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Digital Diplomacy as A Tool for Peaceful Secession: The Use of Twitter in Somaliland's Campaign for International Recognition

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DIGITAL DIPLOMACY AS A TOOL FOR PEACEFUL SECESSION:

The Use of Twitter in Somaliland's Campaign for International Recognition

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Laura Rubidge

A research report submitted to the Wits School of Social Sciences, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts by combination of coursework and research

Johannesburg, 2022

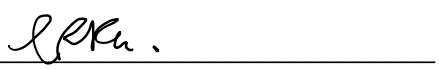
Supervisor: Mr Larry Benjamin

ABSTRACT

The last two decades have witnessed major disruptions to the traditional diplomatic practice as a result of technological breakthroughs. New advantages and challenges have emerged beyond the auspice of traditional diplomacy. Although there is a plethora of research emerging on digital diplomacy theory and practice, gaining momentum since the Covid-19 pandemic, it remains an under researched area of inquiry. This research report is interested in the use of Twitter by the Somaliland government, as a de facto state, as a foreign policy tool. This report employs Damien Spry and Kerrilee Lockyer's (2022) triangulation methodology to conduct an applied evaluation of Somaliland's use of Twitter in its foreign policy. As such, the report firstly examines Somaliland's foreign policy strategy using document analysis, secondly, analyses overarching trends considering metadata and lastly, zooms in to the microdata to analyse small, outlier cases. The overall aim of this research report is to evaluate Somaliland's use of Twitter in its foreign policy activities, extracting unique advantages of digital diplomacy over traditional diplomacy in addition to contributing to the emerging literature on digital diplomacy.

Plagiarism Declaration

I, Laura Rubidge, declare that this Research Report is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the Degree of Masters of Arts in International Relations at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.



(Signature of candidate)

___3_____day of____March_____2023_____in_____Johannesburg____

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In 1972, Cecil Crabb, a seasoned author on diplomacy and foreign policy stated that "reduced to its fundamental ingredients, foreign policy consists of two elements: national objectives to be achieved and the means for achieving them" (Crabb 1972:1). Although this statement remains as true today as it did near the end of the cold war, the digital age has significantly impacted the 'means' of conducting foreign policy in practice.

Governments around the world are increasingly using social networking platforms, such as Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook among others, to engage foreign governments, in addition to domestic and international publics. This trend could, in part, be attributed to the sheer volume of social networking users globally. By July 2022, there were 4.70 billion social media users across the world (Datareportal 2022). However, this trend can also be attributed to the unique opportunities and advantages offered by the internet and social networking platforms to enhance diplomacy, for example by creating the space for networked diplomacy.[1]

The intersection between information and communication technologies (ICTs) with the functions of diplomacy has been termed 'digital diplomacy'. This term and its various definitions will be discussed in more detail in Chapter two.

Although digital diplomacy does not *substitute* traditional diplomatic practices, it does provide noteworthy advantages. One of the most often cited advantages is its cost-effectiveness. For example, the costs involved in creating a virtual embassy on a social platform are minuscule compared to the costs involved in establishing and occupying a physical embassy in a foreign country.

Although there is emerging research on the increasing use of social media by governments as a tool for digital diplomacy, it remains an insufficiently investigated area of inquiry (Habibullah & Xiguangang 2022). Furthermore, the majority of the research has considered Western governments, leaving developing countries the least studied.

[1] Networked diplomacy is a concept proposed by Jamie Metzl in the early 2000 to describe the decentralisation of foreign policy away from the state-centric traditional model. This concept will be further discussed in chapter two.

There have been several studies on the use of digital diplomacy by non-state actors, especially terrorist groups. However, what is largely left unconsidered are the entities that fall between the categories of non-state actors and states: secessionist groups and de facto states.

The few studies that have covered this area have securitised the subject, considering primarily the dangers of social media in perpetuating harmful narratives that incites violence between the parent state and the secessionist movement (see Endong, F.P.C. 2021.).

No known studies have been conducted on the use and advantages of digital diplomacy as a tool to *peacefully* campaign for independence or secession. To fill this gap in knowledge, this research report aims to investigate the use of digital diplomacy by the Republic of Somaliland and the consequences thereof.

1.2. A brief history of Somaliland's status

In 1991, Somaliland proclaimed its sovereignty and independence from Somalia. At the time of writing, Somaliland remains unrecognised by the international community.

Somaliland's unrecognised status has had severe consequences for the nation. For example, it has undermined the nation's ability to receive international attention and aid. For example, compared to its parent state, during its first decade of self-proclaimed sovereignty Somaliland received the equivalent of 0.0025% of the US $4 billion that the United Nations and the United States spent on Somalia's peacebuilding efforts (Phillips 2020 :10).

Two decades later the struggles of non-recognition continue, Somaliland's foreign minister, Saad Ali Shire, has recently acknowledged that "the lack of recognition is proving a major problem." (Wintour 2017).

Other observers have argued that this lack of attention may have contributed to Somaliland's success. The premise is that Somaliland's isolation gave Somalilanders "the freedom to cherry-pick from local and international institutional governance models and to experiment with what was seen as likely to work given the local context" (Peake 2021: 2). For example, to a large extent, Somaliland avoided the external democratisation pressure that the post-cold war Western hegemony ushered in through strong incentives for ruling elites across the world to adopt Western-style political institutions. Levitsky and Way (2002) argued that this incentivised (or coerced) adoption of the Western liberal democratic regimes resulted in a rise

of ‘competitive authoritarian regimes’ that adopted elections, but the ruling elites maintained authoritarian control.

Nonetheless, Somaliland officials have declared that gaining global recognition remains at the “top of Somaliland’s foreign policy”. Many of these officials have emphasised the following question: “if [Somaliland] could achieve all that it has without the global recognition [it] deserves and hope for, imagine what [Somaliland] can do with more recognition.” (Kaariye 2020).

It is for this reason that I hypothesise that Somaliland’s digital diplomacy strategy will mirror this foreign policy objective, campaigning for international recognition through its Twitter accounts. This is a hypothesis that will be tested throughout the report and revisited in chapter seven.

The map below (figure 1) presents the disputed area of land claimed by Somaliland within the international recognised borders of the state of Somalia.



Figure 1: Modern map depicting areas claimed by the self-declared autonomous region, Somaliland, within the internationally recognised Somalia borders, Source: Sovereign Limits: https://sovereignlimits.com/boundaries/somalia-somaliland-land

Although Somaliland remains unrecognised, in recent years it has significantly increased its regional integration and 'de facto'[2] relationship building with regional and international partners. In the past decade, Somaliland's (in)formal relations with other nations has increased exponentially (see figure 2 below). [3] Somaliland has opened several liaison offices in foreign states including Ethiopia, Kenya, and the United Kingdom (UK).

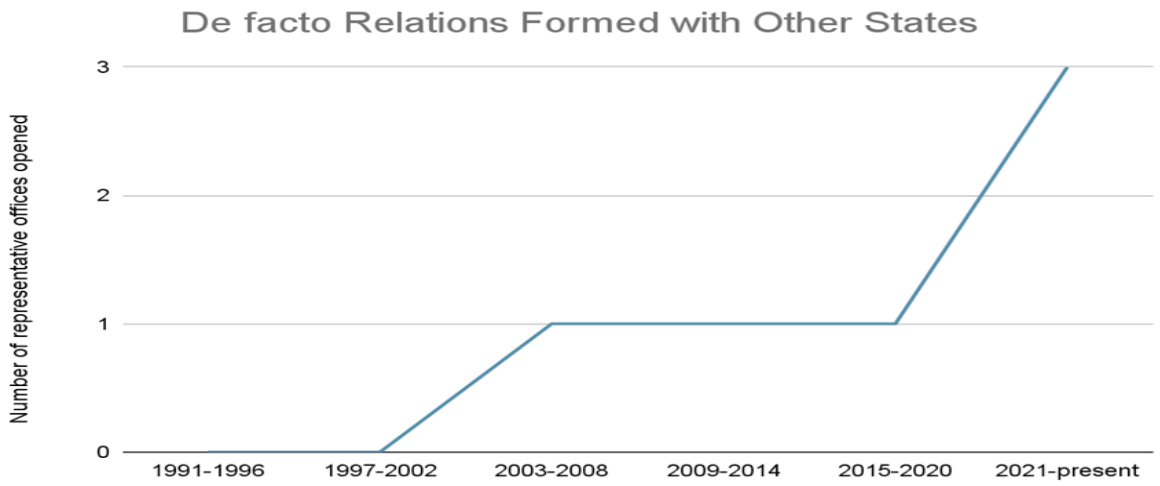


Figure 2: Graph Showing De Facto relations formed by Somaliland with other States. Source: Author's Creation

Relations with Somaliland have increasingly been on the agenda of international governments. On 18 January 2022, the United Kingdom Parliament debated the case of recognition of the Republic of Somaliland (Wakaya 2022). In March 2022, Somaliland's President Bihi undertook a visit to the United States and secured meetings with top White House officials and members of Congress (Pecquet 2022). Bihi also secured bipartisan pledges of increased US support for Somaliland (Ibid.).

There has also been a noticeable normalisation of Somaliland's diplomatic relations by Somalia itself. President Bihi has recently undertaken state visits to Ethiopia and Djibouti, with which Somaliland has de facto relations. Abnormally, these visits were not met with the usual protest by the Somali government in Mogadishu (Mutambo 2022).

Although these events may seem trivial when considered independently; collectively, they demonstrate a shift towards the normalisation of Somaliland's diplomatic relations and increased attention by foreign governments on Somaliland's continuous calls for recognition.

[2] De Facto relations are defined here and throughout this report as any bilateral or multilateral cooperation between a de facto state and external states that have not formally been acknowledged as constituting recognition.
[3] The building of (in)formal relations are quantified in this chart by the number of liaison offices opened.

This uptick in attention and normalisation has also coincided with the adoption of Twitter in its foreign policy toolbox.

Significant academic research has emerged on digital diplomacy and the use of social media, including Twitter, as a tool for promoting foreign policy objectives, to date, there remains a distinct lack of research that has been conducted on the use of digital diplomacy by de facto states or secessionist movements in a peaceful manner.

This research report positions itself within the emerging literature on digital diplomacy as a nascent aspect of foreign policy and diplomacy theory and practice. This report will analyse Somaliland's use of digital diplomacy as a means to achieve its foreign policy objectives.

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

(1) How has Somaliland used Twitter as a tool of digital diplomacy?

(2) To what extent has Somaliland's use of Twitter as a tool of digital diplomacy been successful in furthering its foreign policy goals?

(3) Do social media platforms such as Twitter provide de facto states a significant advantage over traditional diplomatic tools?

1.3. Aim of Research and Rationale

As the research on digital diplomacy increases in volume and refinement, it has become clear that digital diplomacy provides governments with distinct challenges and opportunities in their foreign policy strategy. There is relative consensus among analysts that "diplomacy in the digital age varies greatly from past manifestations of diplomacy" (Turianskyi & Wekesa 2021: 343).

Understanding these challenges and benefits of digital diplomacy could better equip policymakers to utilise this emerging tool to help achieve their foreign policy goals.

This research paper seeks to reflect on these distinct features of digital diplomacy, in particular how they relate to de facto states. This is a niche area of investigation because these states conduct their foreign policy in specific circumstances pertaining to their isolation due to their status as unrecognised by the international community. Furthermore, the foreign policy of de facto states primarily focuses on their quest for international recognition of their independence.

This provides a niche environment to analyse the effectiveness of and implementation of digital diplomacy against very clear objectives.

The era of globalisation emerging from the rise of digital technologies has been characterised by an increase and intensification in political, economic and cultural interactions beyond territorial boundaries (Salmon 2000), thus providing key opportunities for isolated states.

This research report aims to contribute to a better understanding of Somaliland's digital diplomacy as an aspect of their foreign policy. Additionally, this report aims to contribute to the broader academic research of digital diplomacy as a subtheme within diplomacy studies.

This research report is important for three reasons:

(1) Digital diplomacy is projected to be a key feature of diplomacy for the foreseeable future, either as a means of diplomacy in its own right or as part of a hybrid method of diplomacy offline and online. Therefore, it is important to build on and improve the field's understanding of digital diplomacy, including the advantages and challenges thereof.

(2) Somaliland has remained unrecognised by the international community for over three decades, this has had significant consequences on the Somaliland economy and the livelihoods of the Somaliland people. Understanding how, if at all, digital diplomacy has furthered Somaliland's pursuit of recognition necessitates a deeper look into the transformational capabilities of digital diplomacy compared to traditional diplomacy as a worthwhile investigation.

(3) Africa is currently experiencing a new wave of separatism. The African Union has remained committed to maintaining colonial borders and therefore does not entertain secessionist bids (save for the exceptional cases of Eritrea in 1991 and South Sudan in 2011). Most of the existing research has pointed to a net negative impact of digital diplomacy as a tool for secessionism on the continent as an exacerbator of conflict between parent states and secessionists. This research report is therefore a worthwhile exploration into digital diplomacy as a means for *peaceful* campaigning of secession.

This research report aims to target an academic audience, considering one of its core aims to contribute to the academic literature on digital diplomacy and Somaliland's foreign policy. However, this research report may additionally be of interest to practitioners who wish to gain a better understanding of the advantages and challenges of digital diplomacy as well as its

current practice. The findings of this research report may be beneficial to policymakers at all levels, informing possible regulations or best practices of the emerging, largely unregulated, practice of digital diplomacy.

