags, with #COVAX and #UnitedWithUkraine being the most popular ones. The former is an abbreviation for COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access, while the latter signified US support for Ukraine amid an ongoing invasion from Russia. As will be discussed below, these were two of the most prominent themes for US digital diplomacy throughout April 2022. Nine posts were quoted tweets and there were no threads – each post was a standalone.

Table 35 US's tweets April 2023: Specific themes

Specific theme	**Number of tweets**	**Percentage of tweets**
Russia's invasion of Ukraine	45	25%
Vaccine diplomacy	26	15%
State department briefings on foreign affairs	20	11%
Climate change	18	10%
Human rights	13	7%
Multilateral diplomacy	13	7%
Bilateral diplomacy	9	5%

Countering Russian propaganda	8	4%
Disarmament	5	3%
NATO unity	5	3%
Consular services	4	2%
Pollution	3	2%
Announcement on foreign affairs	3	2%
Political crisis in Tunisia	2	1%
Newsletter on foreign affairs sign up	2	1%
Peacebuilding	1	>1%
LGBTQI+	1	>1%

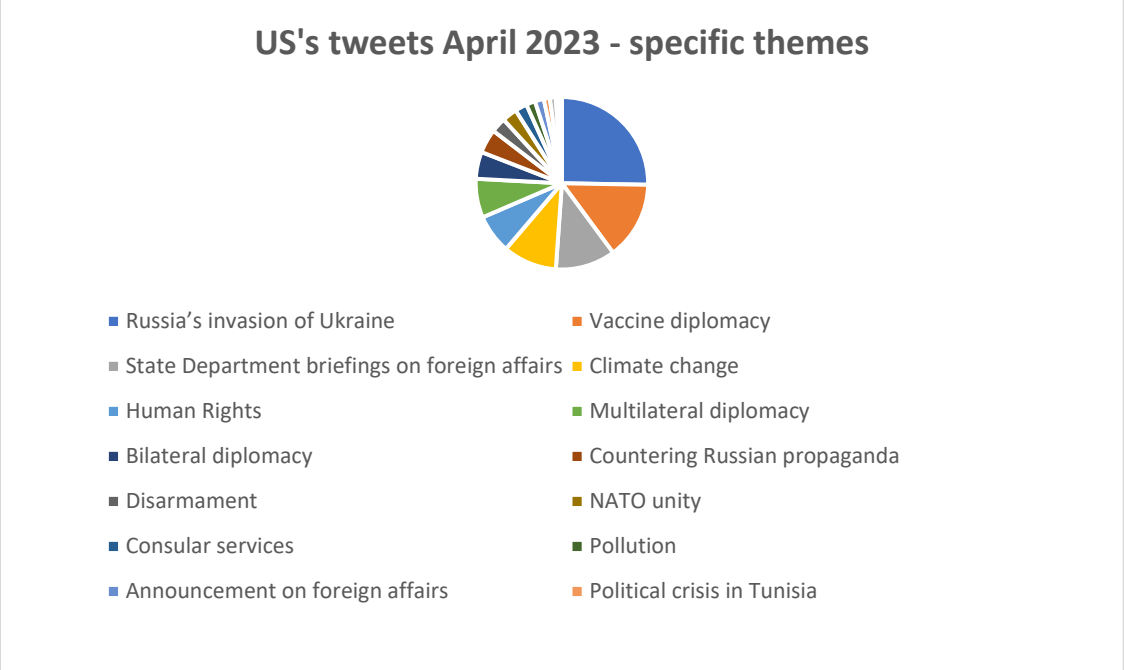


Figure 73 US's tweets April 2023: Specific themes

After the 178 tweets on digital diplomacy were further sub-categorised, three specific sub-themes emerged. The Department of State posted 45 times (representing 25% of the total digital diplomacy tweets) on the topic of Russia's invasion of Ukraine (which included sub-themes of support for Ukraine and condemnation of Russian aggression). The second sub-theme was 'vaccine diplomacy', given the US's efforts to provide free vaccines to developing countries around the world. The third most prominent categorisation, with 20 tweets or 11% of the total, was the state department's briefings.

However, there was no specific theme to these briefings. They took place daily (except on weekends) and were focused on the US's response to events that were in the news that day. These posts contained a link to a livestream so Twitter audiences could watch the press briefings as they were taking place in real time. This was an effective use of the affordances of social media to broaden the audience from select members of the media to virtually anyone in the world, helping to broadcast the US's framing of and messaging of global affairs. The third sub-theme (excepting the category of briefings from the analysis) was 'climate change', with 18 tweets or 10% being dedicated to this topic in April 2022. The three sub-themes (can be directly linked to the 21 policy issues for the Biden administration, which were listed in the section on US Foreign Policy. Russia's invasion of Ukraine (and the sub-themes of condemnation of Russia and support for Ukraine) would fall under 'Holding Russia and Belarus to account' and 'United with Ukraine', climate change would fall under 'Climate and Environment', 'Climate Crisis' and 'The Ocean and Polar Affairs', and COVID-19 vaccine diplomacy would fall under 'COVID-19 Response and Recovery' and 'Global Health'. This is evidence of strategic use of the affordances of social media in pursuit of the US's foreign goals. Notably many other themes outside of the top three identified can also be traced back to the Biden administration's policy priorities, for instance 'human rights', which falls under the 'human rights and democracy' policy priority, the theme of 'countering Russia's propaganda', which falls under 'disarming disinformation' and the sub-theme theme of NATO unity, which can be related to the 'treaties and international agreements' priority.

Word cloud: Case study of the US

To further determine whether the US's foreign policy priorities were communicated and promoted through digital diplomacy in April 2022, the text of all tweets classified under 'digital diplomacy' was inserted into the WordArt.com website and the following word cloud was generated.



Figure 74 Word cloud of US's tweets in April 2022

Table 36 US's tweets in April 2022: top 10 words

Rank	Word	Count
1	State	96
2	Gov	66
3	More	63
4	Go	57
5	Unite	54
6	Sec Blinken	54
7	USA	51
8	Vaccine	46
9	Live	45
10	COVID	42

The word 'state', part of the name of the US's MFA, the Department of State, also sometimes called 'State Department' was mentioned the most, 96 times. This shows that most messaging on Twitter was linked and attributed to the Department of State. Many of the other words in the top 10 can similarly be attributed to the messaging source: 'Gov', 'Sec Blinken' and 'USA'. In terms of content words, 'Unite' at position 5, with 54 mentions, was used in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine

to both signify the US's unity with Ukraine as well as with its NATO allies. This shows the importance the Department of State placed on communicating to its audiences that it supports Ukraine and also to signify its unity with its fellow member countries, both to reassure them that the US would come to their defence if Article 5 was violated and also to signal to Russia that it should not test its resolve. The words 'vaccine' and 'COVID' came in at positions 8 and 10, with 46 and 42 mentions, respectively. Both are related to the second-most prominent theme identified in the Department of State's tweets in April 2022 – vaccine diplomacy – and are related to US foreign policy priorities of 'COVID-19 response and recovery' and 'global health'.

Outside of the top 10 there are also a few words worth mentioning. 'Ukraine' came in at number 11, with 42 mentions. Even though Russia's invasion of Ukraine and support for Ukraine were identified as the most prominent themes in April 2022, other key words overtook the name of the country under attack in the top 10. The word 'unite' overtook it, perhaps because it was used both to communicate support for Ukraine as well as to express unity with NATO allies, thus being used in two different types of sub-themes. The word 'partner' came in at 13 with 32 mentions. This word is closely related to 'unite', with the message being that the US is partnering with countries like Ukraine and its NATO allies in its efforts to uphold global security, but also to describe its efforts in helping to stop the spread of COVID-19 through its vaccine diplomacy. Finally, the word 'ocean' was mentioned 24 times. This was because in April 2022 the US co-hosted a major international conference on oceans, related to its global efforts to promote awareness around the issue and to help mitigate the effects of climate change.

Typology categorisation: Case study of the US

Tweets categorised as 'digital diplomacy' were then categorised further, in accordance with the typology presented earlier in Chapter 3. It is also important to note that despite an average of 49.36 responses to its posts, there were no replies from the state department during the period under analysis, signifying the absence of engagement.

Table 37 US's digital diplomacy tweets in April 2022 (178 tweets)

		Approach	
Communication style		Tactical	Strategic
	One-way	**Broadcasting** 54	**Branding** 0

	Two-way	**Providing e-services** 4	**Influencing** 120

Broadcasting

Over one-quarter, 54 out of 178 of the state department's posts in April 2022 were categorised as 'broadcasting', as per the state-centric typology of digital diplomacy developed for this study. Most of the posts under this category related to daily briefings on foreign affairs conducted by the Department of State. These briefings were livestreamed so anyone who followed @StateDept on Twitter could watch them in real time. Afterwards key messages from these briefings were posted, accompanied by short video snippets featuring the Department of State spokesperson. This was excellent packaging of the MFA's messages, as they were presented both in concise text form and with video content that was under one minute in length that provided more detail on the key messages – straight from the lips of a senior official, so there was no room for interpretation. The Department of State thus made sure that its views on what was happening in the world, as well as its framings of key events and narratives of global processes, were communicated using the affordances of social media daily using two types of packaging: short text-based messaging and slightly longer (although still succinct) video messaging.

Apart from this, there were also nine broadcasting posts about the Our Ocean Conference, which the US co-hosted with the Republic of Palau on April 13-14, 2022. Overall, there were more posts about this global event, but some were categorised as 'influencing'. These are discussed in the relevant section below. Examining different types of posts around the same topic, in this instance a global conference, is helpful to understand how MFAs can use social media for different types of messages, namely broadcasting and influencing ones. In the same vein, there were both broadcasting and influencing messages around the release of the 2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices by the US Government, which will be discussed below. Finally, a number of broadcasting tweets were posted about bilateral relations with other countries, including Brazil, Chile and India, as well as on multilateral diplomacy with the Americas.

A few illustrative examples of 'broadcasting' posts from April 2022 are discussed below.



Figure 75 US's tweet 1 April 2022, broadcasting

The above is an example of a 'broadcasting' tweet from April 2022. This is a live stream of the state department's daily press briefing for journalists, which can also be watched live by anyone who follows @StateDept on Twitter or who simply searches for it. It also provides a link in case anyone would like to watch it on YouTube instead of in the Twitter app. The Department of State spokesperson (an official, rather than a personal handle) is tagged in the tweet.



Figure 76 US's tweet 5 April 2022, broadcasting

Another ‘broadcasting’ tweet from the Department of State, posted on 5 April, announces the establishment of a new Bureau of Cyberspace and digital policy. The messaging is simple: the announcement is made within the context that this is part of the secretary of state’s vision to modernise both US diplomacy more broadly and the state department more specifically. It tags both the spokesperson and then secretary Blinken, although there are no hashtags. The format of the post is similar to other broadcasting posts described earlier: a brief, text-based announcement accompanied by a short video that provides additional detail.



Figure 77 US's tweet 10 April 2022, broadcasting



Figure 78 US's tweet 13 April 2022, broadcasting



Figure 79 US's tweet 22 April 2022, broadcasting

The 'broadcasting' tweets above were posted before, during and after the Our Ocean Conference on April 13-14, 2022, which was co-hosted by Palau and the US. This is consistent messaging around and promotion of an important event on climate change. The Department of State also posted tweets categorised as influencing about this event, which will be discussed later. Furthermore, it also retweeted numerous posts made by John Kerry, who at the time was the inaugural US special presidential envoy for climate. The first tweet, posted before the conference, helps to promote the event. It includes a hashtag for the conference, announces the dates and explains the purpose of this international event: to "increase the ocean's resilience to the climate crisis and safeguard its health for generations to come". The tweet also includes a link to the website for additional information. The second tweet, posted while the conference was taking place, announces that the conference has commenced. It quotes a tweet from another US government agency but adds value by broadcasting that the international partners who are attending the conference are trying to jointly come up with solutions to address problems around the oceans. Interestingly, it uses a modified version of the hashtag #OurOcean, rather than #OurOcean2022, as in the previous tweet. This could just be the lack of attention to detail by the staffer who made the post, or perhaps both hashtags were being used on that day. The third tweet, made over a week after the end of the conference, reports on its outcomes: 410 commitments made that are worth more than $16 billion. This is important as it communicates that the conference was not just a 'talk-shop' and that concrete action items were agreed on. It also provides a link for more detail. The hashtag is once again #OurOcean2022 – including the year. As already discussed, attention to the topic of oceans and ocean resilience is consistent with US foreign policy as it falls under three of the Biden administration's policy priorities: Climate and Environment; Climate Crisis; and, the Ocean and Polar Affairs.



Figure 80 US's tweet 23 April 2022, broadcasting

The tweet above is another example of 'broadcasting' posted by the US Department of State in April 2022. It announces that the under-secretary for economic growth, energy, and the environment (whose title is so long it has been abbreviated to a simple @State_E Twitter handle) will travel to Brazil with the under-secretary for political affairs (whose title is shorter, yet has been translated into a much longer Twitter handle – @UnderSecStateP) – to support the US's economic agenda as well as engage on a number of other topics, including energy, health and women's economic empowerment. A press release is attached for more information. This is an effective way to package traditional diplomatic messaging in a modern way, through using the affordances of social media. The tweet is essentially an executive summary of the press release – just a few sentences with key information, who is going where and why. Additional information can be accessed by reading the attached press release. The 'why', the reason for the visit, is consistent with US's foreign policy priorities: 'Energy', 'Global Health' and 'Global Women's Issues'.



