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Chinese and US digital diplomacy in South Africa: An analysis of Facebook during the Covid-19 lockdown

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2023

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Thesis for a Master's Research Report

Chinese and US digital diplomacy in South Africa: An analysis of Facebook during the Covid-19 lockdown

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND DEDICATION

I would like to express my gratitude to the Lord Almighty for giving me the opportunity and the requisite strength to do and complete this study.

I would like to also express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Bob Wekesa, for sharing his wealth of knowledge with me, for his support and assistance in the writing of this research. Thank you, sir.

I further express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to my family for their patience, confidence in me and unwavering support throughout this study. I duly dedicate this study to you, my beloved husband, Thapelo Petje, and my children Motheo, Monde and Lesang. I could not have chosen a better family. God richly bless you.

Finally, a special note of thanks goes to my mother, Nomampondo Beauchamp, for her encouragement and invaluable support that has seen me throughout this journey. You are the best mom!

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ABSTRACT

Digital diplomacy is a new concept in diplomacy generally and more specifically in public diplomacy. It emanated from the emergence of the internet and digital technologies in the 1990s and has been practised since then.

The outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in 2019 (Covid-19) ushered in novel communication and diplomatic practices. Diplomats still needed to influence and improve their countries' image to their foreign publics. Digital diplomacy was the most viable option for them to successfully ply their craft during a pandemic. Since the 1990s, diplomats and ministries of foreign affairs (MFAs) have been going digital.

The gaps in the field and the scarcity of literature on the topic highlight the importance of and the need for more research. Due to the novelty of digital diplomacy, there is no formal definition of the concept yet; instead, there are myriad definitions influenced by a different understanding of scholars who define it from their different vantage points.

This study focused on Chinese and US digital diplomacy because their digital diplomacy strategies have not focused on the Global South or South Africa. The study established their successes and failures in using digital diplomacy strategies towards South Africa.

The research is significant in that it highlights the need for diplomats to adapt in practising their craft. The study highlights the complementary nature of digital diplomacy to public diplomacy and its importance during a pandemic. The significance of the study is in its ability to demonstrate the symbiotic relationship between digital diplomacy and public diplomacy and how it contributes to the field of journalism and diplomacy since the advent of social media.

The research used digital diplomacy and media theories, such as agenda setting and framing, alongside the qualitative network analysis method. The data collection approach was by means of surfing the relevant embassies' Facebook pages to find posts that fell into the chosen period for this study through sampling and by creating a code sheet. The methodology section below explains in detail how we used the method, how data was obtained, and the period.

Keywords: digital diplomacy qualitative network analysis, visualization, foreign policies, framing, agenda-setting, communication strategies

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANC: African National Congress

AGOA: African Growth and Opportunity Act

AU: African Union

BASIC: Brazil, South Africa, India and China

BNC: Bi-National Commission

BRICS: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa

CDCP: United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Covid-19: Coronavirus

CPC: Communist Party of China

DD: Digital diplomacy

DIRCO: South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation

DOT: Digital Outreach Team

FOCAC: Forum on China-Africa Cooperation

FPO: Foreign policy objective

G-7: Group of Seven developed countries

G-20: Group of 20 developed countries

GBV: Gender-based-violence

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GSP: Generalized System of Preferences

ICT: Information and communication technology

J&J: Johnson & Johnson

MFA: Ministry of foreign affairs

MLK: Martin Luther King Jr

NDoH: National Department of Health

NGO: Non-governmental organisation

NICD: National Institute for Communicable Diseases

OBOR: One Belt One Road

PRC: People's Republic of China

QNA: Qualitative network analysis

SAPA: South African Poultry Association

SNA: Social network analysis

UN: United Nations

USAID: United States Agency for International Development

US: United States of America

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

We now live in a digital world, thanks to the revolution wrought by information and communication technologies (ICTs). Every facet of life has been impacted by digital technologies, and diplomacy is no exception. This has led to the emergence of the concept and practice of digital diplomacy, which this study seeks to contribute to. Today, digital diplomacy is the norm in the diplomatic sphere.

Bolstered by the availability of relevant gadgets such as smartphones and the various digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and the internet, diplomacy has become easier to practise. However, there are challenges, such as the need for relevant skill sets and the danger of misinformation and disinformation.

As Adesina (2017) succinctly puts it: “This is not to suggest that digital diplomacy is immune from criticism. Criticisms of the use of social media in politics have included ineffectiveness and danger. Ironically though, for policymakers, instant dissemination of information about events both far and near is proving to be as much a bane as a bounty. In other words, digital diplomacy has its risks, which include information leakage, hacking, and anonymity of internet users” (Adesina 2017: p13).

Indeed, digital diplomacy gained momentum due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic (Sharma & Sisodia, 2022; Bjola & Manor, 2022; Manor & Pamment, 2022; Araştırma, 2020). The lockdowns imposed during the pandemic to curb its spread escalated the digital revolution, which was already happening before the pandemic. Hantrais et al (2020: p3) support this view when they say: “Since the 1980s, the digital revolution has been both a negative and positive force.” This digital revolution contributed to changes in media and journalism (Küng et al 1999) by making news accessibility much easier via computers and mobile gadgets. The digital revolution has resulted in news production and news updates happening quicker than before due to the convenience offered by the digitisation of news on computers and mobile gadgets.

People can now consume media from the comfort of their home as news gets delivered to their mobile phones. Journalists too are no longer confined to the newsroom to generate news, but they can do that from wherever they are due to the digital revolution, which had already been underway long before the pandemic (Barnnat 2001).

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As mentioned, ordinary people can now access media more easily and quickly. Barnnat (2001) attests to this when he asserts that: "…As a result of the availability and use of such computer hardware, ordinary people can increasingly access a wide range of digital media, products, and services in convenient, physical ways in the real world. No longer does accessing a digital product or service require a human being to be tied to a desk at a traditional screen and keyboard" (Barnnat 2001:2).

Equally, the rate of media consumption from any platform, be it traditional or social media platforms, soared because many people were home-bound**,** a matter discussed in the background section below. The attendant anxiety caused by the pandemic made news more popular because people wanted to know more about the pandemic updates locally and around the globe. This news also applied to international relations and diplomacy, the subject of this research report. The acceleration of digital diplomacy was juxtaposed with the mandates ambassadors had to continue promoting their countries' interests and building relations with host countries, despite the pandemic. The strategy might have changed but their broad mandates and responsibilities remained unchanged. Diplomats had to adapt or fail. Failing to adapt risked rendering their craft archaic and irrelevant in this digital age and in a pandemic.

The study sought to explore the use of social media by the Chinese and US embassies in South Africa to demonstrate the rise of digital diplomacy as a concept and practice. The study investigated how China and the US used digital diplomacy towards South Africa as they sought to achieve their foreign policy objectives by assessing their Facebook pages. The digital media field is large, but this study focused on social media, specifically Facebook. The study did not focus on social media in China and the US. Even in South Africa, the study's focus was only on the Facebook pages of these two countries' embassies. The study did not focus on diplomacy generally, but on digital diplomacy during Covid-19.

Diplomacy generally, including digital diplomacy, are means for the implementation of foreign policy. Thus, at this point, it is important and necessary to highlight how some scholars, such as Crabb, explain foreign policy. Crabb states that "reduced to its fundamental ingredients, foreign policy consists of two elements: national objectives to be achieved and the means for achieving them" (cited in Adesina 2017: p2). Crabb further states: "The interaction between national goals and the resources for attaining them is the perennial subject of statecraft. In its ingredients, the

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foreign policy of all nations, great and small, is the same" (cited in Adesina 2017: p2). "Thus, one of the elements of foreign policy is the means of achieving a country's foreign policy objectives, and one of the major instruments of foreign policy is diplomacy" (Adesina 2017: p 2 & 3). While conventional diplomacy did not allow direct interaction and engagement with foreign publics, on the contrary, digital diplomacy is a tool that does exactly that, thus furthering a nation's foreign policy.

The Chinese and US embassies had to build stronger networks with South Africa during the pandemic, and this required them to tap into local communities through digital networks such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, and YouTube. This study selects the use of Facebook by the Chinese and US embassies in South Africa rather than the other digital platforms, with the justification provided in the background section below. For now, it is sufficient to quote Facebook itself, which states: "Facebook provides a window into foreign ministries, embassies, and the diplomatic world that did not previously exist" (Facebook, undated).

Several factors have led to the rise in the use of digital technologies for diplomatic work. For instance, the digital revolution brought about by technological advancement and events such as the 2010 Arab Spring revolts, among others, have caused a shift in the global diplomatic arena. MFAs realised their failure to monitor digital spaces such as Facebook, where "these revolts took shape" (Manor 2016). Manor (2016) further states: "While Facebook did not cause the Arab Spring, it did serve as a modern-day town square in which digital citizens came together to openly criticize their governments, an occurrence that could never have happened offline." These and other developments will be discussed in the literature review section.

As seen in the research questions below, one could analyse Chinese and US digital diplomacy in South Africa using cultural, financial, social, economic, and political lenses and gain knowledge of these global powers' foreign policy interests. Indeed, these different themes were considered the agendas and frames with which China and the US approach South Africa, as theorised in the literature review and theoretical framework sections.

To effectively analyse Chinese and US digital diplomacy in South Africa, one needs to understand digital diplomacy histories and strategies in these two countries. For instance, in 2002 the US introduced the Digital Outreach Team (DOT) to strengthen its digital diplomatic arm, with the aim of furthering its foreign policy. Since the 1950s, China has leveraged its Panda

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[digital] diplomacy strategy to advance and achieve its foreign policy objectives. “The Chinese MFA created its first social media account — the Public Diplomacy Office [@外交小灵通] — on Weibo in April 2011. It aims to ‘popularize the public diplomacy concept, introduce China’s national conditions and ideas, and interpret China’s policy and advocacy’ ” (Qin 2013: para 5 & 6) for the domestic publics (Huang & Wang 2021: p 2).

Furthermore, the Chinese MFA created its first Twitter account in August 2013 “to digitalize its public diplomacy efforts in the European Union [@ChinaEUMission]”. This after President Xi Jinping encouraged diplomats to do so to “tell China stories well” (Huang & Wang 2021: p 2).

As evidence to demonstrate China’s intentions to beef up its digital diplomacy strategy and to demonstrate its newlfound strategy, “by the end of 2015, the only Chinese embassies/missions with active Twitter or Facebook accounts were the ones in Yangon (opened in October 2011), Brussels (September 2013), Geneva (September 2013), Tokyo (April 2014), Ottawa (August 2014), Pretoria (February 2015), United Nations (April 2015), London (June 2015), Prague (July 2015) and Ankara (November 2015)” (Madrid-Morales 2017: p7).

The background information on digital diplomacy in China and the US is provided in the background, literature review and theoretical framework sections.

Another reason for a shift to digital diplomacy is the fact that these platforms are being used by journalists and news organisations. Journalists and the media are known as agenda-setters and framers of topics and issues including those related to international relations and diplomacy, a matter discussed in the agenda-setting and framing sub-sections of the literature review section. On the other hand, diplomats have traditionally sought to influence how the media portray events, actors and even countries given that the media shape public opinion. Thus, diplomats are also agenda-setters and framers of messages, a matter also discussed in the literature review section. In addition, MFAs rely on journalists and the media for information regarding events in foreign countries. This back-and-forth relationship is set out in the theoretical framework.

It should be noted that “digital diplomacy as a theory and a concept is linked to the concepts and practices of public diplomacy and soft power which we will later define. They can be viewed as sibling theories” (Wekesa 2022). Thus, in the literature review section, a discussion is undertaken to demonstrate the link between digital diplomacy and public diplomacy.

Behavioural change in media consumers shaped when and how they consumed media. Some consumers accessed news early in the morning while in bed and others throughout the day due to

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the new work-from-home rule. This is attributed to the convenience brought to consumers by digital media or smartphones during the Covid-19 lockdowns. The relative ease of availability of smartphones in the developing world and a country like South Africa also contributes to the novel way of communication and news consumption.

In view of the above, it could be that South Africans were more exposed to US and Chinese news content during the pandemic. This exposure could have meant that digital diplomacy by the US and China in South Africa would be effective and beneficial to these two countries as they endeavoured to influence and improve their image among the South African populace. The ground was therefore fertile for them to practise digital diplomacy in South Africa. Data on media consumption during the pandemic, therefore, forms a major underlying factor for the proposed study, as presented in the background section.

The pandemic allowed China and the US to ply their diplomatic craft differently in a challenging time. Maintaining good relations with South Africa remained important for China and the US, even in a pandemic, given South Africa's strategic geographic position on the continent. South Africa is regarded as the gateway to Africa's markets. Covid-19, therefore, became fertile ground for their rivalry and competition over growth as they continued to flex their diplomatic muscles on South African soil. China and the US used the pandemic to up their diplomatic ante to influence and improve their image in South Africa as a host country, using digital platforms such as Facebook. The rationale for their strategic diplomatic communication during the pandemic is stated in the justification section below.

This study is undertaken in light of the fact that the images of both China and the US "plummeted internationally" during the initial stages of Covid-19. The US suffered especially due to its bad handling of the coronavirus during Donald Trump's tenure as president. As Wike R. et al. (2020) put it: "Since Donald Trump took office as president, the image of the United States has suffered across many regions of the globe. As a new 13-nation Pew Research Center survey illustrates, America's reputation has declined further over the past year among many key allies and partners." The failure of the two countries to handle the pandemic effectively resulted in their European counterparts voicing highly unfavourable opinions about them.

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China's image was also tarnished by claims of a 'cover up' of the origins of the virus. In an opinion peace, geostrategist Brahma Chellaney (2020) said: "The lethal virus emanated from China, leading to a paralyzing pandemic. The mounting socioeconomic costs of the unparalleled global crisis will remain immeasurable." He mentions a study that concluded that, "In addition to origins of natural recombination and intermediate host, the killer coronavirus probably originated from a laboratory in Wuhan" Xiao B. & Xiao L. (2020). Chellaney B. (2020) further says: "Just think — if China was not guilty of any coverup, wouldn't it be welcoming the growing international calls for an independent inquiry and offering to provide assistance to such a probe? Such an inquiry would give China a chance to clear the air with the rest of the world." He adds: that "calls are growing louder across the world to publicly hold China accountable for the pandemic's mounting human and economic toll. The only way China can silence such calls and begin to repair the serious damage to its image is through an independent international inquiry," Chellaney B. (2020).

In light of the above, it can be argued that both countries were under pressure to improve their images across the globe. Therefore, the pandemic was an opportune moment for them to do that digitally in South Africa.

This study analysed how the Chinese embassy in South Africa used its Facebook page to communicate with the South African public as it endeavoured to peddle its foreign policy objectives as well as influence and improve its image among South Africans.

Despite the fact that the Chinese embassy did not post "panda-themed" posts on its embassy's Facebook page, its foreign policy objectives were embedded in most of the messages. "China has since the 1950s used so-called animal [Panda]diplomacy as a tool and strategy to influence foreign publics before the era of digital diplomacy (Zhao & Rui 2020:5).

The study also investigates how the US's foreign policy panned out towards South Africa. This was done by analysing how the US embassy in South Africa used a digital diplomacy strategy using its Facebook page to engage with South African audiences, including the South African government, to influence and improve its image.

Conclusion

In view of the above, it is evident that given the era we are in, digital diplomacy is no longer a luxury but a must-do. Diplomats will be ignoring its importance as a tool for public diplomacy to

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their peril. It is therefore safe to say that digital diplomacy is an essential part of public diplomacy as well as an essential tool for diplomats to effectively ply their craft during a pandemic. Digital diplomacy is catalytic to the effectiveness and efficiencies of both diplomats and MFAs, without which they would fail to influence and promote their countries' image in South Africa as a foreign public and a host country. This is particularly because South Africa is strategically positioned geographically as the gateway to the rest of the African continent. It is therefore imperative that Chinese and US diplomats use digital diplomacy to interact with and influence the South African government and ordinary people alike.

Given how central the foreign policies of the US and China are to this study, we have captured these respective policies to see whether and how they feature in these Facebook messages from their embassies. We start briefly by outlining the Chinese and US foreign policies below.

1.1 Chinese foreign policy

Chinese foreign policy is predicated on its Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which are enshrined in the Chinese constitution, namely:

- mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity.
- mutual non-aggression
- non-interference in each other's internal affairs
- equality, and
- mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence.

These principles are regarded as the "cornerstone of China's foreign policy" (Jinping, X 2014). China's respect for these Five Principles saw it establish diplomatic relations with 165 countries and carry out trade, economic, scientific, technological and cultural exchanges and cooperation with over 200 countries and regions (Jiabao, W. 2004). China also peacefully resolved boundary issues with most neighbors and maintained peace and stability in its surrounding areas. In addition to that, China "provided economic and technical aid with no political strings attached to other countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, strengthening the friendship between China and these countries" (Jiabao, W 2004). Among others, it can be argued that the Five Principles helped China to cement itself as a global player in international relations.

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Zhao (2013) argues that “China’s phenomenal rise as a great power has been accompanied by a change in its foreign policy behaviour, adopting a more confrontational position in relation to Western countries, as well as tougher actions, including repeated use of paramilitary forces, economic sanctions, fishing and oil ventures, and other intimidating means, to deal with territorial disputes in the South and East China Seas in the late 2000s and the early 2010s”. President Xi Jinping in 2014 on the 60th anniversary of the initiation of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, emphasised the importance and relevance of these principles. Jinping (2014) says “The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence give concrete expression to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and facilitate their implementation” (Jinping 2014). It could be argued that the importance of the sovereign equality of all countries as espoused by the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, ensures developing countries uphold their sovereignty and independence. The study found that the foreign policy objectives of China were indeed reflected in the messages posted on its Facebook pages during the pandemic. The research also found that Zhao’s (2013) claim that China has now adopted a more confrontational position to deal with the West is revealed. China, this study argues, considers it important to protect its core interests and ensure it continues to be a global force to be reckoned with, especially in light of its competition with the US.

This is attested to by Zhao (2013: p 102) when he says “Most of China’s foreign policy decisions were made through the lenses of issues that were of sole importance to China, rather than on the basis of broader regional or global economic and security concerns. The Chinese government through its MFA is also not shy in its articulation of the function of the MFA. It says one of the functions of China’s MFA is “Implementing the state’s foreign policy and relevant laws and regulations, representing the state in safeguarding state sovereignty, security and interests” (MFA Government of China 2022). This study assesses whether these foreign policy objectives reflect on the embassies’ Facebook posts. Digital media is not only an enabler of digital diplomacy but remains central to it. Its convenience makes it easy for diplomats to be constantly in touch with foreign publics in their own time.

1.2 US foreign policy

US foreign policy is important to international relations because it has been a superpower with influence since the 1800s. Mandelbaum M (2022) says “for over 250 years, [American foreign

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policy] has been unusually democratic". According to Mandelbaum M (2022), "the public has had greater influence on American foreign policy than on the foreign policies of other countries". Foreign policy according to Mandelbaum M (2022), can be influenced by "Defence and treasury departments, and also the Congress and not just the presidency".

The following are the four main policy objectives of the US (US State Department 2017):

- Protect the United States and Americans
- Advance democracy, human rights, and other global interests
- Promote international understanding of American values and policies; and
- Support US diplomats, government officials, and all other personnel at home and abroad who make these goals a reality.

The US aims to root out global terrorism in its effort to protect its citizens first, but also the international community. The US views international terrorism as a threat to the "US, its allies and interests (US State Department 2017). The different administrations, from Bush to Biden in particular, have seen the US involved in wars against terrorism. The US invasion of Iraq during the Bush administration, which claimed the existence of 'weapons of mass destruction' under Saddam Hussain, the killing of Osama bin Laden during the Obama administration, and now the US's participation in the Russian-Ukraine conflict, among others, are examples of the US's crusades to fight terrorism and to protect its citizens and allies.

The US's actions in the above sparked an international outcry and criticism as there was no evidence of the proverbial smoking gun in the case of Iraq regarding 'weapons of mass destruction'. It can therefore be argued that the continuation of regional wars by the US is all about protecting its interests. Furthermore, the US could be criticised for "engaging in unpopular wars and being concerned only with its narrowly defined self-interest" (Ziegler AR et al 2002). On the other hand, the US's per-capita spending on foreign aid could improve its image of being a generous country rather than a selfish one. These were all possible agendas and frames that the study hoped to unearth when I engaged with data for this study, as explained in the methodology section.

The US's commitment to promoting human rights and freedom abroad is essential and central to its foreign policy. The US protects human rights and freedoms using "bilateral diplomacy; multilateral diplomacy; support for defenders of freedom; foreign assistance; reporting on human rights practices; public outreach; and economic sanctions" (US State Department 2017).

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The US maintains diplomatic ties with approximately 180 countries out of more than 190 countries, including many international organisations. (US State Department 2017). These diplomatic ties are an avenue for the US to influence and promote its foreign policy objectives in these countries. Blackwill & Wright (2020: iv) argue that "American foreign policy must begin at home, and the United States needs to focus on improving domestic governance and its economic competitiveness so that the country regains the will and the capacity to play an active role abroad". On the other hand, it can be inferred from Mandelbaum's (2022) assertions that US foreign policy has been influenced by the country's focus on the economy as well as its economic orientation. "America more than other countries has tried to use economic instruments to attain political goals" (Mandelbaum M 2022); its "embargo on Russia" in the Ukraine-Russian war is a case in point (Mandelbaum M 2022).

Mandelbaum (2022) says: "America has devoted more time and attention to promoting its values [such as] democracy within countries and peace beyond its borders than other countries. This research reveals that, indeed, the foreign policy objectives of the US were reflected in the messages posted on its Facebook page. This continues to underscore the importance and power of digital media, which is central to digital diplomacy and especially during a pandemic.

1.3 Bilateral relations between China and South Africa

Economic relations

Chinese digital diplomacy towards South Africa does not exist in a vacuum and should be contextualised from the history of the relations between the two countries as well as the current state of relations.

China understands the importance of bilateral and multilateral relations and would seize any opportunity to build and improve such relations with other countries, including South Africa. Zhao & Rui (2020) opine that "Another approach to improving Sino-foreign relations was to use panda imagery to promote China's geopolitical policies and globalization initiative. In a tweet posted by Xinhua on 12 May 2017, the moving gift of a panda presented China's Belt and Road Initiative to the foreign publics. Through the animated forms of the two pandas and the accompanying story, the Chinese media emphasised President Xi Jinping's vision of 'common prosperity' (Xi, 2017a) achieved by Sino-foreign cooperation" (Zhao & Rui 2020:15).

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The symbiotic relationship between China and South Africa is underpinned by the fact that China is South Africa's largest trading partner, and South Africa is China's largest trading partner in Africa. "Between December 2020 and December 2021, exports of China have increased by $347M (22.1%) from $1.57B to $1.92B, while imports increased by $316M (14.6%) from $2.16B to $2.47B. In December 2021 China exported $1.92B and imported $2.47B from South Africa, resulting in a negative trade balance of $558M." (The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC) 2022).

The above was preceded by a Chinese economic and trade visit to South Africa in 2019. The visit culminated in China and South Africa signing 93 cooperation agreements amounting to approximately US$2 billion. China and South Africa's trade relations were further cemented by multilateral engagement mechanisms, initiated and spearheaded by China, such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), which South Africa hosted in 2015, as well as the One Belt One Road initiative. FOCAC is "a platform for enhanced China-Africa growth and development" (Alden &Wu 2021: p71).

Despite longstanding economic ties and bilateral trade between China and South Africa, there were economic differences and tensions between the two countries, in the textile industry in particular, as discussed in this section below. The economic cracks came to a head when China flooded South Africa's textile industry around 2006. The textiles industry, for instance, has always been a sore point between the two countries, despite their good bilateral relations.

The textile industry plays a significant role in a developing country like South Africa, which is beleaguered by a high unemployment rate. The textile industry employs skilled and unskilled workers from poor communities, the majority being women. Any influx of cheap imports and illegal goods from China that are dumped on South African soil directly threaten the livelihood of these communities. Phungula (2013) says: "In a more specific level, low-cost Chinese imports have negatively affected some South African local manufacturing firms. In 2011, 5% of the manufacturing workforce lost their jobs as a result of retrenchment and factory closures." This raised the ire of trade unions and was one of the causes of economic tensions between China and South Africa.

The positive manifestations of China's and South Africa's economic relations continue to grow stronger, as can be seen below:

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> "By the end of 2020, the stock of China's direct investment in South Africa (including finance) was US$6.147 billion, involving mining, finance, manufacturing, infrastructure, media and other fields. In 2020, China's direct investment in South Africa was US$19.32 million (non-financial). South Africa's actual investment in China is about US$660 million, concentrated in beer, metallurgy and other industries. Since 2018, South Africa has held three investment conferences, and China has sent high-level government delegations and large entrepreneur delegations to participate in the meeting through online and offline forms. (PRC MFA 2004).

Finally, South Africa participates in various multilateral mechanism forums, such as BRICS, the United Nations (UN) and the Group of 20 (G20) to strengthen its trade and economic ties with other nations. At the recent virtual 14th BRICS Leaders' Summit, hosted by China, President Cyril Ramaphosa emphasised South Africa's cooperation with BRICS in line with the "Strategy for BRICS Economic Partnership" (Ramaphosa 2022). Ramaphosa (2022) said, "We want to promote mutual trade and investment, implement structural reforms and other measures to improve the business environment. In particular, we want to enhance trade and investment cooperation that supports value-addition among the BRICS countries." He further said that, "Despite the pandemic, trade and investment cooperation within the BRICS has been steadily improving." (Ramaphosa 2022).

1.4 Political relations

The relationship between the Chinese and the South African people can be traced back to the 1950s. The 1950s were characterised by a series of protests against apartheid and the government's racist policies enforced after the National Party came to power in 1948. This culminated in the banning of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1960 (South African History Online: Undated).