1.4. Research Gap

As aforementioned, the upward trajectory of state's use of digital diplomacy remains an under researched area of inquiry, especially in the global South. Although the literature on digital diplomacy as a tool for secessionist movements is growing, the existing literature has securitised the use of digital diplomacy, focusing on sharp power[4] and the potential for these tactics to prolong and exacerbate conflict. This research gap warrants further attention, which this report aims to begin.

1.5. Methodology

This research report empirically examines Somaliland's use of Twitter as a tool of digital diplomacy and the consequences thereof. The report employs a mixed-methods design (combining both quantitative and qualitative methodologies).

The decision to exclusively focus on Twitter as a social media platform was made considering ethical implications (see page 9) and resource and time limitations of the study. It is also notable that the Somaliland government tends to prioritise Twitter as a platform, for example over Facebook, often posting a post using the respective Twitter account and a day later posting the same post on the equivalent Facebook account. Furthermore, there are more official foreign embassy accounts on Twitter than on Facebook, this allowed for a fuller data set to be collected. However, future studies may benefit from extrapolating this study to other social media accounts including Facebook, TikTok or Instagram.

Through the plethora of recent research on the digitalisation of diplomacy, several methods for analysing the effectiveness and impact of digital diplomacy have been developed. This research report will employ several of these methodologies. Some of these methodologies and their origins are discussed below.

[4] Sharp power is the use of tactics such as disinformation and misinformation. This concept will be further explored in chapter six.

One of the earliest studies on digital diplomacy was the Twiplomacy study which is an annual global survey of the presence and activity of heads of state, foreign ministers on Twitter conducted by Burson-Marsteller. This study considers public metrics such as number of accounts and numbers of followers that each account has as a gauge for the level of digital diplomacy employed by a state.

Another example is the research conducted by Ilan Manor and Geraldine Asiwome Adiku (2021) into the use of social media to engage with diasporas. In this study, the researchers analysed and coded posts from nine Ethiopian embassy Facebook pages. This methodology allowed for the analysis of the engagement between Ethiopian officials and diaspora communities. This study established three key conceptual frameworks which were prominent in their research namely: relationship building, relationship strengthening and relationship leverage.

Dmitry Chernobrov (2022) used case study analysis in order to build a framework of strategic humour as a tool of digital diplomacy. His paper investigated three cases where Russian government officials used strategic humour via social media to advance, popularise, and facilitate the acceptance of state narratives about contested international issues. This study demonstrates the usefulness of the concept of 'strategic narratives' in the study of digital diplomacy.

Although these methods each provide their own advantages to explore aspects of digital diplomacy, when they are employed in isolation from one another, they do not provide a comprehensive analysis. Park, Chung and Park (2019), for example, employ several different methods of analysis within one study to evaluate the dimensions of the digital diplomacy of Japan and South Korea. They employ social networking analysis, user profile analysis, semantic network analysis, and topic modelling.

With this in mind, this research report will employ the triangulation approach to evaluate digital diplomacy. This approach was developed by Damien Spry and Kerrilee Lockyer (2022). This approach integrates three lines of inquiry that have previously been used separately in research projects on digital diplomacy. The three lines of inquiry are: policy analysis, distant reading of large data and computational methodology and close reading of small cases. As argued by Spry and Lockyer, the triangulation of these three methods can generate "nuanced, robust evaluations with both granularity and generalisability" (Spry & Lockyer 2022: 274).

This research focuses on Twitter data due to ethical[5] and capacity considerations. This research report involved collecting primary data by scraping Tweets and their related metadata on Twitter through the Twitter Developers Platform. Using the unique Twitter API token provided to the author by Twitter upon approval of academic access, the author retrieved metadata using the coding programme Python. This data was cleaned and structured using Jupyter notebook. Thereafter the data sets were collated into a dashboard using PowerBI software for easier analysis.

Only aggregate data appears in the final report. However, the author acknowledges that the ethical considerations of social media data collection and research remain a grey area and therefore intends to take every reasonable precaution to ensure that the research report is conducted ethically, and all possible risks are minimised.

The accounts which were analysed include the official Twitter page of Ministry of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation, Republic of Somaliland which has the account name: MFA Somaliland and the handle: @somalilandmfa. Additionally, this report will analyse the various accounts which represent Somaliland in foreign states as foreign missions. These include the following[6]:

Account name	**Handle**	**Description**
Somaliland in Taiwan	@SomalilandinTW	Republic of Somaliland Representative Office in Taiwan.
Somaliland UK Mission	@SomalilandinUK	Official Twitter Account of the Somaliland UK Mission.
Somaliland USA	@SomalilandUS	Official twitter, Somaliland Mission USA.

[5] Twitter is a public platform, therefore compared to other social media platforms such as Facebook or WhatsApp, the ethical considerations of using Twitter data are reduced. The limitations of this decision will be further discussed on the concluding chapter of this report.

[6] Although there are other Twitter accounts that are described as official accounts of foreign missions, many of these accounts are unverifiable. The author chose these accounts because they are either verified or have been engaged with directly by the Somaliland MFA twitter account, providing an indication of authenticity.

Somaliland in Ethiopia	@SomalilandinET	Official twitter page of the Permanent Diplomatic Mission of the Republic of Somaliland to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
Somaliland in Kenya	@SomalilandinKe	The official Twitter account of the Republic of Somaliland mission in Kenya.

The timeline of this research is limited to between 2006 (when Twitter was created) and August 2022 (the month that the author began importing the raw data upon receiving approval of the research proposal). However, it is notable that most of the Twitter data analysed originate from 2014 onwards (when the Somaliland official accounts were launched).

The figure below depicts the percentage of the tweets published by the respective accounts that are original tweets. [7]

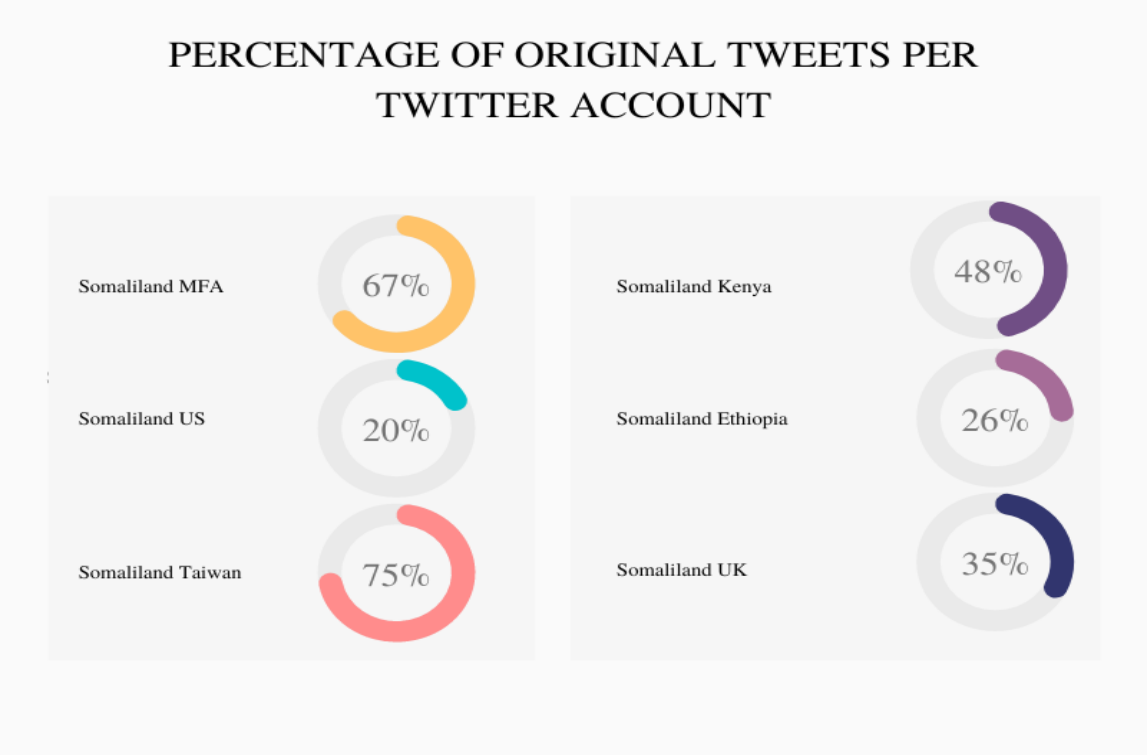


Figure 3: Chart showing the percentage of original Tweets per Twitter account. Source: Author's creation

Considering that four out of the six accounts scored below 50% of original tweets, I decided to remove retweeted tweets from the data sets. This would avoid the skewing of the results and a sharper focus on tweets created and published only by the accounts of interest.

Although I used computational tools to aggregate much of the Twitter data, the author manually conducted the content analysis when coding the tweets thematically. Where tweets were published in a language other than English, the author used google translate to interpret the meaning of the tweet. Furthermore, the manual analysis allowed the author to interpret and analyse hyperlinked content and attached pictures which may have been otherwise missed.

Throughout the research report, where appropriate, the various research methods are described, and their applicability argued.

[7] Original tweets are defined here as tweets written and posted by the account, i.e., not retweeted or quoted tweets.

1.6. Structure

This research report was intentionally structured to best achieve the research aims, relating both to contributing to the broader research on digital diplomacy and the research on Somaliland as a case study.

The chapter which follows provides a brief background to digital diplomacy as an area of study within International Relations. This chapter discusses seminal studies and key concepts which will be employed throughout the research report thereafter.

Chapters three to five will loosely follow the three prongs of Spry and Lockyer's triangulation method. Chapter three will discuss the concept of state sovereignty and the international law on secession, thereafter Somaliland's background and history will be outlined followed by a discussion on Somaliland's foreign policy strategy, before discussing Somaliland's traditional means of diplomacy throughout each presidential administration since declaring independence. Chapter four will look at the big picture using large data sets and distant reading. This chapter will outline the broad implementation of digital diplomacy by the Somaliland government in order to highlight trends and patterns. Chapter five will zoom in and provide a closer analysis of small cases which act as outliers to the trends identified in chapter four. This chapter aims to provide a better understanding of the impact and effectiveness of Somaliland's use of digital diplomacy.

Chapter six will provide a discussion of the results of chapters three to five. This chapter will aim to highlight the key advantages and disadvantages of the use of digital diplomacy by de facto states. This chapter will situate this analysis within the broader context of the rising separatist movements on the African continent. Thereafter, the chapter will provide key implications that emerge from the findings of this study.

Chapter seven will conclude the study by providing an overview of the findings and implications. This chapter will also highlight areas of possible future research.

CHAPTER 2: THE EMERGENCE OF DIGITAL DIPLOMACY

2.1. Introduction

The internet itself has become a central part of the daily lives of billions of people, increasingly through social media platforms. The use of social media is a worldwide phenomenon, with two out of every three individuals connected to the internet visiting social media sites (Kuzma 2010). Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and YouTube, among others, allow diplomats and other international organisations direct access to and communication with their various stakeholders (Habibullah & Xiguang 2022: 210).

The rapid digitalisation of communication globally has impacted almost all sectors of society. Although the structure of international politics and diplomacy has largely remained unchanged since the advent of the internet, the methods of conducting diplomacy and foreign policy have not escaped the impact of digitalisation. Furthermore, the global Covid-19 pandemic has played a catalytic role, forcing diplomacy to move online. As noted by Ashish Sharma & Varsha Sisodia (2022), when governments around the world instituted national lockdowns, digital platforms were used more than ever before to disseminate information on repatriation for stranded citizens and health advisories. Even as borders began to reopen, social media platforms, and digital diplomacy has remained integral. Digital Diplomacy remains "an important bridge between diplomats and their various publics, and even among nations" (Sharma & Sisodia 2022: 63).

The definition of digital diplomacy and its conceptual confines has remained contested. Hanson provides one of the broadest conceptualisations, defining it as "the use of the internet and new Information Communications Technologies to help carry out diplomatic objectives" (Hanson 2012: 2). Whereas Lesley Masters (2021) conceptualises digital diplomacy as "diplomacy *for* digital technology" which includes "[the negotiations for] access, implementation, and the international governance of these digital conduits" (Masters 2021: 362). Some analysts have conceptualised digital diplomacy in a narrower definition, focusing on the use of social media platforms by governments to engage with their counterparts and the public (foreign and domestic) (Manor and Segev 2015; Lewis 2014). Considering the focus of this research report on the use of Twitter specifically as a diplomatic tool, this research report will employ the narrower definition.

As noted in the introduction, digital diplomacy does not replace face-to-face diplomacy, but rather works in conjunction with, or separate from, traditional diplomacy. Nonetheless, considering that approximately 130 United Nations member states have Twitter accounts, (Khazan 2012) no state can afford to ignore digital platforms completely when engaging in diplomacy.

This chapter will provide a brief overview of the emergence of digital diplomacy within the broader field of foreign policy analysis (FPA). [8] Within this overview, seminal authors and work on the relevant topics will be examined in addition to key concepts. These concepts will be defined and thereafter employed in the relevant chapters of the research report.

2.2. Is diplomacy dead?

New York Times columnist, Roger Cohen, declared in 2013 that "diplomacy is dead". He based his argument in the premise that digital communication had fundamentally disrupted the art of effective diplomacy, which he argued had produce diplomatic successes such as the Dayton Peace Accords and the end of the cold war on American terms. Yet, this declaration could arguably be assimilated to be a controversial declaration made by Francis Fukuyama in 1992 in which he argued that 'the end of history' had arrived.