Figure 81 US's tweet 29 April 2022, broadcasting

Finally, the tweet above is yet another way the US state department disseminates information. It invites followers to sign up to a newsletter, cleverly named 'From the Desk of Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken' which provides updates on key foreign affairs issues. The name of the newsletter and the accompanying picture of Blinken in which he is looking at something on his desk, makes it appear more personal, helping to establish rapport with the digital publics and makes it appear as though they will really receive updates directly from him. This is, of course, clever marketing, as the newsletters will be put together by staffers at the state department and then bulk emailed to subscribers. Nonetheless, it helps @StateDept connect with digital publics. Furthermore, these newsletters represent yet another avenue through which the US is able to communicate its narratives and framings of global events.

Providing e-services

There were four posts categorised under 'providing e-services' in the typology of digital diplomacy. They are discussed below.



Figure 82 US's tweet 1 April 2022, e-services

As mentioned earlier, this was one of the most popular posts made by the state department in April 2022 and the most retweeted one. It follows the typical format observed earlier – a brief text message accompanied by a short video that provides more detail. In it, the Department of State's spokesperson provides travel advice to US citizens who are currently in Ukraine and Russia, advising them to leave immediately because they may be singled out by the Russian government due to their nationality. This message was also posted on the Department of State's travel advisory by the Bureau of Consular Affairs (Travel State Gov, no date). However, the ubiquitous use of social media means that far more people are likely to see it on a platform like Twitter (now X) rather than by checking the relevant government website. The fact that this was the most widely reposted message during the period under review is indicative of the willingness of the digital publics to share this message and thereby ensure it reaches as many people as possible.



Figure 83 US's tweet 15 April 2022, e-services

Two weeks later the Department of State posted a tweet with more broad and generic travel advice. The text of this tweet provides links to the its travel website, which contains country-specific travel advice, as well as the @TravelGov handle, which regularly posts information about it. The video goes into a bit more detail: during the daily press briefing, then state department spokesperson Ned Price provided an update on changing travelling requirements amid the COVID-19 pandemic as more countries were starting to open up due to increasing vaccination levels. He also reminded US citizens that most countries required visitors' passports to be valid for at least six months from the date of entry and mentioned that the issuing of new passports would take between eight to 11 weeks. Because this advice was more generic and dealt with routine bureaucratic matters, it was far less popular than the previous tweet, which contained specific advice about countries that had been declared unsafe to travel to or remain in (672 vs 34 retweets and 1,129 vs 102 likes).



Figure 84 US's tweet 1 April 2022, e-services



Figure 85 US's tweet 12 April 2022, e-services

Both posts above are about a new option – to choose X instead of M (male) and F (female) on passports for US citizens who are transgender. The state department made this announcement on April 1, which is also the International Transgender Day of Visibility, before this option became available on 11 April. Then, the day after this consular function was launched, the state department once again posted about this on Twitter, accompanied by a short video with the Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs also making this announcement.

Branding

The US state department did not post any tweets that were categorised as 'branding' in April 2022. There are two possible explanations for this: either there are other US government agencies responsible for branding, or such is the comprehensive power of the US that it does not need significant branding efforts as it is already so well known.

Influencing

120 out of 178 tweets were categorised as 'influencing', representing just over two-thirds or 67.42% of tweets made during the period under analysis. Examples of such tweets, as well as mini-influencing campaigns run by the state department are included below. They were grouped together by themes: Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Countering Russia's propaganda, Vaccine diplomacy, Climate change, Human rights and Bilateral diplomacy.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine



Figure 86 US's tweet 1 April 2022, influencing

This post above quotes Blinken. In it, he talks about Russia's invasion of Ukraine from a different angle – food security. He notes that Ukrainian farmers are not able to tend to their crops and that Ukraine is unable to export grain to the rest of the world by sea. With this context, the tweet also includes a picture – a photograph of Blinken with another quote in which he calls for the international community to put additional pressure on Russia to end its invasion. The words "must increase the pressure" in the quote are italicised for emphasis. This is an effective use of messaging, and could have been a longer tweet. Instead, the social media staff at the state department separated it into context (included in the text of the post) and influencing message – calling on the international community to increase pressure on Russia (included in the quote attributed to the secretary of state). Furthermore, by framing the war in terms of food security, the tweet shows its wider ramifications for the rest of the world. Every word in this tweet and the accompanying image counts, as it also emphasises that Ukraine is an independent state and that Russia's invasion was unprovoked and unjustified (this is a consistent theme that can also be seen in later examples). It must also be noted that after posting this tweet on 1 April, the state department posted it again two days later, on 3 April. Furthermore, the account of Antony Blinken also posted it and it was retweeted by the Department of State. This was clearly an important message worth repeating as they ensured it reached as many as possible by appearing on the top of their feed if they had missed it the first time.



Figure 87 US's tweet 29 April 2022, influencing

Similar messaging was posted at the end of April, this time quoting the then president of the US, Joe Biden. It once again frames the war from a global food security perspective and emphasises that Russia's actions have a broader impact. Similarly to Secretary Blinken's earlier message, Biden discusses the implications for the harvest as well as supply routes, this time adding land routes to sea routes. The tweet also points out that food security is not affected by sanctions that the US, EU and some of its allies have imposed on Russia – which is how Russia was trying to portray it at the time – but rather by Russia's direct actions. In doing so, this tweet also attempts to address disinformation perpetrated by other actors. The format of this tweet is similar to the one discussed previously, this time including a short video instead of a photograph with a quote. In it, Biden provides more details, by telling the audience that Ukraine was one of the world's largest agriculture producers before the invasion, and thus stressing the importance of its grain imports to global food security.



Figure 88 US's tweet 26 April 2022, influencing

Throughout the period under review, the Department of State constantly emphasised its support for Ukraine. The tweet above exemplifies this. Secretary Blinken travelled to Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, during the war. That in itself – travelling to a country where fighting is taking place and which is under constant missile attacks – is a strong act of support. The messaging emphasises this, as Secretary

Blinken expresses US support for both the government and the people of Ukraine. The photograph is also very effective – picturing the secretary of state at a Ukrainian train station in front of an advertisement saying “Visit Ukraine” in English. Blinken is looking quite casual and a similar picture could have been posted on someone’s social media account during a holiday trip another time. This makes it more humane and personal, thus helping to increase its appeal.



Figure 89 US's tweet 24 April 2022, influencing

Although Biden did not travel to Kyiv, his messaging was similar – support for Ukraine and Ukrainian people. Using messaging and quotes as well as photographs of both the president and the secretary of state helps to vary the packaging while ensuring that the messaging remains consistent. The tweet furthermore projects US values – defending freedom and opposing tyranny.



Figure 90 US's tweet 26 April 2022, influencing



Figure 91 US's tweet 27 April 2022, influencing

Both tweets above continue with messaging that was identified earlier in this section – that Ukraine is a free, independent and sovereign state. While the wording is slightly different in the text of both tweets, the messaging is consistent. Furthermore, and as already noted earlier, the packaging of the tweets is also different, to keep posts varied and avoid repetition. The tweet from 26 April uses a photograph of Secretary Blinken with a quote, while the second one includes a short video. This is an effective use of the affordances of social media – using it to push narratives and shape perceptions, and doing so consistently, but in a way that continues to be original and engaging, rather than repetitive.



Figure 92 US's tweet 3 April 2022, influencing



Figure 93 US's tweet 4 April 2022, influencing

The two tweets above show how multifaceted the US's strategic use of social media is to achieve its foreign policy goals. Whereas the previous tweets exemplified the US's support for Ukraine and broader messaging to shape narratives around the war and frame it in a way that shows implications for the rest of the world, for instance given the implications for food security, in the two posts above then president Biden directly appeals to the people of Russia. As discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, this is part of public diplomacy (of which digital diplomacy emerged as a sub-set) – directly addressing and attempting to influence foreign publics. The messaging separates the president of Russia, Vladimir Putin, and the people of Russia, placing the blame for the war solely on the country's leader. This helps the US to push a narrative that it is not an enemy of Russia, or the Russian people – only the leader of Russia, whom they blame for the war. Once again, the packaging of text message accompanied by an audiovisual is used, with the first tweet including a photograph of Biden with a quote and the second one including a video. In the video, he also stresses his long history of engagement with other Russian leaders, once again underscoring that neither he nor the US are enemies of the Russian people.



Figure 94 US's tweet 5 April 2022, influencing

As part of the multifaceted approach used in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine discussed earlier, the Department of State also emphasises the unity of NATO. It is likely that this messaging had two aims and audiences. Firstly, reassuring European NATO allies that the US is united with them and will come to their support, if necessary. Secondly, pre-emptively warning Russia that it should not attack a NATO member state, as the organisation remains united in the face of a possible threat.

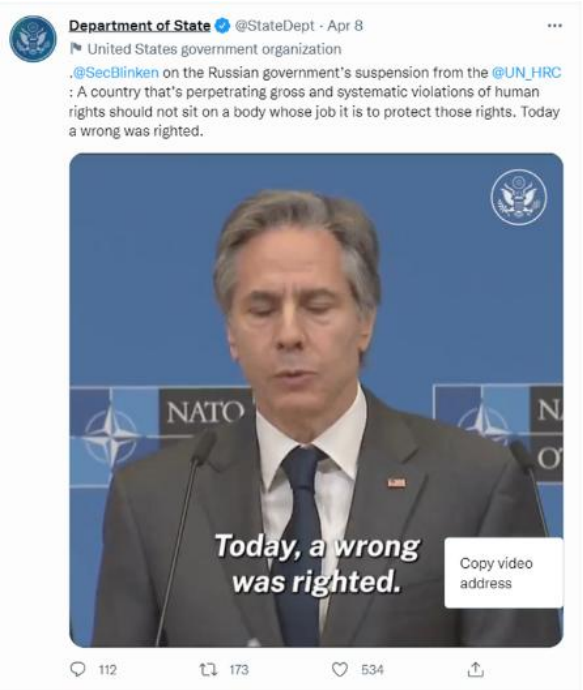


Figure 95 US's tweet 8 April 2022, influencing

The final tweet used as an example of 'influencing' in this sub-section was posted right after Russia was suspended from the UN's Human Rights Council. This happened after a US-initiated resolution achieved the required two-thirds majority of the UN General Assembly voting members, citing "grave concern at the ongoing human rights and humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, particularly at the reports of violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law by the Russian Federation, including gross and systematic violations and abuses of human rights" (UN, 2022). Human rights have always been a cornerstone of US foreign policy and 'Human Rights and Democracy' is one of the Biden administration's foreign policy priorities. Therefore, Russia's suspension from the Human Rights Council of a global multilateral body, the UN, was an important foreign policy objective for the US. Once this objective was accomplished, the state department posted about it, projecting its foreign policy values and taking a moral stance by posting "today a wrong was righted".

Countering Russian propaganda



Figure 96 US's tweet 7 April 2022, influencing

As part of the state department's messaging on NATO, it also tried to dispel disinformation about the alliance and specifically Russian propaganda about it. The tweet above starts with the word 'fact' – using all capital letters for emphasis – and only using one sentence: "NATO is a defensive alliance that does not seek confrontation." In this tweet the state department uses short and sharp messaging to make a point. It then includes a link should the digital publics seek to obtain more information. Such short and sharp messaging is effective to make a point as it is easier to absorb and will likely be better remembered than if the tweet started a long-winded explanation of why NATO is a defensive and non-confrontational alliance. Additionally, the tweet includes a short video that uses Putin's own quote about the right of each country to choose how it ensures its security as counter-propaganda, to emphasise that NATO members have the right to do the same.



Figure 97 US's tweet 19 April 2022, influencing



Figure 98 US's tweet 21 April 2022, influencing

There were more examples of tweets attempting to counter Russian propaganda and disinformation in April 2022, some going beyond its invasion of Ukraine and the stand-off with NATO. The tweets above were a part of a mini-campaign, consisting of two tweets and using infographics, that was repeated twice during April 2022. The campaign was entitled 'Putin's Poison Playbook' (although this was not utilised in the form of a hashtag). In it, the Department of State identified three parts of the Russian government's modus operandi in shaping narratives when implicated in the use of poison abroad: deny, distract and deflect. The two case studies used to prove this point were very different. Khan Shaykhun is a town in Syria that was struck by missiles carrying poison gas in 2017. The Skripal poisonings occurred in 2018 in the UK, when a former Russian spy and his daughter were poisoned using nerve agent. Although these are very different incidents – one involving an air strike on a town and another a clandestine attempt to kill two people – the Department of State attempts to draw parallels between them. According to the Department of State, in both instances the Russian government attempted to deny its involvement, distract attention by providing misleading information without evidence, and deflect by blaming others. This campaign, as well as the tweet above, on NATO's purpose, can be attributed to the US's foreign policy priority of 'disarming disinformation'.

Vaccine Diplomacy



Figure 99 US's tweet 1 April 2022, influencing

Another major sub-theme identified during the period under review was 'vaccine diplomacy', which represented a total of 15% of the tweets categorised as 'digital diplomacy'. The tweet above is an example of American soft power. It starts off by saying that the US has strong and long-standing relations with the people of Nepal, emphasising its connection with the people of the country rather than with the government. It then states that the US has delivered an additional 1.5 million COVID-19 Vaccines to Nepal, and its total contribution is now 3.7 million doses. This shows the US taking a global leadership role in the matters of global health, which is one of its foreign policy priorities under the Biden administration. However, the tweet also makes it clear that the US is doing so multilaterally, as part of COVAX. This is very clear from both the text of the post, as well as the first photograph, which pictures a box of vaccines with a large American flag and the word COVAX under it. COVAX was a multilateral effort co-led by the World Health Organization and others during the COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure to fair and equitable access to vaccines for all countries (World Health Organization, no date). This use of text and visuals helps portray the US as a global leader, but one that is acting as part of a multilateral effort, rather than by itself. The emphasis on US leadership is clear from the body of the text (where COVAX is only mentioned once), as well as the photograph (in which the American flag dwarfs the COVAX logo).