The Chinese people supported South Africans during the dark days of apartheid. China had a friendly relationship with the ANC in its crusade to fight racial discrimination and the oppression

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of black South Africans. The 1994 democratic dispensation, led by the ANC government, "paved a way for the establishment of diplomatic relations between [China and South Africa] and development of all-round bilateral relations" (FMPRC 2004).

China sees South Africa as a beacon of hope for Africa due to its membership in BRICS. According to China, South Africa provides Africa with the opportunity to participate on an international stage and in an international mechanism such as BRICS. "BRICS will enable China the opportunity to voice Africa's issues in BRICS" (Yong 2012).

In 2000, South Africa and China signed the Pretoria Declaration partnership agreement. China and South Africa also signed the Bi-National Commission for cooperation on multilateral platforms such as the UN, the G20, the G77 and the BRICS Summit, which was a collaborative affair between South Africa and China (Yong 2012). In 2019, President Ramaphosa and Chinese President Xi Jinping held a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the G20 Osaka Summit. In the same year, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Naledi Pandor "led a delegation to China to attend the meeting of coordinators on the implementation of the outcomes of the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and visited China" (Yong 2012). Yong (2012) also records: "At the end of October, Assistant Foreign Minister Chen Xiaodong and Vice Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa, Dramini, co-chaired the 10th Central-South Africa Strategic Dialogue and the Sixth Meeting of the Foreign Relations Subcommittee of the Bilateral Committee of Central and South Africa in Beijing. At the end of October and the beginning of November 2019, former South African Vice President David Mabuza paid an official visit to China and co-chaired the seventh plenary session of the China-South Africa Bilateral Commission with Vice Chairman Wang Qishan. In November 2019, President Xi Jinping held a bilateral meeting with President Ramaphosa during his BRICS summit in Brasilia" (Yong 2012).

According to Chinese analysts, "China and South Africa share the same or similar views on international affairs, and both are committed to seeking a fair and reasonable new global economic and political order, despite the differences in their domestic political systems" (Yong 2012). The differences between South Africa and China did not however prevent them from cooperating in climate change negotiations such as BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India and China).

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China regards South Africa as an advocate for "South-South cooperation and multilateral co-operation among developing countries; supports strengthening the role of the UN and multilateral co-operation in responding to global challenges of poverty, insecurity and underdevelopment; and promotes international human rights, democracy, peace and stability, and sustainable development" (Yong page 8).

1.5 Cultural relations

South Africa is not only China's biggest trading partner but also in respect to cultural exchanges. "China and South Africa have signed a cultural cooperation agreement and its implementation plan, and multi-level and multi-channel cultural exchanges and cooperation have developed smoothly" (MFA China 2022).

China and South Africa officially launched the China-South Africa High-level People-to-People Exchange Mechanism in 2017 "and held its first meeting in South Africa" (MFA China 2022).

The 2017 meeting was followed by the second meeting, held in Beijing in 2018, "during which the China-South Africa Mutual Acquaintance and Affinity – Celebrating the Second Meeting was held" (MFA China 2022).

China has opened five Confucius Institutes in five South African universities "as part of its cultural exportation drive" (Alden & Wu 2021: p 223). This is China's effort not only to promote cultural exchanges between China and South Africa but to also promote linguistic exchanges. About 10 universities in China have established cooperative relations with universities in South Africa. The South African and Chinese universities were selected as partners in the "20+20 Cooperation Plan for China-Africa Universities within the framework of the Non-Cooperation Forum" (MFA China 2022). These universities were partnered as follows: "Hunan University and Stellenbosch University in South Africa, Northeast Normal University and the University of Pretoria in South Africa" (MFA China 2022).

Using various public diplomacy tools, "the Chinese government means to transmit its culture, ideas, and policies effectively around the globe" (Zhao & Rui 2020: p 3). Social media platforms have ushered in a new way to position and deploy panda diplomacy: digitalised imagery. Projecting pictures and videos of pandas on social media has become an innovative way to promote a soft national image, for 'the universal image of the panda has helped Beijing bridge

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linguistic, political, ideological, and cultural gaps in its international communication (Zhao & Rui 2020: p3).

The above relations were initiated and strengthened through conventional diplomacy, which required diplomats to physically meet. However, today all these can be done digitally, similar to the June 2022 14th BRICS virtual Summit. Digital diplomacy has cut the red tape, time and expense, thus making public diplomacy effective and easy to practice.

1.6 Bilateral relations between South Africa and the US

Economic relations

Just as in the case of China, US digital diplomacy towards South Africa does not exist in a vacuum and should be contextualised from the history of the relations between the two countries as well as the current state of relations.

Like in the case of China, South Africa is the biggest and most strategic trade partner for the US in Africa. In 2018, for instance, trade between the two countries was at $14 billion with "approximately 600 U.S. businesses operating in South Africa, many of which use South Africa as regional headquarters" (Bavier 2019). The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) as well as the US Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) trade preference programme benefits South Africa. "AGOA grants qualifying countries duty-free access to the U.S. market for thousands of goods. More than $1.8 billion in South African exports to the United States were covered by AGOA last year" (Bavier 2019).

South Africa is one of the 119 beneficiary countries of the US GSP, which enjoy tariff concessions or duty-free products exported to the US.

> "Since 2000, 34% of South African imports to the US obtained duty-free clearance under the GSP/AGOA, in 2019 this had reduced to 26%. Of the $67m import duties paid on US imports from South Africa in that year, the six leading tariff lines in terms of duties paid were all steel and aluminium products and resulted in $50.6m in duties (76% of duties for that year). Most exports from South Africa enter the US duty-free either through the AGOA/GSP preferences or by virtue of the fact that no duty applies on a [Normal Tariff

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Relations, Most Favoured Nation] (NTR, MFN) basis" (Naumann E, 2020).

However, South Africa and the US have economic differences in the poultry industry. The South African Poultry Association (SAPA) demanded the government impose anti-dumping tariffs on the US, an act that was viewed as illegal by the US poultry industry. These looming tariffs were caused by Trump's imposition of tariffs on South African steel and aluminum imports to the US. "The looming row could put at risk duty-free access to the U.S. market for nearly $2 billion worth of South African exports, government officials and trade experts say" (Bavier 2019). Fearing the above, the South African government allowed a tariff-free importation quota of approximately 65 000 tons of meat from US producers. The above differences could have easily led to diplomatic tensions between the two countries.

1.7 Political relations

South Africa's political relations with the US can be traced back to the apartheid era. Although all UN administrations in the 1970s and 1980s condemned apartheid, the US was generally opposed to imposing broad economic sanctions against South Africa (Byrnes R, 1996). The US was of the view that these sanctions would affect the black majority, who were the victims of apartheid in the first place. It was only in 1986 that the US joined other countries in imposing sanctions against the then apartheid regime. In 1964, the US imposed an arms embargo on South Africa and "joined the international consensus in refusing to recognise the 'independence' of four of South Africa's black homelands between 1976 and 1984" (Byrnes ,1996). In 1983, the Gramm Amendment opposed the extension of the International Monetary Fund credits to any country practising apartheid (Byrnes R,1996). The 1985 Export Administration Amendment Act barred US exports to South Africa's military and police, except for humanitarian supplies and medical equipment.

South Africa and the US had a wide range of areas of cooperation agreements, which include mutual defensive treaties and military agreements, during the Bush, Clinton and Mandela, Mbeki administrations. However, relations between the US and South Africa have not been without challenges. For instance, "There were disagreements with the Mandela government over relations with regimes that the United States found objectionable [such as Cuba]."

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Also, relations with the Mbeki administration were marked by continued disagreement over diplomacy, including UN resolutions against Israel and the ongoing disintegration of Zimbabwe Carroll (2017: p14). Furthermore, the Mbeki administration was against the invasion of Kuwait by the Bush administration in 2003.

Tensions continued beyond Mbeki's administration to the Zuma administration. Carroll (2017:15), "There was open disagreement between Washington and its African allies over the intervention in Libya and the removal of Muammar al-Qaddafi, who was an old friend of the ANC. Pretoria has also continued to deepen its relations with fellow BRICS members, including Russia" Carroll (2017:15). These deep relations are interesting considering the ever-evolving tensions between China and the US since the pandemic and the tensions between Russia and the US since the Ukraine-Russia war.

Relations between the two countries improved during the Obama-Motlanthe administrations. This period saw state visits from both sides by diplomats and heads of state. Then acting president Kgalema Motlanthe visited the US in November 2008 and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and a House of Representatives delegation visited South Africa in August 2009 (Byrnes R,1996).

Despite years of good political relations between South Africa and the US, further cemented by the new dispensation in 1994 and highlighted by the launch of a Binational Commission in 1995, the relationship between the US and South Africa during the Trump administration was fractious. The spat caused by Trump's ill-informed tweet about South Africa's land policy was a case of digital diplomacy. He said: "I have asked Secretary of State @SecPompeo to closely study the South African land and farm seizures and expropriations and the large scale killing of farmers. South African Government is now seizing land from white farmers" (@realDonaldTrump, 2018; (Businesstech, 2018). The tweet infuriated the South African government, spurring Ramaphosa to set the record straight regarding this issue.

1.8 Cultural relations

Cultural relations between the two countries were strengthened, among others through the Ambassador's Fund, geared towards supporting less-developed countries or developing countries such as South Africa. As the US continues to strive to woo South Africa, especially in the light

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of China also vying for the same attention, South Africa through the Ambassador's Fund gets support in "historic buildings, archaeological sites, ethnographic objects, paintings, manuscripts, and indigenous languages and other forms of traditional cultural expression" (US Embassy, undated). Other cultural interventions came through the Fulbright Scholarship, which offers South African scholars opportunities to conduct postdoctoral research at the institution of their choice in the US.

Similarly, as stated above, these bilateral relations initiatives can be reinforced digitally. While Covid-19 was a challenge, some opportunities brought much-needed change, especially in diplomacy. The Covid-19 pandemic has positively disrupted the diplomatic world by introducing digital diplomacy as a tool for public diplomacy around the globe.

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CHAPTER 2

2.1 Why South Africa?

Various factors attract China and the US to have a diplomatic interest in South Africa. South Africa's potential as a developing state and a global emerging market are attractions to China and the US to establish diplomatic relations with South Africa. South Africa's geographic position makes it a strategic gateway to the entire continent (Bavier 2019), which the US and China can access by forming diplomatic relations with South Africa. The country is a worthwhile investment destination for both China and the US. South Africa is Africa's economic powerhouse, boasting state-of-the-art infrastructure such as roads and telecommunications; well-run banks and an established financial sector. (Cook 2020).

The country's banking system is considered one of the best in the world. "The solid telecommunications infrastructure enables digital diplomacy particularly in the period chosen for the study" (Cook 2020). China and the US regard South Africa as having a sound legal system "and the judicial process to be open and transparent, making for a good investment environment" (Young 2012).

The above factors are enablers of business and trade both locally and internationally (IMF, 2022), which China and the US can exploit to their advantage by forming diplomatic relations with South Africa.

Furthermore, South Africa is stable compared to some African countries, such as Mozambique and Sudan, which have experienced internecine civil wars and terrorist insurgence; Ivory Coast, which recently had a coup; and Nigeria, which is plagued by Boko Haram military junta (Soyinka, 2021). Young (2012) says: "South Africa has made important contributions to peace and development in Africa and is widely recognised as a leading force in promoting regional peace and development. Push forward African solidarity and co-operation, playing a significant role in conflict resolution, peacekeeping, disaster relief and development assistance, and, as a result, has succeeded in building the image of a responsible regional power."

South Africa's mineral resources, such as diamonds, gold, platinum, and coal, have attracted exploration companies to its shores, particularly in the oil industry. The country also has an established manufacturing sector and a booming motor industry that sees different car models

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manufactured and assembled locally, thus attracting foreign direct investment (Britannica, undated).

Below is a brief outline of South Africa's manufacturing sector and its capabilities. This sector is an attraction for China and the US for bilateral relations with South Africa, as outlined by Britannica briefly as follows:

> "The major manufacturing sectors are food processing and the production of textiles, metals, and chemicals. A large and complex chemical industry has developed from early beginnings in the manufacture of explosives for use in mining. A coal-based petrochemical industry produces a wide range of plastics, resins, and industrial chemicals. The metal industry, centred in Gauteng, draws much of its raw material from the iron and steel producing firms located in the area. Manufacturing encompasses automobiles, ships, building materials, electronics, and many other products, notably armaments. Though the weapons industry has begun to diversify into nonmilitary production, the post-apartheid government has also promoted a controversial export trade in arms, after military sanctions were lifted" (Britannica, undated).

South Africa's manufacturing capabilities and offerings as stated above, are an attraction to other countries, particularly China and the US, which are the subjects of this study. Given the above, there are trade and investment opportunities galore for these two superpowers, which are constantly vying for the top spot in the world.

The country's cultural diversity contributes to cultural diplomacy, which the US and China can leverage (Nawa et al, 2014). It is against this background that South Africa is an important strategic trade and diplomatic partner to China and the US.

2.2 Why Facebook for the study?

As noted by Fisher (2013), the advantage of social media is that it provides the opportunity to reach citizens of other countries in near real-time. Social media platforms also provide spaces for interaction and increased engagement, furthering the goals of diplomacy. The potential ease with which social media can be accessed and the low cost in comparison to other methods make it an

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attractive tool for many embassies, as well as other government offices, which are facing budget cuts and demands to increase engagement. Numerous platforms allow for the use of more dynamic content, such as videos, photos, and links, than traditional methods of giving lectures or passing out pamphlets. In addition, social media offers key channels for reaching youth populations, a major goal of current public diplomacy efforts (Adesina 2017:10).

As mentioned above, digital diplomacy is a new, easier, and quicker way to conduct public diplomacy using soft power. Facebook is the most appropriate platform for this owing to its ability to allow engagement with the public. The News Feed facility on Facebook is the first thing people see on their page. This allows the Facebook page owner to post anything they consider important and worth noting for the reader.

By the same token, diplomats from the Chinese and US embassies can post preferred messages in the order of their importance to influence and improve their image in the South African foreign public. They can advance their countries' foreign policies to achieve desired objectives by communicating and connecting directly with the South African audiences.

Furthermore, Facebook live videos and pictures promote authentic communication and connection with foreign publics. The foreign publics will have a better view of the ambassador, government representative and their country with live videos and pictures. Pictures would also enable diplomats to showcase their countries in a panoramic way. Live videos allow recipients to have a genuine experience, in real-time. According to a study done in 2018, "Facebook live has grown by over 330% since its launch in 2015" (Carter 2018). "According to statistics, Facebook users watch around 100 million hours of video each day. This means Facebook is now contending with YouTube for viewership" (Carter 2018).

Facebook features are good for influencing and promoting a country's image. Uploading live videos on Facebook is the best way to reach out to the foreign publics. The authenticity that is embedded in photos and videos is unparalleled and that is the best way to win foreign audiences' confidence in one's country. Colourful posts on Facebook can also assist with audience retention. Facebook allows the audiences to interact and give feedback whenever they want.

Government officials and diplomats can tag other diplomats or senior government officials of the host country as well as have their pages seen by others who either liked or follow the tagged

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Facebook page of that individual. Facebook is “the largest source of news. Posting news quickly can help get your message out and shape media narratives” (Facebook 2018:13).

Facebook has killed the “inadequacy of short posts as a means of telling a story by allowing long and thoughtful posts that can lead to engagement and assist people to understand issues better, especially complex ones, [in comparison to Twitter, with a limited number of words for a post]” (Facebook 2018:13).

Alden (2021) attests to the fact that Twitter is restrictive. “Twitter … encourages brevity by limiting messages to only 280 characters, therefore affording China the necessity of skipping the pleasantries and getting ‘straight to the point’. Facebook’s interactiveness would assist diplomats to have meaningful engagement with foreign audiences” (Facebook 2018:13).

The versatility of Facebook puts it in good stead to connect with broader audiences. Social media platforms cannot be considered successful without meaningful engagement, and Facebook allows for that. Some researchers found that “…around 2.56 billion global social media users join the ranks each day on mobile, creating an astronomical audience for companies of every shape and size” (Sprout, 2018).

According to a Forrester study, “for everyone million Twitter followers, brands can expect about 300 interactions. On the other hand, for every million Facebook followers, there’s an average of 700 interactions” (Sprout, 2018). Therefore, Facebook’s reach is wider and better compared to Twitter.

Sprout further asserts: “Other studies suggest that Facebook users leave roughly 5 billion comments on brand pages every month. Perhaps one of the most obvious advantages Facebook has over Twitter is that companies have more time to make an impact on their audience. Tweets can get wiped off a stream within a matter of minutes, meaning that brands have to constantly post just to get in front of the right people at the right time” (Sprout 2018).

Further making a case for Facebook, Sprout opines that “Importantly, Facebook and Twitter aren’t necessarily meant for the same thing. Twitter is a fast-paced way for customers to discover new content and see what’s trending in their social world. Facebook, on the other hand, is about connecting with family and enjoying moments of deeper engagement” (Sprout, 2018). Such

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engagement can be used and benefit Chinese and US diplomats as they start conversations with the South African public.

YouTube is another popular social media platform, but it would not be suitable given that it is used to watch “music videos, comedy shows, how to guides, recipes, hacks” than a subject such as digital diplomacy. “YouTube is a video sharing service where users can watch, like, share, comment and upload their own videos. The video service can be accessed on PCs, laptops, tablets and via mobile phones.” (https://www.webwise.ie/parents/what-is-youtube/)

LinkedIn, on the other hand, “is a thriving place for leaders worldwide”. (Bagadiya J 2022). It is suitable for job seekers and business advertising. “It is the ultimate destination for job seekers, experts, executives, mentors, and more from businesses of all ranges. LinkedIn has mellowed down the corporate stiffness for a crowd of 772 million users by aiding them in professional engagement. And over a few months, creators were introduced to some of the coolest LinkedIn features, based on the changing trends in communication, marketing, business sector, etc. Most LinkedIn features focus on securing your privacy, saving time, expanding your network, driving your business goals, and letting people know how to pronounce your name right.” (Bagadiya 2022). Similar to other social media platforms, it will not be suitable for the intended study.

According to some experts, such as Seib (2012), Facebook is more popular than YouTube. He says: “YouTube is the world’s third most popular website, trailing only Google and Facebook” (Seib 2012). YouTube, unlike Facebook, does not have the News Feed facility that allows for interaction. According to Seib (2012): “Much like the content of Twitter and Facebook, the videos appearing on YouTube are so vast in number that even aside from free speech issues they are impossible to police until after a controversy has arisen.” The controversy that is found on YouTube does not bode well for diplomacy, particularly because countries like China and the US are working hard to improve their image abroad using soft power.

Flickr is not as popular as other social media platforms in South Africa. Unlike Facebook, which promotes proper interaction between people and is suitable for digital diplomacy, “Flickr is a popular photo-sharing and hosting service… It supports an active and engaged community where people share and explore each other’s photos” (Newbie 2008). While diplomats who use Flickr can share as many pictures as they could, Flickr does not allow for longer posts except by just bylining the picture.

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Instagram is similar to Flicker in that users mainly post their pictures without saying much given that it does not have the newsfeed feature, which promotes interaction like on Facebook. "Instagram is becoming a very important tool for world leaders and governments to communicate their priorities and to engage on a more personal level — and with few words — with their audiences" (Sandre 2019).

Unlike Facebook, WhatsApp is numbers based. "WhatsApp developers released the phone number-based messaging application (app) for simple communication; however, it took to the internet like a storm" (Chronicle 2016). By 2017, WhatsApp has more than 1.5 billion users around the world, exchanging nearly 60 billion messages on a single day (Sandrin 2018). Facebook is still a better platform to conduct digital diplomacy than WhatsApp based on its features as explained above. Facebook is not cellphone number based, thus making it easy to attract followers from South Africa that the Chinese and US embassies can influence.

2.3 Media consumption during the pandemic

The lockdowns that were imposed around the world, including in South Africa, saw a surge in media consumption. People were eager to get information and updates about the pandemic both locally and internationally. This means that South Africans could have been more exposed to Chinese and US content from Facebook via their smart gadgets during these lockdowns.

The pandemic allowed digital diplomacy to thrive given how impossible it was to practise diplomacy in a conventional way when countries were in lockdown. The subsequent surge in the reliance and consumption of news from mobile gadgets such as smartphones and the reliance on social media further highlighted these novel communication developments.

According to data by Kemp from Datareportal, "there were 38.19 million internet users in South Africa in January 2021. The number of internet users in South Africa increased by 1.7 million (+4.5%) between 2020 and 2021. Internet penetration in South Africa stood at 64.0% in January 2021" (Kemp, 2021). Regarding social media statistics, there were 25 million social media users in South Africa in January 2021(Kemp 2021).

The number of social media users in South Africa increased by "3.0 million (+14%) between 2020 and 2021. The number of social media users in South Africa was equivalent to 41.9% of

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the total population in January 2021" (Kemp, 2021). Finally, there were "100.6 million mobile connections in South Africa in January 2021. The number of mobile connections in South Africa increased by 817 000 (+0.8%) between January 2020 and January 2021."

In addition, "The number of mobile connections in South Africa in January 2021 was equivalent to 168.5% of the total population" (Kemp 2021). These statistics suggest that media consumption during lockdowns in South Africa could have been at an all-time high. International data also indicates a surge in the reliance and consumption of news from mobile gadgets, further highlighting these novel communication developments. According to the Nielsen study, "news consumption grew significantly in the second quarter". It was found that "47% of the [population] surveyed watched or streamed the news" (Adgate 2020).

Kemp (2021) found that the growth of people who spent time on social media amounted to 31%. "Work-from-homers spend more time on digital platforms as well as TV-connected devices and have a larger share of viewing to digital sources (57%) than other viewing types" (Adgate 2020). A change in media consumption has indeed been a global phenomenon during Covid-19.

According to Kemp, "During the first months of the pandemic, industry reports showed that digital media use tremendously increased as people spent more time at home due to coronavirus lockdowns. Such increases were especially prevalent for social media and messaging apps, but particularly remarkable was the unprecedented uptake in video conferencing apps and programmes. Overall, we observed a vast increase in digital communication" (Kemp 2020).

It can be argued that South Africa was fertile ground for China and the US to use digital diplomacy as a tool to influence and improve their images. As can be seen from the above, these two countries did not encounter in South Africa any challenges regarding people not having internet connectivity and/or access to information.

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CHAPTER 3

3.1 Justification and rationale for the study

The first key justification for this study and its importance is that it will fill the gap in the literature since there is no study similar to this that compares China and the US in South African traditional media or the digital space. The study will therefore contribute to the field of media and journalism. This study is new and unique because it draws data from developments during Covid-19, when there was a lot of digital communication due to the lockdowns. As mentioned in the introduction, consumers of media and journalists alike could consume media with ease and in the comfort of their homes. Journalists were not confined to the newsroom to generate news.

The second justification for this study is the fact that it will assist South African diplomats and government officials alike to understand how the Chinese and American diplomacies seek to influence their populace and equip them to know how to respond. This research is important for both journalism and public diplomacy as it deviates from the norm of researching traditional media. In its uniqueness it therefore has the potential to contribute to the field of journalism and public diplomacy.

The third justification for the study is that the increase in news consumption and easy access to the media could mean that more people were exposed to the Chinese and US content on Facebook via their mobile phones. The study will establish whether the US and Chinese news, in particular, influenced South African audiences or not. As mentioned, both in the introduction and background above, the rate of media consumption from any platform, be it traditional or social media platforms, soared because people were homebound.

The preferred digital platform to conduct the study is Facebook because it allows long and thoughtful posts that can lead to engagement and assist people to understand issues better, especially complex ones. Chinese and American digital diplomacy strategies might have worked around the world as indicated above. There is however nothing said about such efforts towards the Global South and in a country like South Africa. Have the Chinese and the US digital diplomacy strategies worked in South Africa? Did they manage to influence and promote their images using digital diplomacy in South Africa? This study will fill in the gaps and thus justify why it should be done.

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Adesina (2022) sheds some light on where the African continent is regarding digital diplomacy. She says that "African Union (AU), and non-governmental organizations have held several virtual peace and security conferences, bringing together thousands of African stakeholders. In May 2020, the AU successfully hosted a "Silencing the Guns" online conference, which was spread over three weeks."

As the chairman of the AU, President Cyril Ramaphosa has been holding online meetings with African leaders during the pandemic. Some African leaders harnessed the power of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram amongst others, to influence and improve their countries' image. Adesina (2022) makes the following example:

> "Many African leaders, ministries of foreign affairs (MFAs), and other related agencies operate social media accounts, especially Twitter and Facebook. Notably, Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari is the most followed African leader with more than 5 million followers on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter combined. He is followed by Ghana's President Nana Akufo-Addo and Rwanda's President Paul Kagame with more than 4 million followers on all three social networks combined. Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta was the most followed African leader with more than 7 million followers on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter combined until he deactivated his accounts in March 2019, which according to him was due to the constant insults and name-calling that flooded his timeline. Furthermore, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, social media platforms helped many MFAs and agencies to maintain ties with some of their country's citizens abroad and to provide them with valuable consular assistance."

Although Africa has made some strides in digital diplomacy, challenges that derail digital diplomacy still abound in Africa. These include the poor connectivity in some countries in Africa due to "poor ICT infrastructure" (Adesina 2022:3). We have stated in the section "Why South Africa?" above that the country's telecommunications infrastructure is reliable, hence it is in China and the US's interests to have diplomatic relations with South Africa.