Cohen and Fukuyama are not alone in their assertions. In the 1860s, Lord Palmerston, the then British Foreign Secretary, reportedly exclaimed "my God, this is the end of diplomacy" upon receiving the first telegraph message. Nevertheless, diplomacy survived the telegraph, and it will no doubt survive the digital age.

It is undeniable that technological advancements have altered the practice of traditional diplomacy, yet it has not eradicated it completely. The emergence of the telegraph that frightened Lord Palmerston, enabled European foreign ministries to instantly issue directives across the globe, reducing the need and decision-making powers of diplomats (U.S. Department of State 1866). Numerous scholars have argued that diplomacy has survived and adapted to the telegraph and subsequent technological advancements such as the telephone, film, radio, video recordings among others (Turianski & Wekesa 2021).

[8] Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) is a subfield of International Relations (IR) which considers how foreign policy decisions are made (see Hudson & Vore 1995).

Scholars such as KC (2020) have argued that traditional diplomacy will neither be replaced by digital diplomacy, nor will digital diplomacy assume dominance, rather, it is proposed, a hybrid form of diplomacy will be practised in the future, combining aspects of traditional and digital age diplomacy to confront nascent and enduring issues more effectively (KC 2020). As articulated by the United States Department of State, referring to digital diplomacy as '21st century statecraft: "We are adapting our statecraft by reshaping our development and diplomatic agendas to meet old challenges in new ways" (US Department of State 2014).

The concept of 'ediplomacy' or 'Digital Diplomacy' formally entered the foreign policy lexicon and practice in the early 2000s following the establishment of the Taskforce on eDiplomacy in 2002 by the US government. Since then, several other foreign departments have followed suit. The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has opened an Office of Digital Diplomacy, whilst Sweden, France and Germany have openly appraised social media as a tool for foreign policy (Adesina 2017: 8).

Russia has also entered the digital diplomacy arena, the Russian Foreign Ministry coined the term 'innovative diplomacy', defining it as a "tool of Russian foreign policy to exert influence on public opinion through the use of ICT" (Chernenko 2013). The recognition of the constructive nexus between digital diplomacy and public opinion manipulation is not exclusive to the Russian government. This nexus, which is core to digital public diplomacy, will be discussed more in subsection 2.4.

However, before moving onto digital public diplomacy, the next subsection will discuss how digital technologies have allowed for the creation of networked communication, transforming diplomatic dynamics and laying the foundation for digital public diplomacy to work effectively.

2.3. Networked diplomacy

Digital diplomacy has emerged within, and in some respects contributed to, a new system of international diplomacy, transformed by the third industrial revolution. In the 2013 Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy, Jorge Heine argued that due to in the increased

interconnectedness imposed on the international architecture through globalisation, [9] diplomacy has undergone a shift from 'club'[10] diplomacy to 'networked' diplomacy.

Whereas the first and second industrial revolutions propelled 'hard' national power and triggered competition and arms races, the third industrial revolution broke down the hierarchical principle of the old industrial order, giving way to a horizontal, networked structure of society (Heine 2013).

This networked structure has been likened to an international 'web', unseparated by the boundaries of sovereign states, but rather connected in a web-like system.

The rise of digital technologies has been integral in this shift from a vertical to horizontal system. By shrinking the world and allowing instant communication from anyone to anywhere, digital technologies have created the possibility to bypass the traditional hierarchy, characterised by channels of authority (Slaughter 2017: 8).

Some scholars have characterised the consequences of social media for diplomacy as catalysing the realisation of networked diplomacy, through the connection of transnational audiences (Park & Lim 2014). The shift from club to network diplomacy has also resulted in an expansion of stakeholders engaging with and influencing foreign policy, adding to the complexity to diplomatic practice. Social media has become important for management of these complex stakeholder relationships (Park et al. 2019: 1468).

Although the involvement of public opinion in foreign policy decision making should not be overstated, national governments have arguably lost *exclusive* control over the achievement of their foreign policy goals (Ibid.) as a consequence of the expanding number of actors involved in foreign policy. Thus, a state's ability to attract diverse stakeholders and persuade them to react favourably to their policy goals and objectives is becoming ever more relevant (Nye, 2008).

Furthermore, the diversification of active actors in foreign policy has altered public diplomacy, propelling the art of public diplomacy towards a "relational, networked, and collaborative"

[9] Globalisation is defined by Heine as the sustained increase in trans-border flows of goods, services, capital, images and data that has taken place with the onset of the Third Industrial Revolution, globalisation is also distinguished from internationalisation.

[10] Club diplomacy refers to traditional diplomacy where diplomats meet only with government officials among themselves (see Heine 2013:60).

practice (Melissen 2005). The following subsection will discuss this shift in public diplomacy and the implications thereof in more detail.

2.4. Public diplomacy 2.0

Digital public diplomacy, creditably, remains one of the most studied aspects of digital diplomacy. For a practice such as diplomacy which was formerly seen as a statist or elitist practice, the integration of common citizens, through social media platforms for example, has been transformational. By lowering the threshold of participation (Seo 2013), Social media platforms have allowed ordinary citizens to engage in foreign policy and diplomacy.

As Shwarzenbach (2015) notes: "the biggest change [that] Twitter has brought to foreign policy has been greater access to unfiltered information and worldwide engagement regardless of nationality or political status…as a result, citizens and civil society are becoming increasingly able to hold governments accountability for policies and for statements made by politicians".

Before exploring the impact of digital technology on public diplomacy in more detail, it is useful to establish a basic understanding of public diplomacy. Public diplomacy is a reasonably recent concept in the diplomatic lexicon, Geoff Berridge in the 5th edition of Diplomacy: Theory and Practice (2015) likens public diplomacy to a 'rebranding' of propaganda, he describes it as "the modern name for white propaganda". [11] What makes public diplomacy distinct from conventional diplomacy is that while the former aims to exert direct influence on foreign governments, the latter is aimed at influencing foreign governments indirectly, by targeting the public, who have their own influence on their heads of state (Berridge 2015: 200).

The role of technology in increasing the prominence and effectiveness of public diplomacy is reasonably intuitive. For example, the content broadcasted through Western radio stations such as the Munich-based Radio Free Europe, have been thought of as critical to the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe. Social media has been deemed the main vector used to coordinate the mass protests which led to the overthrow of traditional authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and North Africa during the 'Arab Spring' to name a few examples.

Social media also allows for easy and instantaneous international communication. Thus, the ordinary people who are now enabled to participate in diplomacy and influence foreign policy

[11] Propaganda has traditionally been classified as either distinguished between white propaganda and black propaganda – the former is transparent and does not hide its origin whilst the latter is more discreet, concealing its source (see Berridge 2015).

to an extent, can be from across the globe. The consequence thereof can be seen in the work of Francis L.F. Lee (see Lee 2022a; Cheryl S. Y. Shea & Francis L. F. Lee 2022) who has written extensively on the 2019 Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement in Hong Kong. The movement had a global reach and was nicknamed the 'international front', with sympathisers being mobilised from around the world through social media platforms.

Digital public diplomacy has further become vital in crisis management by foreign affairs ministries. A March 2022 special issue of the Place Branding and Public Diplomacy[12] focussing on the nexus between Covid-19 and public diplomacy, contained papers which argued that digital diplomacy played a major role at the beginning of the pandemic to allow governments to evaluate the growth and severity of the pandemic and formulate a public diplomacy strategy according (see Bjola 2022) whilst also allowing governments to formulate and promulgate their own strategic narrative, as was the case for the Chinese embassy which, using French social media platforms, pushed back against the negative perceptions of China's role in the origin of the pandemic (see Huang 2022).

Social media has also made it easier to target certain cohorts of people with particular messaging which is integral to effective public diplomacy. For example, a study by Nanterre and Wang in 2021, demonstrated that China engaged in digital public diplomacy using two different platforms to target two separate publics. They used the social media platform 'Weibo' to target their domestic public and 'Twitter' to target foreign publics. The different platforms were used to push differentiated messaging to the target publics. Due to the internet censorship within China, most of the domestic population were unable to access the content on Twitter.

However, it has been argued elsewhere that ability to reach foreign publics and diaspora more easily through social media can also blur the lines and create a 'new' multi-actor network-relational public diplomacy, with different features to public diplomacy in the traditional sense (Huijgh 2012: 361).

Yet even with the lines blurred, the aim of public diplomacy primarily remains to produce strategic consequences and serve national interests by shaping the ideas held by cohorts of peoples (Sharp 2016: 268). Overall, the culmination of digital diplomacy and 'new' public diplomacy has significantly increased the relevance and importance of winning the hearts and

[12] See: Manor, I & Pamment, J. 2022. Place Branding and Public Diplomacy, London 18, (1), (Mar 2022)

minds of people whether domestic or foreign. In other words, it is increased the impotence of *soft* power.

Soft power was conceptualised by Joseph Nye in the 1990s as a distinct type of power to hard power which is traditional thought of in military and economic aspects. Nye defines soft power as "the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment" (Nye 2008: 94). In other words, soft power is the ability to get others to want to do what you want them to do. Therefore, in the current information age that has culminated from the digitalisation of communication, soft power has become more relevant.

Several analysts have argued that digital diplomacy can facilitate the achievement of offline diplomatic goals by reshaping the image of a country and increasing its soft power resources (see Natarajan 2014; Manor and Segev 2015).

This is evident in the study conducted by Ilan Manor and Geraldine Asiwome Adikub (2021) who examined how Ethiopian, Kenyan and Rwandan embassies employed social media when communicating with diasporas. Manor and Adiku found that the rhetoric and discursive framing used by these governments to describe their diaspora transitioned from 'traitors' who had abandoned their country to 'saviours' who benefit their home country's financial prosperity through remittance and investment. This shift in framing via social media allowed the African embassies to better leverage diasporic ties, encouraging more sustained commitments to their home country with the end goal of improving the nation's socio-economic status.

As argued by Hallams (2010: 541): "the art of soft power in the twenty-first century is finding the traditional tools of diplomacy and negotiation and the ability to harness power and potential inherent in the new and emerging technologies that globalisation has wrought". Thus, Hallams is acknowledging that digital technologies have the potential to aid and contribute to effective public diplomacy and soft power. Yet Hallams is further acknowledging that the use of digital technologies does not necessarily guarantee effective public diplomacy. Consequently, the evaluation of public diplomacy and by extension, digital diplomacy becomes vital in understanding this evolving field.

There is significant evidence that researchers and governments are concerned and curious about the impact of public diplomacy and in formulating relevant methods to track the effectiveness of public diplomacy strategies. For example, the UK parliament has commissioned several reviews to identify the challenges and opportunities of British public diplomacy (see 2002

Wilton Review, the 2004 Philis Review, the 2005 Lord Carter Coles review and the 2007 Wilton Park Conference).

This area of interest is wherein this research report aims to find its usefulness. As the use of digital diplomacy grows in diplomatic practice, evaluating the impact, effectiveness and (unintended) consequences thereof becomes increasingly important.

Among other factors which will be unpacked below, the ability to wield and expand a nation's soft power is essential for de facto states in particular. This is because these 'states' have significant constraints on their hard power influence. Therefore, it is important to understand and evaluate the efficacy of social media and digital diplomacy in the context of de facto states.

2.5. Digital Diplomacy as an asset for an isolated state

The above subsections of this chapter have discussed the noticeable trends in the international diplomatic arena: namely a shift from club to networked diplomacy and the increased prominence of public diplomacy 2.0 and soft power. These trends have, to a certain extent, been caused by the introduction of digital technologies into diplomatic practice. However, a key element missing in the discussion is the prominent advantages that digital diplomacy has allowed and what this *could* mean for isolated nations, such as Somaliland as the case study focus of this research report.

The opportunities provided by the online diplomatic arena to de facto, isolated, states could be significant by allowing them to bypass the restrictions on their traditional diplomacy pursuant to their lack of international recognised status. This subsection will hypothesise some of the opportunities that digital diplomacy could provide for de facto states. Considering the lack of academic research on this topic, these hypotheses are based on logical assumptions which will be evaluated throughout the research report.

The seemingly simple act of opening up a diplomatic office in de facto states or even a brief diplomatic visit to a neighbour de facto state can return political backlash from the 'parent' countries. For example, the visit by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan in August 2022 caused significant geopolitical turbulence considering Beijing's position that any official contact between Taiwan and a foreign government constitutes a violation of its sovereignty. Shortly after Pelosi's visit, Beijing announced an unprecedented run of live-fire military drills encircling Taiwan's main island (Davidson 2022). Another example was the severing of diplomatic relations with Kenya by Somalia in 2020 following an official visit to Kenya by

Somaliland President Muse Bihi where it was announced that Kenya would open a consulate office in Somaliland's capital (Dahir 2020).

Considering that by 2016, 90% of UN member states had established a social media presence (Manor & Pamment 2019: 95), digital diplomacy could provide de facto states an accessible avenue to project its foreign policy objectives to foreign powers and publics whilst avoiding political pushback associated with conventional diplomatic relations. Research conducted by Manor and Holmes (2018) demonstrated that a Facebook 'embassy' created by the Palestinian authorities allowed the diplomats to overcome limitations of traditional diplomacy and allowed Palestine to formulate 'virtual ties' with foreign publics which they would otherwise be unable to create.