Figure 100 US's tweet 7 April 2022, influencing

This tweet is another example of how the US used soft power to communicate about its vaccine diplomacy. This time vaccines were donated to Egypt, but the messaging and visuals are similar. The text of the post includes the latest number of vaccine deliveries, as well as the total number donated by the US. It also talks about global partners to highlight that this is being done through multilateral efforts. The visual shows two people holding up a sign with US and Egyptian flags. The US thus uses the affordances of social media to advertise its vaccine diplomacy and highlight its leadership in global health. In April 2022, similar posts were made about US vaccine donations to other countries: Vietnam, Indonesia, Bhutan, Tajikistan, and Pakistan.



Figure 101 US's tweet 2 April 2022, influencing



Figure 102 US's tweet 9 April 2022, influencing



Figure 103 US's tweet 18 April 2022, influencing

As can be seen from the three tweets above, the US also used infographics to show the total number of vaccines it donated to other countries. These infographics were only used to highlight US vaccine diplomacy efforts in the Sub-Saharan Africa region. Some of these posts included links that showed where else the US donated vaccines around the world. Such posts were less personal than the two previous examples (which showed US vaccine diplomacy in action using photographs), merely providing names of countries and numbers of vaccines. Nonetheless, they were posted consistently during the period under review and showed the wide reach of US vaccine diplomacy worldwide.



Figure 104 US's tweet 7 April 2022, influencing COVID-19 part 1



Figure 105 US's tweet 7 April 2022, influencing COVID-19 part 2

The third type of post under the 'vaccine diplomacy' sub-theme was purely self-promoting. Both of the tweets above were posted on the same day. The first, although it still mentions COVAX, uses language like "first" and "only" to promote the US's vaccine diplomacy. The accompanying picture is also unashamedly self-promoting. The text in the picture says that the US has not only led but pioneered the global vaccine effort. The phrase "We have pioneered the vaccine effort" is even highlighted for further emphasis. The second tweet picks up on the text of the picture that accompanied the first tweet, re-emphasising that the US continues to lead and pioneer global vaccination efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19. This time COVAX is not even mentioned. The accompanying picture provides metrics: the US has provided over half a billion vaccines to people in 110 countries. Thus, a different approach can be observed between vaccine diplomacy messages mentioning specific countries and broader vaccine diplomacy messages about US vaccine diplomacy efforts. The former adopt a more a balanced approach. While they highlight the US's lead in vaccine diplomacy and provide statistics about how many vaccines were donated, they also mention that this is done as part of multilateral efforts and speak about partnership with other countries and the relationship between the US and the people of the recipient country. The latter, on the other hand, take an almost arrogant approach, making sure that no one has any doubt that the US is first amongst equals in the global vaccination efforts and is both a leader and a pioneer in this regard.

Climate change

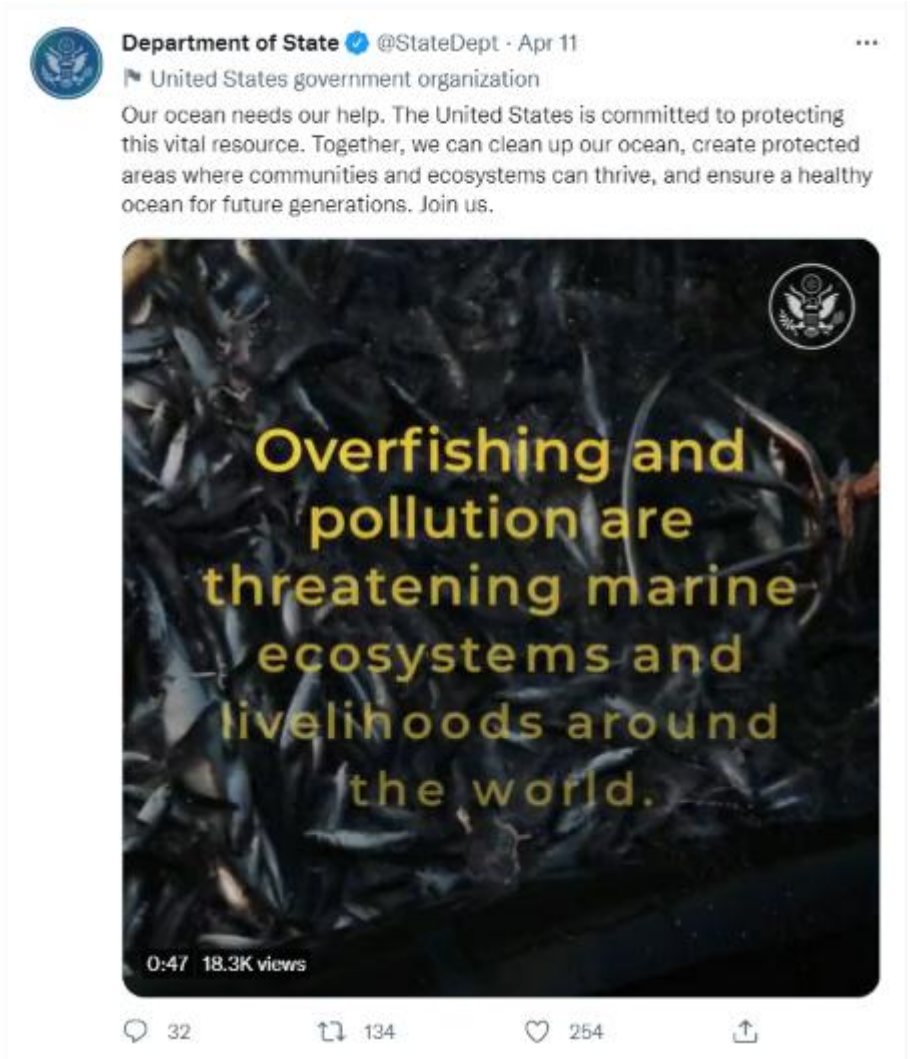


Figure 106 US's tweet 11 April 2022, influencing

The section on US 'broadcasting' tweets in April 2022 discussed the state department's messaging around the Our Ocean 2022 Conference, which the US co-hosted with Palau on 13-14 April. As was mentioned in that section, there were also tweets about the conference categorised as 'influencing'. The tweet above was posted a few days before the conference, on 11 April, and is a call for action ahead of the conference. It put the US position on record as making a commitment to protect the ocean. However, it is also a call for action, saying that the ocean needs our help and outlining what needs to be done. The tweet ends with the words "Join us". This messaging implies that the US is already taking action on oceans and is waiting for others to come on board. It also helps to assert US leadership on this issue. As mentioned earlier, Climate and Environment, Climate Crisis and The Ocean and Polar Affairs are all foreign policy priorities under the Biden administration.



Figure 107 US's tweet 13 April 2022, influencing

Another 'influencing' tweet was posted on the day of the conference, so there was a mixture of 'broadcasting' and 'influencing' posts while the event was taking place. In this specific instance, the Department of State addresses the issues of climate change and oceans from a specific angle: small island nations. Climate change and rising ocean levels have dire consequences for such communities as they may be submerged in water. The Department of State highlights the magnitude of the issue – 63 million people would be affected. It then announces that it is partnering with Palau to co-host the Our Ocean conference, which would help the people and wildlife that would be affected by rising ocean levels. This tweet therefore goes beyond 'broadcasting', i.e. merely announcing that the US is co-hosting an event on oceans. The Department of State instead communicates why the US is co-hosting this event: to spur action by influencing others into joining it to address the threat posed to small island nations. By doing so, it also demonstrates that the US is leading on this issue and is trying to bring others on board.

Human rights

It is also worthwhile to mention a mini-campaign around the launch of the annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices published by the Department of State. This Twitter campaign took place over

a period of two weeks. Some tweets were 'broadcasting', as they merely provided information about the launch of the reports. However, most were 'influencing', seeking to project human rights as the cornerstone of US foreign policy and linking human rights to other US foreign policy priorities. These are discussed below.



Figure 108 US's tweet 13 April 2022, influencing part 1

The first tweet announced the release of the annual country reports. This post could have been 'broadcasting', but the Department of State also included messaging stating that human rights are at the heart of US foreign policy. This ensured that the post projected US values – in this instance human rights – to foreign publics while stating that the US strives to identify human rights abuses anywhere they occur. This signalled that the US had adopted a global watchdog role, a statement supported further by the release of the country reports themselves, which monitor human right abuses worldwide. This messaging meant that this tweet was categorised as 'influencing', since the Department of State did not merely announce the release of the reports but used the opportunity to project US values and assert the country's role as a global human rights champion and watchdog.



Figure 109 US's tweet 13 April 2022, influencing part 2

In this tweet the Department of State actually lays out one of the US foreign policy strategies – using the human rights country reports as a tool to promote human rights worldwide. Furthermore, the Department of State even explains that although these reports are foreign policy tool for the US government, they are in fact used by others, such as activists, journals, academics, lawyers and human rights defenders. This relates back to the points raised during the literature review in Chapter 2 about public diplomacy and digital diplomacy decentralising the practice of diplomacy by facilitating the emergence of other actors. This is the case here: the US government commits to putting human rights at the centre of its foreign policy. It then publishes reports assessing the situation in terms of human rights in other countries and makes these reports publicly available on the internet, and disseminates them through social media. Then other actors in foreign countries use these reports to promote human rights in their societies, effectively doing the US government's advocacy work for it. This tweet, originally posted on 13 April, was posted again on 16 April and 25 April.



Figure 110 US's tweet 13 April 2022, influencing part 3

In this tweet, then State Secretary Blinken links the human rights reports to another foreign policy issue it is concerned with: Russia's invasion of Ukraine. His messaging helps to paint the US and its commitment to human rights as a polar opposite of Russia, which abuses human rights. Not only does Blinken take the moral high ground but he also attempts to isolate Russia and bring others to the US's side, by saying that its actions have prompted people worldwide to action – defending human rights.



Figure 111 US's tweet 13 April 2022, influencing part 4

The post above is similar. In this instance, however, Blinken does not even mention Russia by name. He simply links makes the link between governments that abuse human rights in their countries and those that break other international rules, such as invading other countries. Blinken also mentions breaking trade rules, which is most likely a subtle dig at China. Comparing the flouting of international rules with human rights abuses is clever messaging as it paints such governments as recalcitrant, irresponsible actors that have no respect for rules or order. At the same time, former State Secretary Blinken says that the US will take a leadership role by championing human rights for all, not just people within its borders. Such statements are reflective of the US's status as a global superpower. The attached picture with a quote may be aimed at the domestic audience as it says that the US government's commitment to human rights is vital to its national security. Perhaps this is to explain to the domestic audience why the US spends time and resources on championing human rights worldwide. This tweet was originally posted on 13 April and subsequently posted again three days later, on 16 April.

Bilateral diplomacy

Finally, it is also worth examining a few examples of tweets categorised as 'bilateral diplomacy' that were posted by the Department of State in April 2022.



Figure 112 US's tweet 20 April 2022, influencing part 1



Figure 113 US's tweet 20 April 2022, influencing part 2



Figure 114 US's tweet 21 April 2022, influencing part 3

The above series of tweets was posted before and during Secretary Blinken's trip to Panama. In it, the importance of the US-Panama bilateral relationship is explained. It is likely aimed at both foreign publics (in Panama) and the domestic audience (in the US). The tweets explain the importance of the relationship between the two countries from different angles. The first tweet labels Panama as a

partner of the US and outlines three broad areas of cooperation: regional security, strengthening of democratic institutions, and promoting inclusive economic growth. Although these are quite broad, they nonetheless help to outline the main areas in which the governments of the two countries work together. The second tweet is focused on trade. The infographic provides the volume of trade between US and Panama – US$13 billion, while the text notes that the trade relationship is beneficial for both countries. It furthermore states that the US is both Panama's main economic partner and the highest investor into its economy. This shows the importance of the relationship to foreign publics (in Panama). However, part of the message is also aimed at domestic audiences (in the US) as it highlights that Panama's exports to the US mean more and better jobs in the US. This relates back to Chapter 2's discussion of debates about the target audiences of public diplomacy and shows that messaging can be aimed both internally and externally. Finally, the third tweet also highlights US's vaccine diplomacy efforts, this time specifically in relation to Panama. As highlighted earlier, this was a prominent category of tweets during the period under review and one that used the affordances of social media to promote the US's foreign policy priorities of 'COVID-19 Response and Recovery' and 'Global Health'.



Figure 115 US's tweet 13 April 2022, influencing

Finally, the tweet above was used to project American soft power in a bilateral relationship with India. In it, Secretary Blinken is quoted as saying that there are 200,000 students from India studying in the US. He also notes that the US is lucky to have these students. Such word choice is no doubt intended to make the Indian publics feel more favourable towards the US. The post notes that this is a two-way

relationship because US students also study in India (although the number is not specified, because it is likely significantly smaller). It uses the opportunity to promote two US scholarships – the Benjamin A Gilman International Scholarship Program and the Fulbright US Student Program – that American students can apply to in order to study abroad.

Social network analysis: Case study of the US

The following section will examine the networking aspects of the US's digital diplomacy. The structure of this section is similar to the previous case studies of Kenya and Australia, with social network theory used to analyse which state and non-state actors the state department retweeted in April 2022.

Thematic analysis was applied to retweets to firstly identify broad categories under which they fall, such as foreign affairs and policy, and condolence messages. An additional level of analysis was then carried out to further categorise retweets into specific themes, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine and climate change. During both levels of analysis, themes and sub-themes emerged naturally, either as patterns (where a common theme was identified in multiple posts) or as outliers (as single instances of a post on a specific theme/topic). In terms of the approach used to identify types of actors retweeted by the US's MFA, firstly the same broad categories of actors were used as in the case studies of Australia and Kenya, to ensure consistency – US state actor, US not-state-actor, international state actor, and international non-state actor. The second level of analysis sought to further categorise these actors, for instance US Secretary of State and US President. These sub-categories emerged naturally, either as patterns (where the same account was retweeted) or as outliers (where an account was only retweeted once).