To make matters worse, "Top leaders have also shown distrust of the internet, with several African governments (e.g., Uganda, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Togo, Burundi, Chad, Mali, and

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Guinea) controversially shutting down or restricting access to the internet and social media platforms. The Nigerian government also placed a ban on Twitter on June 4, 2021, two days after the company deleted a tweet by President Buhari that threatened to punish regional secessionists, which Twitter said violated its rules" (Adesina 2022: p 3). Could it be that such dictatorial tendencies contributed to China and the US's interests to influence and promote their image using digital diplomacy in South Africa? This study will fill in this gap and justify why it should be done.

China and the US might have been desperate to improve their image in South Africa after they traded insults and accusations against each other about the origin of the virus (Council on foreign relations 2021). As a result, Covid-19 threatened to dent their image not only in South Africa but globally too. (Wike et al, 2020), (Onnis 2021). Their insatiable appetite for power to influence, their deep rivalry, and the need to settle political scores and clear the air about the origin of the virus were important for them.

Ostensibly, China and the US had the responsibility to ensure that their presence continued to be felt in South Africa by leveraging digital diplomacy using their embassy Facebook pages. Presumably, vigour and proactiveness on their part to salvage what was left of their image were of paramount importance. This means that they would seize and maximise any opportunity they had to improve their image, advance their foreign policy goals, and influence the South African public, using digital diplomacy and soft power.

3.2 Aims/objectives

This research aims to investigate how China and the US communicated towards South Africa by analysing their embassies' Facebook posts using digital diplomacy strategies during South Africa's 20-month lockdown period. The overarching aim is to find out if the Chinese and the US diplomatic missions in South Africa achieved their foreign policy objectives through this strategy during this period. The specific objectives are:

a) establish the strategies that the Chinese and US embassies directed towards South African audiences to further their foreign policies via Facebook.

b) establish whether the strategies used were successful or not using Facebook.

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3.3 Research question

Main question: Is there a link between the policies of China and the US towards South Africa and the messages posted on the respective Facebook pages during the pandemic?

Sub-question 1: Which strategies did the Chinese and US embassies use in their communication towards South Africa during the pandemic?

Sub-question 2: To what extent were the strategies employed by the Chinese and US embassies successful or unsuccessful?

Sub-question 3: Which themes emerge from the analysis of the Facebook posts of the Chinese and US embassies?

3.4 Literature review

Because this study is located at the intersection of media and diplomacy, the relevant conceptual and theoretical considerations will be drawn from the fields of media theory and digital diplomacy. Some have indeed theorised digital diplomacy as mediated diplomacy. According to Golan et al (2019: p 9), “Mediated public diplomacy refers to the organized attempts by governments to influence foreign public opinion via mediated channels including paid, earned, owned and shared media to gain support for its foreign policy objectives.” This definition captures the essence of this study as in part the study seeks to establish the extent to which China and the US succeeded in using their embassy Facebook pages to advance their foreign policies and to influence the South African populace.

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CHAPTER 4

4.1 The history and evolution of diplomacy

According to Britannica (undated), "the term diplomacy is derived via French from the ancient Greek [diploun] diplōma, composed of diplo, meaning "folded in two," and the suffix -ma, meaning "an object." The folded document conferred a privilege — often a permit to travel —on the bearer, and the term came to denote documents through which princes granted such favours." Munsaka (undated) says diplomacy is the art and practice of conducting negotiations betwixt countries and the requisite skill in handling affairs without causing hostility." Munsaka (undated) also says "During the reign of the Roman Empire, passports and waybills were stamped and folded on metal plate. And so, these metal passes were called diplomas." The Vatican weighed in on diplomatic matters as further explained by Munsaka (undated) below.

> "During the Middle Ages, the Vatican joined the band wagon of the 'diploun' concept and slowly it evolved into managing international relationships. Edmund Burke introduced it in 1796 in England. In 1875, at the Congress of Vienna, the diplomatic service was formally recognized as a distinct profession. Old diplomacy was discussed in detail by Richelieu and expanded by Galliers in the 17th century and adopted by most European countries then."
>
> The distinction between old diplomacy and war nevertheless persisted, and the distinction between an old, political diplomacy and a new diplomacy, focused on trade, was maintained as a liberal critique throughout the 19th century.
>
> Joseph Chamberlain argued for a 'new diplomacy' characterized by openness towards the public. Diplomacy has since evolved in the last decades and has greatly shifted from the original diplomacy as it now encompasses a host of world problems at the centre of negotiations (RP Barston 1985:5). The transition from old diplomacy to new diplomacy was expounded by Nicolson

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(1969:36), who states that there were three broad reasons for the shift:

1. Renewed sense of the community of nations

2. Advanced communication systems

3. Need to include public opinions (Munsaka undated).

Having briefly looked at the history of diplomacy, we now zoom into digital diplomacy, the subject of our research below.

4.2 Digital diplomacy

This section looks at the various definitions of digital diplomacy by different scholars given its newness as a tool to conduct public diplomacy using soft power. This section also zooms into the different media theories relevant to the study. This study draws from Manor & Sege's (2015:14) definition that "Digital diplomacy refers mainly to the growing use of social media platforms by a country in order to achieve its foreign policy goals and proactively manage its image and reputation." Digital diplomacy shifted power from governments to digital networks. Some argue that diplomatic work "is no longer limited to cultural, financial, social, public, economic, or political verticals. There is a brand-new kind of diplomacy that encompasses all of them, one which practitioners must adequately embrace and understand to be successful: Digital Diplomacy" (Facebook Undated). Fitzpatrick (2013) says engaging with target audiences through social media is a way to overcome the limitations of traditional diplomacy, as it enhances mutual understanding and shared interests among countries and the public (Fitzpatrick, 2013 cited in Park & Chung 2019:3).

The absence of a definite or conclusive definition of digital diplomacy "explains the absence in the current literature of a reliable conceptual framework for assessing the effectiveness of social media for public diplomatic purposes" (Bjola & Jiang 2015).

Marcus Holmes views digital diplomacy as a "strategy of managing change through digital tools and virtual collaborations" (cited in Adesina, 2017). Similarly, in part, Lewis (2014) defines digital diplomacy as the use of digital tools of communication (social media) by diplomats to communicate with each other and with the general public (Adesina 2017).

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The different vantage points from which scholars define digital diplomacy make for different perspectives and contributions to digital diplomacy as a theory and concept. Sharma and Sisodia (2021) assert that “Digital diplomacy involves the states’ use of digital technologies, particularly social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook. Through these platforms, states communicate with various audiences in a non-costly manner.” Adesina (2017:3) weighs in on the debate and argues that digital diplomacy is solving foreign policy problems using the internet. She further says that digital diplomacy is conventional diplomacy through a different medium.

On the other hand, Sotiriu (2015) says “digital diplomacy can, and should, be understood and employed as a novel and practical extension of the soft power and public diplomacy concepts”. She adds that digital diplomacy “has been presented as the use of the internet and information technology in order to carry out diplomatic objectives or to solve foreign policy problems” (Sotiriu 2015).

The definition offered by DiploFoundation, an organisation that focuses on the nexus between digital technology and diplomacy, is interesting as it looks at this concept holistically, including its impact. The organisation “describes [it as] new methods and modes of conducting diplomacy with the help of the internet and ICTs and describes their impact on contemporary diplomatic practices” (DiploFoundation, undated). Potter (2002) shares a common view with DiploFoundation regarding the internet as an enabler of digital diplomacy when he says digital diplomacy refers to “the diplomatic practices through digital and networked technologies, including the internet, mobile devices, and social media channels” (cited in Adesina 2017).

Sancar (2019:373) says, “The new public diplomacy is not a monologue understanding, but a structure that wants to understand integration and develops cooperation with non-state actors, works with a network method rather than a hierarchical method, and provides accurate information instead of propaganda”. In short, Değirmenci, F. and Terzioğlu, E. (2022:491) say: “Digital diplomacy is the way of managing international politics with digital tools and virtual collaborations to get the highest impact in the decision-making processes, public diplomacy and professional rules of states.”

In summary, digital diplomacy is defined as “public diplomacy activities realized through information communication technologies and social media. It can also be said that it is seen as a part of foreign policy activities used by states to inform and connect foreign publics using

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websites and social media applications, in short, to carry out public diplomacy activities." (Değirmenci, F. and Terzioğlu, E. (2022: p 494).

Finally, Manor (2016) opines that digital diplomacy is "the positive and negative impact digitalization has had on the practice of diplomacy at both institutional and personal level".

Given the above definitions of digital diplomacy, it is important to also note that following the 2010 Arab Spring revolts, change was inevitable in the diplomatic arena, which subsequently saw MFAs move online to stay abreast and monitor developments in foreign countries. "Social media and fast mobile penetration especially in the developing world changed government-to-government engagements to people-to-government and people-to-people engagements (Ross 2020). Digital technologies forced diplomats to adapt and "connect with non-traditional audiences, and in turn, allow citizens to influence their governments in ways that were not possible ten years ago" (Ross 2020).

The use of the internet by terrorist groups to recruit youths to militant Islamic jihadi movements also caused a shift in diplomacy. "In an attempt to combat such activities and prevent terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda from gaining online support, the US State Department took to the internet in order to wage a war of ideas and win over the hearts and minds of Muslim internet users" (Manor 2018:4). "Today, digital diplomacy is a foreign policy essential. The world is such that state and non-state entities all compete for influence and power in the same online space. That space now hosts more than 3 billion people, most of whom only access the internet through their mobile phones. When used properly, digital diplomacy is a persuasive and timely supplement to traditional diplomacy that can help a country advance its foreign policy goals, extend international reach, and influence people who will never set foot in any of the world's embassies" (Adesina 2017:13).

Manor and Segev (2015) note that digital diplomacy "exists at two levels: that of the foreign ministry and that of embassies located around the world. By operating on these two levels, nations can tailor foreign-policy and nation-branding messages to the unique characteristics of local audiences with regard to history, culture, values, and traditions, thereby facilitating the acceptance of their foreign policy and the image they aim to promote" (Adesina 2017: p3).

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Through the internet, people can be influenced by messages despite how far apart geographically they may be from one another at a low cost. “As a result, the Internet has gradually increased its importance to countries that struggle for soft power in formulating diplomatic strategy. The effective way of promoting soft power is to carry out public diplomacy or Internet diplomacy in the Information Age” (Xiaoying 2014).

Hanson (2012) underpins the importance of the internet as a tool to practise public diplomacy when he defines digital diplomacy “as simply the use of the internet and new Information Communications Technologies to help carry out diplomatic objectives including its related goals. Digital diplomacy is seen as an important tool in furthering a nation’s foreign policy as it enables direct interaction and engagement with foreign publics” (Adesina 2017).

Wekesa B (2020) says, “Public digital diplomacy, on the other hand, is outward-looking, targeted at both domestic citizens and global citizens. This kind of digital diplomacy is aimed at promoting the images of countries, projecting power, and influencing foreign citizens. This latter version is linked to the older concepts and practices of public diplomacy and soft power in such a way that we start talking about the notion of “public diplomacy in the digital age” and “soft power in the digital era”. This type of digital diplomacy is heavily communications-based and is undertaken through popular social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn, to name a few.”

Below we zoom into the Chinese and US digital diplomacy as we seek to see how these two countries used this tool to ply their craft during the pandemic.

As an important tool in furthering a nation’s foreign policy, the study shows through digital diplomacy that indeed there was a link between the policies of China and the US towards South Africa and the messages posted on the respective Facebook pages during the pandemic – thus assisting us to answer our main question.

4.3 Chinese digital diplomacy

The Chinese government recognised cyber diplomacy as meaningful statecraft in 2013 (Zhao 2013: cited in Wang 2015). According to Wang (2015), Chinese cyber diplomacy consists of the following three levels:

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> "The first level is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs [MFA] direct operation, which is the core of the whole. According to the statistics from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in 2012 alone, the websites managed by the ministry released over 190 thousand pieces of information." (MFA of China 2013 cited in Wang 2015).
>
> "The second component is the utilization of social media. It provides direct communication for China's cyber diplomacy. On Sina Weibo, the official account of the Office of Public Diplomacy, "外交小灵通" (little messenger of diplomacy), is followed by over 6.6 million users. It has posted more than 11.5 thousand micro-blogs."
>
> "The final level is the participation of the Chinese civil society, which provides advisory support for cyber diplomacy. It consists of two parts. The first is the Chinese netizens' opinion. International politics as a topic is frequently discussed on China's online such as Tianya.cn and People.cn because of the online nationalism" (Wang 2006: p 1–13 cited in Wang 2015).
>
> The most influential one is "外交大家谈" (let's talk about diplomacy),
>
> which is a theme activity organised by the Office of Public Diplomacy regularly. "It is a platform for the direct communication between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Chinese netizens. From 2012–2013, it had been held over 11 times" (MFA of P.R. China 2013 cited in Wang 2015).

China has since the 1950s used so-called animal diplomacy as a tool and strategy to influence foreign publics before the era of digital diplomacy. As part of its charm offensive, China "sent three giant pandas – Ping-Ping, Chi-Chi, and An-An – to improve the national image of China during the Cold War. Giving the panda a clear political meaning, Beijing presented one to the Soviet Union in 1957 to symbolize their socialist brotherhood and sent two more to the United States after Richard Nixon's 1972 visit to China" (Zhao & Rui 2020:5).

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Technological advancement and the digital revolution saw China adopt a new strategy in practising public diplomacy using the panda, called Chinese Panda Digital Diplomacy. It is important to note that China's Panda digital diplomacy was all focused-on Europe and America initially, with Africa, in particular the Global South, specifically, not featuring at all (Ittefaq 2019). It could be argued that it is because digital diplomacy is fairly new, with prospects for scholars to "explore the avenues social media opens across the globe. Consequently, small and developing countries are neglected in digital diplomacy literature" (Ittefaq 2019).

China used digital diplomacy strategies using Panda Digital Diplomacy and the 'Wolf Warrior' to advance its foreign policy. Through its state-owned media, "panda-themed tweets, including static images, moving gifs, and video clips" were posted (Zhao & Rui, 2020:3). Through these posts, the "Chinese government attempts to wield soft power and 'shape perceived interests' of target publics (Zhao & Rui 2020:3). The study aims to show how Chinese foreign policy panned out using digital diplomacy through its Facebook page in South Africa during a pandemic.

For image improvement, state-owned Chinese media communicated "a soft, attractive, and humanitarian image of China through these peaceful human-panda relationships" (Zhao & Rui 2020:10). Therefore, tweets designed "to entertain can rhetorically support, in subtle and appealing ways, the idea of China's peaceful rise in global power" (Zhao & Rui 2020:10). It being a state-owned media, they were the voice and mouthpiece of the Chinese government that articulated China's foreign policy objectives, amongst others.

The posts resulted in online interaction and engagement with the foreign publics. Images of the interaction between Panda and former US first lady Melania Trump were tweeted and seen across the globe. In this instance, the panda was used in digital diplomacy to foster bilateral relations with the US, using Trump and Melania's visit to China in 2018. "Many states regard animal diplomacy as an effective way to maintain international relations. The longevity of this para-diplomatic practice underscores its purpose of attracting foreign publics" (Zhao & Rui 2020:3).

As stated above, China also used the Wolf Warriors digital diplomacy strategy. This diplomacy, unlike charm offensive Panda digital diplomacy strategy, was more combative and assertive. "'Wolf Warriors' diplomacy is defined as an "aggressive and combative diplomatic strategy bordering on nationalism, based on the popular Chinese film by the same title. 'Wolf Warrior'

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was a 2015 Chinese production about a former Chinese special forces soldier who fought and defeated a group of foreign (American) mercenaries, depicting the Chinese as tenacious and able to conquer forces from the West." (Shumba 2021: p 2). The Wolf Warrior digital diplomacy strategy was prompted by the cyber-attacks, particularly on Twitter, and the criticism levelled against China, particularly by Trump, about the origins of the virus. "He repeatedly referred to it as the 'Chinese virus'" (Shumba 2021: p 2). Chinese diplomats such Lijian Zhao, the Chinese Foreign Affairs spokesperson, adopted this 'fight back' strategy to set the record straight about their country. "Zhao in particular sparked controversy by alleging that the US had brought the coronavirus to China" (Shumba 2021: p 3). However, it must be noted that Wolf Warrior diplomacy was not an official Chinese government strategy.

Covid-19 spurred China to be more intentional and strategic using soft power and digital diplomacy strategies to improve its image and to portray China's caring side by adopting and practising 'mask diplomacy', which complemented the Wolf Warrior strategy. The mask diplomacy was a consequence of China's donation of personal protective equipment – surgical masks, gloves and ventilators, especially to Africa (Shumba 2021:4).

As is demonstrated in this study, an analysis of China's Facebook posts to the South African public shows that it intended to engage, influence and improve its image using digital diplomacy. According to Madrid-Morales (2017:10), "Online, advocacy is the sole form of public diplomacy in which embassies engage. The mission in Pretoria is alone in having a Facebook page allowing users to comment on posts."

Although China previously banned social networks like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, China now uses Twitter "to shape the emerging debate on a given topic, given how Twitter is the "preferred channel" for conducting digital diplomacy" (Alden 2021). However, Alden (2021) asserts that China's use of Twitter diplomacy is effectively a 'crisis messaging tool' for Beijing. Twitter allows China to selectively post messages and topics that have the potential to influence foreign audiences. Twitter enabled Chinese diplomats to rebut any negative narrative aimed at compromising China's image, "that reached a global audience in near real-time" (Alden 2021). As demonstrated above, China has maximised Twitter to advance and defend its foreign policy using the Panda and Wolf Warrior digital diplomacy strategies (Zhang & Oloo Ong'ong'a 2021).

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In the study conducted by Denisov et al, cited in Manor & Segev (2015:94), it is noticeable that China uses international experience, which is based on the premise that nation branding practised through digital diplomacy channels such as Facebook can serve as an effective tool for image and reputation management. As such may help nations alter their status quo image.

According to Zhao and Rui, "Digital communication has extended the influence and attractiveness of more traditional animal diplomacy (e.g., fauna exchange). Via Twitter, the panda has become the most adorable and popular witness of the bilateral and multilateral relationships between China and foreign nations" (Zhao & Rui, 2020).

Although the Chinese embassy did not always use the panda and wolf images in its messages, the essence of the messages on donations and those denying that the virus originated in China, betray the communications strategies they used in those posts. China is portrayed as caring, reflecting the panda image, and feisty, reflecting the Wolf Warrior strategy. This helps us answer sub-questions 1 and 2 about the strategies used by China and to what extent they were employed.

4.4 US digital diplomacy

The US State Department has been credited with being the first to "establish a dedicated ediplomacy unit which created the Taskforce on eDiplomacy in 2002" (Adesina 2017:7-8). Not only were they the first to venture into digital diplomacy, but they were successful at it too. The success of digital diplomacy is in its ability to promote engagement between the diplomats and the recipients of the message. Nantongo S, (2019:80) says "The effective integration of Facebook into America's digital diplomacy efforts has developed visible engagement with its audience and created a community that will last due to Obama's dedication to digital diplomacy."

The US in 2000 established the usa.gov website, the first e-government application in the world. In 2007, the US Department of State published the first blog, called 'Dipnote', within public diplomacy. In addition, blogs, videos, webcasts, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and links were included in the US america.gov portal, which was designed interactively (Yağmurlu, 2019, p.1272 cited in Değirmenci, F. and Terzioğlu, E. (2022) page 494).

Furthermore, "The State Department enjoys mutual Twitter relations with 54 other leaders, mainly foreign ministries, and it is unilaterally followed by 210 other world leaders, including

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the Russian Foreign Ministry, but it hasn't reciprocated Moscow's overture yet" (Twiplomacy, 2018).

Considering how the US State Department responded to the digital revolution and the advent of social media, it can be assumed that the US saw these as game changers in public diplomacy, and duly seized the opportunity. Hence, they are bold to say:

> "The United States Department of State has been described as the vanguard of digital diplomacy, which it refers to [as] 21st Century Statecraft, using new technology to engage a growing, changing set of stakeholders across the globe. According to the U.S. State Department, the twenty-first-century statecraft agenda addresses new forces propelling change in international relations that are pervasive, disruptive, and difficult to predict. The distinctive features of the twenty-first-century statecraft point the way toward deeper changes that will gradually permeate all of foreign policy: expanding its scope, substituting new tools, and changing its values" (U.S. Department of State, 2014).

Various recent US presidents have used digital diplomacy to advance foreign policy. "The four main objectives of U.S. foreign policy are the protection of the United States and its citizens and allies, the assurance of continuing access to international resources and markets, the preservation of a balance of power in the world, and the protection of human rights and democracy." (Lumen undated). The US government and the diplomatic corps, therefore, have the responsibility to protect and promote these foreign policy objectives abroad. The US presidents endeavoured to do that despite their different approaches to using digital diplomacy. Nantongo S, (2019) notes that "both presidents have divergent styles on foreign policy as locally, President Trump administration's leadership style entails being anti-Obama, and a larger proportion of the population tend to like it".

Former US president Trump's propensity to use digital diplomacy via Twitter to communicate personal and "individual feelings intents and convictions", (Nantongo S, 2019:84), defies the diplomatic decorum expected from a head of state. Nantongo S, (2019:83): Trump "is fundamentally the paradigm shift concerning the manner in which an individual makes use of the digital diplomacy as a key tool for foreign policy". On the other hand, former president Barack

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Obama's approach was more about "promoting US foreign policy not by agitating foreign publics, but through decent and polite engagement to have and sustain a dialogue" (Nantongo S, 2019). He "placed more emphasis on positive and deep substance as well as less on the style, this was reversed to short, simpler, and non-diplomatic style along with the dearth of intricate substance concerning the foreign policy" (Nantongo S, 2019:84).

Early in his presidency, Obama videotaped a message "on the occasion of Nowruz, the Persian New Year" (Ross 2020). The video went viral in Iran and was subsequently shared on approximately "60,000 blogs and watched by more than one-third of the citizens of Iran" (Ross 2020).

Former Secretary of State Hilary Clinton also practised digital diplomacy and created an aggressive innovation agenda that she termed '21st Century Statecraft' (Ross 2020). "This agenda compliments traditional foreign policy tools with newly innovated and adapted instruments of statecraft that fully leverage the networks, technologies and demographics of our networked world" (Ross 2020).

Obama and Clinton conducted digital diplomacy through Twitter and Facebook and connected with domestic and foreign audiences alike. This was a novel way in US foreign policy to conduct public diplomacy.

In pursuit of protecting US foreign policy objectives during his tenure, for example, Donald Trump said, "[U]nder my administration, we will never enter America into any agreement that reduces our ability to control our affairs." Furthermore, in his nomination speech on 21 July 2016, Trump (2016b) renewed his "pledge to never sign any trade agreement that hurts our workers, or that diminishes our freedom or independence…" (Rolf 2021). Trump used digital diplomacy to communicate the above stance to both domestic and foreign publics.

Current President Joe Biden and his administration also use digital diplomacy to advance US foreign policy in a pandemic. Through the official US government Twitter page, @POTUS, Biden posted the following message: "I spoke today with Prime Minister Modi of India. We committed to strengthening our defense, economic, and people-to-people relationship to together seek a peaceful and prosperous world" (Twitter, @POTUS 11April 2022).

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Biden is also using the opportunity provided by the Russian-Ukrainian crisis to advance US foreign policy using digital diplomacy. He posted the following message from @POTUS:

> "This morning I met with Allies and partners to discuss our support for Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression. We are committed to continuing our assistance and to imposing severe economic costs on Russia – and we reaffirmed our solidarity with Ukraine people" (Twitter, @POTUS 19 April 2022).

In the same way, Biden uses his page @JoeBiden to highlight the US's disapproval of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, together with US allies such as countries that constitute the G7. Such digital diplomacy may portray the US (to some) as both caring and responsible in ensuring the safety of civilians and supporting Ukraine's sovereignty. America's critics such as China believe that its intervention in conflict is always motivated by economic interest despite it being masqueraded as noble. It is such criticism that makes a country want to redeem its tarnished image in the eyes of some.

Furthermore, the US would want to improve its image given the insults it traded with China about the origins of the pandemic. Digital diplomacy as a tool presents such an opportunity for the US. These insults are similar to the criticism and insults exchanged between the two countries during the US-China trade war. Omidi & Moradifar, (2021:336), "… the U.S. government portrays China as a threat to its hegemony and has taken advantage of the international community's interest in the origins of the coronavirus pandemic to promote its anti-China agenda".

Such digital diplomacy activities have been enabled by the availability of the internet, which in turn should be attributed to technological advancement. This, coupled with a social media strategy, makes it easy for diplomats and heads of state to reach out to foreign publics to improve their image.

Having briefly outlined digital diplomacy, and how different US presidents and leaders used it to project and advance US foreign policy to the world, the jury is out on whether the US and China succeeded in their digital diplomacy strategies towards South Africa.

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The study shows how, in its different Facebook posts, the US managed to carve in different themes such as “democracy” “human rights” and “American values”, thus answering sub-question 3 about themes that emerge in its messages.

4.5 The link between digital diplomacy and public diplomacy

Public diplomacy remains an important tool of engagement with foreign publics for China and the US, in light of the competition between them. It is also a tool to persuade and influence foreign publics amongst others. These two countries rely on public diplomacy to successfully influence foreign publics as well as to advance their foreign policies. Zhao & Rui (2020) say, “Public diplomacy is primarily a tool for persuading publics that a nation promotes values, goals, and desires that those publics share. This communication process uses shared value narratives and emotional appeals to ‘understand, inform, engage, and influence people’ ”.

It is however extremely difficult for diplomats to practise their craft in a crisis such as a pandemic without digital tools. Social media enables diplomats to carry out their diplomatic mandates in a pandemic, thus demonstrating the link between public diplomacy and digital diplomacy. Digital diplomacy is public diplomacy conducted on digital platforms. It is linked to public diplomacy, which uses soft power for influence and the advancement of the foreign policy abroad. Sotiriou (undated) says “digital diplomacy can, and should, be understood and employed as a novel and practical extension of soft power and public diplomacy concepts”.