There may even be further opportunities provided by digital diplomacy that are beyond the capabilities of traditional diplomacy. For example, some analysts have argued that online and offline diplomacy are not always directly related, with digital diplomacy providing key and distinct advantages rather than simply catalysing opportunities provided by offline diplomacy.

A research report published in 2019 by Ilan Manor and James Pamment demonstrated that there is a marked difference between the concepts of online and offline prestige, concluding that digital diplomacy may be used to "overcome offline prestige deficits, perform a form of prestige mobility and boost a country's standing" (Manor & Pamment 2019: 94).

Therefore, it is plausible that the foreign policy objectives and strategies online of de facto states may differ to those offline.

2.6. A note on the risks of digital diplomacy

Although this chapter has presented a somewhat optimistic overview of the advantages and opportunities provided by digital diplomacy, it is important to note that digital diplomacy does have its risks. Adensina (2017) highlights three key risks of digital diplomacy including hacking, information leaks and the anonymity of internet users (Adesina 2017: 10).

Fake news has also become a growing concern on social media, rising to prominence since the Brexit referendum and Trump's 2016 campaign (Bennett and Livingston 2018).

A further concern emanates from the fact that Big Tech corporations are largely in control of the algorithms and policies that govern and manage social media platforms. As commercial

corporations, tech firms have been known to align these algorithms with profit creation without sufficient consideration of the ethical implications thereof.

A research report published by Ranking Digital Rights for example found the following:

> "All three tech giants [Twitter, Facebook and Google] have built their business models on targeted advertising and algorithmic systems that can determine the reach of a message by targeting users who are most likely to share it…these dynamics can lead to the proliferation of disinformation at a massive scale, with dire consequences for democracy or public health." (Ranking Digital Rights 2020)

These algorithms have been used by political actors to manipulate public opinion. This can lead to the phenomenon of computational propaganda as an emerging form of political manipulation or 'black propaganda' using key features of the internet and social media platforms such as echo chambers and political bots[13] which can distort public sentiment and create false narratives.

2.7. Concluding remarks

The global Covid-19 pandemic has catalysed the move of diplomacy towards online activities. With the normalisation of in-person conferences and meetings, the question has emerged if digital diplomacy will remain relevant.

Bjola and Manor (2022) argue that digital diplomacy will remain relevant as part of a hybrid mix of online and offline diplomacy. With this assumption in mind, this chapter has discussed some of the key impacts that digital technologies have had on diplomacy and the key advantages and risks it could provide.

Considering one of the key research questions which this research report sets out to answer namely the effectiveness and key advantages of digital diplomacy as a tool for de facto states, specifically Somaliland, to achieve their foreign policy objectives, the chapter to follow will provide the necessary contextualisation on Somaliland's political status, foreign policy objectives, and Somaliland's traditional foreign policy methods.

[13] An **echo chamber** is an environment where a person only encounters information or opinions that reflect and reinforce their own, online echo chambers can be created through targeted algorithms which push content of a similar nature to that which the user had previously engaged (See Cinelli et al 2021). **Political bots** are fake social media accounts which are coded to learn from and mimic real people, they have been used to help propagate fake news and inflate the apparent popularity of fake news on social media. In 2017, there were approximately 23 million bots on Twitter (around 8.5% of all accounts) (see De Lima Salge & Berente 2017)

CHAPTER 3: SOMALILAND'S FOREIGN POLICY

3.1. Introduction

In order to lay the foundation for this report's case study on Somaliland, this chapter will provide a brief overview of Somaliland's foreign policy. One of the objectives of this research report is to provide a comprehensive, applied evaluation of Somaliland's digital diplomacy. To avoid evaluation for its own sake, it is necessary to unpack Somaliland's foreign policy goals and objectives in order to situate the analysis within Somaliland's strategic context. This chapter will therefore address the first prong of Spry and Lockyer's triangulation method: policy analysis.

The chapter will begin by providing an overview of Somaliland's status as a de facto state and succession in international law and norms. Thereafter, Somaliland's Comprehensive Foreign Policy document will be analysed, with key goals identified, against which the evaluation will be conducted. The final subsection of this chapter provides an analysis of Somaliland's traditional diplomacy methods and strategy. This will be conducted longitudinally through the various presidential administrations since declaring independence in 1991. This chapter aims to establish a baseline against which Somaliland's use of digital diplomacy will be compared.

3.2. International Legal Sovereignty: why does it matter and how does a state get it?

One of the simplest questions that arise when discussing Somaliland's 31 year long fight for recognition and legal sovereignty status is why does the fight continue? What are the distinct benefits of recognition? The primary argument within the literature alludes to the exclusion from core international organisations and structures that remain exclusive to sovereign, recognised states.

Somaliland's status as an unrecognised state has left its economy isolated. Its situation has been likened to that of a state facing the toughest economic sanctions. Its borders and passports are largely not recognized,[14] its currency is untransferable, and the Somaliland banking system does not have a SWIFT code which is required for money to be transferred into foreign currencies digitally.

[14] Although Somaliland's passports are not formally recognised by the international community, there are some states that do accept them, including South Africa, Kenya, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Uganda, UK, Sweden, Great Britain, France, Belgium, and the USA (see Beyene 2019)

Furthermore, Somaliland is formally categorised as part of Somalia in international organisations which has its own consequences. One example which demonstrates this point was in 1988 when the International Monetary Fund (IMF) declared Somalia ineligible for loans, Somaliland was included in this exclusion and therefore barred from receiving loans from international financial institutions for 30 years (Shala 2020). Due to its economic isolation, Somaliland has largely depended on the private sector for growth. Much of its income is received in the form of remittances, in 2018, remittance received in Somaliland totalled $1.4 billion accounting for half of the nation's GDP (Bradbury et al 2021).

Within international law, there is little guidance on the right to or procedure for secession. The Montevideo Convention of 1933 is one of the only documents that speaks to what constitutes a state. The convention simply defines that the state as a person of international law should possess the following qualifications:[15]

a. a permanent population.

b. a defined territory.

c. government; and

d. capacity to enter into relations with the other state.

Yet the Montevideo Convention omits the procedure of how qualifying states can gain recognition or how to be legally born from other states and the question remains, if a de facto state qualifies as a state under the Montevideo requirements but remains within a larger state, does it have a right to succeed?

If we consider the right to secession as a form of self-determination, then then states may interpretively have a right to secession as a basic principle of international law. The United Nations Charter provides for the legal right of a group of people to determine their own purpose and control their political economic or socio-cultural future. [16]This is further reiterated in the common Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) which reads: "all

[15] Montevideo Convention 1933, Article 1

[16] United Nations Charter, Article 1 (2).

peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development". [17]

Looking more regionally, the right to self-determination is acknowledged in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Right (African Charter) which states "all peoples shall have the right to existence, they shall have the unquestionable and inalienable right to self-determination.". [18] Article 20 (2) of the African charter provides that "colonised or oppressed peoples shall have the right to free themselves from the bonds of domination by resorting to any means recognised by the international community". [19]

The acknowledgment of the right to self-determination that is evident in these charters, the implementation of this right has been less clear, especially on the African continent.

In a somewhat contradictory stance to the recognition of the right to self-determination, the African Union Charter denounces secession and maintains respect for colonial borders under the principle of 'uti possidetis' (Latin for as you possess). Therefore, since the end of colonialism, Africa has experienced few successful secessionist cases. The exceptions to this include Eritrea which seceded from Ethiopia in 1991 and South Sudan which seceded from Sudan in 2011.

Although these cases are the only successful secessionist movements in Africa since the end of colonisation, there are growing calls for secession, primarily rising from the failure of the central government to give political, economic and cultural recognition to marginalised groups (Ekeke & Lubisi 2019: 252). [20]

Yet the African Union's dissuasion from entertaining secessionist bids on the continent has left secessionist movements without many platforms to make their case for secession, regardless of their legal argument for independence.

3.3. Somaliland's background and case for independence

In order to understand Somaliland's case for independence, it is important to understand its history. The Horn of Africa was colonised by the French, British and Italians from the end of

[17] ICCPR and ICESCR, Common Article 1.

[18] African Charter, Article 20 (1)

[19] African Charter, Article 20 (2)

[20] Examples (not including Somaliland) include Biafra movements in Southeast Nigeria. Ambazonia movement in Cameroon, Azawad movement in Mali to name a few.

the 19th century. As illustrated in the map below, the region that is formally recognised as modern-day ‘Somalia’ was divided by European occupation. ‘Somaliland’, illustrated in the map below, was known as ‘British Somaliland’ and Somalia was known as ‘Italian Somaliland’ eponymous of their respective colonial powers.

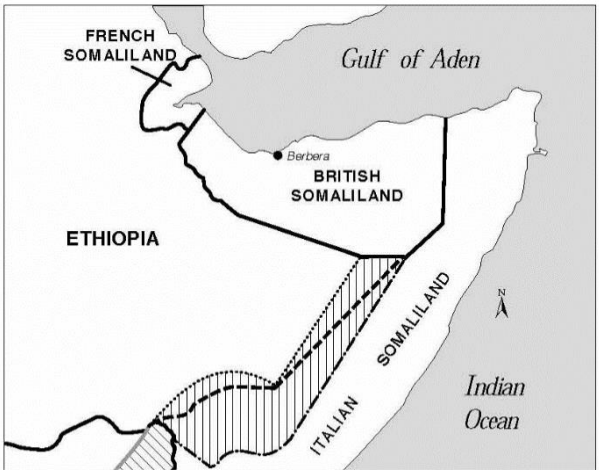


Figure 4: Map of Colonisation of Somalia. Source: Chucky Sosinki, 2014, "colonization of Somalia". https://sites.psu.edu/afr110/2014/10/08/colonization-of-somalia/.

The British governance approach in the north significantly differed from the French and Italian approaches in the region. Somaliland clans were allowed to maintain their nomadic lifestyle and continued to use their laws and decision-making mechanisms (Ahmed et al. 1999). The Italian Somaliland however, imposed stricter policies that undermined the Somali structures, diminished the elder's power and appropriated their lands (Samatar 1989). Therefore, it has been argued that the majority of the people of Somaliland, formerly under British colonisation, have developed a national identity distinct from the rest of Somalis (Huliaras 2002).

In 1960, British Somaliland declared its independence, followed shortly by Italian Somaliland. Somaliland was formally recognised by 35 countries including all five permanent members of the Security Council. Formerly British and Italian Somaliland subsequently united to form the Somali Republic days after their formal independence. Almost immediately friction between the north and south began to arise.

In 1969, Somalia's national army commander, Mohamed Siad Barre, successfully implemented a coup, beginning his military rule that lasted for 20 years. Not only did the Siad Barre regime economically marginalised the north, but the regime also exploited, and armed, the masses of

Somali refugees flooding into northern Somalia following the end of the Ogaden war. [21] These armed militias terrorised the northern population, resulting in the formation of the Somali National Movement (SNM) by members of the Isaaq tribe, as a key anti-government group, opposing Siad Barre's regime.

Thus began the Somaliland War of Independence. During the war, the Siad Barre regime carried out a massacre of an estimated 200 000 members of the Isaaq tribe known as the Hargeisa Holocaust (Kennard & Einashe 2018).

In 1991, Siad Barre's regime collapsed, and Somaliland declared its independence. In 2001, Somaliland held a referendum on a draft constitution to affirm its sovereignty, this referendum received a 97.1% vote in favour. [22]

Yet Somaliland remains unrecognised 31 years after declaring independence.

Somaliland's qualification as a state has been noted repeatedly by international experts. For example, the Office of the Chief State Law Adviser (International Law) in South Africa prepared a legal brief entitled "Somaliland's Claim to Sovereign Status" (Lujiza 2003). The brief argued that "it is undeniable that Somaliland does indeed qualify for statehood" (Lujiza 2003: 6) under Article 1 of the Montevideo Convention 1933.

Furthermore, there are several legal arguments that justify Somaliland's case for self-determination. The first is that the Somaliland inhabitants are 'people' and therefore qualify for the right of self-determination under the international law of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Somalilanders can be considered 'people' in the subjective definition, considering that they have their own identity and culture distinct from the rest of the inhabitants in that area. As alluded to in the preceding subsections, Somalilanders share a different colonial history to their Somali counterparts that were former Italian or French protectorates. Furthermore, it has been argued that the Somalilanders garnered a distinct self-identity during their persecution by the Siad Barre regime (Huliaras 2002: 159).

The second legal argument is based on decolonisation, as inscribed in the OAU charter that member states must "respect the frontiers [of all member states] existing on their achievement of national independence". Based on this logic, Somaliland's independence is justified because

[21] The Ogaden War, or the Ethio-Somali War, was a military conflict fought between Somalia and Ethiopia from July 1977 to March 1978 over the Ethiopian region of Ogaden.

[22] See: African Elections Database, http://africanelections.tripod.com/somaliland.html

its borders were created separate to Somalia upon gaining independence from its British coloniser. Furthermore, although the people of Somaliland consented to the union with South Somalia to form the Somali Republic, during the procedure of unification, the people of the north were not consulted. Pursuant to the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties which dictates that a treaty requires consent of the other state, the unification could be deemed invalid. [23]

The third legal ground that justifies Somaliland's independence is on the grave human rights violations during the Barre regime. This justification falls within the nexus of the theory of suffering and remedial theory. The former argues that "if a people keep up guerrilla warfare for long enough, they will be rewarded with statehood" (White & Robin 1981: 70) the latter argued that in cases where" serious and persistent violations of human rights exist... and no remedy except self-determination is feasible" (Freeman 1999), the right to self-determination is valid. This theory was applied to the case of South Sudan's secession.