Table 38 US's retweets in April 2022: Broad themes

Broad theme	**Number of retweets**	**Percentage**
Foreign affairs and policy	127	73%
State Department announcement	14	8%
Condolences	9	5%
Diversity	6	3%
Earth Day	4	2%
Student lecture	3	2%
History of US diplomacy	2	1%

Happy Easter		1%
Happy Passover	1	1%
Happy Ramadan	1	1%
Release of a US citizen from a Russian prison	1	1%
Commemoration of Armenian genocide	1	1%
Take your child to work day	1	1%
World Heritage Day	1	1%

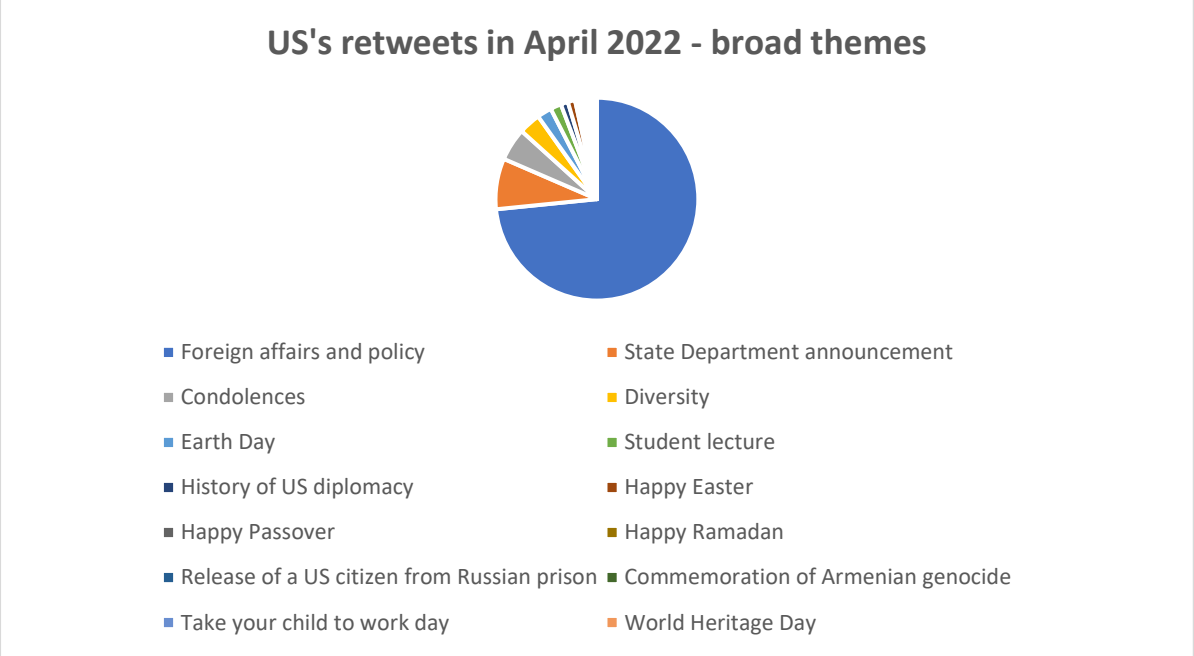


Figure 116 US's retweets in April 2022: Broad themes

Table 39 US's retweets in April 2022: Specific themes

Specific theme	**Number of retweets**	**Percentage**
Russia's invasion of Ukraine	46	36%
Bilateral diplomacy	26	20%
Multilateral diplomacy	16	13%
Climate change	10	8%
NATO unity	8	6%

COVID vaccines	2	2%
Expo 2020	2	2%
Fulbright award	2	2%
Aid for Afghan people	1	>1%
Arrest of a Russian opposition figure	1	>1%
Child protection	1	>1%
Conflict in Ethiopia	1	>1%
Congratulating French president on re-election	1	>1%
Cyber security	1	>1%
Infrastructure aid	1	>1%
International transport	1	>1%
Internet governance	1	>1%
Migration	1	>1%
New state department appointment	1	>1%
AIDS vaccines	1	>1%
Release of a political prisoner in China	1	>1%
Violence in Jerusalem	1	>1%
War in Syria	1	>1%

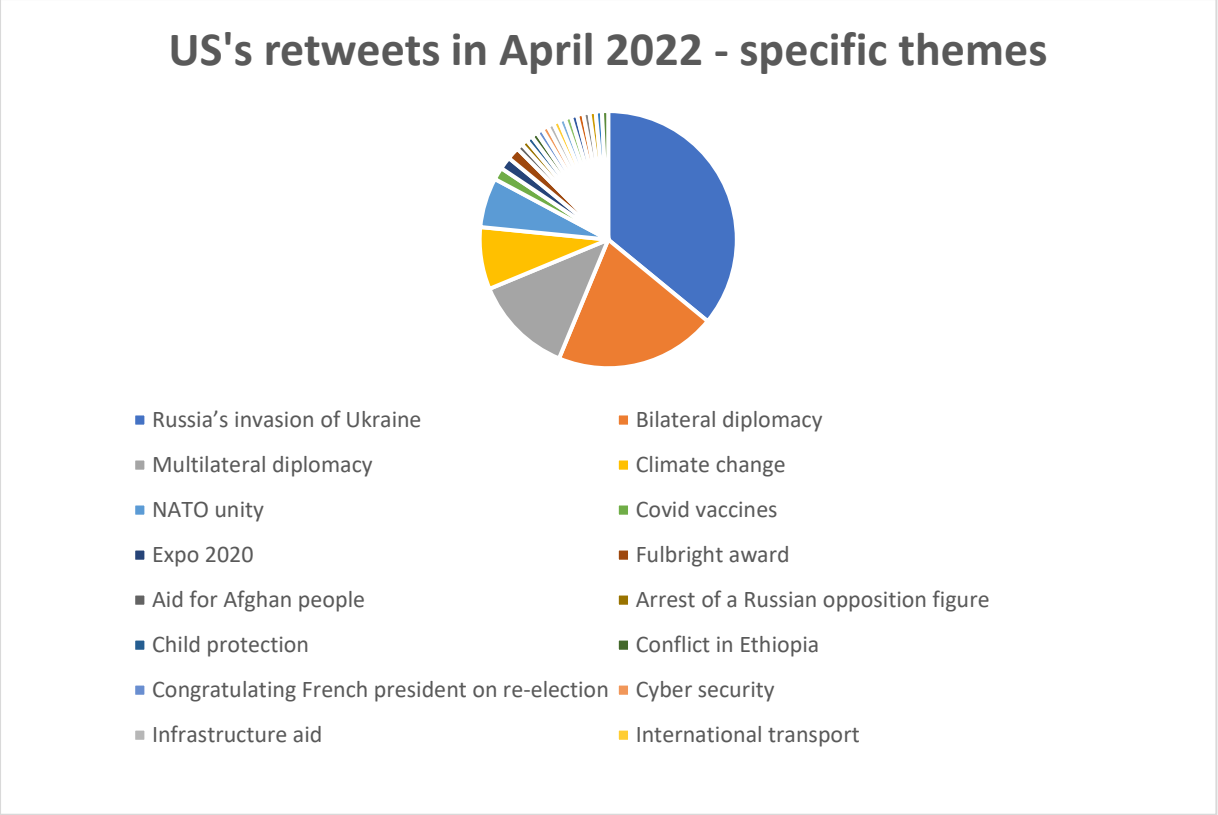


Figure 117 US's retweets in April 2022: Specific themes

The Department of State retweeted posts made by others on 173 occasions during the period under review. Thematically, the majority of these retweets corresponded with the posts made by the state department during the reporting period – Russia's invasion of Ukraine. There were 45 posts on this theme, representing 25% of all posts made, and 46 retweets on this theme, representing 36% of all retweets. This shows coherence in the Department of State's approach to social media – prioritising amplifying messaging from other actors on the topic clearly deemed most important at the time. By retweeting others, the Department of State helped to promote this topic on social media, by fuelling the algorithm. Thus, it tried to ensure that it became not only the topic it tweets about the most, but the topic that 'trends' and dominates Twitter feeds. Similarly, other topics the Department of State deemed important enough to prioritise posting about on Twitter in April 2022, including 'climate change', 'vaccine diplomacy' and 'NATO unity', also featured on the most-retweeted list, although they weren't as prominent as retweets about 'bilateral relations' and 'multilateral relations'.

Table 40 US's retweets April 2022: Broad actors

Broad actor	Number of retweets	Percentage
International state actor	4	3%
International non-state actor	3	2%
US state actor	165	95%
US non-state actor	1	>1%

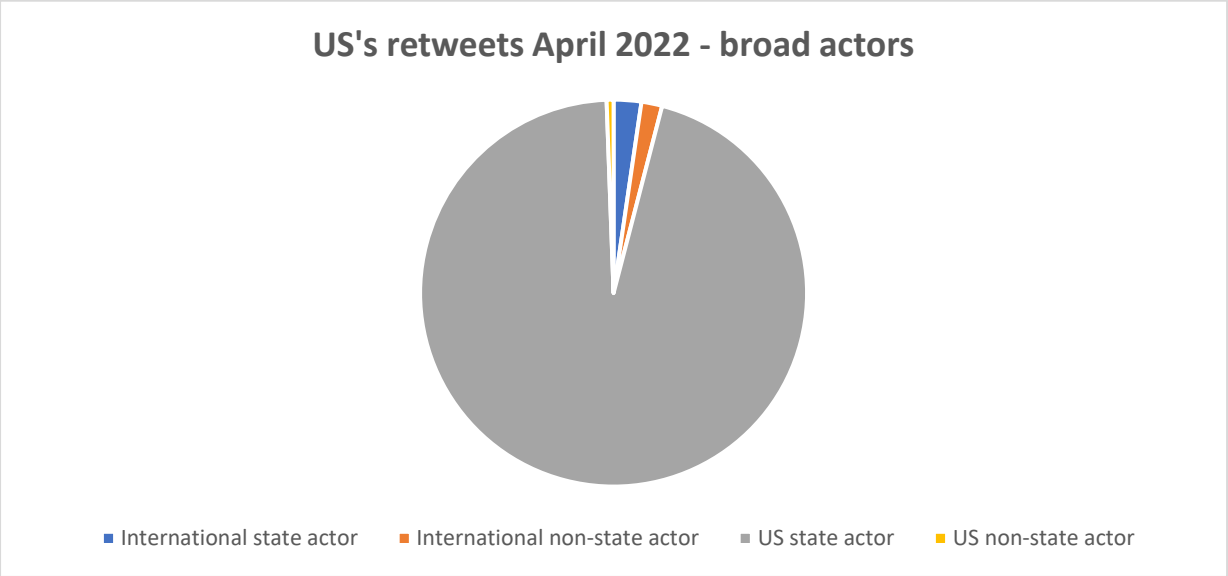


Figure 118 US's retweets April 2022: Broad actors

Table 41 US's retweets April 2022: Specific actors

Specific actor	Number of retweets	Percentage of retweets
US Secretary of State	64	37%
State Department Spokesperson	15	9%
Deputy Secretary of State	11	6%
US President	9	5%
US Ambassador to the UN	9	5%

US Mission (to NATO, UN, OSCE)	8	5%
Presidential Climate Envoy	7	4%
Educational and Cultural Affairs Department	6	3%
State Department Under Secretary	5	3%
State Department Deputy Spokesperson	5	3%
White House	4	2%
Cabinet Office UK	4	2%
US Embassy (Ukraine and India)	3	2%
USAID	3	2%
USA Expo 2020	2	1%
UN	1	>1%
Brussels Media Hub	1	>1%
Federal Chief Sustainability Officer	1	>1%
Secretary of Defense	1	>1%
Foreign Press Center	1	>1%
National Museum of American Diplomats	1	>1%
Our Ocean Palau	1	>1%
Pentagon Press Secretary	1	>1%
Population, Refugees and Migration Bureau	1	>1%
President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief	1	>1%
State Department official	1	>1%

Trafficking in Persons Office	1	>1%
Transportation Secretary	1	>1%
US Ambassador to Israel	1	>1%
US Department of State Bureau of Intelligence and Research	1	>1%
Vice President	1	>1%
Western Hemisphere Affairs Assistant Secretary	1	>1%