Some theorists were of the view that public diplomacy would be more successful if there was sufficient engagement between the diplomats and the foreign publics. Melissen J, (2005) says, “This was a departure from traditional diplomacy which took a one-way stream communication approach.” Melissen J, (2005 p.13) further says, “The new public diplomacy moves away from – to put it crudely – peddling information to foreigners and keeping the foreign press at bay, towards engaging with foreign audiences.”

Public diplomacy can be described as communication targeted at foreign publics by both government, individuals, and multinational companies (Snow & Cull, 2020:8). Gilboa (2008:66), attests to this connection between public diplomacy and communication when he says, “Public diplomacy and branding are similar in certain areas but very different in others”.

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Similarities include image and symbols management, relationship building, and extensive use of the mass media. The differences include goals or outcomes — increased sales versus foreign policy, means, types of communication, management, language, and culture. Callahan (2006) correctly observed that public relations, advertising, political campaigns, and movies are related to public diplomacy as much as baseball is related to cricket.

Similarly, we argue that there is a link between digital diplomacy and public diplomacy. Diplomats use public diplomacy and soft power to communicate with internal and foreign publics using digital diplomacy as a tool. Public diplomacy which can "be understood overall as the strategy by which soft power can be most efficiently maximized" (Sotiriu, 2015), needs digital platforms for its messages to be effectively disseminated to foreign publics. With the "rise in popularity of social media platforms, websites and digital applications, the contour of digital diplomacy starts to appear, tying public diplomacy and soft power together…" (Sotiriu, 2015).

Communication is the nexus between public diplomacy and digital diplomacy. Diplomats can therefore conduct public diplomacy using the digital diplomacy strategy. Furthermore, digital diplomacy has enabled ordinary people to directly engage with diplomats and government officials, easily and at a low cost. Diplomats or MFAs can now bypass mainstream media by communicating directly with the publics using digital platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

Previously this was impossible before the advent of social media and its pervasiveness. "Through the web we can listen, publish, engage, and evaluate in new and interesting ways. Crucially, we can also widen our reach and communicate directly with civil society as well as governments and influential individuals" (Adesina 2017:3).

Diplomats using digital diplomacy through their Facebook pages can send messages meant to influence foreign audiences to improve their countries' images abroad. The interactive nature of digital diplomacy assists diplomats to know how and what they think about their countries through immediate feedback. Social media enables diplomats to communicate with foreign publics directly, easily, quickly, and at a low cost. On the other hand, public diplomacy uses soft power to influence the decisions and behaviour of foreign publics and their governments through negotiations and dialogue.

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Sotiriu (2015) says that public diplomacy is also “not clearly and universally defined”; furthermore, “public diplomacy is an instrument used by states… to understand cultures, attitudes, and behaviour; build and manage relationships, and influence thoughts and mobilise actions to advance their interests and values”. To do this effectively, diplomats should employ the digital diplomacy strategy to disseminate their messages.

Whatever strategy diplomats may choose to use, the bottom line is they should have effective communication skills. Such communication skills are important for practising diplomats to foster cross-cultural relations with host countries.

The interdependence and the link between digital diplomacy and public diplomacy as demonstrated above is important for this study. The link between digital diplomacy and public diplomacy is central to the study.

Such links are essential ingredients for the study, without which it would be impossible to do. There would be no digital diplomacy without public diplomacy. It can be argued that public diplomacy is the mother of all kinds of diplomacies, be it digital or conventional.

The link between digital diplomacy and public diplomacy enabled the Chinese and the US embassies though their Facebook posts to communicate their foreign policies and endeavour to promote their image to the South African populace. This essentially answers our main question and sub-questions about whether their strategies were successful or not. This we will discuss in detail under our findings section.

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CHAPTER 5

5.1 Theoretical framework

This study used concepts and ideas from the theory of digital diplomacy on its own, the combination of agenda-setting and digital diplomacy, and the combination of media framing and digital diplomacy. The different theories assisted in answering the main question as well as the sub-questions. As mentioned above, digital diplomacy has been defined in different ways by different scholars. Some say, “digitization’s influence transcends the utilization of innovative technology” (Manor, 2018). Another scholar says, “it is a strategy for change management” (Sotiriu, 2015). Adesina on the other hand argues that digital diplomacy is solving foreign policy problems using the internet (Adesina 2017: p3). This novel way of conducting diplomacy rests on public diplomacy and soft power.

Since there is no official definition for digital diplomacy, the study drew from Manor & Segev’s (2015) definition that “Digital diplomacy refers mainly to the growing use of social media platforms by a country in order to achieve its foreign policy goals and proactively manage its image and reputation”. This does not mean that the study did not consider other definitions of digital diplomacy.

Drawing from Manor & Segev’s (2015) definition above, digital diplomacy via Facebook was adopted for this study because it answered our main question, i.e. “Is there a link between the policies of China and the US towards South Africa and the messages posted on the respective Facebook pages during the pandemic?” This is discussed and will be seen in the relevant section below.

The importance of digital media cannot be overemphasised in making this possible. There would be no digital diplomacy without digital or social media. In the context of this study, Facebook therefore played a catalytic role in answering our main question as stated above.

Therefore, engagements of the Chinese and US diplomats with the South African populace via Facebook embassy pages, successfully led us to answer our main question. Manor & Segev’s (2015) definition of digital diplomacy remains a relevant reference point that also contributed to the answering of the main question.

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Social media was therefore the bedrock of digital diplomacy, especially in a crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic that the globe has been plunged into. The convenience, speed, and inexpensiveness were attributes that attracted diplomats to influence and promote their policies to the South African populace. The study reveals their successes and failures in doing this.

It is through diplomacy strategies that use digital media that we determined that South African audiences responded to these posts and to what extent, and that diplomats from these two countries did not adequately respond to questions and concerns raised by South Africans, especially China.

By assessing the Facebook posts of these countries, set agendas and frames use were revealed. This explains why we chose to use agenda-setting and framing media theories. In determining the agendas set and how messages were framed, these media theories helped us answer the following study's sub-questions:

Sub-question 1: Which strategies did the Chinese and US embassies use in their communication towards South Africa during the pandemic?

Sub-question 2: To what extent were the strategies employed by the Chinese and US embassies successful or unsuccessful?

Sub-question 3: Which themes emerge from the analysis of the Facebook posts of the Chinese and US embassies?

Foreign policy objectives of China and the US, which include mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity and respect for human rights respectively, can be placed within Manor & Segev's (2015) definition of digital diplomacy in that the diplomats harnessed the effectiveness of social media platforms i.e. Facebook, to promote these objectives to the South African populace during the pandemic.

Using Qualitative Network Analysis, we were able to determine which agendas and frames the diplomats from these countries used in their endeavour to influence South Africans. Therefore, over and above Manor & Segev (2015), Entman (2004), McCombs & Shaw (1972), and Bhandari (2020) amongst other scholars cited in this study, assisted in answering our research question.

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Through data analysis, the study determined whether these countries' policy objectives were seen as good or bad by the South African populace. This determination depended on how the messages were framed, which frames were used as well as what agendas were set in these Facebook posts. Entman defines framing "as selecting and highlighting some aspects of a situation to promote a particular interpretation". This study analysed what frames the Chinese and US diplomats used to influence South Africans regarding their foreign policies. The study's sub-questions were answered through this process as beyond determining the agendas and frames, we determined the communications strategies used and to what extent, including the emerging themes.

Agenda-setting and framing are relevant media effect theories that helped answer the above questions. The study determined the agendas these diplomats set by the number of "likes" their messages received, which also revealed the themes that emerged. Furthermore, the relevance of framing as a chosen media theory for this study was determined by what the diplomats emphasised in their messages, which put some issues before others.

Furthermore, the qualitative analysis method, whereby data was analysed through coding and thematic analysis, assisted in answering our sub-question 3. This is illustrated in figures 5 and 7 below.

Cobb and Elder (1983) distinguish between types of agendas as follows:

- **Systemic agenda**: "All issues that are commonly perceived by members of the political community as meriting public attention and as involving matters within the legitimate jurisdiction of existing governmental authority."
- **Formal agenda**: "That set of items explicitly up for the active and serious consideration of authoritative decision-makers" Cobb and Elder (1983).

The Chinese and US diplomats in the context of the above can be considered to be a "political community" who believed that their foreign policies merited public attention and consideration by the South African government, who are the decision-makers. In other words, their foreign policy principles were their agendas. Scouring through data from the respective Facebook pages assisted in determining the types of agendas in line with those Cobb and Elder (1983) above

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found in the messages, thus assisting in answering our sub-questions and in particular sub-question 3.

We looked at what US and Chinese foreign policies were and how they panned out using digital diplomacy. Did the Chinese non-interference policy with its internal affairs, mutual respect and sovereignty of states come out? The US is a proponent of human rights and China's track record on human rights has been bad over the years. These were agendas we looked for in their Facebook posts to influence the host country, South Africa. These were also themes that emerged in these posts and how these posts were framed as mentioned above.

Similarly, we assessed if the US foreign policy of promoting democracy, respect for human rights, and promotion of American values came out whilst South Africa was on lockdown. We analysed if the posts reveal the above, and we describe these as emerging themes that betrayed a particular set agenda by the US. In other words, their foreign policy principles were seen as agendas. Both countries' foreign policies are embedded in their embassies' Facebook posts. Therefore, both countries' agendas or their foreign policies came out in their messages to influence South Africans. We have discussed this in detail in the relevant section below.

Furthermore, framing enabled us to determine that the US and Chinese diplomats managed to frame their foreign policies in South Africa by highlighting certain aspects of these foreign policies. It was interesting to see what these Facebook posts accomplished or not regarding their foreign policies and how South Africans interpreted them using framing. Their Facebook messages sought to influence and position the US and China as caring countries that have supported South Africa for years. Their posts also showed their protection and support for human rights, democracy, sovereignty, non-interference etc. As Entman says, "The interpretation generally comes through a narrative that encompasses an interrelated definition of the policy problem, analysis of its causes, moral evaluation of those involved, and remedy" (Entman, 2004 cited in Entman 2008).

The above media and digital theories betrayed the communication strategies the diplomats used and to what extent they were used to promote their foreign policies to South Africans. These theories revealed the themes that emerged as we analyse the data, thus assisting in answering the

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sub-questions. The success of these strategies employed by the diplomats was determined by the level of engagement and the number of likes the messages generated.

5.2 Agenda-setting and digital diplomacy

5.2.1 The importance of agenda-setting in digital diplomacy

In the complex interplay of multiple issues and actors in diplomacy, the key challenge is to place certain issues on global diplomatic agendas. Similarly, to the media in general and the world of the internet, a fight for attention takes place, in this case, diplomatic attention. Kehone and Nye suggest that states "struggle to get issues raised in international organisations that will maximise their advantage by broadening or narrowing the agenda".

Currently, there are many unresolved issues related to internet governance. As a result, extensive maneuvering by different actors trying to place their issues on emerging internet diplomatic agendas is taking place.

Studies on digital diplomacy often use media and journalism theories such as agenda-setting and framing. Given the US and China's relentlessness and obsession to take the centre stage on the global platform, we argue that they employed any strategy that would assist them to put their countries' issues on the international agenda using digital diplomacy. They did this by employing media effects theories such as agenda-setting and framing.

This despite claims by Gilboa (2008:63-64) that "public diplomacy scholars and practitioners rarely employ them, and very few studies have integrated media effects with public diplomacy concepts". Despite this assertion, studies on digital diplomacy as mentioned above often use media and journalism theories such as agenda-setting. McCombs & Shaw (1972) say "Agenda setting refers to the idea that there is a strong correlation between the emphasis that mass media place on certain issues (e.g., based on relative placement or amount of coverage) and the importance attributed to these issues by mass audiences" "The theory explains how the news media tells the public what to think and how to think about certain issues". Lippman is more graphic about how the media use agenda-setting when he likens press coverage to the "spotlights on a stage, shifting from character to character, from event to event. [He says], modern communication scholars have come to call this the agenda-setting function of media" (Vargo C, 2016:126).

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The use of agenda-setting as a theoretical and analytical tool paired with the network analysis methodology to find out what the Facebook posts reveal as the US and Chinese interests and strategies towards South Africa was relevant for this study. The study assessed and evaluated the issues China and the US emphasised in their Facebook posts and whether the public considered them important. We also assessed whether their objectives for emphasising those issues as described in the agenda-setting theory bore any fruit.

> Some scholars argue that the agenda setting and priming model (which will not be used in our study) "assume that people form attitudes based on the considerations that are most salient (i.e., most accessible) when they make decisions (Hastie & Park, 1986). In other words, judgements and attitude formation are directly correlated with "the ease in which instances or associations could be brought to mind'' (Tversky & Kahneman 1973:208).

Collins and Bekenova below show how diplomats can manipulate their communications to foreign publics using agenda-setting by posting information selectively as follows: "For the embassy webpages, agenda-setting is taken to be the opportunity to accentuate the positive and, where possible, ignore news items which may present their countries in a less than favourable light in terms of local opinion. In this process, social media offer the advantages of reach and immediacy. On the other hand, diplomats may wish to refrain from discussing certain topics if there is any doubt as to how they might be received by the local audience" (Collins & Bekenova 2018).

As stated above, this is a classic example of how diplomats can manipulate information to set their own agendas that favour their countries. Agenda-setting is premeditated and intentional and diplomats whose interests are to influence foreign audiences as well as promote their images, will use their digital platforms or digital diplomacy strategies to do this, similar to how journalists use agenda-setting to influence and shape public opinion in the media.

By choosing what to publish and when to respond, diplomats set their agendas to influence foreign populaces. Agenda-setting is universal in that it can be applied in any medium and used in any discipline, as will be demonstrated in this study about digital diplomacy.

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Agenda-setting contributed to the embassies' objective to influence and improve their image in South Africa. "In the context of Bjola and Jiang's study of digital strategies of three embassies in China, agenda-setting is used to explain to what extent social media enables diplomats to set the agenda of discussion with their audience (Bjola & Holmes 2015:7). Agenda-setting is also used in their study to understand if there is a shared understanding and common interests between what the embassies publish, in this case on the Chinese social media forum Sina Weibo, and what the audience's response is (Bjola & Holmes 2015:7). Agenda-setting has therefore been used "to understand the foreign public perceptions from a diplomatic standpoint by looking at comments and responses of social media posts by the embassies themselves" (Elvstrom 2018). The study reveals that the messages posted by diplomats shed some light on the "shared understanding and common interest" and the lack thereof between what the Chinese and US embassies publish or communicate towards the South African audience.

The instantaneous nature of a "messaging application such as WhatsApp" (Facebook Undated), "has given diplomats the opportunity to influence deliberation as they happen or in real-time. As a result, diplomats from different MFAs have launched virtual embassies in virtual worlds to brand their nation" (Facebook Undated). Therefore, digital diplomacy is not limited to social media but "rather includes a variety of digital tools" (Facebook Undated). Digitisation has its challenges that warrant some criticism despite its benefits to today's communication. For instance, it is easy to peddle misinformation and hide your identity in the digital sphere. This could be harmful information that could see individuals' and governments' images badly tarnished, as will be seen later in this study.

The impact of digital public diplomacy can be studied through "three things to find out how much mutual understanding, collaboration, and engagement are taking place" (Rachmawati et al 2020). "This measurement was conducted by looking at the agenda-setting, presence expansion, and conversation generating on Twitter. First, to find out how effective the agenda-setting is, it can be measured by the number of 'likes' obtained through each upload. Before counting the number of 'likes', which can be interpreted as approval or support towards the content, the researcher must establish the agenda-setting in advance" (Rachmawati et al 2020). Our study reveals the approval or rejection of the messages based on the number of "likes" their messages generated per post. We discuss this in detail in the relevant section below.

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Both China and the US embassies used agenda-setting in their messages as they selectively chose what to post and when to post those messages. Agenda-setting comes out in their foreign policy objectives, as can be seen in their messages. This essentially assists in answering our main and sub-questions.

5.3 Framing

Heads of state and their administrations endeavour to control the "framing of their foreign policies" in both domestic and local media (Entman R, 2008:94). Entman R (2008) asserts that it would be difficult for any US president to control frames in foreign media if they fail to do that in their domestic media (Entman R, 2008:90). Implying therefore that "charity begins at home". This underscores the importance of framing as a media theory worthy to be used in digital diplomacy as it is used and described in Entman's (2008), *Mediated public diplomacy*. It is for this reason that this study will, alongside agenda-setting media theory, also use framing theory to determine how diplomats' Facebook posts sought to promote or highlight some issues using framing.

Entman defines framing "as selecting and highlighting some aspects of a situation to promote a particular interpretation". The interpretation comes through a narrative that encompasses an interrelated definition of the policy problem, analysis of its causes, moral evaluation of those involved, and remedy (Entman, 2004 cited in Entman 2008). The caveat is that "Unless the narratives are compared, frames are difficult to detect fully and reliably because many of the framing devices can appear as "natural," unremarkable choices of words or images, (Entman, 1991:6, cited in Arowolo 2017).

MFAs are custodians of their countries' foreign policies. This responsibility amongst others requires them to communicate and advance these foreign policies to foreign audiences. The MFAs therefore would depend on the media to help them disseminate their messages. Mass media plays a pivotal role in this instance. The digital revolution is catalytic to the birth of social media networks, which are platforms for digital diplomacy. Manor & Crilley (2018) say, "Social media enable MFAs to craft frames so as to influence audiences' perception of foreign affairs".

Tversky & Kahneman (1973) say, "Framing is based on the assumption that how an issue is characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences". As a

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construct, framing is described as both macrolevel and microlevel. “As a macroconstruct, the term ‘‘framing’’ refers to modes of presentation that journalists and other communicators use to present information in a way that resonates with existing underlying schemas among their audience” (Shoemaker & Reese 1996).

Manor and Crilley say digital diplomacy is intrinsically linked to the need to frame events, issues, and actors in a new digital media ecology (Manor & Crilley 2018). One of the main drivers of US digital diplomacy was the need to counter Al-Qaeda’s use of online platforms to spread its narrative of jihad against Western imperialism (Manor & Crilley 2018).

The study analysed text messages, video messages and images to get a full picture of how these embassies framed their messages on Facebook using soft power in digital diplomacy.

The study’s approach to framing and digital diplomacy is echoed by Manor & Crilley (2018) when they say, “Notably, the MFA used images to support these frames and it is through images that the linguistic frames were made to resonate with Israeli strategic narratives”. Manor & Crilley (2018) pay attention to how images published by the Israeli MFA constitute three visual tropes and highlight how images function to augment frames (which focus on the present) to broader narratives that involve the past, and present and future. Here, they explore how images invoke the past to illuminate the present and future and create a shared identity in the context of the Gaza War.

It should be noted that framing is not equivalent to or the same as spinning. Journalists consider framing necessary to demystify the complex areas in an issue. “As a microconstruct, framing describes how people use information and presentation features regarding issues as they form impressions” (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). “Through social media, MFAs can now frame foreign policy events and communicate these frames directly to national and global audiences (Manor & Crilley 2018).

Considering the above, it can be assumed that digital diplomacy has been made easy as diplomats are in control of the message which they can frame anyhow they want, to suit the agendas they want to set and send it directly to foreign publics without it having to go through the editing process found in traditional media. The editing process in traditional media is seen as tempering and changing the essence of the original message. In the same vein, we argue that

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diplomats do not have control of the original message as respondents changed it by putting their interpretation by design or not. We discuss this in the relevant section below.

The caveat “however, [is that] digital diplomacy has also complicated the art of diplomatic framing as social media are contested framing environments in which numerous actors vie for audience attention, including traditional media outlets, new media outlets, citizen journalists and a plethora of diplomatic actors” (Manor & Crilley 2018).

In approaching this study there was an acknowledgment that digital diplomacy has its limitations, which include misinformation and misrepresentation of facts owing to the easy access of social media platforms. There is also an acknowledgment that given its limitations, digital diplomacy may not be a game changer or magic pill in the field of public diplomacy.

In our quest to determine how the framing was used in these posts, we established the type of frames that formed and with what intention. In analysing how the recipients (South Africans) used the information posted on these pages, we established if these influenced them or not. Influence is about power and control, which is what China, and the US want over South Africa, and especially when South Africa’s position looked vulnerable due to the pandemic. The study determines whether these countries were successful in influencing and improving their respective images to South Africans using agenda-setting and framing media effect theories. This aspect is discussed in the relevant section below. Through this study, we see what foreign policy objectives these two countries peddled on their Facebook pages.

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CHAPTER 6

6.1 Methodology

6.1.1 Qualitative research methodology

Most studies on digital diplomacy typically use qualitative research methods such as Park et al (2019); Ahrens (2018); and Hepp et al (2016). Since this research involves the collection and analysis of data from the embassies' Facebook pages, we have used qualitative research methodology as it was the most appropriate to conduct this study. "Qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data (e.g., text, video, or audio) to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences. It can be used to gather in-depth insights into a problem or generate new ideas for research" (Bhandari, 2020). "Qualitative research is the opposite of quantitative research, which involves collecting and analyzing numerical data for statistical analysis" (Bhandari, 2020).

Qualitative research has different types of methods, such as social network analysis and content analysis. In the context of this study, we have explained content analysis and social network analysis qualitative research methods. This highlighted how different these methods are from the preferred qualitative network analysis (QNA) method for this study.

Qualitative research is commonly used in the humanities and social sciences, in subjects such as anthropology, sociology, education, health sciences, and history (Bhandari, 2020). Phungula (2013) says, "Qualitative research strategy is primarily concerned with exploring issues, understanding phenomena, and answering questions without relying on numerical data. This method is also concerned with explaining the kind of data, and it is usually associated with generating knowledge and empirical data through interviews, participant observation, etc."

Data is explained through the process of coding which is explained in detail below.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006) postulate that "Coding is the heart and soul of whole-text analysis. Coding forces the researcher to make judgments about the meanings of contiguous blocks of text. The fundamental tasks associated with coding are sampling, identifying themes, building codebooks…" which we discuss in detail below. This study shows how codes and themes were developed to make meaning of the text and data of our research. In doing so, the

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study did thematic analysis, defined as follows by Boyatzis (1998) cited in Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006), “Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, it also often goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic.” “Therefore, thematic analysis can be a method which works both to reflect reality, and to unpick or unravel the surface of reality” Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). This study hopes to show the above claim. “A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). The above assertion captures the essence of this study, as will be seen in our data analysis below.

6.2 Content analysis

Previously, when it was only traditional media, content analysis was the most suitable and relevant methodology, particularly for print media. Cole (1988) defines content analysis as “… a method of analysing written, verbal or visual communication messages”. “It was first used as a method for analysing hymns, newspaper and magazine articles, advertisements and political speeches in the 19th century” (Harwood & Garry 2003 cited in Elo & Kyngas 2007). Content analysis is also “known as a method of analysing documents” (Cavanagh 1997). “Through content analysis, it is possible to distill words into fewer content-related categories. It is assumed that when classified into the same categories, words, phrases, and the like share the same meaning” (Elo & Kyngas 2007). Krippendorff (1969), defines content analysis as the use of a “replicable and valid method for making specific inferences from text to other states or properties of its source” (Krippendorff 1969:103 cited in Mayring 2000). Thus “qualitative content analysis defines itself within this framework as an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytical rules and step by step models, without rash quantification” (Mayring 2000). A few sentences explain how content analysis will be used in this study.

6.3 Social network analysis

Establishing networks in public diplomacy using digital diplomacy as a tool is of utmost importance. It is through these networks that diplomats will be able to “build relations and facilitate dialogue” (Park et al 2019) between themselves and the foreign publics. “The potential

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benefit of activating connections is the possible contribution to collaboration in the foreign policy decision-making process" (Park et al 2019:2-3).

Castells et al (2009) describe social network analysis (SNA) as "the investigation of the relationships between actors". Aishwarya S (2022) says SNA is "the process of exploring or examining the social structure by using graph theory. It is used for measuring and analyzing the structural properties of the network. It helps to measure relationships and flows between groups, organizations, and other connected entities". According to Aishwarya S, (2022), there are two types of social networks, that is, ego network analysis and complete network analysis. Ego network analysis "finds the relationship among people". "The analysis is done for a particular sample of people chosen from the whole population. This sampling is done randomly to analyze the relationship" through traditional surveys. On the other hand, she describes complete network analysis as "the analysis that is used in all network analyses. It analyses the relationship among the sample of people chosen from the large population" (Aishwarya, S 2022). Our preferred methodology for this research is qualitative network analysis (QNA) discussed in detail below.

Facebook is a social network. Anything posted by the ambassadors out in the open via their Facebook pages will be seen by fellow citizens. The latter will comment on these posts, and it will thus become a bigger network.

Having explained the two different qualitative research methods above, we now zero into QNA, the preferred method for this study. According to Ahrens (2018), qualitative network analysis (QNA) is "an innovative method of gathering discursive forms of data on maintaining complex transnational networks in the everyday work of individual actors". Furthermore, she says, "Complementary to social network analysis, qualitative network analysis allows collecting details on the meaning individual actors attach to their network ties and the network as a whole…" (Ahrens 2018:1). QNA employs "common qualitative research strategies, like interviewing, observing, and analyzing documents and archival material" (Bhandari, 2020).

At the initial stage of data analysis, we conducted a more 'general qualitative analysis' by developing "a storyline" (Stuckey H, 2015:8), which is directly related to the research question "Is there a link between the policies of China and the US towards South Africa and the messages posted on the respective Facebook pages during the pandemic?"

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This assisted in determining the storyline told within the data concerning the research question.

The storyline can be captured in a "sentence or a short paragraph that summarizes what the data is saying in general terms" (Stuckey H, 2015:8) as follows, "Despite the negative impact the pandemic had on humanity broadly and on South Africans in particular, China and the US leveraged on their embassy Facebook pages to influence South Africans as well as promote their foreign policy objectives".