Intuitively, gaining recognition and promoting Somaliland's case for independence remains a core aspect of Somaliland's foreign policy which will be discussed in more details below.

3.4. Somaliland's Foreign Policy

In 2020, the Somaliland government published an official comprehensive foreign policy document. Securing international recognition was declared as a guiding principle for Somaliland's foreign policy. Another key goal espoused in the document is "promoting foreign direct investment and development assistance". Thirdly, the document places significant emphasis on the role of the diaspora, in engaging and building stronger ties with their new 'home' countries. In this regard, the document commits the ministry of foreign affairs and cooperation to adapting the document and consulting with various stakeholders through public diplomacy.

The document also makes specific reference to the use of 'social media' as a tool to promote this engagement. The document further mentions creating international awareness of Somaliland's tragic history as part of the Somali republic as a foreign policy objective.

Furthermore, the document mentions Somaliland's foreign policy goal of promoting peace and security, in the region, at home and internationally. The document commits to "safeguarding

[23] Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, 1969, Article 24.2.

Somaliland's independence in a manner that will do no harm to the Somaliland people or its neighbours." Thus, it is committed to the peaceful pursuit of independence, avoiding the incitement of violence.

In terms of building regional relations, the document notes that building good relationships with direct neighbours, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Somalia is paramount. Additionally, the document emphasises the importance of building good relations with other regional actors of interest including Kenya, Uganda, Sudan, South Sudan. The document also singles out Canada as a country with a large diaspora yet insignificant presence in the country in terms of development programs. Therefore, the document notes greater engagement with the Canadian government and aid agencies constitute one of the challenges of Somaliland's foreign policy.

3.5. Somaliland traditional diplomacy

"Whether one embraces, rejects, or is ambivalent about Somaliland's bid for recognition, Somaliland's progress in democratisation, stability and economic recovery constitutes one of the few pieces of genuinely good news in the troubled Horn of Africa."- (Menkhaus 2005: 84)

This quote demonstrates the essence of how Somaliland has promoted itself in the region to other horn of Africa nations. The successive Somaliland governments have been pragmatic and patient in their pursuit of recognition.

Although the Ethiopian government has repeatedly admitted that it will not be brave enough to be the first state to recognise Somaliland's independence (Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi 2006). Since 2000, Ethiopia and Somaliland have had a working bilateral economic relationship and opened liaison offices in each other's capitals to manage growing bilateral ties in 2006. Somaliland conducted regular diplomatic state visits to Addis Ababa.

In 2006, Somaliland's former president Dahir Riyale Kahin conducted an East African diplomatic tour to Kenya, Zambia, Tanzania, Rwanda and Uganda which "opened up new avenues for Somaliland's case to be heard" (Jhazbhay 2009 p.160).

In order to understand how digital diplomacy has transformed Somaliland's foreign policy, it is useful to survey the methods, tools and strategies of Somaliland's foreign policy before and during the transition to the digital age.

Somaliland's first President in the modern era, President Abdirahman, focused his foreign policy on translating their decision of restoring Somaliland's independence into a palatable

narrative (Duale & Ahmed 2018). In order to reach this objective, President Abdirahman sent a delegation, led by his foreign minister, Yusuf Sheikh Ali Madar, to Europe and North America to deliver Somaliland's message to the international community thus the main method of foreign policy used during President Abdirahman's administration was ambassadorial diplomacy.

Somaliland's second presidency, President Mohamed Haji Ibrahim Egal, elected in 1993, shifted Somaliland's foreign policy inwards, under the philosophy that "the best foreign policy is a good internal policy". Thus, under the Egal administration, Somaliland focused on nation-building programmes, which he contended were fundamental for Somaliland's quest for recognition. Similarly, to Abdirahman, Egal focused his diplomacy at the highest level, Egal sent idiosyncratic letters and faxes, using his own signature, to foreign diplomats, UN officials and heads of states, attempting to convince key decision makers of the efficacy of his country's campaign for international recognition (Bryden 2003: 328). During these exchanges, Egal aimed to convince leaders (mainly outside of the African Continent) that Somaliland had the historical and legal right to recognition and independence. For example, a lengthy government dossier was circulated to delegations at the July 1996 summit of the OAU in Cameroon, the document detailed Somaliland's history and right to self-determination. Although Egal did conduct public diplomacy, this was limited to press interviews in which he threatened pro-unity forces or aimed at winning credibility with the Somaliland public by publicising the 'discovery' of mass graves of victims from the Barre regime that were uncovered in floods in 1997 (Bryden 2003).

Chief among the foreign policy successes of the Egal administration was the relations with Ethiopia's Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, convincing him to establish formal diplomatic representative offices in Somaliland. By the end of the year 2000, several agreements were signed between Somaliland and Ethiopia following President Egal's three-day official visit to Addis Ababa. President Egal approached several other nations with the offer of closer relations including Djibouti, Egypt and other Gulf States, yet his efforts were met with hostility and reluctance.

Succeeding Egal's administration was President Rayale, who remained in power from 2002-2010. Similarly, to his predecessor, Rayale's primary foreign policy success was his strengthening of relations with Ethiopia, particularly on security and anti-terrorism cooperation. However, unlike Egal, Rayale turned to the African continent to seek friendships

and support for Somaliland's independence. In 2005, he wrote a direct application for admission into the AU. Rayale also strengthened ties with the British government, making an official visit to London and delivering an impassioned speech to British lawmakers.

President Ahmed Silanyo, 2010-2017, marked a shift in Somaliland Foreign Policy towards Somalia, entering into talks directly with Mogadishu on several occasions. Previous administrations had consistently denounced the possibility of talks with Somalia governments. Silanyo's acceptance of the UK government's invitation to participate (through his Foreign Minister) in the Wilton Park Conference on Somalia's state-building sparked a public criticism of the Silanyo regime. Although Silanyo's foreign policy tenure has primarily garnered criticism, one achievement was Somaliland's increased engagement with the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Through extensive diplomacy, Somaliland and the Dubai Ports World Company in 2016 agreed on a large investment in the expansion of the Berbera Port.

Muse Bihi's election win in November 2017 has renewed hopes for a new era of Somaliland's foreign policy. His predecessors have focused on high level diplomacy, often creating direct relations with top officials in neighbouring countries and other countries of interest. Considering that Bihi's term has largely covered the emergence of Somaliland's use of digital technologies for foreign policy activities, the foreign policy strategy throughout Bihi's regime will be discussed in more detail throughout the rest of the Research Report.

3.6. Concluding remarks

Somaliland's foreign policy has remained centred on its bid for international recognition and sovereignty. However, there have been clear shifts and nuances in each presidential administration since 1991.

Somaliland's foreign policy has several dimensions in parallel and in addition to its quest for recognition including building regional stability, economic development and trade and cultural cooperation with external actors.

The comprehensive foreign policy document outlines clear objectives, goals and restrictions to Somaliland's foreign policy strategy. The discussion in this chapter will be used as a measuring stick throughout the rest of the research report, against which the successful use of digital diplomacy will be measured.

Another key aspect of Somaliland's foreign policy strategy which was highlighted in this chapter's discussion is the changes in modes and methods of conducting diplomacy over the 31 years of de facto independence. With the rapid digitalisation of communication and diplomacy at large, it is unsurprising that Somaliland has begun to embrace the opportunities that digital diplomacy can provide. The following chapter will consider the 'big picture' of Somaliland's use of digital diplomacy using big data sets to highlight trends and patterns.

CHAPTER 4 SOMALILAND'S DIGITAL DIPLOMACY PRESENCE: THE BIG PICTURE

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter used document analysis to establish a measuring scale, i.e., the goals and objectives of Somaliland's foreign policy. Chapters four and five will apply this measuring scale to the data collected and collated. As the second 'prong' of analysis in Spry and Lockyer's (2022) triangulation method of applied evaluation, this chapter will use large data sets and 'distant reading' to understand and highlight the basic trends and patterns within the data collected.

The method of 'distant reading' (Moretti 2013) or 'macroanalysis' (Jockers 2013) involves the study of a large corpus of content in order to illuminate general patterns, shapes and themes. It also provides the opportunity to identify outliers in the data which can feed into the small stories analysis in the final prong of the triangulation analysis, to be discussed in chapter five of this report.

To conduct this distance reading, this chapter will focus on the three key aspects of public diplomatic engagement as defined by Bjola and Jiang in their seminal chapter "Social Media and Public Diplomacy: A comparative analysis of the digital diplomatic strategies of the EU, Us and Japan in China" of the Routledge book "Digital Diplomacy" (2015). These three include (1) digital agenda-setting, (2) digital presence expansion and (3) digital conversation-generating.

4.2. Agenda-setting

Agenda-setting has been defined by McCombs and Reynolds as the "ability [of new technology] to influence the salience of topics on public agenda" (McCombs & Reynolds 2002:1). In other words, through agenda setting, certain topics are perceived as more important than others by the public. Therefore, the aim of this section is to analyse what agenda the respective Somaliland Twitter accounts promoted. Of key importance include the topics and themes which appeared prominently within the content published by the accounts.

In order to visualise the prominence of each topic, the author employed a method of manual coding of the content of each tweet. The author began by randomly coding a sample of 10 tweets from each account to formulate a rough list of categories which may be represented in the full data set. Through a process of iteration, this list of categories grew until the author was

satisfied that the categories had reached a point of saturation. The final categories are as follows: (1) Relations with host country, (2) Nation Branding, (3) Relations with external states, (4) Independence, sovereignty, and recognition, (5) General information, (6) Holiday celebration, (7) Fundraising, (8) Diaspora engagement, (9) Commenting on geopolitics, and (10) Fundraising.

Thereafter, I manually analysed and coded[24] all original tweets from each of the six accounts into the categories established in the previous step. The results this initial coding exercise will be analysed by the author below. The author has elected to analyse the @SomalilandMFA account separately from the foreign mission accounts in order to allow for easy comparison.

4.2.1. Somaliland MFA agenda setting

For this subsection, the author analysed and coded 993 original tweets published by the @somalilandMFA accounts. The diagram below illustrates the distribution and prominence of

[24] In the cases where a Tweet could have reasonably fallen into two or more categories, the author applied discretion by considering the interpreted purpose or aim of the Tweet. The author acknowledges that a different researcher may have interpreted the categorisation differently, however considering that the same approach was used across all of the accounts and data sets, the data is comparable to itself and therefore fit for the intended purpose of this research report.

the various themes which were mentioned by this account.

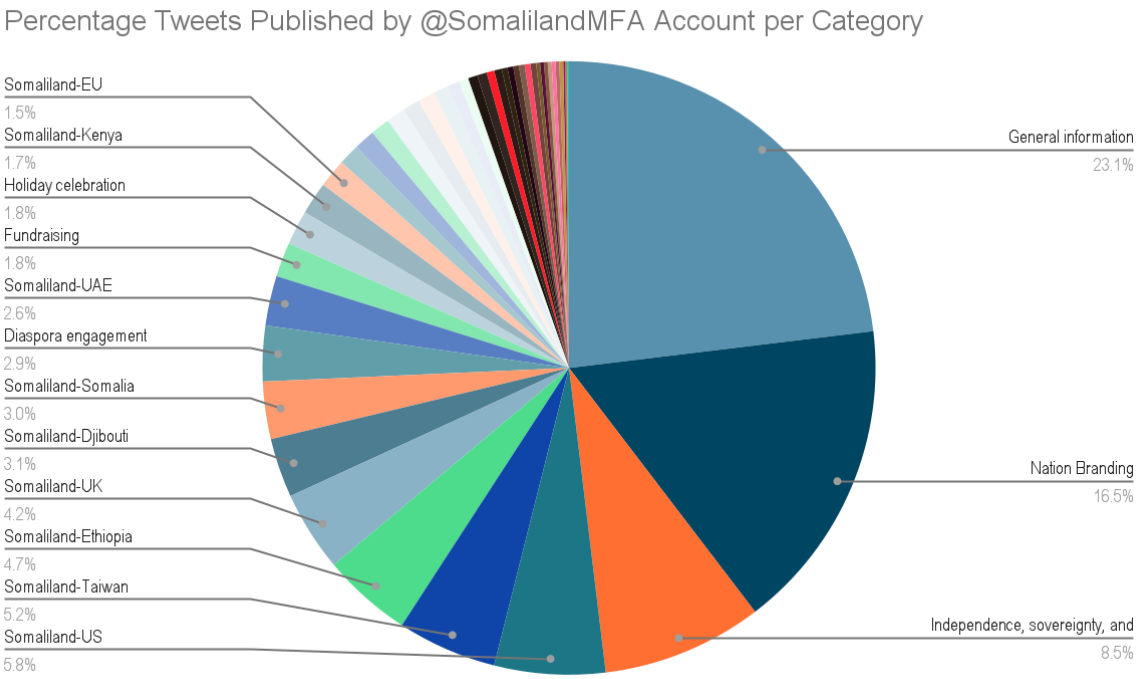


Figure 5: Pie Chart showing the percentage Tweets published by @SomalilandMFA account per category. Source: Author's Creation

Following 'general information', the two top categories and therefore the two most prominent messages pushed by this account, were on the 'Nation Branding' (16.5%) and the 'promotion of Independence, sovereignty and recognition' (8.5%). The promotion of these two messages is well aligned with the foreign policy strategy which emphasises their importance.