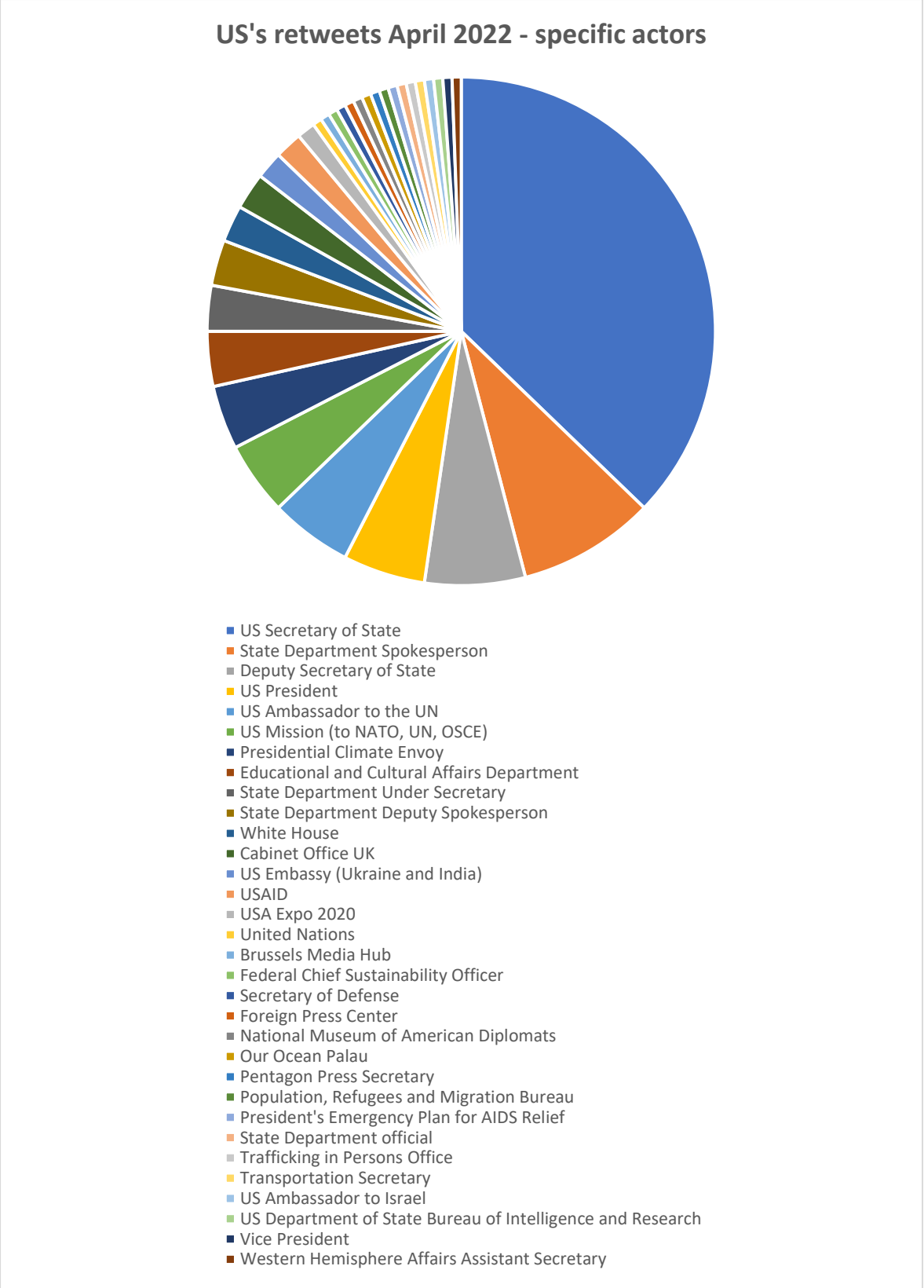


Figure 119 US's retweets April 2022: Specific actors

Examination and analysis of the types of actors the state department retweeted during the period under review paints a very clear picture: 165 out of 173 retweets, or 95%, were retweets of posts

made by other US state actors. Subcategorising these retweets further, into specific actors, is even more telling. The top three most-retweeted accounts in April 2022 were the US Secretary of State (Antony Blinken) with 64 retweets, representing 37% of the total, Department of State spokesperson with 15 retweets, representing 9% of the total, and Deputy Secretary of State with 11 retweets, representing 6% of the total. Together these add up to 90 tweets or 52% of the total. Therefore, just over half of all the retweets by the Department of State were of posts made by accounts belonging to its officials. This furthermore demonstrates a strategic approach to retweeting. Essentially four accounts from the Department of State were tweeting the same narratives, underpinned by similar messaging and retweeting each other. Apart from that, the state department also amplified a diversity of other US state actor voices, including officials from other departments and diplomats.

Data interpretation: case study of the US

The Department of State's use of the affordances of social media in April 2022 is impressive both in terms of its broadcasting ability, as well as in terms of the use of soft power and strategies to influence others, to shape narratives, promote the US view of events, and combat disinformation. In both 'broadcasting' and 'influencing' posts every single word counted – the messaging was concise, succinct and to the point. In most instances it was also supported by photographs with quotes that highlighted the key point, infographics that included supporting evidence, or short videos that provided additional detail. 'Broadcasting' messages stated the US position or views on global events and US actions. 'Influencing' messages also stated the US position, but went further, by trying to influence other countries towards a certain type of action, creating a more favourable view of the US amongst foreign publics, using soft power to show positive US actions in the world, projecting US values, and furthering US foreign policy. During April 2022 the Department of State also used its tweets to promote at least 11 out of its 21 stated policy priorities: Arms Control and Nonproliferation; Climate and Environment; Climate Crisis; COVID-19 Response and Recovery; Disarming Disinformation; Global Health; Holding Russia and Belarus to Account; Human Rights and Democracy; The Ocean and Polar Affairs; Treaties and International Agreements; and, United with Ukraine. The US certainly lives up to its status as a superpower in its use of social media to further its foreign policy goals through the breadth of the topics it covers, strategies employed to promote its narratives, and messaging used to support these.

Chapter 6: Discussion and conclusion

Introduction

This thesis aimed to compare how countries with a different status in international relations, namely developing countries, middle powers and great powers, use the affordances of social media to practise digital diplomacy to achieve their foreign policy goals and objectives. Digital diplomacy proceeds in different ways in countries with different political and economic profiles, creating asymmetries in the conduct of international affairs. As per the data analysis and interpretation, this chapter argues that while digital diplomacy broadly reflects existing power structures in global politics, agility on social can reward countries with a lower status in international relations.

The following data supports this claim. On 1 May 2022, Kenya's MFA handle @ForeignOfficeKE had 364,400 followers, while Australia's MFA handle @dfat had less than a third of that number, 104,800, despite having joined Twitter (now X) two years earlier (Australia joined in March 2011 whereas Kenya joined in May 2013). In the two years since this data collection took place (May 2024, at the time of writing), Kenya was able to grow its number of followers by 60,800, to 425,200. In the same time period Australia, on the other hand, only grew its number of followers by 6,800, to 111,600, which is 10% of what Kenya accomplished in that same time period. On 1 May the US had 6,300,000 people following its Department of State account. Two years later this increased by approximately 100,000, to 6,400,000 followers. This indicates that while the US, as a great power, has the most followers of its digital diplomacy content and can grow its followers at a faster rate, the roles of a developing power, Kenya, and a middle power, Australia, have been switched when compared in terms of their status in the global system and the interest of digital publics in their digital diplomatic activities. Not only has Kenya got more followers than Australia, but in two years Australia has grown its following by 6,800, while the US and Kenya have grown theirs by 100,000 and 60,800, respectively.

This chapter, which concludes the thesis, conducts comparative analysis of how Kenya, Australia and the US practice digital diplomacy by capturing key metrics from the state-centric typology of digital diplomacy and social network analysis presented and interpreted in Chapter 5. The structure of this chapter is as follows:

Firstly, it compares the data from the three case studies from Chapters 5, which analysed how Kenya (during two time periods – April 2022 and April 2023); Australia (also during two time periods – April 2022 and April 2023); and the US (during one time period – April 2022) conducted digital diplomacy on Twitter (Now X). The comparison section is divided into two sub-parts. The first part compares how

Kenya (a developing country) and Australia (a middle power) conducted digital diplomacy in April 2022 and April 2023. Both countries have undergone a change in government between these time periods, meaning they have had different administrations in 2022 and 2023.

The second part compares how Kenya, Australia and the US practised digital diplomacy in April 2022. These comparisons are conducted as per the methodology set out in Chapter 4. Firstly, social media metrics, thematic analysis and engagement are used to analyse the posts made by the countries' respective MFAs on Twitter (now X). Secondly, social network theory is used to analyse retweets done by the MFAs to see which voices they choose to amplify: domestic state actors, domestic non-state actors, international state actors, or international non-state actors. Thirdly, it uses the categorisation of social media posts as per the state-centric typology of digital diplomacy developed in Chapter 3 to determine whether developing countries, middle powers and great powers primarily use digital diplomacy for the purposes of 'broadcasting', 'branding', 'providing e-services' or 'influencing', and whether they prioritise a tactical or a strategic approach and whether they utilise a one-way or two-way communication style. Fourthly, it uses social network theory to discuss how the case study countries use networking opportunities provided by social media to use networks to amplify their messaging and promote narratives that are consistent with their foreign policy goals.

After this analysis is conducted, this chapter acknowledges limitations of this study, sets out recommendations in terms of the way forward, and concludes with the main findings of this thesis.

Discussion: Comparison of Kenya and Australia

Social media metrics

Table 42 Kenya and Australia social media metrics April 2022

Country	Number of posts	Average likes	Average retweets
Kenya	55	40.1	14.7
Australia	20	17.9	8.5

Table 43 Kenya and Australia social media metrics April 2023

Country	Number of posts	Average likes	Average retweets
Kenya	20	61.5	9.1
Australia	20	25.3	9.3

In April 2022, Kenya posted 55 tweets, which equated to an average of 1.8 tweets per day. Australia, on the other hand, posted 20 tweets or 0.66 tweets per day. One would expect that a middle power would have more to say and have more resources to make itself heard. However, this was not the case, and in April 2022, for instance, Kenya, a developing country, tweeted 175% more than Australia, a middle power. In April 2023, Kenya tweeted substantially less: 20 times, which meant an average of 0.66 tweets per day. Australia tweeted the exact same number of times: 20, which equated to 0.66 times a day. On this basis, the claim that a country's economic and political status is a predictor of its digital diplomacy prowess cannot be confirmed. Instead, any country, regardless of its power status, can rise to high levels of agility in the digital diplomacy sphere, at least based on the sheer frequency and volume of tweets.

Being able to post content that the digital publics find appealing is also important. In April 2022, Kenya's 55 tweets attracted an average of 14.7 retweets and 40.1 likes per tweet. In April 2023, Kenya's 20 tweets attracted an average of 9.1 retweets and 61.5 likes. This was interesting, as while the average number of retweets dropped from the year before, the number of likes increased substantially. This could be explained by the following. In April 2022, only one tweet attracted more than 100 likes, although substantially so: the tweet about solidarity with Somaliland attracted 541 likes. On the other hand, in April 2023, there were five tweets with over 100 likes: bilateral relations with Belarus, bilateral relations with Thailand, Peace Mediation Training sponsored by the government of Finland, digitisation of services provided by Kenya, and assistance to Kenyans stranded in Sudan during the conflict. With the smaller overall number of tweets, these significantly boosted the average number of likes. Australia's metrics were similar in both periods under review. In April 2022, 20 tweets attracted an average of 8.5 retweets and 17.9 likes per tweet, while the same number of tweets a year later attracted 9.3 retweets and 25.3 likes.

Kenya posted substantially more tweets than Australia, at least during one of the periods under review. In addition, its tweets were more popular, in terms of likes, and seemingly had an effect on the number of people following its account. On 1 May 2022, Kenya's MFA handle @ForeignOfficeKE had 364,400 followers, while Australia's MFA handle @dfat had less than a third of that number, 104,800, despite having joined Twitter (now X) two years earlier (Australia joined in March 2011, whereas Kenya joined in May 2013). In the two years since this data collection took place (May 2024, at the time of writing), Kenya was able to grow its number of followers by 60,800, to 425,200. In the same time period Australia, on the other hand, only grew its number of followers by 6,800, to 111,600, which is 10% of what Kenya accomplished in that same time period. It is clear that continuously

posting new content helped to keep the account fresh and was a successful tactic in attracting readership. As of the time of writing, Kenya, a developing country, had roughly four times more followers than Australia, a middle power. This means that four times as many people are regularly exposed to its posts on X (formerly Twitter). The major conclusion here is that traditional economic or political power does not automatically translate into effectiveness in digital diplomacy. Rather, the tactic of sustained posting of social media content enhances digital presence, enabling developing countries like Kenya to achieve greater online reach than an economically stronger middle power such as Australia.

Thematic analysis

Table 44 Kenya and Australia thematic analysis April 2022

Country	Bilateral relations	Regional relations	Multilateral diplomacy	Climate change	Trade	Diaspora affairs
Kenya	69%	10%	3%	5%	5%	5%
Australia	60%	7%	0%	0%	20%	0%

Table 45 Kenya and Australia thematic analysis April 2023

Country	Bilateral relations	Foreign policy	Multilateral diplomacy	Regional diplomacy	Consular diplomacy	Climate change
Kenya	69%	15%	8%	0%	0%	0%
Australia	38%	0%	8%	15%	23%	8%

When analysing the tweets both countries' MFAs posted during the two periods under review from a thematic perspective, the following can be observed: both countries prioritise communication about bilateral relations with other countries. In both April 2022 and April 2023, 69% of Kenya's posts were about Kenya's diplomats meeting with their counterparts from other countries. In 2022, regional relations with a focus on the EAC was the second most popular topic, albeit a distant second. Australia had the same focus, with 60% of tweets being about bilateral relations in April 2022 and 38% (not the majority, but still the most) in April 2023. While both countries prioritised posts about bilateral relations with others, they differed in approach and communication style. Kenya displayed a wide geographical reach in both years, covering relations with fellow African countries, as well as countries in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, South America and North America. Australia, on the other hand, focused on its traditional partners (the UK and US) and well as countries in the Indo-Pacific in 2022, before also covering a wider geographical scope in 2023 and including countries from Africa and South America. The importance of this finding is that both Kenya and Australia prioritised bilateral relations with other countries under different administrations. Indeed, this seems applicable since both developing countries and middle powers rely on cooperation with others to achieve their objectives

in the international system. Having good relations with others is key in this instance. A high-level conclusion based on this analysis indicates that both developing countries, represented by Kenya, and middle powers, represented by Australia, share similar foreign policy priorities emphasising bilateral and regional cooperation. Therefore, the supposition that developing nations and middle powers differ fundamentally in their digital diplomatic practices lacks empirical support. This is evidenced by Kenya and Australia's similar thematic content as per the analysis of their social media posts, which suggests similar foreign policy objectives in terms of bilateral and regional cooperation.