Following the above, we created a code sheet/book with the collected data for easy access, which is appended below. The organised and structured data on the code sheet "single place," helped with consistency when analysing data. This also assisted when we summarised and gave meaning to our data through a report (Crosley & Jansen 2020).

Through data analysis, we attempted to establish if there was a link between the policies of China and the US towards South Africa and the messages posted on the respective Facebook pages during the pandemic. The task of analysing these posts or messages was to "scour through the codes that emerge[d] from the data and [draw] meaningful correlations from them" (Crosley J, & Jansen D, 2020). Analysing our data was the beginning of answering the research question and sub-questions.

This process was followed by categorizing the codes. Categorisation assisted with the identification of emerging themes such as human rights, equality, sovereignty, non-interference, security, democracy, peace, etc. The identified themes were then paired with QNA – our preferred methodology. From these themes, a narrative was formed guided by our research question, the objectives, and our method of analysis, which is QNA. (Crosley & Jansen 2020). The process of developing codes and categorising them is explained thoroughly below.

The themes also assisted in determining the agendas and the frames these diplomats used in their messages. In addition to the above, we tried to establish whether there was any link between these themes and the foreign policy objectives of these two countries.

This research used the qualitative data coding approach defined by Crosley & Jansen (2020) as "the process of creating and assigning codes to categorise data extracts". This study also adopted a hybrid coding approach to avoid limiting it to predetermined codes or deductive coding. The hybrid approach is popular in undertaking such a study because it provides the researcher with

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the best of both worlds. The hybrid approach is a combination of deductive and inductive coding. Inductive coding is when codes emerge from the data as one interacts with it (Crosley & Jansen 2020). We also looked for emerging themes beyond predetermined ones before engaging with the data.

Analysing the data using QNA, as mentioned, established the emerging themes, agendas, and frames used by the diplomats to communicate with different networks, including pictures and videos. We discuss networks in detail in the paragraph below. This assisted in answering the main research question and sub-questions as stated above.

Furthermore, we identified the different networks formed by these individuals and how they engaged with diplomats. Networks are characterised by engagement. The networks could, for example, be the South African government, the head of state, the minister of International Relations and Cooperation, political parties, government officials, advisers, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), business, community leaders, media, etc. Hepp et al (2016) say, “The link to media and communication research comes from the fact that the object of qualitative network analysis is formed by the communicative relationships realised through the media: the media or communicative mediation of network relations.” It can be argued that the above assertion also applies to social media, the enabler of digital diplomacy and the core of our study.

Like Park et al (2019), the study sought to establish if they used “a relational and collaborative approach through which it engaged in dialogue with the public”. We looked at how the different networks as suggested above engaged with these embassies.

Networks such as those created on Facebook and other social media platforms create a sense of being in the same place with those you communicate with. Hepp et al (2016) describe a network as “a commonplace in work on media and communication…” Networks created relationships that the Chinese and US diplomats could harness to influence and promote their foreign policies to the South African populace. Park et al (2019): “As the objective of digital diplomacy is utilizing a digital platform to enhance mutual understanding and communication between the governing and governed, rather than the one-way propagation of ideas and values, it is important to consider the aspects of communication and engagement between diplomatic staff and target audiences (Melissen & Keulenaar, 2017). Therefore, it is important to develop a new evaluation

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standard to assess digital diplomacy that reflects the relationship between agents (government) and stakeholders (public)."

In the era of new media digitisation, messages are fast paced, thus necessitating a novel approach and new research methodology, such as QNA. Where in the traditional media, the news would just be processed in a room, with new media, the room will constitute users producing "user-generated content". Barnatt C (2001) says user-generated content can be described as content originating and initiated by the sender of the message using smartphones or any other electronic gadget enabled by the internet. Given the study, the content was generated by diplomats but there is a caveat because once the message is sent, they do not have control over it as it can be changed by the recipients' responses. Barnatt C (2001) adds that data shows that indeed recipients in part changed the message and spanned it to suit their narrative using their agendas and frames. This was particularly seen in data from the Chinese embassy. We employed ideas of different scholars such as Manor & Segev (2015) digital diplomacy, Entman (2004) media framing theory, McCombs & Shaw (1972) agenda-setting theory and Bhandari (2020), Park et al 2019; Ahrens 2018; and Andreas Hepp et al (2016) qualitative theory method, amongst others, to do the above in this study.

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CHAPTER 7

7.1 Data analysis

7.1.1 Economic, political, diplomatic and cultural analysis

In this section, we have created an example of a code sheet to demonstrate the study's data analysis from different networks. However, before we get to the code sheet, it is pivotal that we briefly explain what coding is. Coding is the process of labelling and organising "data in such a way that [one] can then identify themes in the data, and the relationships between these themes" (Sahifa 2014).

Following sampling, we created a code sheet similar to a table. Sahifa (2014) says, "codes are not the final words or phrases on the basis of which evaluation will be made". We looked for verbs and the actions that the respondents have used in the text which would shed light on their interpretation of the posts or Facebook messages. Their actions include arguing, debating, criticising, being malicious and angry etc.

Sahifa (2014) also says "Qualitative data analysis is all about finding out the meanings and interpretations, so the coder should have an eye for such things".
We developed a code frame to group and structure the codes. Once these codes were structured, we gave them meaningful names and categorised them. These categories assisted in refining our research.
In the code sheet or table, we were able to identify keywords and emerging themes that could be economic, political, diplomatic, cultural etc. as depicted in the code sheet. It should be noted that these themes are these two countries' policies, which are the agendas they set through their posts. To make a thorough comparison and to get a true picture of the emerging themes, two separate tables were created representing each country. Once a pattern of the formed themes or agendas emerged, we plotted them on a graph to show stronger and weaker themes, popular and less popular themes. As Sahifa (2014) opines, "The refined data itself leads to patterns and themes. The patterns are the key to finding out the true results of the research."
In the previous section, we have mentioned that the study will take a hybrid approach, which is a combination of both deductive and inductive coding.

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7.1.2 Step 1 – Initial coding

In coding my data, we used (Crosley J, & Jansen D, 2020) Qualitative Data Coding 101 model because it is straightforward and easy to follow. Informed by the dynamism found in text (data), the research used some different approaches to code my text, which are:

- In vivo coding – using direct codes from participants as [my] codes
- Process coding – using action-based codes
- Descriptive coding – summarises extracts by using a single word or noun that encapsulates the general idea of the data.
- Structural coding – describes specific structural attributes of the data and includes coding according to answers to the questions of "who," "what," "where," and "how".
- Value coding – involves coding that relates to the participant's worldviews. (Crosley J, & Jansen D, 2020) Qualitative Data Coding 101.

First, we did initial coding by identifying the core of the collected data and applied the hybrid approach (deductive and inductive) to code data, resulting in our appendix codebook below. Informed by the above coding approaches, the study under our data analysis section discusses themes that emerged, examples of direct quotes from the data, strategies used and application of QNA, our preferred method for this study. This is also illustrated in the appended table below.

7.2 Scope and sampling

As mentioned above, the focus was on the data collected from the Chinese and US embassies' Facebook pages from April 2020 – December 2021. This was the period when South Africa was going through a series of lockdowns due to the outbreak of Covid-19.

The study answers the following question: "Is there a link between the policies of China and the US towards South Africa, and the messages posted on the respective Facebook pages during the pandemic?"

This research investigated how China and the US communicated towards South Africa by analysing their embassies' Facebook posts using digital diplomacy strategies during South Africa's 20-month lockdown period.

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To do this study we used digital diplomacy theories as well as the agenda-setting and framing media theories. The study used the network analysis method and qualitative research analysis method. Given that "collection of all data is impossible" (Afribary, 2021), it follows that "all research is restricted in scope and subjected to limitations" (Afribary, 2021). With this in mind, we sampled the posts. Through sampling, we picked every fifth post within the stipulated period for analysis. "In research terms, a sample is a group of people, objects, or items that are taken from a larger population for measurement. The sample should be representative of the population to ensure that we can generalise the findings from the research sample to the population as a whole" (The Hillingdon Hospital, 2006).

7.3 Data analysis: networks formed from data using QNA

As mentioned, Ahrens (2018), says, qualitative network analysis (QNA) is "an innovative method of gathering discursive forms of data on maintaining complex transnational networks in the everyday work of individual actors". Furthermore, she says, "Complementary to social network analysis, qualitative network analysis allows collecting details on the meaning individual actors attach to their network ties and the network as a whole…" (Ahrens 2018:1).

Network maps, according to Hollstein (2011), are important tools of QNA. Using Hollstein's (2011) assertion on QNA tools, I have customised it to my study as follows: "QNA tools allow examining what agency [action] means in a certain context, how policy processes (in the case of my study), [messages] and actors [diplomats and recipients] are connected, and which dynamics occur in networks" (Holstein, 2011).

Given the above assertion, the study argues that the common thread between embassies (diplomats) and recipients (South Africans), was the messages. These messages spurred individuals to act in a particular manner, be it in support or against.

We investigated actions of individuals as alluded to by Ahrens P (2018) when she says "QNA stipulates that networks depend on the actions of individuals and that these are essential to any aspect of networks." These actions led to the formation of different networks which either had shared sentiments or whose actions were similar. We discuss this in the relevant section below.

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While Ahrens (2018) contends that "QNA enables visualizing where and which formal and informal networks exist in everyday working situations…" the study argues that these embassies could only determine the existence of formal rather than informal networks "in everyday working situations". The formal networks would be the heads of state, ministers, mayors, premiers, other government officials etc., which diplomats from these embassies would be targeting knowingly. This is a network the ambassadors interact with daily in their line of duty to promote their countries in a host country. The informal networks are the recipients of messages that formed based on their views and sentiments towards the messages or posts sent, which we suggest diplomats from these embassies would not have determined or known.

Informal networks it can be argued, were not permanent. These networks disintegrated once the topic was exhausted. Theirs was a happenstance determined by the different opinions they held of the embassy messages and how they responded to those messages guided by their conviction and sentiment.

Diplomats sent messages to promote their countries and to influence South Africans without intentions to form any networks – especially if there was minimal or no engagement at all from these embassies with the recipients or South Africans.

Formal networks, on the other hand, can be described as permanent with staying power because ambassadors from these embassies endeavour to promote their policies in the host country, requiring them to constantly and adequately communicate with government, ministers, premiers, mayors, the president, and other relevant parties.

The study argues that networks become vibrant and active because of constant communication and engagement. This engagement can be between the embassy and recipients or among the recipients in a particular network. It could be argued that embassies could have successfully promoted their policies and influenced South Africans if they adequately engaged with the locals. This is a matter that is discussed in our findings and conclusion below.

The visualisation of such networks is seen in the conversations that are conducted on Facebook as a network. It is such visualisation that resulted in the creation of a freehand sketch of different networks that emerged from embassy messages. See figures 1 and 3 below.

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Using framing theory, the study also looked at the extent of influence the posts had on recipients, what type of frames, and how many frames were used, guided by the framing theory. Diplomats from the two embassies used a "human interest" frame, which according to (Enteman, 1991), is "presenting a story with human face, [whereby] personality is promoted over more important aspects". Diplomats also used political, economic and social, frames amongst others, which could be considered as some of the strategies used by embassies to communicate with South Africans in a pandemic. The above frames also appear in the themes that emerged or agendas in the embassies' Facebook posts, as it will be seen in the discussion below.

7.4 How the Chinese embassy used agenda-setting and framing and the link between their policies and their messages towards South Africa

The Chinese embassy used agenda-setting and framing in some of their posts to do damage control on their battered reputation and to influence South Africans. The embassy framed some of their messages as follows: "China will continue to protect the rights of its African brothers and sisters" (Embassy post: 2020), "[highlighting] some aspects of a situation to promote a particular interpretation" (Entman, 2004 cited in Entman 2008).

Similarly, it can be argued that agenda-setting was used as a ploy to dissuade people from alleged Chinese racism during the pandemic. The above framing is in line with China's policy of equality, mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence.

A message that warned against racism allegations levelled at China as having the potential to "destroy jobs and lives," shows that the embassy knew how desperate locals were and that they would prioritize job opportunities than a debate on racism given the scarcity of jobs in South Africa then and now. The embassy's agenda and frames can be seen in how they entitled the post as follows: "As the novel coronavirus Covid-19 continues to wreak havoc around the world, so does misinformation, fear, fake cures, fake news and malicious hoaxes" (Chinese Embassy post: 2020). This it can be argued that it was a strategy to dissuade South Africans from negative allegations levelled against China, which damaged its reputation.

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The embassy's warning about destroying jobs and lives as mentioned above, confirms McCombs & Shaw's (1972) assertion that "there is a strong correlation between the emphasis that mass media place on certain issues and the importance attributed to these issues by mass audiences".

The embassy Facebook post therefore subtly told the public "what to think and how to think about certain issues," as McCombs & Shaw (1972) assert. The Chinese embassy messages also "accentuate[d] the positive and, … ignore[d] news items which may present their [country] in a less than favourable light in terms of local opinion" as Collins & Bekenova (2018) claim. The framing of the above message was also in line with Entman's (2008) definition of framing "as selecting and highlighting some aspects of a situation to promote a particular interpretation".

Tapping into Tversky & Kahneman's (1973) definition that "Framing is based on the assumption that how an issue is characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences," it could be argued that the embassy's message on crime against Chinese in South Africa is intended to influence South Africans to see Chinese as victims and locals as ungrateful perpetrators, despite the fact that crime affects everyone in the country. The post was entitled, "Chinese Embassy in South Africa strongly condemns recent crimes against Chinese nationals" – Chinese Embassy in South Africa (2020). To this post with the stated title, it could be argued that the embassy deliberately used an irrelevant picture of people queuing for food with the following caption: "People queue up for food and supplies provided by charity groups in Soweto, southwest of Johannesburg, South Africa, on June 5, 2020."

It could be further argued that the caption by "charity groups" referred to Chinese ones as indeed data shows that different groups ranging from Chinese business to Chinese communities including the embassy, made these donations to locals. This was deliberately done by the embassy to portray South Africa as "biting the hand that feeds them." Thus, it was setting the agenda and influencing people about "what and how to think about" this particular issue. Using agenda setting and framing, the Chinese embassy managed to shift criticism about singling out Chinese as victims of crime in South Africa, to Chinese as victims of crime perpetuated by those China helped in the pandemic. The "spotlight" was shone on Chinese as benevolent victims. Thus, aligning with Entman's definition of framing "as selecting and highlighting some aspects of a situation to promote a particular interpretation" (Entman, 2004 cited in Entman 2008).

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Such posts from this embassy fulfil Lippmann's "more graphic [description] about how the media use agenda-setting when he likens press coverage to the "spotlights on a stage, shifting from character to character, from event to event. [He says], modern communication scholars have come to call this the agenda-setting function of media" (Vargo C, 2016: p126).

To further demonstrate the embassy's use of agenda-setting and framing in the above message, we argue that the embassy knew that the majority of people were adversely affected by the pandemic and were desperate for food and basic supplies. Therefore, South Africans would prioritise access to food during the pandemic more than Chinese as victims of crime especially because crime affected everyone in the country, as already mentioned. It could be argued that their attempt to spin defeated the purpose of their agendas and frames in this message as per the argument above.

All these, the study argues, were different agendas set by the embassy in their messages and emphasis of a particular aspect of the posts described as framing. The incongruence of the picture of South Africans queuing for food with the accompanying title about crime against the Chinese, is a classic example of framing and agenda setting, the study argues.

Given the impact the pandemic had on people, it could also be argued that the Chinese embassy exploited people's vulnerabilities by setting agendas and frames that perpetuated their embassy's narratives. Also, by using that irrelevant picture, the embassy set an agenda and influenced people about "what and how to think about" that particular issue, which is central to agenda setting. It could be argued that the picture exposed South African nationals' ungratefulness – a message and agenda the embassy was delivering.

The study argues that the embassy also set preferred agendas by selectively posting on donations, with the intention to improve China's image in South Africa given its tarnished image due to racism allegations. In promoting their foreign policy objectives of equality and mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence and image, the Chinese embassy tapped into President Xi Jing Pi's telephonic conversation with President Ramaphosa when he said, "China stands ready to continue support for African countries in their battle against the Covid-19 epidemic and help Africa improve its capacity of disease prevention and control." If South Africa and the continent win the battle against Covid-19, it will be a win-win situation for both China and the African countries it helped, it could be argued.

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In addition, the availability of vaccines to the continent, including South Africa, reinforces China's policy of equality, I suggest. President Xi therefore leveraged on the needs of South Africa and the continent to promote China's foreign policy. President Xi's utterances also set the agenda as "there [was] a strong correlation" McCombs & Shaw (1972), between what the embassy emphasised, and the importance placed by South Africans on Covid-19 and availability of vaccines.

These agendas and frames are also linked to codes or keywords such as friendship, solidarity, trust, freedom, democracy, brotherhood, comradeship, and support, found in the embassy posts. There is a detailed discussion captured under the relevant section on coding and emerging themes below. This is illustrated in figures 6 and 7 below.

The embassy also framed their messages using words such as "cooperation, solidarity, brotherhood …." in some of their posts to promote their foreign objectives. This was reinforced by the pictures used of these food donations depicting important people such as the ambassador, premier, minister or businesspeople giving and receiving the donations on behalf of communities. Such pictures and videos helped change the negative narrative and perception of China to a positive one, it could be argued.

The timing of some messages from the embassy was another ploy to sell China's image and promote their foreign policies to South Africans. It can be argued that by being that timely, the embassy was setting agendas and using suitable frames to influence South Africans. Their messages coincided with what South Africans would be talking and thinking about at that time. This is in line with McCombs & Shaw's (1972) assertion of "[telling] [South Africans] what to think and how to think about certain issues."

The embassy also reposted articles from mainstream media with agenda setting and framing embedded in them, that focused more on science than "politicisation" of the virus. This study argues that the embassy employed a reactive communication strategy in reposting these posts to defend China against the so-called "China virus" narrative perpetuated and deliberately framed like this by Trump to dent China's image. The study also argues that these messages were opportunistically and intentionally posted to either refute, clarify, or defend China on this issue with regards to the South African public.

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In order to appeal and influence South Africans, the embassy posted a transcript of an interview between a Chinese journalist and a South African research professor, Mammo Muchie, with the headline: “COVID-19 origin debate on a wrong path of blame and shame”. Muchie said: “What should have been done is to do very strong scientific research. We should have applied science, not opinion, not saying that it took place in China because of some views you have about China.”

By doing this, Chinese diplomats, journalist, and nationals did not only frame the debate to suit themselves, but put this issue in the public domain repeatedly, thus setting the agenda. This against the background that the ping-pong game between the US and China was a talking point and it was important to the public to get clarification about the origins of the virus at that time.

It can be argued that by “explicitly oppos[sing] politicizing the coronavirus pandemic and labeling of the virus to prohibit the spread of any “political virus” rampaging across the world, (Chinese foreign minister:2020) the Chinese embassy used frames and set an agenda by “[telling] the public what and how to think about certain issues.”

Dispelling the issue using the scientific argument made China sound more credible than those who initiated the claim without any scientific evidence, the study argues. Thus, it was shining a spotlight on the US which made such a claim as “emotional and petty without any scientific evidence,” it can be further argued. The embassy thus managed to “select and highlight some aspects of a situation to promote a particular interpretation,” which is framing just as the embassy through their Facebook posts subtly “[told] the public what to think and how to think about [this issue of the origins of the virus]” McCombs & Shaw (1972), which is agenda setting.

The Chinese embassy set the agenda as it framed its messages to influence South Africans by posting certain messages that coincided with South Africa’s national calendar, such as Freedom Day. The message and the timing correlated with what people were thinking about and spoke about at the time – thus, demonstrating how these diplomats used framing and agenda setting in their messages to influence South Africans.

We further argue that that the recipients through their responses to the embassy messages also set their own agendas using different frames to influence other South Africans. These two media theories assisted us to answer our research question and three sub-questions as stated above.

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7.5 How the US embassy used agenda-setting and framing and the link between their policies and messages towards South Africa

Like the Chinese Embassy in South Africa, the US embassy also used agendas and frames already described as their foreign policy objectives above to communicate to South Africans during the country's lockdown. These agendas and frames were meant to influence locals to think in a particular way both about the issue communicated and about the country – the US. These can be seen in messages in posts such as "Changing lives in Diepsloot." Using soft power, the US promoted their foreign policy objectives to influence South Africans at the time. Education is considered a human rights issue, and this speaks to the US policy to "Advance democracy, human rights, and other global interests."

As the majority of South Africans know the need and desperation of Diepsloot people, such agendas and frames, it can be argued, influenced the general public. "The LEAP Science and Maths Schools provide free, student-centered, Math and Science-focused education…" (US Embassy Facebook page: 2020) "Diepsloot", "science" and "maths" were not just important frames in these posts but out of these a theme such as "Empowering the disadvantaged in maths and science" emerged. Tversky & Kahneman (1973) say, "Framing is based on the assumption that how an issue is characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences".

The US it can be argued positioned itself as a proponent of human rights that cares for the poorest of the poor. The embassy also tried to ensure their agenda to promote international understanding of American values and policies becomes a lived experience to the community of Dieplsloot in particular and South Africans, broadly.

The US, like China, reinforced its agendas and frames in its posts by using words such as partnership, friendship, cooperation, support, committed etc., which have also been identified as codes for this study. The US endeavoured to influence South Africans about their values which came out as agendas and frames in messages such as "Gender-based violence is not a South African problem; it is a global problem. It is a problem in the U.S. and we can learn from each other; and to solve it takes partnerships…" (US Embassy Facebook: 2020). GBV is a violation of the human rights of those who are subjected to it, like women and children.

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Advocating for the fight against gender-based violence (GBV) helped the US set the agenda as a protector of human rights. The timing of posts such as this was also important as this coincided with the South African national calendar to fight GBV at that time. The message, it can be argued, was proactive, relevant and helped the US embassy to promote their country's image. The US, therefore, highlighted GBV to influence the public to think about it as a scourge to be fought. By doing this, the US successfully setan agenda that correlated with what the public was thinking about at the time.

Considering the above, the study argues that there "there [was] a strong correlation" McCombs & Shaw (1972), between what the embassy emphasised [GBV], and the importance placed by South Africans on the scourge. Highlighting this scourge in the midst of a pandemic, where people were worried about their safety as they witnessed loved ones die, put the spotlight on GBV rather than the pandemic. This is in line with Entman's definition of framing "as selecting and highlighting some aspects of a situation to promote a particular interpretation". (Entman, 2004 cited in Entman 2008).

Such calculated and intentional postings by the US embassy fulfilled Lippmann's "more graphic [description] about how the media use agenda setting when he likened press coverage to the "spotlights on a stage, shifting from character to character, from event to event. [He says], modern communication scholars have come to call this the agenda-setting function of media" (Vargo C, 2016:126).

The US embassy further demonstrated that they respect human rights and are proponents of democracy by positioning these as agendas in the message to the family of the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu and South Africans broadly. This is what they said in their message: "We join South Africa and the global community in honoring a man who spent his life fearlessly speaking truth to power. From his work against apartheid in South Africa, to his championing of democracy, freedom and human rights, and advocacy for those still living under the scourge of homophobia, racism or xenophobia, Archbishop Tutu was the conscience of his generation." US Embassy Facebook: (2021).

Tutu was loved by many South Africans and the timing for such a message was crucial in strengthening the issue of agenda setting because the message correlated with what the public was thinking and talking about then.

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Further advancing their policy or agenda of being protectors of human rights and proponents of democracy, the US embassy used a post about the late Dr Martin Luther King, Jr, juxtaposed with the South African struggle icon and former president, Nelson Mandela. Both men fought for equality and the liberation of Black people in their respective countries. This, it can be argued, shows how the embassy "[told] the public what to think and how to think about certain issues" as McCombs & Shaw (1972) assert in their definition of agenda setting.

An embassy post about the attacks on 9/11 furthered their foreign policy agenda of protecting the United States and Americans. The post conveyed the anti-terrorism message to South Africans. This correlated with what was in the minds of people because most people remember the 9/11 incident when the Twin Towers were brought down by a plane. Such correlation confirms the agenda by the embassy in line with the agenda-setting theory.

By posting messages on "climate change," "AIDS Day," "Repatriation messages" etc., the US was furthering its foreign policy and agenda to "promote international understanding of American values and policies"; to "protect the United States and Americans" and "advance democracy, human rights, and other global interests." Their spontaneity in engaging the recipients especially on repatriation and immigration-related messages, demonstrated their passion and respect for their policies.

The "climate change," message was framed as follows: "A resilient, clean-energy economy will help the world achieve the Paris Agreement goals while creating millions of jobs," (US Embassy Facebook: 2021). It selects and highlights some aspects of a situation to promote a particular interpretation, according to Entman's definition of framing, "as selecting and highlighting some aspects of a situation to promote a particular interpretation". (Entman, 2004 cited in Entman 2008).

The above US embassy post also fulfils Lippmann's "more graphic [description] about how the media use agenda setting when he likens press coverage to the "spotlights on a stage, shifting from character to character, from event to event. [He says], modern communication scholars have come to call this the agenda-setting function of media" (Vargo C, 2016:126). The US has demonstrated this by putting the spotlight on climate change in the midst of a pandemic when

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there were so many issues competing for media space such as vaccines and the US's management plan of Covid-19 given how its citizens were being decimated by the pandemic.

Through this post, the embassy "highlighted" jobs because they knew how important and scarce jobs are to South Africans, and especially during the lockdown period. The "strong correlation between the emphasis that [the embassy Facebook page] placed on certain issues and the importance attributed to these issues by mass audiences," fulfilled McCombs & Shaw's (1972), assertion on agenda setting just as it aligns with Entman's (2004) framing definition.