Following these categories in order of prominence, the @SomalilandMFA account pushed the promotion of relations with the US, Taiwan, Ethiopia, and the UK in similar proportions (between 4-6% respectfully), followed by the promotion of relations with Djibouti and Somalia in slightly smaller proportions (~3%). The promotion of good relations with Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Somalia is aligned with the foreign policy goal of "building good relationships with direct neighbours", the strategy document elaborates that this is "paramount".

Notably, the emphasis on building relations with other regional actors including Kenya, Uganda, Sudan, South Sudan and international actors such as Canada, which is also specified in the foreign policy document as priorities, are almost absent in the promoted agenda set by the @SomalilandMFA account. The promotion of relations with Kenya constituted less than 3% whereas the promotion of relations with Uganda, Canada and South Sudan constituted less than 1% and relations with Sudan were completely absent from the content published by this

account. Other categories which feature in noticeably lower proportions are 'diaspora engagement' (2.9%) and 'fundraising' (1.8%). These two categories fall within Somaliland's foreign policy priorities of 'public diplomacy' and diaspora fundraising promotion.

The above data indicates that the SomalilandMFA account prioritises discussions on the theme of its nation branding and providing information regarding relations with other nations that are already established. The use of this account to promote the formation of new relations and engaging with diaspora and foreign publics is lacking, despite being noted as a priority in Somaliland's Foreign Policy Strategy document. Therefore, although some of the content published by this foreign ministry account is aligned with the overall strategy, there are areas which may require increased attention.

4.2.2. Somaliland Foreign Missions Twitter accounts

The above subsection focused exclusively on the tweets published by the official Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Somaliland Twitter account, this subsection will compare and contrast the various agenda setting trends of each of the other official twitter accounts of the Somaliland foreign missions. The author manually analysed and coded a total of 1099 original tweets from all of the five foreign mission accounts. The collated data is presented in the table below.

Account	Relations with the Host Country	Nation Branding	Relations with External States	Independence, Sovereignty and Recognition	Holiday Celebration	General Information	Fundraising	Commenting on Geopolitics	Diaspora Engagement
@SomalilandinTW	50%	21.9%	18.8%	3.1%	1%	3.1%	0%	0%	0%
@SomalilandinKE	23.3%	35.1%	25.5%	10.6%	2%	2.1%	2.1%	0%	0%
@SomalilandinUK	9.9%	18.1%	2.3%	21.6%	1.3%	20.6%	10.3%	0.4%	15.4%
@SomalilandinET	13.3%	13.3%	11.1%	8.8%	9.5%	23.6%	2.9%	10.2%	7.3%
@SomalilandUSA	15.6%	23.4%	15%	10.1%	8.4%	16.8%	0%	7.2%	3.6%

Figure 6: Chart comparing the percentage Tweets published by each foreign mission account per category. Source: Author's Creation

The figures highlighted in the above table constitute the most prominent category for each account. Considering the above comparison table, several observations were drawn by the author.

The first observation is that there is no clear strategy employed across all of the foreign mission accounts on agenda setting. Nation branding is the only category which features prominently across two accounts (@SomalilandinKE and @SomalilandUSA). Although it is notable that

all of the present categories are aligned with the Somaliland foreign policy strategy document. This observation concurs with the observation in subsection 4.2.1 above which noted that there were areas that were prioritised in the strategy document which were neglected by the @SomalilandMFA account.

Secondly, it is notable that significant emphasis is placed on the relationship between Somaliland and Taiwan, [25] particularly promoted by the @SomalilandinTW account. Not only does it represent a significant majority of the discussions promoted by the account itself (50%), but it is also the most prominently promoted category across all of the accounts. This may indicate that this relationship is of primary importance to the Somaliland government. Although as a de facto state itself, Taiwan is unable to provide Somaliland with international recognition in international law, it is the only partner which has explicitly recognised Somaliland as a state. It is also the only partner which has established a corresponding twitter account (Taiwan in Somaliland; @Taiwan_SLD).

The establishment of formal relations between Taiwan and Somaliland were described by Somaliland's Foreign Minister Essa Kayd as "special and historical relationship" whereas Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen hailed the relationship as "one of her administration's chief diplomatic breakthroughs" (The Diplomat 2022). This could indicate that the relationship between Somaliland and Taiwan has symbolic significance, representing peaceful cooperation between "two champions of democracies in Africa and Asia (DW 2022).

Furthermore, the comparably low percentage of tweets which promoted Somaliland's independence and recognition by this account (3.1%) may also indicate that the Somaliland officials value the relationship with Taiwan in and of itself and do not see it as a gateway to gain recognition. This can be seen as a pragmatic decision considering that Taiwan itself cannot provide Somaliland with legal recognition.

A third observation is the correlation between the prominence of content that promotes fundraising and diaspora engagement. The two accounts (@SomalilandinUK and @SomalilandinET) which promoted diaspora engagement the most (accounting for 14.4% and 7.3% respectively) also promoted fundraising the most (10.3% and 2.9%). These two categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as an isolated economy, remittance

[25] Although there has been no formal explanation given for this prioritisation by the Somaliland government, as the only partner that has explicitly recognised Somaliland in public, it is possible that this relationship is emphasised as a milestone in Somaliland's pursuit of international recognition.

contributes a significant proportion of Somaliland's economy, accounting for 37% of Somaliland's GDP in 2020 ($1.3 billion) (Schipani 2021). The possible correlation between these two aspects of Somaliland's foreign policy objectives may indicate that Somaliland is using digital diplomacy as a tool to harness diaspora engagement to fundraise. This hypothesis will be further explored in the following chapter (Chapter 5) when smaller case studies are examined.

4.3. Digital Presence-Expansion

Although having a digital presence does not directly lead to the creation of a favourable opinion or the achievement of a desired outcome, as Bjola and Jiang caution, "without enough exposure, the public diplomatic strategy will ultimately fail." (Bjola & Jiang 2015: 75). Thus, although not a sufficient condition, creating a digital presence is a necessary condition for any successful digital diplomacy campaign.

President Muse Bihi noted during an address at the Heritage Foundation in the US in March 2022, that despite the horrific genocide of the Somaliland people during the Siad Barre regime, similar to the atrocities being committed against the Ukrainian people in 2022 by the Russian invasion, yet Somaliland suffered in the dark, without social media and 24/7 news to show the

world. Thus, there is evidence that the current Somaliland President appreciated the value of social media to tell Somaliland's story.

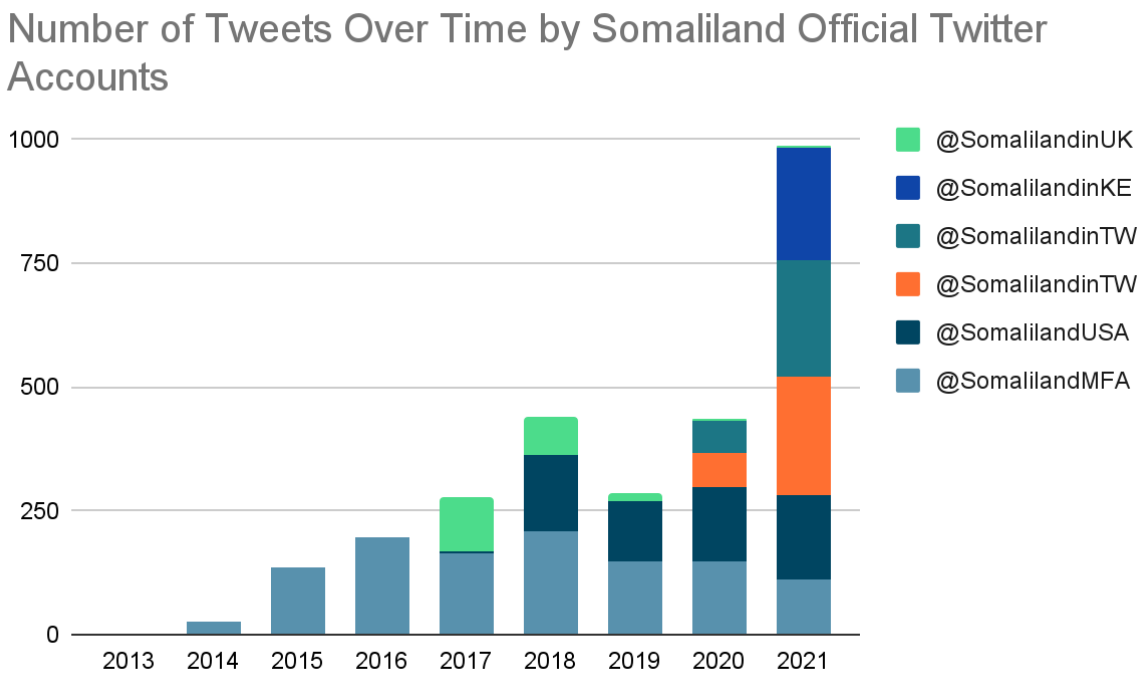


Figure 7: Graph showing the number of Tweets over time by Somaliland official Twitter accounts. Source: Author's Creation

As demonstrated in the above graph, which depicts the number of tweets by Somaliland official accounts over time (from 2013-2021), it is evident that the Somaliland government has increasingly used social media in the past 5-8 years as a mechanism to engage with foreign governments and publics and disseminate their foreign policy. The graph demonstrates that not only has the number of Twitter accounts dedicated to foreign policy and foreign missions overseas grown significantly in the past few years, the level of activity of these accounts has also increased over recent years.

The previous subsection analysed the content and agenda setting of the accounts. This subsection will consider the impact and effectiveness thereof. As Emily Metzgar (2012) argued in her seminal work entitled 'Is It the Medium or the Message?', Metzgar said "equipping public diplomats with social media technology does not ensure the successful delivery of a message, nor does it guarantee the message's favourable response upon receipt" (Metzgar 2012: 12). Thus, it is of significant importance to follow the analysis of the content of the Somaliland accounts and the perceived agenda setting strategy with an analysis into the efficacy or resonance of the message. In other words, it is important to ask if the content of the tweets from the various accounts have had an impact on the engagement by its target audience?

In order to answer this question, this subsection considers two key factors to gauge resonance and engagement of the public with the tweets from the various accounts, these aspects are recognition and amplification. The former measures the level of 'positive reaction' by the audience to the tweet by way of 'likes' that the tweet received. The latter measures to what extent the tweet was 'forwarded' to a broader audience by way of the number of retweets and replies the tweets received. This method to gauge resonance originates from a study done by Collins DeWitt and Lefebvre in 2018 entitled 'hashtag diplomacy: Twitter as a tool for engaging in public diplomacy and promoting US foreign policy'. This study was one of the first to formulate a method for measuring the efficacy of the use of Twitter in Digital Diplomacy strategy.

The graph below compares the average public metrics received by each of the respective Twitter accounts.

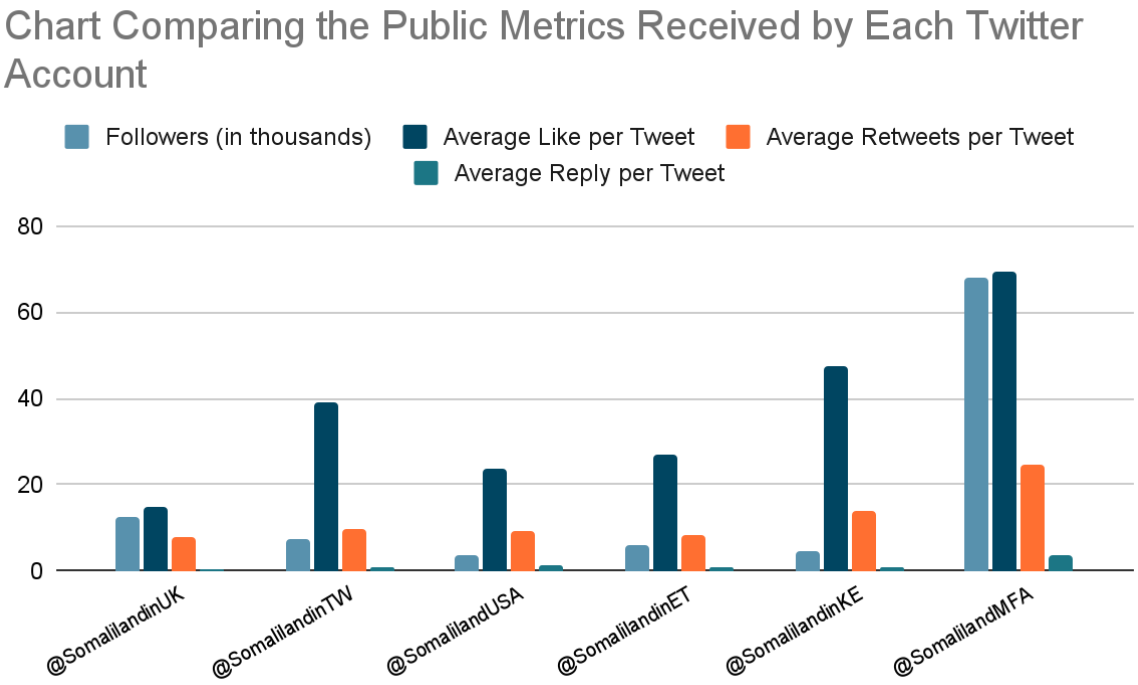


Figure 8: Chart comparing the average public metrics received by each Twitter account. Source: Author's Creation

What is immediately obvious is that the @SomalilandMFA account dominates across all metrics, although in particular, the number of followers of this account are significantly higher than the other accounts. This may be due partly to the higher activity rate of this account compared to the other accounts in addition to fact that it is the oldest account, starting in 2014, with the next account only starting in 2017 (@SomalilandinUK) [see figure 7]. Another immediate observation is that the average reply rate remains severely low across all of the

accounts, this may indicate that the content posted by all of these accounts struggle to stimulate direct engagement.