Quality of engagement

Table 46 Kenya and Australia quality of engagement April 2022

Country	Engagement posts
Kenya	0
Australia	66

Table 47 Kenya and Australia quality of engagement April 2023

Country	Engagement posts
Kenya	0
Australia	2

In terms of engagement, Australia engaged with users in both April 2022 and April 2023, while Kenya did not. On a positive note, Australia seemingly responded to every single Twitter (now X) user who asked a question. On a negative note, as discussed extensively in Chapter 4, these were 'cut-and-paste' answers that directed users towards a website or a phone number to call. In other words, this was not meaningful engagement by any stretch of the imagination and it certainly did not help to explain Australia's foreign policy priorities to foreign publics. Kenya's lack of engagement stands out in this analysis. It seems that foreign policy and diplomacy in Kenya, as a representative of developing countries, is a preserve of the MFA and that it precludes the involvement of citizens and other non-state stakeholders.

Social network theory

Table 48 Kenya and Australia social network theory April 2022

Country	Retweets of international state actors	Retweets of international non-state actors	Retweets of domestic state actors	Retweets of domestic non-state actors
Kenya	5%	28%	61%	5%

Australia	0%	0%	100%	0%

Table 49 Kenya and Australia social network theory April 2023

Country	Retweets of international state actors	Retweets of international non-state actors	Retweets of domestic state actors	Retweets of domestic non-state actors
Kenya	2%	4%	90%	4%
Australia	0%	0%	100%	0%

When looking at the two countries' activities in terms of network engagement, in April 2022 Kenya prioritised firstly other Kenyan state actors (61% of retweets) and secondly international non-state actors (28% of retweets). The focus on international non-state actors was likely tactical, rather than strategic. Kenya and Sweden were jointly organising a major international event on the environment, hence the retweets on this topic. In April 2023, on the other hand, 90% of retweets were of Kenyan state actors. Australia even more so prioritised amplifying the voices of other Australian state actors. In both April 2022 and April 2023 Australia only retweeted other Australian state actors and no one else. This suggests that both Kenya and Australia primarily used retweets strategically to amplify domestic state actors, reinforcing government cohesion domestically, although Kenya demonstrated more flexibility in engaging international non-state actors when it was tactically beneficial to do so.

Comparative analysis through the typology of digital diplomacy

Table 50 Kenya and Australia typology comparison April 2022

Country	Broadcasting	Branding	E-services	Influencing
Kenya	35 posts	2 posts	0 posts	2 posts
Australia	3 posts	2 branding	4 posts	7 posts

Table 51 Kenya and Australia typology comparison April 2023

Country	Broadcasting	Branding	E-services	Influencing
Kenya	13 posts	0 posts	1 post	2 posts
Australia	4 posts	0 posts	3 posts	6 posts

The state-centric typology of digital diplomacy helped to determine the approaches and communication styles of Kenya and Australia during the periods under review. The analysis suggests that developing countries make do with presence in the digital diplomacy space while a middle power is likely to influence geopolitical issues. In both April 2022 and April 2023, Kenya primarily conducted digital diplomacy in a manner that could best be described as tactical (in terms of its approach) and one-way (in terms of its communication style). 90% of Kenya's posts in 2022 and 81% in the following

year were categorised as ‘broadcasting’. Australia was more varied in how it practised digital diplomacy during these two time periods. In April 2022, 47% of were categorised as ‘influencing’. Although they made up only single digits, the rest of the posts were more or less evenly spread between ‘provision of e-services’, ‘broadcasting’ and ‘branding’. Overall, Australia’s approach was strategic and its communication style two-way. Therefore, while both Kenya and Australia prioritised bilateral diplomacy, they went about it in two different ways.

The tweets posted by Kenya and Australia on Ukraine, shown in the previous chapter, are illustrative. Both were categorised under ‘bilateral diplomacy’ but Kenya’s tweet was categorised as ‘broadcasting’, while Australia’s was ‘influencing’. The context is important – they were posted approximately two months after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Kenya’s tweet was about a meeting between the Ukrainian ambassador to Kenya and Kenya’s principal secretary (effectively deputy minister) for foreign affairs. It is likely that the ambassador tried to gain Kenya’s support as an important regional and continental player. Yet the tweet does not state support for Ukraine or even mention the war, portraying this as a routine protocol visit. Although Kenya expressed support for Ukraine at the UN Security Council, where it held a temporary seat, it chose not to communicate this support through its digital diplomacy. As a developing country, it may have wanted to remain as neutral as possible in this war, especially given the conflict between the US and Russia, as well as China’s tacit support for Russia. Thus, Kenya reported on this meeting, but said nothing further. By contrast, Australia’s tweet was classified as ‘influencing’ because it overtly stated its support for Ukraine and Ukrainian people, thus taking a stance and a clear side in the war. It furthermore listed its support *for* Ukraine as well as the measures it has taken *against* Russia and its ally, Belarus. While some of this may have been aimed at the domestic audience, to let the Australian people know how their government is supporting Ukraine, there is also a clear element of leading by example and, as befitting a middle power, showing that it is working in conjunction with other international actors to help the country in need. The visual differences are also notable. Kenya used two photographs and tagged the principal secretary as well as the Ukrainian Embassy. Australia posted an infographic. As a developing country, Kenya may not have the resources to hire a graphic designer in-house or to outsource this work. Australia, as a middle power, has the resources to do this and supplement its post with an infographic.

Another interesting point of comparison is how the MFAs of Kenya and Australia responded to the conflict in Sudan. Australia employed e-services (consular digital diplomacy) efforts to provide information to its citizens who were stranded in the country. Kenya’s digital diplomacy efforts in this

regard consisted of three tweets, all part of the same thread, which highlighted the evacuation efforts of Kenyan nationals. Thus, the digital diplomatic efforts of both countries in response to the Sudan conflict exhibited both similarities and notable differences. Both MFAs utilised Twitter (now X) as part of providing e-services, by sharing practical consular information and evacuation details for their citizens stranded in Sudan and emphasising the value of social media during crises for this purpose. However, despite only making a few more posts, Australia's digital engagement came across as more coordinated, clear and proactive, consistently sharing essential updates, guidance and infographics, reflecting a unified crisis communication approach. By contrast, Kenya's efforts consisted of one post classified as 'provision of e-services' (consular diplomacy) that provided practical information to Kenyans stranded in Sudan on how to register with the government for evacuation purposes.

In terms of the political dimension of the conflict, the following observations and comparisons can be made. Apart from posts on e-services, Australia's DFAT did not tweet about the conflict, merely retweeting what DFAT Minister Penny Wong said about the situation. Kenya's MFA similarly did not post directly about the conflict, only reposting a statement from Cabinet Secretary Mutua. It is, however, important to bear in mind that while for Australia, Sudan is on the other side of the world, for Kenya it is much closer to home. Furthermore, Kenya's MFA not reposting statements by President Ruto on the conflict once indicates a lack of a coherent digital diplomacy strategy and an opportunity to amplify messages from other state actors.

Discussion: Comparison of Kenya, Australia and the US

Social media metrics

Table 52 Kenya, Australia and the US social media metrics April 2022

Country	Number of posts	Average likes	Average retweets
Kenya	55	40.1	14.7
Australia	20	17.9	8.5
The US	241	235.3	87

This section adds the US to the analysis and examines how the three case study countries conducted digital diplomacy in April 2022. While during this period Kenya posted 55 tweets (an average of 1.8 tweets per day) and Australia posted 20 tweets (an average of 0.66 tweets per day), the US posted 241 (an average of 8.03 tweets per day). This means that the US, a great power, posted 1,105% more than Australia, a middle power, and 338% more than Kenya, a developing power. Clearly, Australia is an outlier in this instance, at least in terms of social media metrics in accordance with the status of countries in the international system. In terms of the appeal of the content posted, the metrics are as

follows. In April 2022 Kenya's 55 tweets attracted an average of 14.7 retweets and 40.1 likes per tweet. Australia's 20 tweets attracted an average of 8.5 retweets and 17.9 likes per tweet. The US's 241 tweets attracted an average of 87.0 retweets and 235.3 likes. Once again, Australia is an outlier and seems to be punching below its weight as a middle power, receiving both fewer retweets and fewer average likes for its posts.

Thematic analysis

Table 53 Kenya, Australia and the US thematic analysis April 2022

Country	Bilateral relations	Multilateral diplomacy	Climate change	Russia's invasion of Ukraine	Vaccine diplomacy	Trade
Kenya	69%	3%	5%	0%	0%	5%
Australia	60%	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%
The US	5%	7%	10%	25%	15%	0%

From a thematic perspective, as discussed in the previous section, in April 2022 both Kenya and Australia prioritised communication about bilateral relations with other countries. 69% of Kenya's and 60% of Australia's posts were about their diplomats meeting with counterparts from other countries. In the case of the US, the top three themes were Russia's invasion of Ukraine, vaccine diplomacy and Department of State briefings. Bilateral diplomacy was number seven on the list, at 9% of the total posts. This shows that, as a great power, the US is far less reliant on good relations with others to pursue its foreign policy goals. Rather, it sets the agenda and then uses relations with others to help further it. This is evident from the fact that most of the posts about bilateral diplomacy contained messaging about Russia's invasion of Ukraine, while most of the tweets about vaccine diplomacy also emphasised the partnership aspect with the recipient country and its people.

Quality of engagement

Table 54 Kenya, Australia and the US quality of engagement April 2022

Country	Engagement posts
Kenya	0
Australia	66
The US	0

Interestingly, while engagement was considered as a 'golden standard' of digital diplomacy only a few years ago, as per the literature review conducted in Chapter 2, the three case study countries do not prioritise it. Kenya and the US did not practise it at all, despite most of their posts attracting many

replies and questions. Australia practised a limited form of engagement, responding to consular queries posts only. Yet, as discussed in Chapter 5, these were copy and paste answers that were not actually engaging. In most instances they did not actually answer the followers' questions but merely re-directed them to the DFAT's website or pointed them to DFAT's phone number. It is therefore likely that the practice of digital diplomacy has moved on from the theory and engagement is no longer seen as practical or useful.

Social network theory

Table 55 Kenya, Australia and the US social network theory April 2022

Country	Retweets of international state actors	Retweets of international non-state actors	Retweets of domestic state actors	Retweets of domestic non-state actors
Kenya	5%	28%	61%	5%
Australia	0%	0%	100%	0%
The US	3%	2%	95%	>1%

In terms of use of networks, in April 2022 Kenya prioritised firstly other Kenyan state actors (61% of retweets) and secondly international non-state actors (28% of retweets). Australia only retweeted other Australian state actors. 95% of the US's retweets were of posts made by other US state actors. The US and Australia therefore prioritised amplifying other state-based voices from their own countries. While Kenya also primarily retweeted other state actors, it was more amenable to amplifying other voices, specifically international non-state actors. However, this could have been a once-off occurrence, since as mentioned, during the period under review Kenya was organising a major international event on the environment and was retweeting international non-state actors in order to promote it.

Comparative analysis through the typology of digital diplomacy

Table 56 Kenya, Australia and the US typology comparison April 2022

Country	Broadcasting	Branding	E-services	Influencing
Kenya	35 posts	2 posts	0 posts	2 posts
Australia	3 posts	2 branding	4 posts	7 posts
The US	54 posts	0 posts	4 posts	120 posts

Finally, using the state-centric typology of digital diplomacy and categorising social media posts made by Kenya, Australia and the US in April 2022 yields the following results. In April 2022 Kenya primarily conducted digital diplomacy in a tactical (in terms of its approach) and one-way (in terms of its

communication style) manner, with 90% of Kenya's posts categorised as 'broadcasting'. In this instance, Australia lived up to its status as a middle power as its approach was strategic and its communication two-way. Almost half of Australia's posts were categorised as 'influencing' and the rest were spread across the three other categories: 'provision of e-services', 'broadcasting' and 'branding'. In the case of the US, 67% of posts were categorised as 'influencing' and 30% as 'broadcasting'. Overall, the US practised digital diplomacy in a way that can be categorised as strategic and two-way. While both Kenya and Australia prioritised bilateral diplomacy, the US projected its influence in terms of support for Ukraine and condemnation of Russia following the February 2022 invasion, as well as in terms of vaccine diplomacy amidst the ongoing COVID-19 health pandemic.

It is important to bring in the US to add to the discussion in the previous section of how Kenya and Australia posted about Russia's invasion on Ukraine. As discussed earlier, both Kenya and Australia's tweets were categorised under 'bilateral diplomacy', with Kenya's tweet being placed into the typology as broadcasting and Australia's tweet as 'influencing'. In contrast, this was the most important topic for the US during the period of analysis (April 2022), so rather than being categorised under 'bilateral diplomacy', it was a theme on its own, the most prominent by far, with 45 posts representing a quarter (25%) of all tweets posted. In terms of the state-centric typology of digital diplomacy, some of these tweets were classified as 'broadcasting' and others as 'influencing'. The former were relatively few – only four posts on Russia's invasion of Ukraine were categorised as 'broadcasting'. The vast majority, 41 posts, were categorised as 'influencing', either expressing condemnation for Russia's actions or attempting to rally global support for Ukraine. This category of tweets for instance included a post with a photo of Secretary Blinken travelling to the capital of Ukraine, Kyiv, in an act of support. Other tweets of support included consistent messaging that Ukraine is a sovereign and independent state, as well as projecting US values – defending freedom and opposing tyranny. This demonstrates the stark differences between how great powers, middle powers and developing countries approach issues of global significance. The US, as a great power, prioritised Russia's invasion of Ukraine and focused most of its digital diplomatic efforts on this during the period under review, mostly posting influencing tweets on this topic. While Australia, as a middle power, also strongly expressed its support for the country and its people, and its tweet was influencing, it was still bilateral diplomatic support, given that Australia largely followed what its more powerful democratic allies – such as the US – were doing in terms of global efforts to rally behind and support Ukraine. Finally, Kenya, as a developing country, also posted on this in the context of bilateral diplomacy but stopped short of expressing its support or taking sides in this conflict.