It can thus be further be argued that the US Embassy "[told] the public what to think and how to think about [this issue], when it engaged with South Africans asking them "Which jobs do [they] believe can be created by a clean-energy economy?"

Finally, the US posted the following: "South Africans know they can count on the United States, as a friend and partner, to support their efforts to fight the pandemic and get their economy back on track." "This is about our responsibility — our humanitarian obligation to save as many lives as we can — and our responsibility to our values." (US embassy Facebook 2021).

Like China, the US used the above agendas and frames to influence South Africans and to promote their foreign policy objectives. These foreign policy principles, just like China's, were agendas and themes that emerged in their messages to influence locals. These themes are well represented in our appendix and figures 6 and 7 below, where stronger and weaker themes are graphically shown. The emerging themes are further discussed in our coding section below.

7.6 Chinese embassy Facebook page networks

South Africans of all races for example, formed a network to criticise China. However, blacks formed their own network to defend a post on the Chinese embassy Facebook page where President Ramaphosa was shown unveiling a statue of Oliver Tambo, who was one of the African National Congress's struggle stalwarts. A network of white critics was also formed. South Africans were divided along racial lines on this post or message. There were however very few (less than 10 both black and white people) who either criticised or supported the post on the unveiling of the statue. This group fell within either of the two groups, driven by their opinion and not race. These networks were however not stable; they formed and collapsed based on the issue under discussion at that time.

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The study examined through QNA the meaning embedded in the embassies' messages. Some meanings in the messages were obvious, others obscure. Both types of meanings were aimed at either influencing or promoting each country's foreign policy objectives. These include the pictures and videos used in these messages. For example, pictures of the Chinese flag next to the South African flag spoke of the bilateral relations (support, friendship, brotherhood, cooperation) they had with the host country. The Chinese foreign policy is captured in the words in brackets above. This also applies to the US.

As discussed in sections above, there were themes, frames, and agendas in these messages that sought to influence people in South Africa. For example, these messages have frames such as "virus politicisation", "Chinese President Xi Jinping favours consultation on world affairs" and "Solidarity and cooperation are the most powerful weapons." These themes, agendas and frames are clearly illustrated in figures 5 and 6 respectively below in the appendices. The illustrations make it easy to see and understand the agendas, themes and frames that emerged from the Chinese embassy Facebook posts.

The Chinese embassy's posts on donations, Freedom Day, the origins of the virus debate, anti-terrorism posts, vaccine equity etc. were deliberate attempts to influence and promote their policies to South Africans. These messages had specific agendas and frames as discussed above, in accordance with what they thought was important to locals at the time. Food, personal protective equipment and vaccine donations posts were of absolute importance to South Africans at the peak of the pandemic.

Individuals holding similar views about the message unintentionally formed a network. Similarly, those who believed that the virus originated in China and that the country was responsible for the mayhem it has caused around the globe, belonged to the same network, as did those who believe America is a great country. Banter, sarcasm and criticism of the messages were a common thread that bound each network together. For example, on a post about the appointment of US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, recipients sarcastically raised the issue of "Hunter Biden's scandalous emails" while others said they were "waiting to see the fall of the country under Biden" etc. On the Chinese embassy donations posts, some recipients insinuated

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donated PPEs and other products to South Africans were of a sub-standard quality, with China aiming at gaining access to South Africa's mineral resources.

Figure 1 below is a freehand schematic representation of the networks we identified based on the discussions and the people involved. It is further noted that these recipients who formed informal networks, did not have any shared experiences and values before, they were connected by shared sentiments and views based on messages from these embassies.

Crossley (2010) says, "…what is often missing in SNA is the possibility to investigate content, meaning, and reasons for interaction in policy networks". QNA, the study argues, reveals the reasons why these networks formed and the reasons for interaction in that particular network based on their views, reaction and interpretation of the messages from the embassies as explained above.

An interesting pattern in the network is the division and unity of South Africans. There are instances where black and white formed a network of those who distrusted and were cynical about China's donations etc. This network even dubbed China an "African economic coloniser". However, we see a split when China's racism was exposed repeatedly through texts and videos posted by black people in particular. The majority of whites did not condemn the alleged racism, effectively joining a network of those who said China was not racist. Those few whites who mentioned China's racism in the network did it because they hated China and not because they hated racism against blacks, it can be argued. This dynamic was interesting because whilst in some instances China can be described as a "common enemy," the racial divide in South Africa was exposed by how South Africans dealt with the issue of racism.

The networks exposed the hypocrisy of some as much as it highlighted others' passion in standing for a principle they believed in. These two opposing networks were formed by those who were hell-bent on exposing China's racism discounting the embassy's message to promote China's image in South Africa. The other network was formed by those who defended China. The networks showed how relationships developed within a network. This was enabled by the common views, perceptions, and personal interpretation of messages by individuals in the network. These relationships were not formed by design but by the shared opinions recipients held towards messages from the Chinese and the US embassies.

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The individuals in this network played a significant role, as QNA explains. Individuals in the network were able to deviate from the original messages such as the ones on China's donations towards helping South Africa to fight Covid-19 to the agendas they wanted to set. Individuals piggy-backed on the embassies' messages to promote different narratives. Generally, this was a negative narrative that dented China's image, it can be argued. Individuals in the networks altered the embassy's positive message to a negative one. This also applies to the US messages, as will be discussed below.

The Chinese embassy through these posts, it can be argued, was setting its own agendas based on what they believed was important to the public at the time. The embassy deliberately put the spotlight on donations rather than zooming into the alleged racism and violation of human rights. In fact, by choosing not to post racism allegations against China, the Chinese embassy was setting its own agenda, with the intention to influence South Africans into thinking differently.

Below is the freehand sketch depicting different networks formed on the Chinese embassy Facebook page:

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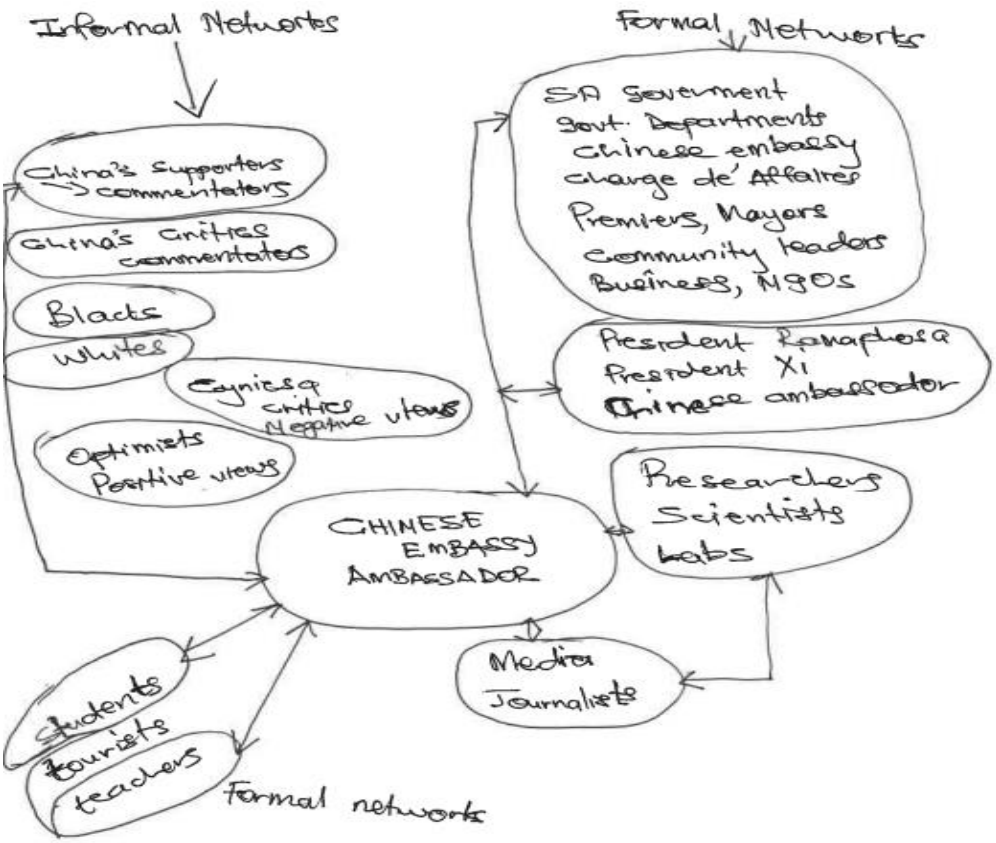

Figure 1: Networks formed on the Chinese embassy's Facebook page

Figure 2 below visualises the different networks based on their responses and sentiments held towards the Chinese embassy Facebook messages.

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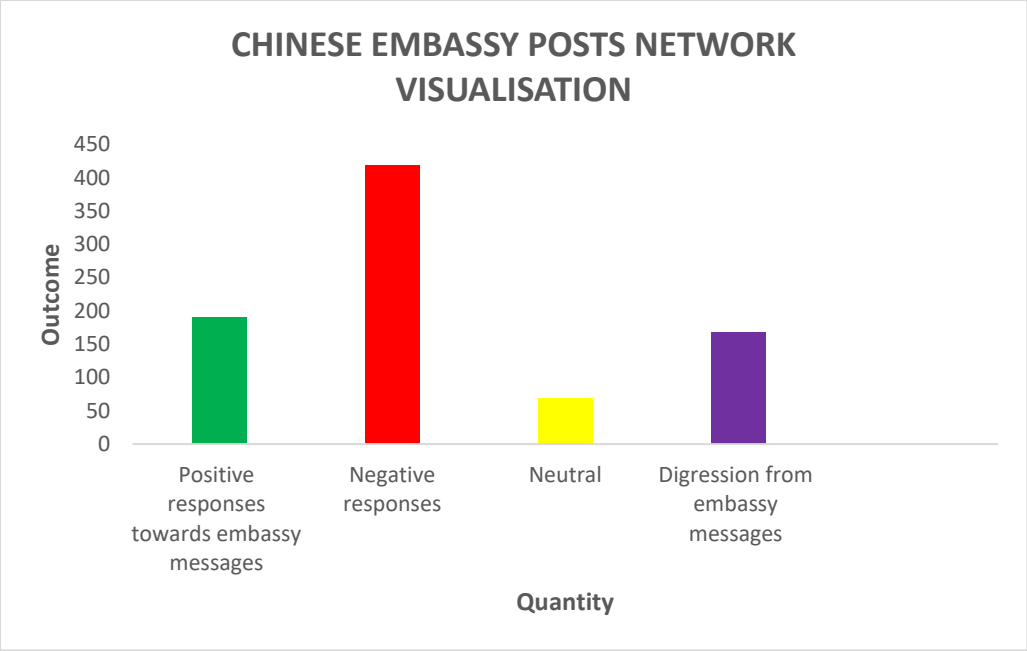

Figure 2: Opinion and sentiment-based Chinese embassy Facebook network visualisation

7.7 US embassy Facebook page networks

Like in the case of China, different networks formed on the US Facebook page in response to their messages. As in the case of China, recipients' comments morphed into different networks based on different views and sentiments they held. For example, on the embassy's message about the US's 4th of July Independence Day celebrations, some veered off this message but still, distinct networks ironically formed from this message. Respondents also set their own themes and agendas from the same message, such as "White South Africans are experiencing genocide." It could be argued that this network of white South Africans imply that farm killings should be seen outside the general crime in South Africa, just like the Chinese embassy's message about crime against Chinese nationals in South Africa. This network unsurprisingly regarded Donald Trump as their "protector" more than the laws of the country. The other network that formed in this message was the one that congratulated the US on their independence.

Themes, agendas and frames are clearly illustrated in figures 7 and 8 respectively below in the appendices. The illustrations make it easy to see and understand the agendas, themes and frames that emerged from the US embassy Facebook posts. On the post on US donation of funds, four distinct networks formed. The first was a network of disgruntled white South Africans who

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wondered why Trump helped South Africa when Ramaphosa “insulted” him in response to his ill-informed tweet about South Africa’s land policy. This was the same network that believed that the ANC government was corrupt, and that money will disappear. The second network that formed was of those who appreciated the donations gesture from the US, which had a combination of black and white South Africans, the majority which were black. Sceptics and cynics who said there was a catch to the US donations formed the third network. Like in the case of China, this network believed that the US would use their donations as a strategy to access South Africa’s mineral resources. The fourth network that formed from this message was of who held a view that America must sort out its own pandemic challenges first before trying to help South Africa.

The Facebook post on the appointment of Antony Blinken as Secretary of State also led to different networks, e.g. one for network of those who were happy about his appointment and congratulated him as the new Secretary of State. There was yet another network of those who were scathing on his appointment and expressed cynical and negative views about the future of America under President Biden and Blinken. This network highlighted conflict in countries such as Iraq, Kazachstan, the Phillipines and Puerto Rico, hinting at US involvement in all of them. In the case of Iraq, the US was criticised for its invasion under the guise of weapons of mass destruction which to date have not been found. While this post generated 1.6 thousand likes, this study argues they were not only an indication of approval of the message but an indication that the US succeeded to influence South Africans in regard to their policy, described as their agenda.

There were other networks that formed influenced by immigration, repatriation, political, economic and international relations (policy-related issues) issues. Still, on the same message, there emerged Hunter Biden’s scandalous email network that involved Blinken. Some of these networks, it must be noted, did not only include South Africans but also other nationals who leveraged on the embassy Facebook page.

All the above, it can be argued, were informal networks formed based on sentiment and opinion towards the embassy’s posts.

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The US embassy also had formal networks which consisted of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), US government, SA government, United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC Global), South Africa's National Department of Health (NdoH), National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD), ministers, and various government officials and leaders in other tiers of government.

Below is the freehand sketch depicting different networks formed on the US embassy Facebook page:



Figure 3: Networks formed on the US Embassy Facebook page

Figure 4 below visualises the different networks based on their responses and sentiments held towards the US embassy Facebook messages.

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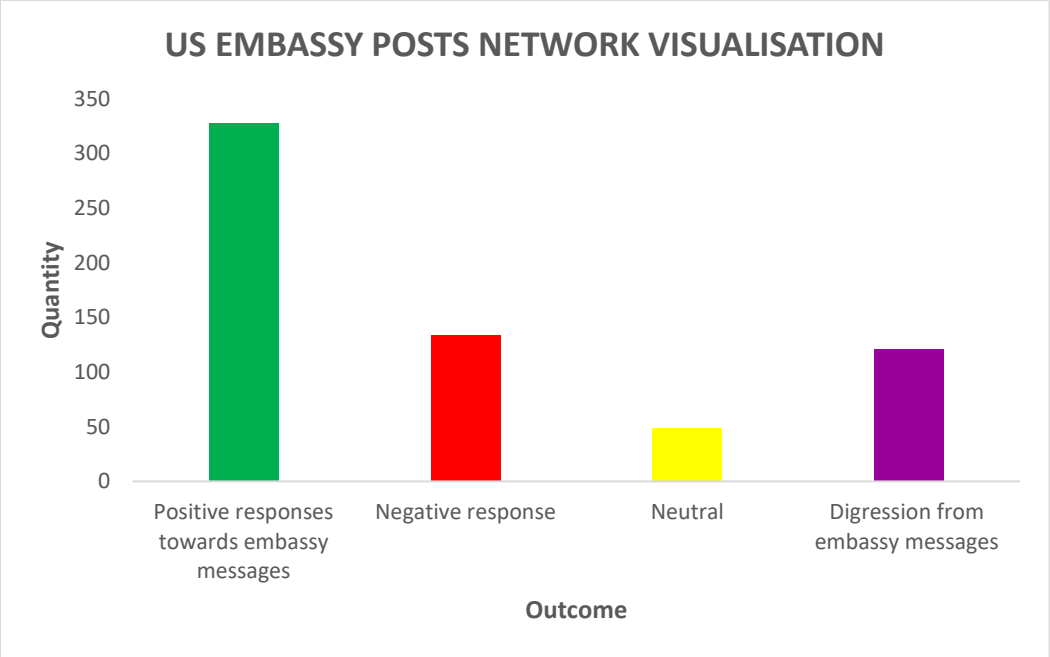

Figure 4: Opinion and sentiment-based US embassy Facebook network visualisation

7.8 Actions of individuals in the network

Individuals play a significant role in a network as their actions and what they say can influence the entire network and those outside it. As Hollstein and Straus (2006) say, "SNA—when analyzing and visualizing networks between institutions—tends to disregard individuals and their role in influencing the network and anything belonging to it. QNA starts exactly here, with the individual actor, and aims to tease out the subjective interpretation of networks."
We now zero in on the actions and behaviour of individuals in these networks as per the (Hollstein, 2011) assertion that "QNA aims to analyze everyday communication and actions, their formal and informal content, and the role time constraints may play." For the purposes of my study, I focused on communications and actions (how individuals responded to the messages and the debates that ensued from these messages) of networks in the study, such as diplomats and respondents.

Native Knowledge: Circles of Life states that "In general, concentric circles represent processes, interrelationships, wholeness", using their analogy that states that, "I choose to keep two analogies in mind when trying to remember all that the concentric circles represent. First, I think of the raindrop hitting the surface of a pond or lake. When the raindrop touches the surface, its

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impact upon the surface ripples out in the form of concentric rings. We cannot ignore that our actions affect the environment, and that all actions are interrelated."
http://www.hyperformer.com/NativeArt/Circles/index.html

This research concurs with the above and our data shows that the individuals' actions in the networks affected the environment by creating toxicity and reinforcing racism, amongst others. One respondent who felt the racism and toxicity spread by others, said, "Reading these comments, there's so much hatred in SA. Racism on steroids. Just sad!" (Chinese embassy Facebook: 2020). This recipient (South African) was tired of the racist debate in the network which veered from the original message posted by the Chinese Embassy about the unveiling of the statue of OR Tambo by President Ramaphosa.

The debate as mentioned in the relevant section on network discussion, created a black-only and white-only network because of the irreconcilable views these groups held about race relations in South Africa. These are represented in our network map in figure 1 below. The recipients' actions, the study argues, hurt the image of China and the US because the criticism, "misinformation" and "lies" were out there in the public domain for anyone to see. This, it could be argued, flew in the face of what these two embassies were trying to achieve through their messages. Their deliberate actions betrayed how intentional they were as individuals and as a collective to destroy the images of these two countries by perpetuating their negative views on the embassies' Facebook pages.

Furthermore, the actions of individuals in the networks were vitriolic, sarcastic, disrespectful, and critical. Needleless to say, these were irrelevant to the original messages sent by the embassies. Criticism was both constructive and unconstructive from these networks.

Some individuals in the networks acted disrespectfully towards others in the course of the "irrelevant" raging debates. The deliberate digression of recipients from the original message, with some posting commercials in the middle of a debate, was a display of arrogance and disrespect towards the embassies' messages. Such actions, which in some instances manifested as scathing criticism, damaged the images of these two countries and misled others in the network, with the potential to kill the original message, it could be argued.

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Ahrens P (2018) says, “QNA stipulates that networks depend on the actions of individuals and that these are essential to any aspect of networks.” Some recipients’ actions are seen when they attacked each other either as an endorsement or rebuttal of the messages that portrayed China or the US in a positive or negative light. The above as mentioned placed recipients in specific networks.

Such individual actions, it could be argued made networks become dependent on individual actions. Discussions and debates fell and stood on the actions of individuals in the network. These individuals either helped to promote the countries’ image or destroyed it, depending on which country they were aligned with.

These individuals took an active role to influence others through their comments and to either promote or denounce any of these countries.

Step 2 – Line by line coding

Line-by-line coding was completed before code categorisation. This enabled us to closely zoom into or “dig deeper” into the codes, paying further close attention to the data. Through this approach, we refined the data. See figure 5 below:

As mentioned above in our initial coding section, this study used various coding approaches, such as in-vivo coding, process coding and descriptive coding, as mentioned in that section. Below is a discussion of themes that emerged, examples of direct quotes from the data, strategies used and application of QNA, our preferred method for this study. This is also illustrated in the appended table below.

7.9 Themes, codes, strategies and QNA

Partnership

This theme was underlined by the following categorised codes or keywords: brotherhood, comradeship, friendship, bilateral, relationship, coalition, shared-future, win-win, unbreakable ties, and cooperation. There was a focus on mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence, mutual non-aggression and equality, which are some of China’s foreign policy principles and agendas or themes that emerged in our data**.** An example is the post that stated thus: “China is committed to

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the basic state policy of opening up, pursues development with its doors open and unswervingly upholds a mutually beneficial and win-win strategy of opening up." 'Comradeship plus brotherhood' marks the special friendship between the two countries and the two ruling parties."

Strategies and did they work?

China used both proactive and reactive communications strategies towards SA, carefully using words such as "brotherhood," "cooperation," "consultation", "mutual respect and mutual benefit" etc. to promote their foreign policies and to influence South Africans. As mentioned in the data analysis above, the embassy used political, economic, social and human-interest strategies, embedded in their Facebook messages, to communicate with locals. It can be argued that their strategies did not work due to criticism, distrust and cynicism about China's donations from recipients in the network. Some codes were derived from conversations within the network from recipients and respondents to posts from the embassy. Posts on President Ramaphosa and Xi, for example, should have bolstered the message and generated many likes, but the post only generated 19 likes.

QNA

QNA is "an innovative method of gathering discursive forms of data on maintaining complex transnational networks in the everyday work of individual actors" (Ahrens 2018:1). Different networks emerged from the posts such as President Xi and President Ramaphosa's ambassadors and different stakeholders such as ministers, premiers, mayors, etc. and networks that emerged from recipients or South Africans based on their views and sentiments about the posts. The presidents, diplomats, and government officials' networks are important for promoting China's foreign policy objectives. Theirs is a formal network that is transnational.

"Through QNA we could visualize the formed networks and analyzed their conversations or posts to promote China's foreign policy objectives. Through QNA, we were able to [collect] details on the meaning individual actors attach to their network ties and the network as a whole…" (Ahrens 2018:1).

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Presidents Xi and Ramaphosa in their discussion mentioned important things because they understood the importance and the value of their network as heads of state. Given China's interest in Africa, it can be argued that this could morph into a bigger network of Xi and other African presidents, visualised by their interactions. QNA stipulates that networks depend on the actions of individuals as these are essential to any aspect of networks.

Xi's effort and initiative to reach out to Ramaphosa telephonically is an important individual action that could keep this network alive. Even more important is if he keeps his promise to Ramaphosa and South Africans.

QNA tools allow examining what agency [embassy] means in a certain context, of how policy processes [messages] and actors (recipients) are connected, and which dynamics occur in [social] networks (Hollstein, 2011). Here, QNA analysed everyday communication and actions of [embassies, individuals, networks], their formal and informal content [of embassies], and their objectives with these messages. Their shared interests and trust towards each other and actions as (Hollstein and Straus, 2006), say, "Networks depend on the actions of individuals," and these are important ingredients for the formation, strengthening or weakening of this network as presidents.

Peace

This theme was underlined by the following categorised codes or keywords: harmony, unity, equality, mutual respect, benefit, consultation, cooperation, solidarity, shared future, cordial, trust, teamwork, brotherhood, peacekeeping. There was a focus on mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence, mutual non-aggression, equality – themes and agendas that emerged that form part of China's foreign policy principles. An example is the post that stated thus: "The world needs true multilateralism" and "peace, development, equity, justice, democracy and freedom are common values of humanity and represent the abiding aspirations of both China and Africa".

China used both proactive and reactive communication strategies towards SA, carefully using words such as "brotherhood," "cooperation," "consultation", "mutual respect and mutual benefit" etc. to promote their foreign policies and to influence South Africans. Similar to the above, it can be argued that their strategies did not work due to criticism, distrust and cynicism

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about China's donations from recipients in the network. Some codes were derived from conversations within the network from recipients and respondents to posts from the embassy. It can be argued that the Chinese strategies were not successful in SA also due to the few likes the embassy's posts generated jointly.

The discussion on QNA is similar to the first paragraph above as this captures Xi and Ramaphosa's network as discussed above. The same would apply in some parts of this discussion. It should also be noted that the principles of QNA noted here apply to all sections of this discussion, irrespective of who formed the network; in this instances we used Xi and Ramaphosa's network.

Politics

This theme was underlined by the following categorised codes or keywords: freedom, democracy, equality, racism, equal rights, discriminatory, politician, disenfranchised, apartheid, politicisation, socialist, human rights, infringements, political manipulation, justice, democracy, virus-politicisation, China-Virus, win-win, consultation, autonomy, nationalism, multilateralism, political manipulation, "conspiracy theory". There was a focus on mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence and equality, themes and agendas that emerged, as well as China's foreign policy principles. An example is the post that stated thus: "Human rights should not be used to serve political ends or as a tool to smear other countries and contain their development." The strategies and how these can be aligned with QNA is the same as the above and further illustrated in our table in the appendix below.

Vaccines

This theme was underlined by the following categorised codes or keywords: pandemic, origins, deadly, novel, coronavirus, epidemic, infectious, immune, CoronaVac, Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca, infected, virus, pharmaceutical, Johnson & Johnson (J&J) Covid-19 vaccine, immunisation, Sinovac, Sinopharm, safety, efficacy, immunogenicity, access, equality, roll-out, There was a focus on mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence and equality, themes and agendas that are China's foreign policy principles. An example is the post that stated: "We are ready to provide vaccines to the South African side as long as there is a need and an approval by the regulatory authorities here, so as to benefit the South African people at an early date."

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China's reactive communication strategy to dismiss claims that the virus originated in China, later on dubbed "China virus," was good but attracted both positive and negative reactions. It is not clear whether the embassy's strategy succeeded or not given that the 1.9 thousand generated likes from the message were not only limited to South Africa but globally. It should also be stated that some likes were not directly linked to the original message, but to the criticism or support of China in the message by recipients, whom we can argue morphed into different networks depending on their views and sentiments. The discussion on QNA is similar to the first above as this captures Xi and Ramaphosa's network as discussed above. The same discussion would apply in some parts of this discussion.