Further observations of interest can be made when comparing this graph with the categorisation per account presented in the Agenda Setting section of 4.2.2. [see figure 6]. For example, although the @SomalilandinKE account has one of the lowest follower metrics, the average like and retweet per tweet metrics are among the highest of the accounts. Considering the category that is promoted the most by this account, namely 'Nation Branding', and that the account promoted this theme more than 10% more than any other account, a correlation may be drawn between nation branding and audience engagement.

Contrastingly, there is a notable lack of engagement with the content posted by the @SomalilandinUK account, although it has the second highest follower counts, its average like count per tweet is significantly less than the other accounts, almost 50% less. When revisiting figure 6, one distinguishing factor regarding the agenda and messages set by this account is the diaspora engagement which is almost 10% higher than any other account. This could indicate that the attempt by this account to engage with the diaspora is not translating to online engagement. However, there is no indication as to the level of offline engagement.

Across all accounts, there is a clear preference of recognition over amplification. In other words, viewers are more likely to 'like' a tweet than to retweet it. This may indicate that the viewers acknowledge the messages that are published by the Somaliland officials but do not feel obliged to share them to their own followers, and thereby these observers are avoiding becoming one of the promoters of the message but do not oppose it explicitly.

4.4. Digital Conversation-Generating

The third dimension of social media's impact is digital conversation-generating. As noted by Cowan and Arsenault in 2008, good public diplomacy can no longer be monologue-based but must be dialogue-based, in other words, it should facilitate a two-way communication channel.

One way that diplomats can encourage engagement on topics that they promote is through the use of hashtags. Hashtags facilitate the search for tweets covering specific information (Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012). Compared to low-level engagement tactics such as "likes" and "retweets," as discussed in the previous subsection, hashtags highlight both semantic and relational aspects of engagement (Wonneberger et al., 2020) and enable engagement at a higher

level, across geographical borders to leverage global campaigns (Tombleson & Wolf, 2017; Xiong et al., 2019).

Through the manual content analysis process conducted for section 4.2., where the content published by each of the Somaliland twitter accounts were analysed and coded, the author noted several hashtags that were promoted by the accounts along Somaliland's foreign policy framework. These included #SomalilandDemocracy, #LearnFromSomaliland, #InvestSomaliland, #MySomaliland, #VisitSomaliland, #SomalilandAchievements, #SomalilandSovereignty, #RecognizeSomaliland. It is reasonably unsurprising that the Somaliland accounts wanted to create engagement on tourism, investment opportunities, recognition and Somaliland's good image as a democratic, model state considering that these objectives are prioritised in the foreign policy strategy document.

The map below depicts the geographical reach of the conversations induced by these hashtags in addition to the mentions of each Somaliland account. [26] The purpose of this map is to demonstrate the geographical reach in the conversation either directly (through mentions) or indirectly (through using the hashtags promoted by the Somaliland accounts) with the accounts. It is notable that the geographic reach is much larger than the location of each virtual embassy. Although there is a notably limited reach within the African continent, particularly beyond the immediate Horn of Africa region, it is interesting that the conversations reached countries such as Canada, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and India among others that were not prioritised by any of the Somaliland official accounts [see figure 5]. This may present possible outreach opportunities that are currently being missed by the Somaliland government.

[26] Whether a Twitter user allows their location to be recorded with their tweet is a privacy setting, chosen optionally by the user, therefore this map is created from the accessible locations of users that engaged with these hashtags.



Figure 95: Map showing the geographic reach of Twitter conversations with Somaliland official accounts

It is also notable that there are some regions with no engagement with the Somaliland accounts, for example South America.

4.5. Concluding remarks

This chapter has looked at the commonalities and trends that emerge from Somaliland's various foreign policy Twitter accounts, compared to the objectives outlined in the Somaliland foreign policy strategy document. Two observations that have emerged repeatedly are that there does not appear to be a clear, cohesive strategy employed by the various accounts and that there is a noticeable distinction between the MFA account and the individual foreign mission accounts.

There have been some interesting trends highlighted, including the prioritisation of the relationship between Somaliland and Taiwan, the nexus between fundraising and diaspora engagement and the possibility of a higher engagement rate with content promoting Somaliland's good image and nation branding content.

Another observation which surprised the author is that the promotion of Somaliland's independence and recognition did not stand out as a prioritised theme and in most cases, it was overshadowed by other themes.

These observations and several outliers identified from the data will be analysed in more detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: SMALL CASES

5.1. Introduction

To satisfy the final prong of Spry and Lockyer's (2022) triangulation method of applied evaluation of digital diplomacy, this chapter will conduct small stories analysis. As argued by Georgakopoulou (2015), small stories analysis allows for a closer, deeper analysis which identifies the "underrepresented minimal story in narrative research". In other words, rather than looking at the 'typical' narrative trends as discussed in the previous chapter, it highlights the a-typical, outlier cases, to understand why they differ from the norm.

This chapter will begin by discussing the outlier tweets which stand out in terms of public metrics. This subsection will consider which tweets are outstanding in the level of engagement and why?

The subsections which follow discuss other small cases in more detail which were highlighted in the above chapter including nation branding, fundraising, relations framing and commenting on geopolitics respectively.

5.2. Identifiable outliers

The previous chapter considered the public metrics as an average statistic per account, however, as highlighted by analysts (see Spry and Lockyer 2022), not all content receives the same amount of attention. By looking at the metrics overtime per account, spikes in attention and engagement are noticeable. This subsection will therefore identify these spikes and briefly analyse the corresponding tweets with the aim of understanding why some tweets received markedly more attention than others.

As noted in the above chapter, there are clear distinctions between the MFA account and the respective foreign missions, therefore this section will discuss these separately.

5.2.1. @SomalilandMFA Account: Most Engaged with Tweet

The figure below provides an overview of the metrics of the @SomalilandMFA account over time. This dashboard allowed the author to identify key outliers for closer, small case analysis.

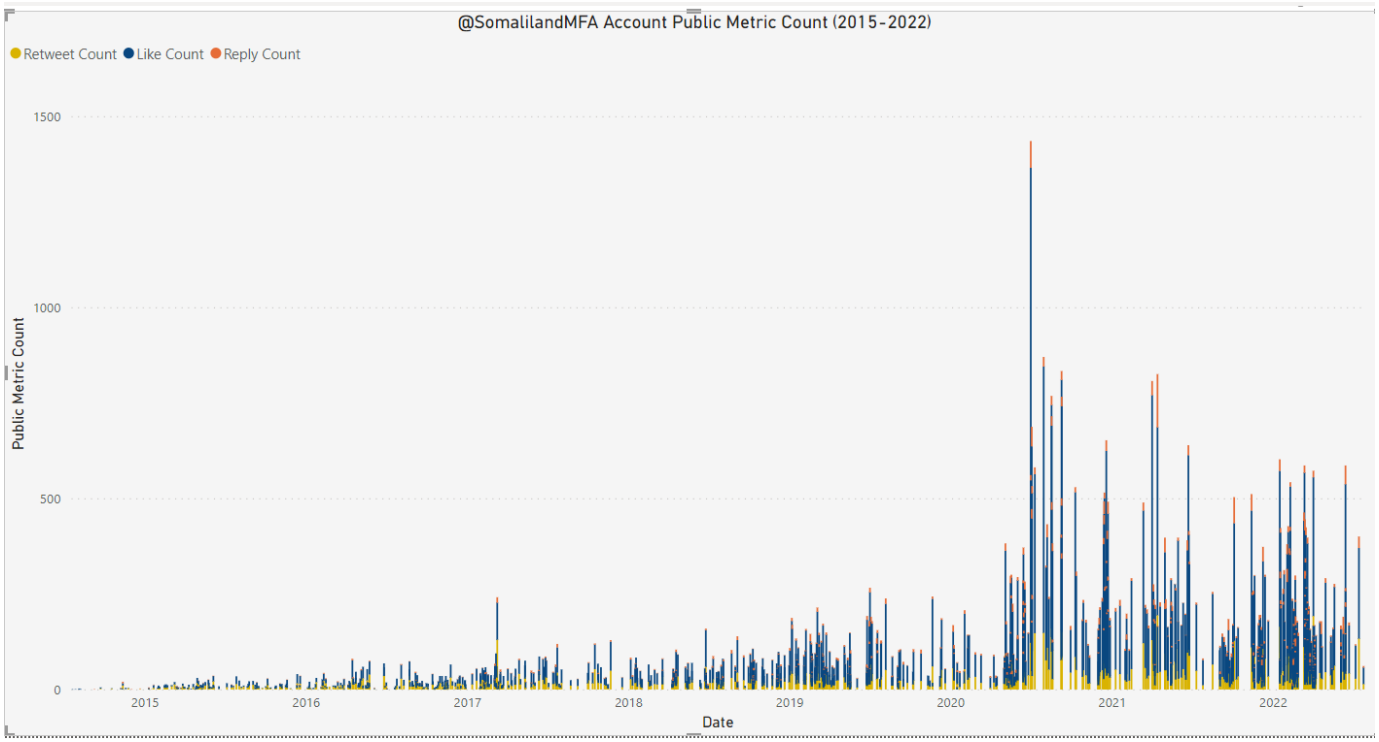


Figure 10: Graph showing the public metrics of Tweets by the @SomalilandMFA account (2015-2022). Source: Author's Creation

Although there is a consistent trend of relatively low engagement rates (measured by retweet, like and reply to rates) on tweets published by the @SomalilandMFA account, there are obvious exceptions to this trend. Although there are several noticeable spikes, the author isolated the tweet which had the highest engagement rates across all three dimensions for closer analysis. This tweet was published on 14 April 2021 and is presented below in figure 11.

This tweet was published in response to the Somali government's decision to extend the presidential term by two extra years. This was shortly followed by an alleged attack by Islamist al Shabaab militants, during which 15 civilians were killed in a minibus in Mogadishu (Houreld 2021).



Figure 11: Screenshot of Most-Engaged-With Tweet by the SomalilandMFA account. Source: Twitter

Through a closer inspection of the engagement received by this Tweet, it became evident that a significant proportion of the responses were concerned with the controversial use of the phrase "our neighbouring country Somalia" which placed Somaliland as a neighbour to Somalia rather than as one unified country in addition to presenting both as 'countries'.

The metric dimensions used to highlight this case, namely the likes, retweets and replies received, are known as 'indicators of attention'. These are also sometimes referred to as vanity metrics, and often mistakenly used to indicate the success or positive reception of a Tweet (Rogers 2013, 2019). Although these are useful indicators in identifying outlier cases, further

analysis into the engagement and sentiment of the tweet provides another layer of understanding.

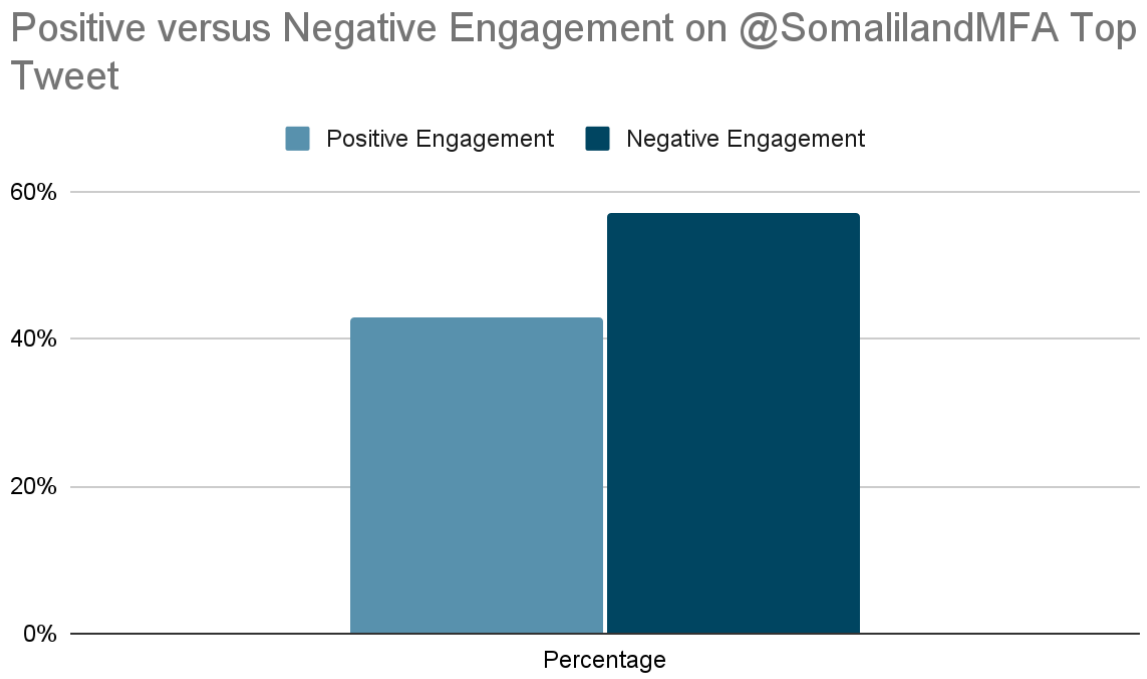


Figure 12: Chart showing positive versus negative engagement received by the @SomalilandMFA most-engaged-with Tweet. Source: Author's Creation

As demonstrated in the above figure 12, the engagement on this tweet was more negative than positive. [27] It is notable that the MFA has since not used the phrase 'neighbouring country' in relation to Somalia in any of its future tweets (neither has the foreign mission accounts). This could indicate that the officials which control the accounts took into account the net negative sentiment received from the use of the controversial phrase. As noted by Gilboa (2016), a key advantage of digital diplomacy is the two-way communication which it allows, whereby diplomats can "reach and engage large audiences, and citizens can influence foreign policy and diplomacy". This example demonstrates that Somaliland may be using digital diplomacy to gauge public sentiment and adapt their policies and rhetoric framing accordingly.