Another topic all three case studies posted about is climate change. This example once again demonstrates the stark contrast between the US, as a great power on one hand, and Kenya and Australia, as a developing county and middle power, respectively, on the other. In April 2022, Kenya posted two tweets, both of which promoted the 2022 Our Ocean Conference and were categorised as 'influencing'. In the analysis section of this thesis, both posts were commended as examples of successful digital diplomacy, as they were consistent with Kenya's foreign policy and sought to promote an event on climate co-hosted by Kenya and Sweden. Australia similarly posted a tweet (in April 2023) supporting a climate resilience project in the Pacific that was also classified as 'influencing'. Australia further highlighted its efforts in this space through another tweet on a programme dedicated to hosting foreign journalists, which showcases Australia's efforts to mitigate climate change, amongst other initiatives. In contrast, the US's tweets on climate change in April 2022 represented 10% of all its posts during the month. Similarly to the case study of Kenya, most of these were intended to promote an event, the Our Ocean Conference on April 13-14, 2022, which was co-hosted by Palau and the US. Tweets categorised as both 'broadcasting' and 'influencing' were posted. These sought to increase awareness on the importance of the oceans for climate change, provide updates throughout the conference, and finally, a list of concrete actions agreed on during the event. These posts included a strong message: that the US is already taking action on oceans and is inviting other countries to join them in these efforts, thereby asserting US leadership and attempting to influence others to do the same. This once again underscores the differences between great powers, middle powers and developing powers. While this topic was certainly on the radar for Kenya and Australia, their efforts cannot be compared to what the US has done on climate change during the period under review, in terms of projecting its power and using soft power to influence others on climate change action.

Finally, it is worth bringing in the topic of vaccine diplomacy. This was the second-most important theme for the US in April 2022. The US Department of State tweeted a total of 26 times (representing 15% of all its tweets during the month) on this topic. Most of these tweets – categorised as 'influencing' in the state-centric typology of digital diplomacy – demonstrated the great power status of the US through effective use of soft power and underscores America's global leadership in public health (a key foreign policy priority of the Biden administration) while simultaneously reinforcing its multilateral approach, as illustrated through clear visual branding (most of the tweets featured an American flag prominently displayed above the COVAX logo, a multilateral initiative led by WHO). In contrast, there were no such posts by Australia as a middle power (which may not have had the resources for global vaccine efforts, beyond its efforts in the near abroad), or Kenya as a developing power (which was likely on the receiving end of the US's vaccine diplomacy efforts).

Research questions

The deductions made from the data analysis on Australia and Kenya pave the way for a response to the research question.

Key research question

How do countries with a different status in international affairs, namely developing countries, middle powers and great powers, use the affordances of social media to practise digital diplomacy to achieve their foreign policy goals?

Based on the above comparison, the hypothesis that the status of a country in the international system corresponds to its digital diplomatic practices holds in some instances but not in all circumstances. This is certainly most evident in the case of the US. As a great power in global politics, it acts accordingly on social media, evidenced by most of its posts being categorised as 'influencing'. As discussed in Chapter 5, it was also highly successful in using the affordances of social media to further its foreign policy agenda, both in terms of the issues of the day that were important for the US, as well as the long-term stated foreign policy objectives. The US was also highly successful at supplementing its posts with audiovisuals, including photographs, infographics and videos, which helps to make the content more engaging.

Australia also, for the most part, conducts its digital diplomacy in accordance with its status as a middle power in international politics. This is evidenced by the fact that in the two periods under review, most of its tweets were categorised as 'influencing' and used to promote Australia's stated foreign policy objectives, such as upholding the global order. As a middle power, Australia therefore attempted to influence others and project its values but did not do so to the same extent as the US and also did not cover the same breadth of topics. While it utilised audiovisuals in some instances, it was certainly not on the same level as the US, with only one post containing a video. Therefore, Australia falls short of its status as a middle power in some instances, such as the quantity of posts and the use of audiovisuals to supplement them.

Kenya, as a developing country, also conducts its digital diplomacy in accordance with his status. It does not try to influence events but primarily uses the affordances of social media to broadcast its foreign policy activities. There is also an element of using social media to promote its stated foreign policy objectives, but it's not a major one. Compared to Australia and especially the US, the use of audiovisuals is also very limited. However, where Kenya manages to punch above its weight is in the

quantity of tweets, which is higher than Australia's. As a result, Kenya has more followers and was also able to grow its follower base significantly more than Australia since the data collection took place.

This suggests that while the status of a country, the size of its economy, resources and digital connectivity play a role, a certain amount of effort is nonetheless required to make the most of the affordances of social media to further a country's foreign policy goals. In the case of the US, it is very clear that it practises digital diplomacy in accordance with its status as a great power, as evident both in the quantity and quality of its social media posts. When it comes to Kenya and Australia, however, this is not as definitive. As a developing country, Kenya clearly lacks the resources to make its posts more engaging, both from a content and an audiovisual perspective. However, it is able to make up for it through the quantity of its posts. The tactic of frequent posting has helped Kenya's MFA both attract more followers and grow them at a faster rate than Australia. As a middle power, Australia is able to create engaging posts and content (noting that it is not as advanced as content posted by the US). However, its infrequent posting means that it has fewer followers than Kenya, a developing country, and that its messaging reaches a smaller audience. Kenya, while having fewer resources than Australia, is therefore more adept at using the affordances of social media to further its foreign policy messaging.

Research sub-question 1

How do Australia and Kenya, representing middle and developing countries respectively, perform in terms of tactical and strategic uses of digital diplomacy?

At the start of this analysis, it is important to recognise that Australia and Kenya's MFAs have different priorities, which is evident in how they were named. The name of Australia's MFA, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, explicitly links diplomacy with economic interests. By including trade in the ministry's title, Australia signals the importance of economic relationships in its foreign policy. This highlights Australia's focus on trade and economic prosperity as central to its global influence and security, especially given its geographic and economic positioning in the Indo-Pacific region.

Kenya, on the other hand, has opted for the name Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs, which implies a different set of priorities. By incorporating diaspora affairs into its foreign ministry, Kenya explicitly recognises the critical role of its diaspora community, which contributes substantially through remittances, investment, knowledge transfer, and cultural diplomacy. Thus, the inclusion of

the word ‘diaspora’ signifies Kenya’s strategic intention to actively engage with Kenyans abroad and harness their potential for national development and diplomatic leverage.

Based on the data analysis conducted earlier, Kenya and Australia broadly perform in accordance with their status in international relations, in terms of how they exercise digital diplomacy. The different status of Kenya and Australia in the international system, as well as their resources, have therefore been translated into their conduct of digital diplomacy. Kenya, as a smaller player, uses it to share information (tactical approach). Australia, as a player with some gravitas, communicates its policy position (tactical), takes a stance and attempts to bring others to its side (strategic approach). Kenya uses modern digital packaging for traditional diplomatic communication (tactical), while Australia uses the affordances provided by social media to influence others (strategic). Australia also has a greater focus on amplifying the voices of other Australian actors to strengthen its narratives (which can be interpreted as strategic). Therefore, while Kenya solely uses tactical approaches in digital diplomacy, Australia employs a combination of tactical and strategic approaches and attempts to influence others, in accordance with its status as a middle power in the international system. Kenya, however, gains an advantage by posting more frequently than Australia, which means that not only does it have more followers but its followers are growing at a much faster rate – meaning that ultimately its messaging reaches a greater number of people. Both countries have focused on bilateral relations with other states, demonstrating the importance of working with others for both developing countries and middle powers.

Research sub-question 2

How do Australia and Kenya compare to the United States, which represents a great power, in terms of tactical and strategic uses of digital diplomacy?

Based on the four ideal types of digital diplomacy which emerged from the literature review – ‘broadcasting’, ‘branding’, ‘providing e services’ and ‘influencing’ – the categorisation of social media posts from the periods of data collection shows that Kenya primarily uses the affordances of social media to ‘broadcast’ (tactical), Australia focuses on ‘broadcasting’ (tactical), ‘providing e-services’ (tactical), and ‘influencing’ (strategic), and the US prioritises ‘broadcasting’ (tactical) and ‘influencing’ (strategic). Based on the analysis, it is clear that Kenya, as a developing country, focuses on the tactical approach, while Australia, a middle power, and the US, a great power, use a combination of tactical and strategic approaches in pursuit of their foreign policy goals. Apart from that, Australia is punching below its weight as a middle power, by both posting less frequently and reposting content from others

less frequently. Kenya, on the other hand, punches above its weight, as a developing country, both posting more frequently as well as reposting content posted by other actors – both Kenyan and international. The US, in accordance with its status as a great power, posts and reposts far more than Kenya and Australia do, combined. An interesting observation is also made with the focus of posts. It is clear that Kenya and Australia both prioritise bilateral diplomacy, while for the US, posts on bilateral diplomacy (as categorised using the state-centric typology of digital diplomacy) are not even in the top five themes identified. This is indicative of how developing countries and middle powers are reliant on good relations with others in the international system to drive their foreign policy agenda, while the US, as a great power, projects its influence globally to drive its agenda and far more often uses soft power (such as vaccine diplomacy) to maintain and consolidate its status.

Recommendations on the way forward

Recommendations for Kenya

Based on both social media analytics and thematic analysis of Kenya's MFA's tweets in April 2022 and April 2023, the country has successfully embraced the practice of digital diplomacy. Yet, there is more work to be done in terms of taking the next step. According to Allen (2022), African states need to prioritise a strategy on shaping and taming the algorithms if they are to compete in the digital diplomatic realm. Kenya is no exception. While the ministry tweets often, it does not utilise the affordances of social media to their full extent. The MFA tends to use Twitter as a dissemination vehicle, broadcasting information about bilateral and multilateral meetings. Information is presented in a rather dry and official manner. Apart from the extensive use of photographs, which is commendable, there are no efforts to digitise the information to make it more appealing and engage Twitter followers and other Twitter users. Furthermore, a lack of engagement with other users is evident because the MFA does not reply to tweets or quote tweets by others. Nonetheless, the Kenya MFA's tweets are consistent with the country's foreign policy priorities and are most frequently used to highlight its bilateral relations with other countries in Africa and the rest of the world, and serve to underline the country's importance as a regional leader. Related to a point discussed earlier about the use of digital tactics vs digital strategies, it is evident that Kenya uses its Twitter (now X) account to practise the former. This means that in its current mode of engagement, Kenya's digital diplomacy may have reached its limits. Taking the next step will require developing a formal digital diplomacy strategy, applicable to both the MFA and the Presidency, in order to use the affordances of social media to further its foreign policy goals in a more coherent, structured and formalised manner. Overall, the following recommendations can be made:

Firstly, improve collaboration between Kenya's MFAs and non-state actors. The only evidence of this in April 2022 was Kenya's MFA retweeting Kenyan media organisations on two occasions, as well as on one occasion in April 2023. More of this needs to be done, and with quoted tweets and added value and content, rather than mere retweets. Apart from media houses, Kenya's MFA could also focus on think tanks, academics and political analysts.

Secondly, more focus on nation branding campaigns. Although during both periods under review this study did not find much evidence of nation branding in the MFA's tweets, the literature review uncovered stories of Kenya's success in this regard, for instance during former US president Obama's visit to Nairobi, which, as discussed earlier in Chapter 1, was hailed as a success of the country's digital diplomacy. In April 2023, there were instances of tweets that were categorised as cultural diplomacy or sports diplomacy, for instance, the MFA tweeting about Kenyans winning the Boston marathon in both men's and women's races (The Guardian, 2023). However, this did not in any way detract from the MFA's focus on foreign policy and was instead done in a way that celebrated the country's achievement and its athletes in an ad hoc manner. Kenya should therefore capitalise on its technological, sporting and cultural successes to further promote its brand.

Thirdly, online activities should be utilised in a way that complements offline ones. Arguably, this is an area where Kenya is already doing well, but there is room for improvement. Kenya's MFA has done a commendable job of communicating bilateral meetings which took place throughout both April 2022 and April 2023. One of the more successful examples was a tweet to promote the 2002 Our Ocean Conference. The latter serves as a good example of how the former could be improved. As discussed earlier, the tweet about the conference explained the importance of oceans to the public, tagged relevant organisations and included a hashtag. Similarly, and as noted above, digital communication about Kenya's bilateral diplomacy efforts could be improved by explaining to followers why its relations with a specific country are important, providing some concrete evidence such as trade statistics, outlining advantages for future cooperation, and being more concrete (where possible) about outcomes from the meeting.

Fourthly, focus on influencing as is befitting of a regional leader and one of Africa's powerhouses. In this regard an attempt could be made to focus on promoting various pillars of Kenya's foreign policy, particularly by using news hooks in terms of the current developments in the region, on the continent and globally. This would enable Kenya to be more strategic in its digital diplomacy. It would also assist it to further its foreign policy goals by consistently posting about them and showing foreign and domestic publics how they are linked to what is happening in the news. Combined with more effective

use of social networks, this would enable Kenya to be more proactive and start influencing the discussions.

Recommendations for Australia

Similarly to the case study of Kenya, a thematic analysis of Australia's DFAT tweets in April 2022 and April 2023 and their subsequent categorisation into a state-centric typology of digital diplomacy shows that since the scathing review of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade in 2012, it has successfully embraced the practice of digital diplomacy. Importantly, DFAT embraces Australia's role as a middle power in international relations, evidenced by most of its tweets being categorised as 'influencing' under two different governments in 2022 and 2023. Projection of soft power in the digital space is crucial for a middle power and Australia does this successfully. Furthermore, it also successfully uses the affordances of social media to communicate and disseminate objectives as set out in the country's foreign policy. At the same time, there is room for improvement. Although a social network analysis demonstrates sufficient synergies with Australian state actors, DFAT should broaden this to include Australian non-state actors as well as foreign state and non-state actors. Engagement is an important part of digital diplomacy and there is simply not enough of it. Similarly, while DFAT's use of Twitter (now X) for e-services or consular digital diplomacy is commendable, this could be improved through providing real help and advice to digital publics rather than simply directing them to DFAT's email or phone number – this is something digital publics who are sophisticated enough to use social media to ask for consular assistance can find out themselves, through a simple Google search. Nonetheless, there are more positives than negatives and DFAT has certainly made great strides in the use of digital diplomacy in the past decade. The following recommendations can be made to further improve Australia's digital diplomacy efforts.