Donations

This theme is underlined by the following categorised codes or keywords: brotherhood, comradeship, friendship, relationship, support, partnership, mutual, benefit, food parcels, face masks, free, poor quality, ventilators, loyalty, trust, respect, compassion, food, donations, surgical masks, face masks, free, food parcels, humanitarian. There was a focus on mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence, equality, mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, which were themes and agendas that emerged and are China's foreign policy principles. An example is the post that stated thus: "1,000 food parcels were 'far from enough' but the donation represented the 'cordial brotherhood and friendship of the people of China'".

Messages on donations were generally criticised and frowned upon as mentioned above. These generated a few likes. Therefore, it could be argued that China's strategies to communicate donations failed to influence South Africans. Discussion on QNA would be the same as above sections.

Culture

This theme was underlined by the following categorised codes or keywords: language, training, Confucius Institute Consortium, people-to-people exchange, food, education, savouring China, unveils, statue, newspapers, media, information, erect, bridge, buildings, pictures, film, poetry, music. There was a focus on mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence which were themes and agendas that emerged which are China's foreign policy principles. An example is the post that

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stated: “I love China. I hope more people get to know the real heart-warming country. I’ll continue to serve as a culture Ambassador to bridge the friendship between China and Africa.”

China used culture as a soft power strategy to woo South Africans and to showcase and promote China to the locals. Judging from the number of likes, it could be argued that China did not succeed in influencing South Africans and promoting its country as it received very few likes. i.e below 20.

Diplomacy

This theme was underlined by the following categorised codes or keywords: diplomats, ambassadors, foreign relations, cooperation, consultation, respect, equality, host country, citizens, Chargé d'affaires, bilateral, relationship, brotherhood, sovereignty, cordial, government, people-to-people, embassy, international relations, regional, international, cooperation, foreign mission, foreign secretary, diplomats, internal affairs, multilateralism, inter-dependent, unbreakable and rock-solid, iron-clad, multilateralism. There was a focus on mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, equality, mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence, which were themes and agendas that emerged and are China’s foreign policy principles. An example is the post that stated**:** “China’s diplomacy will keep facilitating domestic development strategies, boosting the global economic recovery, promoting the building of a new type of international relations, and deepening regional and international cooperation, as well as participating into the process of global governance system reform and building the community with a shared future for mankind.”

There was distrust around donations and they were viewed as “what’s in it for China?” by South Africans. The tone and the language showed how patronising and disrespectful recipients felt by such donations. China, it could be argued, did not succeed in promoting its foreign policy objectives, nor did it succeed to promote its image in SA.

Sovereignty

This theme was underlined by the following categorised codes or keywords: freedom, independence, self-rule, autonomy, unilateral, totalitarian. There was a focus on mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, which were themes and agendas that emerged and China’s are foreign policy principles. An

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example is the post that stated: “It is important that we uphold the spirit of extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits, fully heed the views of developing countries, and better reflect their legitimate concerns.”

Strategies and did they work?

China used a defensive strategy which, it could be argued, did not succeed in influencing SA or promoting its foreign policy objectives based on the responses and the number of likes.

It should also be noted that the principles of QNA discussed here apply to all sections of this discussion, irrespective of who formed the network; in this instance we used Xi and Ramaphosa’s network.

Bilateral

This theme was underlined by the following categorised codes or keywords: relationships, partners, cooperation, ties, strengthen, collaboration, supporting, together, cooperate, friend, partner, cooperation, bilateral cooperation, partnership, supports, cooperate, partnership, bilateral, solidarity. There was a focus on advance democracy, human rights, and other global interests and promoting international understanding of American values and policies. These were themes and agendas that emerged which are also US foreign policy principles. An example is the post that stated: “I welcome the support of US President Biden for a TRIPS waiver to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are urging leaders at the G7 Summit to support a time-bound and limited waiver to expand the global supply of COVID-19 vaccines and medicines.”

Strategies and did they work?

The US embassy’s communication strategy towards South Africans was more proactive than reactive. They diplomatically and strategically framed their messages by using words such as, ties, friendship, collaboration, cooperation to promote their foreign policy and to influence South Africans. The chosen frames above are not as obvious as the Chinese ones in regard to their foreign policy. But it can be argued that it is through partnership and cooperation that the US embassy could promote their policy in South Africa.

Strategies and did they work?

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It could also be argued that the US's strategies worked in South Africa because of the overall positive responses from the recipients in the networks and the many likes their messages generated compared to the Chinese messages. The US's messages were minimally criticised compared to the barrage of criticism levelled at the Chinese embassy messages. The majority of responses from South Africans betrayed how much they trusted the US's initiatives such as donations compared to China's.

QNA

Qualitative Network Analysis (QNA) is "an innovative method of gathering discursive forms of data on maintaining complex transnational networks in the everyday work of individual actors."

Different transnational networks also formed from the US posts. These include formal networks such as Ramaphosa and President Biden's network, diplomats, and ministers, government officials' network, network between the embassy and students, academics, artists, and the community. Also, a network of recipients that formed along sentiment, opinion, and racial lines, amongst others.

Through QNA we could visualise the formed networks and analysed their conversations or posts to promote the US's foreign policy objectives. Through QNA, we were also able to collect details on the meaning individual actors attach to their network ties and the network as a whole (Ahrens 2018: p. 1).

For example, President Biden and Ramaphosa seized the moment and mentioned important issues because they understood the importance and value of their network as heads of state. QNA stipulates that networks depend on the actions of individuals and that these are essential to any aspect of networks.

The presidents' effort to meet on the margins of the G7 Summit underscores their individual actions and the importance they attach to their meeting to keep their network alive. Their network is important to the US-South Africa bilateral relations. QNA tools allow examining what agency [embassy] means in a certain context, of how policy processes [messages] and actors [recipients] are connected, and which dynamics occur in [social] networks (Hollstein, 2011). Here, QNA aims to analyse everyday communication and actions [embassies, individuals,

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networks], their formal and informal content [of embassies], and [their objectives with these messages].

Their shared interests and trust towards each other are important ingredients for the formation and strengthening of this network as presidents. Depending on their individual behaviour as (Hollstein and Strauss, 2006), say, networks depend on the actions of individuals, which will be important to either strengthen or weaken their network, it can be argued. The principles of QNA discussed here apply to all sections of this discussion, irrespective of who formed the network; in this instance we used Biden and Ramaphosa's network.

Politics

This theme was underlined by the following categorised codes or keywords: freedom, democracy, equality, inequalities, power, rights, denounce slavery, women suffragists, independence, inequalities, multilateral, bilateral, human rights, justice, politicians, inauguration, sworn in, oaths, office, presidents, vice presidents, Inaugural Committee, invocation, pledge, allegiance. There was a focus on protecting the United States and Americans, advancing democracy, human rights, and other global interests, promoting international understanding of American values and policies. These were themes and agendas that emerged which are also US foreign policy principles. An example is the post that stated: "Getting to learn more about [Martin Luther King Jr] MLK for me was more like learning about Nelson Mandela, as I see both men as struggle leaders and having almost the same dream for black people. They held nothing but the truth in every encounter they had in their fight to free black people from oppression - to free black people was the only dream." The strategies and the link to QNA are similar to the discussion above. Discussion on QNA would be similar to the above.

Repatriation

This theme was underlined by the following categorised codes or keywords: immigration, visa, migration, citizens, repatriation. There was a focus on protecting the US and Americans, supporting US diplomats, government officials, and all other personnel at home and abroad who make these goals a reality. Similarly, these were themes and agendas that emerged which are also US foreign policy principles. An example is the post that stated: "The current round of repatriation flights being planned may be the last. If you wish to repatriate to the United States,

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please travel now or be prepared to wait until commercial flights resume in the future. We are not able to say when commercial flights will resume or if the South African lockdown will be extended."

Climate

This theme was underlined by the following categorised codes or keywords: clean, energy, economy, fossil, fuels, protect and planet. There was a focus on advancing democracy, human rights, and other global interests. These were themes and agendas that emerged which are also US foreign policy principles. An example is the post that stated: "We've rejoined the Paris Agreement! Combating the climate crisis requires every tool in the toolbox. We must all work together to build the resilience to climate change that is critical to save lives today and protect the planet for future generations!"

Strategies and did they work?

It could be argued that the US embassy was successful in communicating this message, which reinforced their policy on advancing other global interests. Being released in the thick of a pandemic made it more strategic. Although the number of likes was not that high, overall response to the embassy's messages was good. Discussion on QNA would be similar with the above.

Economy

This theme was underlined by the following categorised codes or keywords: growth, support, cooperation, partnership, investors, trade, government, global, economically, economic and funding. There was a focus on advancing democracy, human rights, and other global interests. These were themes and agendas that emerged which are also US foreign policy principles. An example is the post that stated: "South Africans know they can count on the U.S., as a friend & partner, to support their efforts to fight the pandemic & get their economy back on track." The strategies and the link to QNA are the same as the above.

Vaccines

This theme was underlined by the following categorised codes or keywords: transmission. Moderna, Pandemic, Coronavirus, COVID-19, patients, scientists, health, novel, epidemic,

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infections, screening, healthcare, safety, Johnson & Johnson immunisation, efficacy, equality, roll-out, Pfizer, jabs and donation. There was a focus on protecting the US and Americans, advance democracy, human rights, and other global interests, promoting international understanding of American values and policies. These were themes and agendas that emerged which are also US foreign policy principles. An example is the post that stated: “As President Biden has said, none of us are safe until all of us are safe, and this is just part of our already strong and growing health partnership with South Africa.” The strategies and the link to QNA are the same as the above.

Covid-19

This theme was underlined by the following categorised codes or keywords: vaccine, globally, deadly, scientists, novel, coronavirus, drugs, epidemic, pandemic, quarantine, face masks, ventilators, infectious, PPE, supplies, vaccination, sanitising, spread, ventilators infection, safety, medicine, PPEs, healthcare, screening, transmitted, thermometers, virus, symptomatic, Covid-19 transmission, tracing, patients, lockdown, health and handwashing.

There was a focus on protecting the US and Americans, advancing democracy, human rights, and other global interests and promotion of international understanding of American values and policies. These were themes and agendas that emerged which are also US foreign policy principles. An example is the post that stated: “From the beginning of my presidency, we have been clear-eyed that we need to attack this virus globally as well. This is about our responsibility — our humanitarian obligation to save as many lives as we can — and our responsibility to our values. We’re going to help lead the world out of this pandemic, working alongside our global partners.” The strategies and the link to QNA are the same as the above.

Donations

This theme was underlined by the following categorised codes or keywords: friendship, relationship, support, partnership, partners, funds, governments, stakeholders, mutual, benefit, mitigating, impact, help, assist, resources, ventilators, values gift, emergency, gloves, medical gowns, donated, Pfizer, sanitizing, supplies, equipment, face masks, ventilators, compassion, humanitarian and provider. There was a focus on protecting the US and Americans, advancing democracy, human rights, and other global interests and promotion of international

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understanding of American values and policies. These were themes and agendas that emerged which are also US foreign policy principles. An example is the post that stated: “Thank you, USA. Trust your support much more so than medical equipment etc. being delivered by China. Please use the money and assist local manufacturers to make and manufacture our own medical needs. Please.” The strategies and the link to QNA are the same as the above.

Culture

This theme was underlined by the following categorised codes or keywords: language, training, food, education, film, poetry, music, photographic, documentary, records, Archive, university, teacher training, motto, professional, cultural, development, Heritage Month, cooking, Fulbright Program, crowds, flags, marching bands, galas, performers, ceremonies, festivities, concerts, parades and balls. There was a focus on advancing democracy, human rights, and other global interests and promoting international understanding of American values and policies. These were themes and agendas that emerged which are also US foreign policy principles. An example is the post that stated thus: “Teaching Americans about my culture and learning how to blend the cultures of the CCIP group was one of the highlights of this experience.”

Strategies and did they work?

The embassy’s strategy to use soft power – culture in the heart of the pandemic – was a positive destruction for South Africans. This post generated sufficient likes for us to suggest that their strategy succeeded, and the message was endorsed.

Diplomacy

This theme was underlined by the following categorised codes or keywords: diplomats, ambassadors, foreign relations, cooperation, consultation, respect, equality, host country, citizens, Chargé d’affaires, bilateral, relationship, cordial, government, embassy, regional, international, global, cooperation, foreign mission, secretary of state, diplomats, multilateralism, justice, peace, partnership and values. There was a focus on protecting the US and Americans, advancing democracy, human rights, and other global interests, promoting international understanding of American values and policies and supporting US diplomats, government officials, and all other personnel at home and abroad who make these goals a reality. These were themes and agendas that emerged which are also US foreign policy principles. An example is the

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post that stated thus: “We will revitalize American diplomacy to advance our interests and values in the world as it is – not as it was. American leadership matters, and we have a unique ability to bring other countries together to meet the challenges and opportunities of our time.” The strategies and the link to QNA are the same as the above.

Gender-based violence

This theme was underlined by the following categorised codes or keywords: women, children, gender-based-violence, partnership, education, hope, safety, support, protection, empowerment, men perpetrators, police, cooperation, support, protection, hope, homes, violence, values and safety. There was a focus on protecting the United States and Americans. advancing democracy, human rights, and other global interests and promoting international understanding of American values. These were themes and agendas that emerged which are also US foreign policy principles. An example is the post that stated thus: “Gender-based violence (GBV) is not a South African problem; it is a global problem. It is a problem in the U.S., and we can learn from each other; and to solve it takes partnerships... We are proud to join each of our partners in supporting access to care and services as an essential part of building hope, safety, & personal resilience.”

Strategies and did they work?

It can be argued that the US embassy was successful in reinforcing their policy on advancing other global interests through this message. It was released during a pandemic, which made it more strategic. Although the number of likes was not that high, overall response to the embassy’s messages was good.

The rest of the codes and themes were well represented in the table in the appendix below.

The graph below depicts stronger and weaker themes that emerged in the Chinese and US embassies’ messages as per the discussion above and data in our appended tables below.

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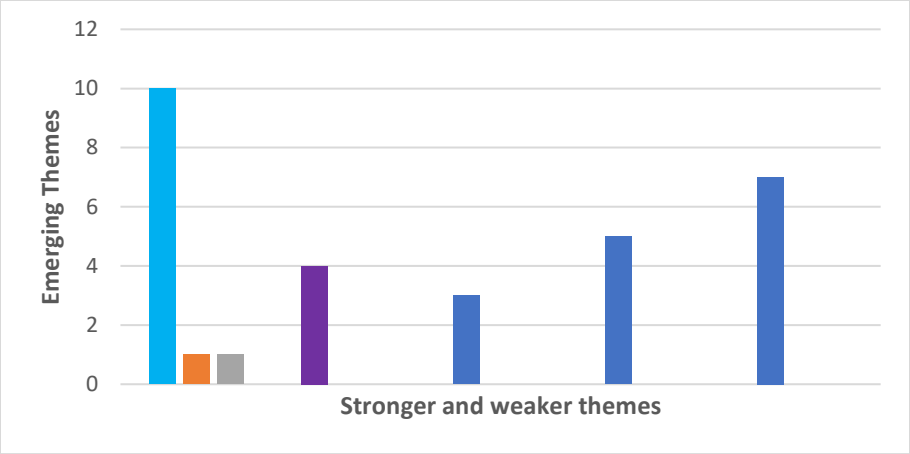
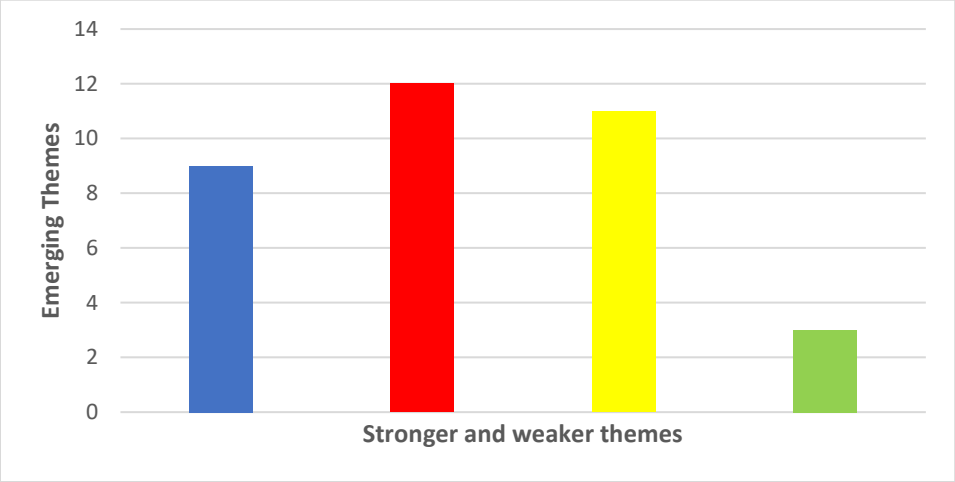


Emerging themes	Stronger and weaker themes
Mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence	10
Mutual non-aggression	4
Non-interference in each other's internal affairs	3
equality	5
Mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity	7

Figure 6: Stronger and weaker themes that emerge in the Chinese embassy's messages

The graph below depicts stronger and weaker themes that emerged in the US embassy's messages as per data in our appended table below.



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Emerging themes	Stronger and weaker themes
Protect the United States and Americans	9
Advance democracy, human rights, and other global interests	12
Promote international understanding of American values and policies	11
Support US diplomats, government officials, and all other personnel at home and abroad who make these goals a reality	3

Figure 7: Stronger and weaker themes that emerge in US embassy's messages

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CHAPTER 8

8. The limitations of digital diplomacy

Despite the fact that digital diplomacy enabled the Chinese and US embassies to promote their policies and improve their images locally during a pandemic, it has its own limitations. The vitriol, banter, misinformation, unconstructive criticism and the changing of messages by recipients prove the risks inherent in digital diplomacy. The sender of the message is not in control of it once it is out there. Recipients changed the message in accordance with their interests and thus changed the narrative to suit theirs. It could also be argued that recipients could deliberately mislead others by changing the message's original meaning.

For example, recipients changed a message about donations to one about China's racism. Similar were the US's messages about Covid-19 interventions from the US which morphed into comments about migration and securing a US visa. It could be argued that China in particular suffered more reputational damage than the US judging by the responses to their respective messages. Furthermore, some in the networks used the digital space at the back of the embassies' messages to advertise their products, thus undermining the importance of those messages. They proved that the digital space meant to practise digital diplomacy could be abused.

Another risk of digital diplomacy is the possibility for diplomats to butt heads publicly, thus risking reputational damage of their countries. This was seen in our study in various situations such as the butting of heads about the origins of the virus and about Trump's ill-informed criticism of South Africa's land policy.

8.1 Conclusion

Based on the analysis, we can make the following conclusions:
First, that there was indeed a link between the policies or agendas of China and the US towards South Africa, and the messages posted on their respective Facebook pages during a pandemic. Our assessment is that in part there were those who saw the US and Chinese policies as good but others did not. According to what we found in our data, there were more who believed in the US policies and messages than the sceptics and critics. On the other hand, those who believed in China's policies and messages were in the minority, with messages having generated many

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negative comments. The study also found that their policies were in some instances couched in messages about donations, anti-terrorism, support for democracy, culture and education, etc. Second, the US embassy strategy entailed targeting important dates such as South African and American holidays and including pertinent issues for locals to communicate such as GBV, Youth Day on June 16, America's Independence Day on July 4, Martin Luther King Junior Day and "Juneteenth Commemoration" etc. This strategy, it can be concluded, benefitted the embassy as their messages were generally well-received compared to the Chinese embassy's. The Chinese embassy's used the strategy of posting messages about donations mainly. The study found that the frames used in the messages could be seen in theirs strategies, themes or respective foreign policies, as discussed in the previous section above.

The study concludes that the US embassy succeeded in its strategies to influence and promote its country's policies and image in South Africa during a pandemic based on the higher number of positive comments and likes their messages generated. This was an endorsement of their message by locals. The research also concludes that the Chinese embassy failed in its endeavour to influence South Africans during the pandemic based on the myriad negative comments and the few likes their messages generated: an indication of a lack of endorsement and rejection of their messages.

Third, this research found that despite the above, the number of likes was not a reliable indicator for approval and endorsement of the message, as Rachmawati et al (2020) postulate. The study found and concludes that some likes were not a reaction to the original messages, but rather reactions to individual comments in the network that either opposed or supported the original message. This study has dubbed such likes as "reactions to reactions."

Fourth, the study found that different informal networks formed based on common interest, shared views and sentiments South Africans held towards the embassies' messages. These recipients morphed into different networks and were influenced by the agendas and frames used in messages while others were not. Networks were strong yet temporary and swayed the discussion, also indicating the meaning individuals attached to these networks.

Ahrens P (2018) says, "QNA stipulates that networks depend on the actions of individuals and that these are essential to any aspect of networks." The study found that these networks depended on individuals' actions, which manifested as banter, sarcasm, foul language debates and

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deliberate digression from the original message from the embassies. Some in the networks used kind words accompanied by emojis of love and appreciation such as a heart, teddy bear etc.

Digital diplomacy has potential areas of future research on how diplomats can improve on the use of digital diplomacy to ply their craft and optimally benefit from it by successfully promoting their polices and connecting with the host countries. This also puts the spotlight on the relevance of traditional diplomacy versus digital diplomacy in the digital age as a way of practising diplomacy in the future.

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APPENDIX

CODE BOOK**: CHINA**

solidarity, trust, freedom, democracy, brotherhood, comradeship, friendship, support, mutual, benefit, cooperation, equality, racism commitment, politics, economy, health, pandemic, partnership, unity, rights, distrust, equality, vaccine, food, donations, culture, music, weal, woe, experts, boycott, racist, investors, freedom, totalitarian, exploitation, colonialism, agony, respect, origins, globally, deadly, scientists, novel, coronavirus, epidemic, Pandemic, mutual, respect, benefit, discrimination, mistrust, brainwashing, propaganda, misinformation, politician, trouble, anxiety, discriminatory, apartments, hotels, hospitals, quarantine, blacks, Africans, exploit, slobber (dribble), survive, contributed, community, difficulties, citizenry, naturalizations, embassy, food parcels, influence, thanks, economy, trade, education, unity, disenfranchised, desperate, agenda, culture, face masks, free, poor quality, corrupt, government, racial, murders, newspapers, media, information, propaganda, self-respect, Chargé d'affaires, ventilators, tide over difficulties, tyrannical, watchdog, motherland, lockdown, contributions, cordial, brotherhood, bilateral, relationship, resurgence, infections, isolation, crimes, citizens, nationals, indignation, bridge, savoring, statue, unveils, erect, country, OUR land, corruption, thievery, legacy, oppressor, battling, jobs, taxpayers, apartheid, farmers, unveiling, poverty, homelessness, corruption, PPE, infectious, drugmakers, researchers, immune, CoronaVac, domestic market, innovation, economic, integration, Virus, virologist, effective, Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca, shared future, epicenter, birthplace, infected, disastrous, humanitarian, tragedy, Chief Economist, surgical masks, shared values – loyalty, trust, respect, compassion and independence, virus politicization, win-win, Foreign Relations, socialist, modernization, international relations, regional, international, cooperation, consultation, economic, growth, pharmaceutical, investing, treatment, coalition, Mission, foreign secretary, diplomats, deception, lies, false information, smear, interfere, internal affairs, accusations, ethnic, policy, autonomy, prosperity, human rights, slander, interfere, affairs, human rights infringements, PPEs

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(personal protective equipment), regulatory authorities, law, nationalism, roll-out, Johnson & Johnson Covid-19 vaccine, experts, immunization, , Sinovac and Sinopharm, safety, efficacy, symptomatic, immunogenicity, procuring, multilateralism, strengthened, political manipulation, discarded, COVAX, ultrastructural morphology, origins (of COVID-19), mainstream media, China Virus', dignity, ridicule, transmission, tracing,
research, leak, politicization, stigmatization and ideological framing, economic sanctions, rapidly-globalizing, inter-dependent, unilateral, sanctions, scientific research, trade, exports, imports, terrorism, counter-terrorism, enhancing security, capacity-building, provide protection, denounce, evolved naturally, "conspiracy theory," solidarity, immunization, wind turbines, megawatts, low-carbon, peacekeeping, troops, unbreakable and rock-solid "iron-clad" solidarity, justice, democracy, tourism, language, training. Confucius Institute Consortium, people-to-people exchange, peace, security, food, donations.

CODE BOOK: US

Vaccine, equality, cooperation, supporting, ventilators freedom, justice, vaccine, equality, cooperation. Support, combat, inequalities, unity, together, divided, reconciliation, division,
Culture, politics, equality, democracy, partnerships, relationships, partners, governments, stakeholders, together, tackle, global, problems, immunity, transmission. Moderna, Pfizer, inauguration, sworn in, concerts, parades, balls, festivities, president, crowds, flags, marching bands, galas, performers, novel coronavirus, pandemic, inauguration, events. oaths, office, presidents, vice presidents, ceremonies, power, values, motto, stronger, together, apart, Inaugural, Committee, invocation, pledge, allegiance, sworn in, sing, national anthem, celebrating, commander in chief, ceremony, military troops, guards, wreath, tomb, soldier, emeritus, inaugurations, speech, Inaugurations, democracy, event, bilateral, relationship, expand, global COVID-19, vaccine, supply, support, cooperate, climate, goals, bilateral, regional, vaccines, medicines, mask, shaking, hands, mask, sanitizer, margins, G7 summit, sponsor, sponsorship, friend, partner, cooperation, bilateral cooperation, health, partnership, Mission, friend partner, support, fight, pandemic, economy, noble, tested, committing, funds,
COVID19, pandemic, commitment, funding, support government, critical needs, surveillance, rapid, response, case, management, and risk communication, supports a comprehensive effort, mitigating, impact, emergency, plan, AIDS relief, lab, clinic systems, modeling, surveillance, health worker, training, financial, aid, spread, politicians, handouts, loan, doctors, drugs, effective, economic, power virus, giving, countries, worldwide, help, fight, coronavirus, pandemic. retraining, health, workers, screen, coronavirus Aids, monitoring, work, patients, antiretroviral, medicines, minimizing, risk, transmission, Surveillance, rapid, response, leadership, greatest, amount, money, spent, epidemic, programme, transmitted, humans, humans, facts, pandemic, politics, science, money, resources,
Global, epidemic. Science, politics, epidemic, politics, medicine
generous way, health, humanitarian, bilateral, assistance, generous, partner, provider, politics, scientists, economy, strict lockdown, state, the governors, respirators or PPEs, resources, involved, economically, repatriating, citizens, coronavirus, infections. roll out, screening, participants with a non-degree, academic-year program, leadership, capabilities, study Community, College, Initiative, Program, culture, learning, Cooperation, thermometers, assist, efforts, combat, COVID19, committed. supporting, flatten, COVID19, curve, commitment, ventilators, values gift, people, frontline, healthcare system, partnership, countries, help, people, around, world, assistance from the U.S. government private sector, NGOs, faith-based organizations, individuals, Consul General, diplomatic , Missions, infection, safety, celebrate our country, our partnerships, and our history, partnering, local, communities, relief, justice and equality, independence, democracy, cornerstone, principles,

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created equal, denounce slavery, women suffragists, rights, unifying, tenant, independence, freedom, partnerships, delivered, masks, gloves, medical gowns, sanitizing, supplies, equipment, supplies, front-line health, workers, supporting handwashing, contributing, support, lifesaving, equipment, defense, cooperation, bolster, support, contributions, critical PPE, supplies, help, commitment, partnership, nonimmigrant, consular, supported, dance, solidarity, respect, terrorist, attack, ambassador, heritage, month, cooking challenge, program, non-immigrant, visa, innovative, partnership, support, local, production, mask, partnership, government, successful partnerships, relationships, private sector, partners, host country, governments, stakeholders together, tackle global problems, grant, support, teacher training, professional, development, Gender-based violence (GBV), partnership, education, hope, safety, support, protection, empowerment, supporting, hope, safety, & personal resilience, committed, gender-based, violence, partners in supporting, hope, safety, personal, resilience, commemorated, justice, peace, coming, together, inequalities, inequalities, unity, together, divided, reconciliation, division, diplomacy, advance, interests, values, countries together, challenges, opportunities, trade, investment, relationship, cooperate, global, regional, multilateral, COVID-19, vaccination, engagement, climate change.
university, ambassador's, fund, cultural embassy support photographic, documentary, records, archive. clean, energy, economy, fossil, fuels, protect, planet, partnership, partnership, security, continent, commitment, partner, health, boost, economic, commercial, ties, strengthen, collaboration, safety, security, citizens, people. collaboration threat, climate change, mitigate, impacts. democracy, economic, development, relationships, partners, world, unite, celebrate, together, freedom, democracy, human rights, health, partnership, quarantine, Pfizer, jabs, region, donated, COVID-19, vaccine, doses, Chargé d'Affaires, vaccine, equality, cooperation.

CHINESE EMBASSY CATEGORISED CODES AND THEMES

Comments on the last column entitled, QNA apply to all codes, themes, and objectives as per the reflection of the table. These comments are not placed in all columns as it will be repetition.

Codes and Categorized codes	**Codes and emerging themes**	**Example of quotation**	**Strategies and did they work?**	**QNA**
Code - Partnership brotherhood, comradeship, friendship, bilateral, relationship, coalition, shared-future, win-win, unbreakable ties, cooperation.	**Partnership** mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence mutual non-aggression equality	"China is committed to the basic state policy of opening up, pursues development with its doors open and unswervingly upholds a mutually beneficial and win-win strategy of opening up." "Comradeship plus brotherhood" marks the special friendship	China used both proactive and reactive comms strategies towards SA carefully using words such as "brotherhood," "cooperation," "consultation", "mutual respect and mutual benefit" etc. to promote their foreign policies and to influence South Africans. Their	Different networks emerged from the posts such as President Xi and Ramaphosa's the ambassadors and different stakeholders such as Ministers, Premiers, mayors, etc. and networks that emerged from recipients or South

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		between the two countries and the two ruling parties."	strategies did not work because instead of attracting positive feedback from recipients in the network, they were heavily criticised and seen as unauthentic about those "donations." Distrust came out strongly towards these posts from respondents. Some codes were derived from conversations within the network from recipients and respondents of posts from the embassy. Posts on President Ramaphosa and Xi for example, should have served to bolster the message and generated many likes, but only generated 19 likes in one post. The responses from various messages betray the distrust and hatred for China. This I argue indicates that the Chinese strategies were not successful in SA also due to the few likes the embassy's posts generated jointly.	Africans based on their similar or different views about the posts etc. The presidents, diplomats, and government officials' networks are important for the promotion of each country's foreign policies, focusing on China's. Qualitative Network Analysis (QNA) is "an innovative method of gathering discursive forms of data on maintaining complex transnational networks in the everyday work of individual actors." Theirs is a formal network that is transnational. Through QNA we could visualize the formed networks and analyzed their conversations or posts to promote China's foreign policy objectives. Through QNA, I was able to [collect] details on the meaning individual actors attach to their network ties and the

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				network as a whole…" (Ahrens 2018: p. 1). President Xi and Ramaphosa mentioned important things because they understood the importance and value of their network as heads of states. It was not an opportunity to be missed. Given China's interest in Africa, I contend that this could easily be a network of Xi and other African presidents, thus making it bigger and clearly being visualized by their interactions. QNA stipulates that networks depend on the actions of individuals and that these are essential to any aspect of networks. Xi's effort and initiation to reach out to Ramaphosa telephonically is an important individual action that would keep this network alive. Even more importantly, is if he

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				keeps his promise to Ramaphosa and South Africans. QNA tools allow examining what agency (embassy) means in a certain context, of how policy processes (messages) and actors (recipients) are connected, and which dynamics occur in (social) networks (Hollstein, 2011). Here, QNA aims to analyze everyday communication and actions (embassies, individuals, networks), their formal and informal content (of embassies), and (their objectives with these messages) the role time constraints may play. Their shared interests and trust towards each other, are important ingredients for the formation and strengthening of this network as presidents. Depending on their individual behaviour

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				as (Hollstein and Straus, 2006, says, "Networks depend on the actions of individuals," will be important to either strengthen and weaken their network, I contend.
Code - Peace Harmony, unity, Equality, mutual respect, benefit, consultation, cooperation, solidarity, shared future, cordial, trust, teamwork, brotherhood, peacekeeping,	**Peace** mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. mutual non-aggression. mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence	"The world needs true multilateralism" and that "peace, development, equity, justice, democracy and freedom are common values of humanity and represent the abiding aspirations of both China and Africa."	Given the number of likes which was only nine, the embassy's strategy to publish Xi's speech at FOCAC Conference did not yield any fruit for them. South Africans were not sold on the speech and thus the message was not endorsed nor did the embassy's strategy to communicate it succeed.	Same as above
Code – Politics freedom, democracy, equality, racism, equal rights, discriminatory, politician, disenfranchised, apartheid, politicization, socialist, human rights, infringements, political manipulation, politicization, justice, democracy, virus-politicization, China-Virus, win-win, consultation, autonomy, nationalism, multilateralism, political manipulation, "conspiracy theory,"	**Politics** Mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence equality	"Human rights should not be used to serve political ends or as a tool to smear other countries and contain their development." "Let us all join hands and let multilateralism light our way toward a community with a shared future for mankind."		Same as above

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Code – Economy economic, growth, support, cooperation, partnership, investors, trade, government, financial markets, free-trade, win-win, growth, investing, prosperity, economic sanctions, rapidly-globalizing, exports, imports, tourism, domestic market, farmers, jobs, taxpayers,	**Economy** Equality. Mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence Mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity	"China's diplomacy will keep facilitating domestic development strategies, boosting the global economic recovery, promoting the building of a new type of international relations, and deepening regional and international cooperation, as well as participating into the process of global governance system reform and building the community with a shared future for mankind."		Same as above
Code – Vaccines Pandemic, origins, deadly, novel, coronavirus, epidemic, Infectious, immune, CoronaVac, Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca, infected, virus, pharmaceutical, Johnson & Johnson Covid-19 vaccine, immunization, Sinovac and Sinopharm, safety, efficacy, immunogenicity, access, equality, roll-out,	**Vaccines** Equality	"Fourth, we must uphold fairness and equity as we strive to close the immunization gap." "We're only safe when everyone is safe and that's why AstraZeneca is giving its vaccine to everyone at no profit."	China's posts especially ones about president Xi, are meant to communicate and promote China's foreign policy objectives. This he did by directly referring to their strategic objectives such as phrases like "equality, brotherhood, mutual respect" etc. Also, by criticizing the US and its democracy – ("No country has complete ownership of democracy")	Same as above
Code - Covid-19 Vaccine, origins, globally, deadly, scientists, novel, coronavirus, epidemic,	**Covid-19** Mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence	"China attaches great importance to South Africa's demand and is willing to fulfill the	China's reactive communication strategy to dismiss claims that the virus originated in	Same as above

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Pandemic, quarantine, face masks, ventilators, Infectious, immune, CoronaVac, Virus, virologist, epicenter, infected, surgical masks, virus, symptomatic, Covid-19 vaccine, immunogenicity, transmission, tracing, lockdown,	equality	commitment to make Covid-19 vaccines global public goods. We will give priority to supplying Chinese vaccines to the South African side." "We are ready to provide vaccines to the South African side as long as there is a need and an approval by the regulatory authorities here, so as to benefit the South African people at an early date."	China later on dubbed "China virus," was good but attracted both positive and negative reactions. Given the number of 1.9 thousand likes the message generated, we conclude that China's strategy succeeded, and the message was endorsed globally not only by South Africans.	
Code – Donations brotherhood, comradeship, friendship, relationship, support, partnership, mutual, benefit, food parcels, face masks, free, poor quality, ventilators, loyalty, trust, respect, compassion, food, donations, surgical masks, face masks, free, food parcels, humanitarian	**Donations** equality mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity;	"1,000 food parcels were 'far from enough' but the donation represented the cordial brotherhood and friendship of the people of China".	Messages on donations were generally criticized and frowned upon. These generated a few likes. Therefore, their strategies to communicate donations failed to influence South Africans.	Same as above
Code - Science Experts, scientists, origins, immune, Researchers, CoronaVac, China-virus, Covid-19, virologist, virus politicization, pharmaceutical, symptomatic, immunogenicity, transmission, tracing, Research, scientific research.	**Science** mutual respect	"What should have been done is to do very strong scientific research. We should have applied science, not opinion, not saying that it took place in China because of some views you have about China."	China's reactive communication strategy to dismiss claims that the virus originated in China later on dubbed "China virus," was good but attracted both positive and negative reactions. Given the number of 1.9 thousand likes the message generated, we conclude	Same as above

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			that China's strategy succeeded, and the message was endorsed globally not only by South Africans.	
Code – Culture language, training. Confucius Institute Consortium, people-to-people exchange, food, education, Savoring China, unveils, statue, newspapers, media, information, erect, bridge, buildings, pictures, film, poetry, music	**Culture** mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence	"I love China. I hope more people get to know the real heart-warming country. I'll continue to serve as a culture Ambassador to bridge the friendship between China and Africa."	China used culture as soft power to woo South Africans and to showcase and promote China to the locals. Judging from the number of likes, China did not succeed to influence and to promote its country as it received very few likes which were below 20.	Same as above
Code – Propaganda brainwashing, propaganda, misinformation, mistrust, lies, misinformation, miscommunication, media, newspapers, false information, smear, slander, ridicule, framing, deception, leak	**Propaganda** mutual respect mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence non-interference in each other's internal affairs;	"Human rights should not be used to serve political ends or as a tool to smear other countries and contain their development." "The UK adopts double standards and is indulged in intervening in other countries' affairs while turning a blind eye to human rights infringements in its own country."	China's strategy leveraged on events such as Freedom Day to demonstrate its respect for SA's democracy and its people. The embassy posts were calculated and intentional by marking such days as this and the erection of the statue of the struggle stalwart, OR Tambo. This however did not succeed as respondents focused their attention on President Ramaphosa criticizing him for doing that. Such posts were watered down by the criticism amongst the citizenry which showed how divided South Africans	Networks are formed based on individual's opinions. Individuals who do not even know each other but their common views make hem to unintentionally form a network. The common thread in this network is an ant- China sentiment about how oppressive and "totalitarian" China is. There is only one descending voice from the common view held in this network, making it impossible for it to influence in

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			still are However, there are only 12 likes means their message was not as influential as they may have aimed it to be. I also argue that the opposite narrative also did not influence people.	accordance with their narrative.
Code - Diplomacy Diplomats, ambassadors, Foreign Relations, cooperation, consultation, respect, equality, host country, citizens, Chargé d'affaires, bilateral, relationship, brotherhood, sovereignty, cordial, government, people-to-people, embassy, international relations, regional, international, cooperation, foreign Mission, foreign secretary, diplomats, internal affairs, multilateralism, inter-dependent, unbreakable and rock-solid "iron-clad", multilateralism	**Diplomacy** mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. mutual non-aggression. non-interference in each other's internal affairs. equality. mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence	"China's diplomacy will keep facilitating domestic development strategies, boosting the global economic recovery, promoting the building of a new type of international relations, and deepening regional and international cooperation, as well as participating into the process of global governance system reform and building the community with a shared future for mankind," Wang Hi	Donations were untrusted and viewed as "what's in it for China" attitude by South Africans. The tone and the language showed how patronising and disrespectful recipients felt by such donations. China did not succeed to promote its foreign policy objectives, nor did it succeed to promote its image in SA.	Same as above
Code – security Terrorism, anti-terrorism, safety, peace, troops, brotherhood, comradeship, friendship, partnership, crime, murderers, citizens, nationals,	**Security** mutual non-aggression mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence	"China endorses the continued joint counter-terrorism operations by Niger and countries in the region, supports sustainable and predictable funding to the G5 Sahel Joint Military Force and	China failed to convince and promote its image and FPO as it this generated a lot of criticism which was scathing and damaging to its image. Worse, the embassy did not defend China's save for one or two individuals in the	Same as above

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		calls on the international community to provide more help in logistics and capacity building," he said – Zhang Jun	chat. Only a US ambassador and another one defended China. The embassy simply reposted the article in mainstream media.	
Code - Sovereignty Freedom, independence, self-rule, autonomy, Unilateral, totalitarian	**Sovereignty** mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity non-interference in each other's internal affairs;	"It is important that we uphold the spirit of extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits, fully heed the views of developing countries, and better reflect their legitimate concerns."		Same as above
			China came out as defensive and irritated by the US and its comments. But I argue that it did not succeed to influence SA and to promote it foreign policy objectives based on the responses and the number of likes.	

FIGURE 5: Chinese embassy themes and strategies US CATEGORISED CODES AND THEMES

Comments on the last column entitled, QNA apply to all codes, themes, and objectives as per the reflection of the table. These comments are not placed in all columns as it will be repetition.

Codes and Categorised codes	**Codes and emerging themes**	**Example of quotation**	**Strategies and did they work?**	**QNA**
Code – Bilateral relationships, partners, cooperation, ties, strengthen, collaboration,	**Bilateral** Advance democracy, human rights, and other global interests.	"I welcome the support of US President Biden for a TRIPS waiver to respond to the	The US's communication strategy towards South Africans was more proactive than reactive. They	Qualitative Network Analysis (QNA) is "an innovative method of gathering discursive forms of

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supporting, together, cooperate, friend, partner, cooperation, bilateral cooperation, partnership, supports, cooperate, partnership, bilateral, solidarity,	Promote international understanding of American values and policies.	COVID-19 pandemic. We are urging leaders at the G7 Summit to support a time-bound and limited waiver to expand the global supply of COVID-19 vaccines and medicines."	diplomatically and strategically framed their messages by using words such as, "ties, friendship, collaboration, cooperation etc. to promote their foreign policy and to influence South Africans. The chosen frame above are not as obvious as the Chinese ones in regard to their foreign policy. But I argue that it is through partnership and cooperation that the US could promote their policy as stated under emerging themes. I further argue that the US's strategies worked in South Africa because of the overall positive responses from the recipients in the networks and the many likes their messages generated compared to the Chinese messages. The US's messages were minimally criticized compared to the barrage of criticism levelled against the Chinese embassy messages.	data on maintaining complex transnational networks in the everyday work of individual actors." Different transnational networks also formed from the US posts. These include formal networks such as Ramaphosa and President Biden's network, diplomats, and ministers,' government officials' network, network between the embassy and students, academics, artists, and the community. Also, a network of recipients that formed along sentiment, opinion, and racial lines amongst others. Through QNA we could visualize the formed networks and analyzed their conversations or posts to promote the US's foreign policy objectives. Through QNA, I was able to [collect] details on the meaning

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			The majority of responses from South Africans betray how much they trust the US's initiatives such as donations compared to China's. Hence, I argue that the US strategies succeeded towards South Africans.	individual actors attach to their network ties and the network as a whole…" (Ahrens 2018: p. 1). For example, President Biden and Ramaphosa seized the moment and mentioned important issues because they understood the importance and value of their network as heads of states. QNA stipulates that networks depend on the actions of individuals and that these are essential to any aspect of networks. The presidents' effort to meet on the margins of the G7 Summit underscores their individual actions and the importance they attach to their meeting to keep their network alive. Their network is important to the U.S.-South Africa bilateral relationship. QNA tools allow examining what agency [embassy]

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				means in a certain context, of how policy processes [messages] and actors [recipients] are connected, and which dynamics occur in [social] networks (Hollstein, 2011). Here, QNA aims to analyze everyday communication and actions [embassies, individuals, networks], their formal and informal content [of embassies], and [their objectives with these messages] the role time constraints may play. Their shared interests and trust towards each other, are important ingredients for the formation and strengthening of this network as presidents. Depending on their individual behaviour as (Hollstein and Straus, 2006, says, networks depend on the actions of individuals", will be important to either

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				strengthen and weaken their network, I contend.
Code- Politics freedom, democracy, equality, inequalities, power, rights, denounce slavery, women suffragists, independence, inequalities, multilateral, bilateral, human rights, justice, politicians, inauguration, sworn in, Oaths, office, presidents, vice presidents, Inaugural, Committee, invocation, Pledge, Allegiance,	**Politics** Protect the United States and Americans. Advance democracy, human rights, and other global interests. Promote international understanding of American values and policies	"Getting to learn more about MLK for me was more like learning about Nelson Mandela, as I see both men as struggle leaders and having almost the same dream for black people," Mpho said. "They held nothing but the truth in every encounter they had in their fight to free black people from oppression - to free black people was the only dream."	Same as above	Same as above
Code – Repatriation Immigration Visa, migration, citizens, repatriation,	**Repatriation** Protect the United States and Americans. Support U.S. diplomats, government officials, and all other personnel at home and abroad who make these goals a reality	"The current round of repatriation flights being planned may be the last. If you wish to repatriate to the United States, please travel now or be prepared to wait until commercial flights resume in the future. We are not able to say when commercial flights will resume or if the South African	This was irrelevant to locals but relevant and endorsed by US citizens in South Africa.	Same as above

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		lockdown will be extended." "Wow, I take my hat off to you guys! Reassuring your citizens who are stranded in a foreign country is truly compassionate and shows us that with just a little bit of kindness and humanity, citizens can feel heard and understood and at ease in such unprecedented times."		
Code – Climate Clean, energy, economy, fossil, fuels, protect, planet	**Climate** Advance democracy, human rights, and other global interests	"We've rejoined the Paris Agreement! Combating the climate crisis requires every tool in the toolbox. We must all work together to build the resilience to climate change that is critical to save lives today and protect the planet for future generations!"	The US embassy to communicate this message was successful in reinforcing their policy on advancing other global interests. Released during a pandemic made it more strategic. Although the number of "likes" were not that high, overall response to the embassy's messages was good and thus successful to influence locals.	Same as above
Code – Economy growth, support, cooperation, partnership, investors, trade,	**Economy** Advance democracy, human rights, and other global interests.	"South Africans know they can count on the U.S., as a friend & partner, to support	Same as above	Same as above

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government, global, economically, economic, Funding		their efforts to fight the pandemic & get their economy back on track."		
Code – Vaccines transmission. Moderna, supply Pandemic, coronavirus, COVID-19, patients, scientists, health, novel, epidemic, infections, screening, healthcare, safety, Johnson & Johnson immunization, efficacy, equality, roll-out, Pfizer**,** jabs, donation	Protect the United States and Americans. Advance democracy, human rights, and other global interests. Promote international understanding of American values and policies.	"As President Biden has said, none of us are safe until all of us are safe, and this is just part of our already strong and growing health partnership with South Africa."	Same as the first comment above	Same as above
Code - Covid-19 Vaccine, globally, deadly, scientists, novel, coronavirus, drugs, epidemic, Pandemic, quarantine, face masks, ventilators, Infectious, PPE, supplies, vaccination, sanitizing, spread, ventilators infection, safety, medicine PPEs, healthcare, screening, transmitted, thermometers, virus, symptomatic, Covid-19 transmission, tracing, patients, lockdown, health, handwashing,	**Covid-19** Protect the United States and Americans. Advance democracy, human rights, and other global interests. Promote international understanding of American values and policies.	"From the beginning of my presidency, we have been clear-eyed that we need to attack this virus globally as well. This is about our responsibility — our humanitarian obligation to save as many lives as we can — and our responsibility to our values. We're going to help lead the world out of this pandemic, working alongside our global partners.	Same as the first comment above	Same as above
Code – Donations friendship, relationship, support, partnership, partners, funds,	**Donations** Protect the United States and Americans.	"Thank you, USA. Trust your support much more so than medical equipment	Same as the first comment above	Same as above

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governments, stakeholders, mutual, benefit, mitigating, impact, help, assist, resources, ventilators, values gift, emergency, gloves, medical gowns, donated, Pfizer sanitizing, supplies, equipment, face masks, ventilators, compassion, humanitarian, provider,	Advance democracy, human rights, and other global interests. Promote international understanding of American values and policies.	etc. being delivered by China. Please use the money and assist local manufacturers to make and manufacture our own medical needs. Please." "This delivery of lifesaving equipment, critically needed here in SA, shows how we can leverage our strong defense cooperation to further bolster the U.S. support to SA's ongoing COVID-19 response."		
Code - Science scientists, origins, researchers, lab, virus, Covid-19, politicization, surveillance, antiretroviral, medicines, scientists, transmission, tracing, research	Promote international understanding of American values	"In the history of mankind, may I say humbly, the greatest amount of money spent on any epidemic is by the United States on the global Pepfar programme. Since its inception the US has put science ahead of politics," she added.	Same as the first comment above	Same as above
Code – Culture language, training, food, education, film, poetry, music, photographic, documentary, records, Archive, university, teacher training, motto, professional, cultural, development, Heritage Month, cooking Fulbright	**Culture** Advance democracy, human rights, and other global interests. Promote international understanding of American values and policies.	"Teaching Americans about my culture and learning how to blend the cultures of the CCIP group was one of the highlights of this experience."	The embassy's strategy to use soft power – culture in the heart of the pandemic was a positive destruction for South Africans. This post generated a decent number of posts for us to conclude that their strategy succeeded, and	Same as above

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Program, crowds, flags, marching bands, galas, performers, ceremonies, festivities, concerts, parades, balls			the message was endorsed.	
Code - Diplomacy Diplomats, ambassadors, Foreign Relations, cooperation, consultation, respect, equality, host country, citizens, Chargé d'affaires, bilateral, relationship, cordial, government, embassy, regional, international, global, cooperation, foreign Mission, secretary of state, diplomats, multilateralism, - justice, peace, partnership, values	**Diplomacy** Protect the United States and Americans. Advance democracy, human rights, and other global interests. Promote international understanding of American values and policies. Support U.S. diplomats, government officials, and all other personnel at home and abroad who make these goals a reality	"We will revitalize American diplomacy to advance our interests and values in the world as it is – not as it was. American leadership matters, and we have a unique ability to bring other countries together to meet the challenges and opportunities of our time."	Same as the first comment above	Same as above
Code – security Terrorism, anti-terrorism, safety, peace, troops, brotherhood, comradeship, friendship, partnership, crime, murderers, citizens, nationals, soldiers	**Security** Protect the United States and Americans. Advance democracy, human rights, and other global interests. Promote international understanding of American values and policies. Support U.S. diplomats, government officials, and all other personnel at home and abroad who make these goals a reality	"This week's visit by the USS Williams is one more step in bolstering our already strong security cooperation, a partnership that is mutually beneficial and will lead to greater prosperity and security for both our nations."	Same as the first comment above	Same as above
Gender-based-violence Women, children, gender-based-violence, partnership, education, hope, safety,	**Gender-based-violence** Protect the United States and Americans.	"Gender-based violence (GBV) is not a South African problem; it is a global	The US embassy to communicate this message was successful in reinforcing their	Same as above

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support, protection, empowerment, men perpetrators, police, cooperation, support, protection, hope, homes, violence, values, safety	Advance democracy, human rights, and other global interests. Promote international understanding of American values	problem. It is a problem in the U.S., and we can learn from each other; and to solve it takes partnerships... We are proud to join each of our partners in supporting access to care and services as an essential part of building hope, safety, & personal resilience"	policy on advancing other global interests. Released during a pandemic made it more strategic. Although the number of "likes" were not that high, overall response to the embassy's messages was good and thus successful to influence locals.	

Figure 7: US embassy themes and strategies

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