The first recommendation is for the DFAT to simply post more frequently. Over a period of 30 days in both 2022 and 2023, the DFAT only posted 40 tweets in total – 20 in each year. For a middle power that is simply not sufficient. To be effective in projecting its soft power and influencing foreign publics, Australia's DFAT needs to tweet more often to project its soft power and communicate its foreign policy goals and objectives more frequently. Consistency is key on social media and posting regularly helps to ensure that relevant algorithms prioritise the content and therefore it is often at the top of users' feeds when they log in to social media.

The second recommendation is for DFAT to become more active in externally-focused networking. During the two periods under review, there was no engagement with other MFAs and others users, for instance (apart from on consular matters). On the other hand, DFAT was successful in networking

with other Australian state actors, including both governmental departments and individuals (such as diplomats). DFAT amplified tweets from the foreign affairs and minister and other governmental agencies by retweeting them in both 2022 and 2023. This is consistent with the importance the country's Public Diplomacy Strategy 2014-16, which stressed the importance of working with other governmental departments. Furthermore, in a number of instances, DFAT quoted tweets from Australian government actors and used the opportunity to provide additional information, highlight its foreign policy values and project its soft power. This can be related to DFAT's Media Strategy, which listed the importance of explaining the government's international policies as a key activity.

Third, given the quality of responses (or lack thereof) to users in both 2022 and 2023, DFAT should rather include the website and phone numbers to call in the header on the Twitter (now X) page or in a 'pinned' tweet on top. This would save the social media team time in posting the exact same responses to all queries received. As already discussed in the previous section, such responses cannot be construed as engagement.

Recommendations for the US

Finally, thematic analysis of the US state department's tweets in April 2022 and their subsequent categorisation into a state-centric typology of digital diplomacy shows it is highly successful in using the affordances of social media to achieve its foreign policy goals. The US certainly acts like a superpower on Twitter (now X), evident by how its frequently highlights its global leadership and pioneering efforts in a number of areas. At the same time, this underscores US commitment to multilateralism, which is a foreign policy approach preferred by the Biden administration. Similarly, the US also promotes its bilateral partnerships with countries across the world. Although it is evident that the US is the senior partner, its soft power messaging helps to project it in a way that makes it seem more appealing and more favourable to foreign publics. Its influencing messages also make its policy positions very clear and attempt to bring others on board. Provision of e-services (consular services) are mostly handled by another account - @TravelGov, which means there is no need for the Department of State to deviate too much from its core messaging about foreign policy. Given the US's status as a superpower, there is also no need for the Department of State to use social media for branding purposes, for instance as a travel destination or in an attempt to attract foreign investment. Once again, this helps the Department of State to stick to its core purpose of communicating US foreign policy, projecting US values and attempting to influence others through furthering US foreign policy goals and priorities on social media. The Department of State is also highly effective in

amplifying other voices in US foreign policy, with an emphasis on accounts of high-profile individuals working within the state department itself.

As per the data analysis and data interpretation presented earlier, there is not much room for the US to improve in its practice of digital diplomacy. It is an adept digital diplomatic player and others – including Kenya and Australia – would do well to examine and study its methods and approaches to improve their own use of the affordances provided by social media to achieve their foreign policy objectives. If there is one area where the US state department could improve, however, it is engagement. As mentioned earlier, despite an average of 49.36 responses to its tweets, the state department did not reply to a single one. There were also no discussions with other MFAs around the world or non-state actors. This was likely a deliberate choice, given how evidently strategic the US's approach has been otherwise. It is also unlikely that this is due to a lack of resources, since the frequent posting and use of high-quality audiovisuals indicates that time, money and personnel are not a problem for the department. It may be worthwhile for the state department to reconsider this and start responding to at least some posts, with a view to further influencing foreign publics.

Looking ahead, the US will not be able to rest of its laurels and will need to evolve and recalibrate its approach to digital diplomacy in order to remain effective in an increasingly complex online environment. While it retains significant advantages in terms of its great power status, resources and global reach, and soft power resources, it will increasingly face pressing challenges that may undermine its ability to lead in the digital sphere. The include information overload, which dilutes the visibility and resonance of official diplomatic messaging; pervasive spread of misinformation and disinformation, which erodes trust in state communications and complicates efforts to build credibility; and deep domestic political polarisation, which not only constrains policy consistency but also projects an image of fragmentation to foreign audiences. To sustain its leadership role in digital diplomacy, the US Department of State will need to increase the use of credibility-building narratives, amplify the voices of both state and non-state actors who put across similar and supportive messaging and develop communication strategies that are resilient to internal partisan contestation. By constantly staying ahead of the game, the US will be able to continue to use the affordances of social media to advance its foreign policy goals and maintain influence in a crowded and contested information environment.

Conclusion

This study set out to make a contribution to scholarship on digital diplomacy, with a specific focus on additional research and analysis of how African states, in this instance represented by Kenya, are able

to use the affordances of digital diplomacy to further their foreign policies. According to Allen (2022), African states are at risk of being dominated by others in cyberspace, who are digitally more mature, and thus need to upskill their digital diplomats. Although digital diplomacy became firmly entrenched on the continent in the 2010s, as demonstrated by the presence of MFAs and diplomats from almost all African countries on social media, scholarly discourse and engagement on digital diplomacy in Africa only began in the second half of 2020, mostly due to the increased focus on digitalisation as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Furthermore, according to Manor, while many African diplomats have embraced digital diplomacy, its practice tends to be ad hoc and tactical, rather than formalised and strategic (Manor, 2019). Wekesa (2020) echoes this view, stating that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, social media messaging by African MFAs and African embassies was erratic or altogether missing. Instead, social media platforms were used for domestic communication and only featured a diplomatic angle when the need arose, for instance during diplomatic visits abroad or when hosting foreign delegations.

The findings of this study are consistent with Manor's (2019) and Wekesa's (2020) analysis and Mboya's (2021) views. Mboya claimed that Kenya's digital diplomacy "hardly engages in direct, interactive and personal communication" and that rather than posting interactive and innovative content, the MFA focuses on sharing official information and retweeting. In his study, Mboya (2021) similarly found that the MFA's tweets were "too formal to be interesting for tech savvy citizens", and criticised them for not being "clear, attractive or engaging". This criticism is certainly consistent with the shortcomings identified during the thematic analysis of Kenya's MFA's social media posts – far more often than not they were presented as traditional diplomatic messaging in new digital packaging.

Arguments from the earlier discussion about the importance of digitally-savvy diplomats certainly apply in this instance. According to Waithaka (2018), the MFA has both digital enthusiasts as well as digital laggards, who need to be convinced of the benefits of digital diplomacy and taught how to practice it more effectively. Even more important is Waithaka's suggestion (2018) suggestion was that Kenya's MFA should formulate and adopt a digital diplomacy strategy, which would help to guide the ministry staff (Waithaka 2018). Yet, according to Mboya's article, published in 2021 (Mboya, 2021), such a strategy was not in place and the findings of this study similarly show a lack of strategy in the MFA's digital diplomacy.

In fact, it seems that some regression may have taken place in Kenya's engagement through digital diplomacy, as in 2015 Manor (Manor, 2015) praised Kenya for engaging with followers and other

users. At the time, he argued that the "true measure of digital diplomacy success lies not in the number of followers or even their quality. Rather, it lies in the foreign ministry's willingness to engage with its followers on a daily basis." He noted that although engagement was a rarity among MFAs, Israel, Kenya, and the US were successful in this practice, and even went as far as saying that Kenya's MFA exhibited a higher level of engagement than the US. Yet it seems that Kenya soon stopped engaging with its users. Three years later, in 2018, Manor conducted a study in which he analysed posts from five African MFAs, which included Kenya. Manor found that all five "failed to leverage digital platforms to practice the 'new' public diplomacy and foster relationships with foreign populations or create digital communities with their diasporas, by not answering questions or responding to comments on social media" (Manor, 2019). This was certainly the case in April 2022 and April 2023, as per the analysis conducted during this study.

On a more positive note, in some respects Kenya is able to perform better than a middle power like Australia in using the affordances of social media to further its foreign policy. This is evident from its higher numbers of followers – a feat made even more impressive by the fact that its MFA joined Twitter (now X) two years later than its Australian counterpart. Seemingly, this was accomplished through merely making posts more often than Australia did. Even though Australia came across as a more advanced digital diplomacy actor based on the thematic analysis of its tweets, and the DFAT's successful use of audiovisuals, Kenya nonetheless leapfrogged it in reach on social media through sheer numbers – more frequent posts.

These findings are important, as the case study of Kenya is representative of other developing countries, particularly in Africa, which are likely to be facing the same challenges, but also have the same opportunities, provided by social media. This study therefore helps to fill in existing research gaps given the lack of academic discourse on digital diplomacy in Africa and it also provides an update to Manor's (2019), Wekesa's (2020) and Mboya's (2021) assessments in terms of how formalised or ad hoc the strategy is of one of Africa's key digital diplomacy actors.

Limitations of this study

Every effort has been made to make this study empirically sound and thorough. This was accomplished, in the first instance, through a comprehensive literature review to identify ideal types of digital diplomacy and compile a state-centric typology of digital diplomacy. In the second instance, as discussed in Chapter 1, the case study countries chosen would also be representative of others. Despite that, however, a country like Ethiopia, while also a developing country in Africa, may practise its digital diplomacy differently from Kenya. Similarly, Canada and the UK, while also middle powers,

may differ in how they use the affordances of social media to Australia. Finally, China, which is either a great power or on the way to becoming a great power (depending on which scholar one asks), would also differ in its approach to the US. Because digital diplomacy is such a fast-moving field, new themes are also continually emerging and it is possible that the state-centric typology of digital diplomacy may need to be updated, given that engagement was not prioritised by any of the three case study countries, despite being characterised as a golden standard in the second wave of digitalisation of diplomacy by numerous scholars. Digital diplomacy is a work in progress (Manor, 2019), which is continuously evolving. Technological dimensions will continue to shape diplomacy at a much faster rate than before, given that the 'digital' and 'diplomatic' aspects are now inextricably linked.

A further limitation of this study is the reliance on quantitative metrics, such as the number of followers, likes, reposts and shares, as measures of influence of digital diplomacy. As acknowledged in Chapter 4, while these metrics offer useful insights into levels of online activity, they do not necessarily capture the depth or quality of engagement, nor do they reflect whether messages have shaped attitudes or behaviours among target audiences. These metrics have nonetheless allowed this study to examine broad trends and provided a basis for comparison between the three country case studies.

Potential areas of future study

Going forward, it is important to bear in mind that while digital diplomacy is here to stay, so are traditional forms of diplomacy (Holmes, 2015: 204). Digital diplomacy cannot replace the 'personal touch' when it comes to other forms of change, such as exogenous crises and situations where a careful analysis of state intentions is required (Holmes, 2015: 204). While the COVID-19 pandemic helped to accelerate the uptake of digital diplomacy across most of the world, its end also signalled a return to face-to-face bilateral and multilateral diplomacy. However, there is now also an acceptance that it is not necessary to meet face to face every time. Some diplomatic forums, summits and meetings are held online and some in a hybrid format, with some participants in the room and some online. Thus, while diplomacy has been digitalised to a large extent, it will retain its core, which is about relations between countries, facilitated by human beings – whether online or in person. Bjola and Manor's (2022) introduction of the concept of hybrid diplomacy is a testament to this and would be an important area of future study, examining how MFAs combine the physical and digital aspects of diplomacy to achieve their foreign policy goals. Similarly, an analysis of how countries exercise soft power online and in the physical world, as part of a specific initiative or project, would be a fascinating area of future study. Furthermore, while this study used three democratic countries as case studies, future studies could broaden this scope, to examine the role of the regime type, bureaucratic culture, and institutional capacity as explanatory variables in shaping digital diplomacy.

Another, more obvious and very topical area of future research is the role of AI in digital diplomacy. As demonstrated in this thesis through screenshots of social media posts and analysis of them, although Kenya, Australia and the US all practise digital diplomacy, they go about it in different ways. This was evident in the different emphasis on strategic vs tactical approaches as well as prioritisation of different ideal types of digital diplomacy. The same goes for the use of tags and hashtags, threads and audio-visual materials in these posts. While all three countries practise digital diplomacy, they each do it in their unique way, having developed their own unique style. It is very likely that the situation would be similar in the use of AI in digital diplomacy. Since ChatGPT rose to prominence in late 2022, followed by Gemini and now a plethora of others, such as DeepSeek, many digitally savvy people across the world have started using them. Because, as argued earlier in this thesis, individuals are products of their societies and diplomats are individuals, it is likely that AI has become an important part of digital diplomacy. A worker managing the social media account of an MFA, who uses AI to proofread and improve his/her emails, is likely to do the same for social media posts. Others may use AI to analyse social media posts made by others, to find patterns. Previously, finding such patterns would have been resource-intensive and therefore only available to countries who could afford to allocate them. The same point made in Chapter 1 about digital diplomacy being the great equaliser could therefore be made about the use of AI in digital diplomacy. It allows most digital diplomacy actors to do what was previously only possible for a select few. Future research could therefore attempt to answer the question, 'How do developing countries, middle powers, and great powers use the affordances of AI to achieve their foreign policy goals?'

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