[27] The author applied a binary metric to the contents of the tweets in order to code them into positive and negative categories. The categorisation was only applied to the tweets which expressed an emotion on the content of the tweet itself where 'positive' was in support of the statement made by the MFA, whereas 'negative' included comments which ridiculed or disagreed with the statement made by the MFA.

5.2.2. Foreign Mission Accounts: Most Engaged with Tweets

The below screenshots [figure 13] present the most engaged with tweets of each of the Somaliland foreign missions accounts.

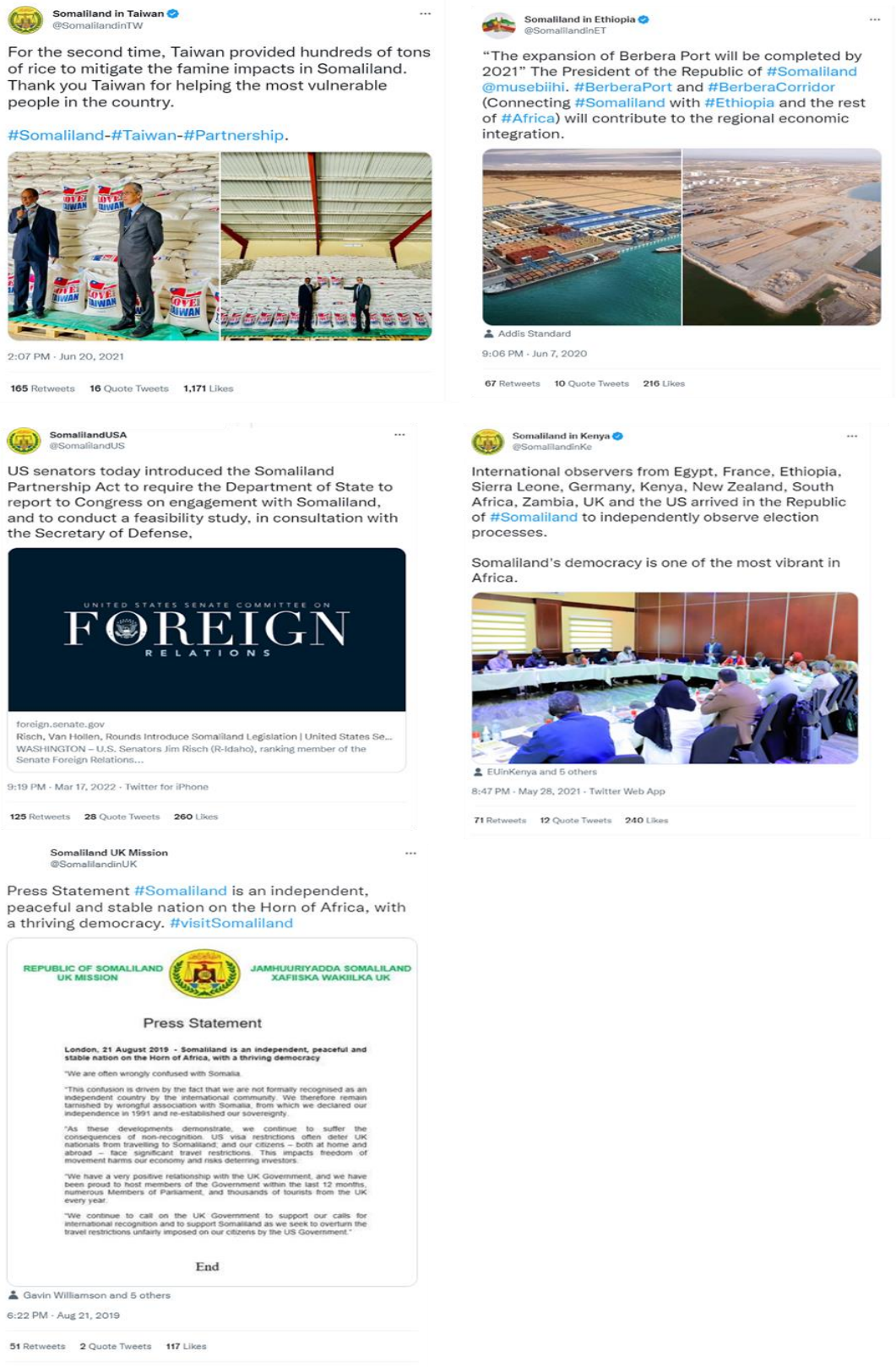


Figure 13: Collage of most engaged with Tweets from each foreign mission Twitter account. Source: Twitter

There are two observations that emerged from looking at the most engaged with tweets from the foreign mission accounts. The first is that three out of the five most engaged with tweets

discuss growing partnerships and collaboration between Somaliland and its host partners. For example, the most-engaged-with tweet by the @SomalilandinTW account discussed the rice donations by Teipei to Somaliland to assist with the ongoing famine. The overwhelming sentiment expressed in the comments was positive, primarily from members of the Taiwanese public expressing support for the Somaliland community. Phrases such as “glad we can help” were repeated. An interesting observation was the use of the phrase “a friend in need is a friend indeed” by Taiwanese commentators, this phrase is used frequently by the @SomalillandTW account (this will be discussed in more detail in subsection 5.5 of this chapter). The repetition of this phrase by commentators may indicate a level of influence and infiltration by the Somaliland Twitter account on public opinion and public rhetoric.

The @SomalilandUSA tweet discussed the introduction of the Somaliland Partnership act to the US Congress. The Act’s sponsor, James Risch, noted that the act “requires the administration to review outdated policies and diplomatic frameworks that don’t meet today’s challenges”, and “review opportunities for establishing a partnership” between the US and Somaliland (Pecquet 2022). The conversation on this tweet was also supportive. Notable was the acknowledgements made by United States community members that this policy development would produce mutual benefit for the US and Somaliland alike. There was also an interesting sentiment expressed by US commentators of the enormity of the deal, and the prospect that it demonstrated the Biden administration’s prioritisation of its partnership with Somaliland, which would be supported by the US community. This case is particularly interesting as it indicates that the public sentiment perceived through engagement with Tweets by the official Somaliland accounts may provide key insights into the public reception of enhanced cooperation between the US and Somaliland, this could be useful for US policy makers to guide their decision making.

The most engaged with Tweet by the @SomalilandinET account promotes the building of the Berbera corridor between Somaliland and Ethiopia. This Tweet only received a total of seven replies, no points of interest in this conversation were found by the author.

The two remaining most engaged with tweets promoted Somaliland’s national brand, projecting Somaliland as a democratic, reliable, and legitimate partner and deserving of recognition. The most engaged with tweet by the @SomalilandinUK account describes Somaliland as a “peaceful, independent and stable nation” ... with a “thriving democracy”. In the attached statement, it is emphasised that Somaliland calls for the UK’s support in their quest

for recognition. The most engaged with tweet by the @SomalilandinKE account also projected Somaliland as a democratic nation, outlining the several international observers which were present to legitimise their previous elections. The increased engagement by observers on Tweets that promote Somaliland as a 'good citizen' may indicate that Somaliland's good behaviour is recognised as an asset by public observer, this is a significant contrast to the norm treatment received by 'quiet' secessionist movements on the continent, where successful precedence of secession can be observed in the rewarding of recognition to Eritrea and South Sudan, both cases which followed years of bloody wars and instability. The use of twitter for Somaliland's nation-branding will be discussed in more detail in subsection 5.2.

Overall, the themes which drew a greater level of engagement notably do correspond with the priorities of the Somaliland foreign policy strategy.

5.3. Nation-Branding

Nation branding constituted the second most prominent theme promoted by the MFA account and the third most promoted theme by the foreign mission accounts collectively. Considering that it also featured as part of the most engaged with tweets, the author considered it an outlier theme which requires further attention.

The promotion of a certain image or brand of a nation relates to a country's nation-branding. Nation-branding can be defined as "a process by which a nation's images can be created, monitored, evaluated and proactively managed in order to improve or enhance the country's reputation among a target international audience" (Fan 2010: 6). Nation-branding can be a tool of soft power.

The relevance of soft power is indisputable, as Joseph Nye puts it: "soft power is a means to success in world politics for those who know how to use it" (Ikenberry & Nye 2004: 136). As mentioned in the introduction of this report, for an isolated state with restricted economic power, soft power can be imperative.

Aronczyk (2013) identifies three dimensions of nation branding which will be used to analyse the 'image' projected by the Somaliland Twitter accounts. These three dimensions are: (1) as a strategy of capital generation; (2) to generate an image of legitimacy and authority and finally (3) creating a unique national identity (Aronczyk 2013: 116).

As argued by Manor and Segev (2015), digital diplomacy allows nations to "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" (Manor & Segev 2015). In light of this, this section will compare the 'brand' projected by the @SomalilandMFA account in to the five foreign embassy accounts in order to identify any variation of intent in branding.

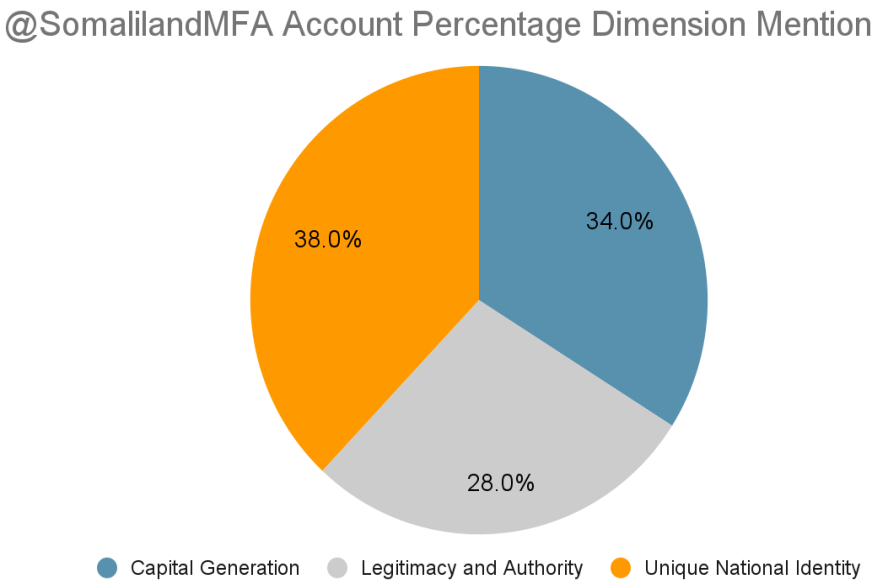


Figure 14: Chart showing the percentage per dimension mentioned by the @SomalilandMFA account. Source: Author's Creation.

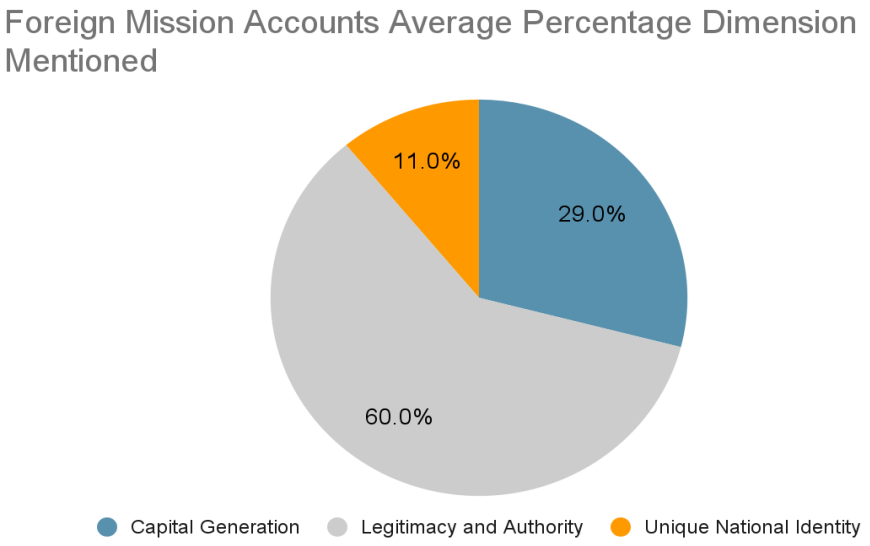


Figure 15: Chart showing the percentage per dimention mentioned on average by the foreign mission accounts. Source: Author's Creation

Comparing figure 14 and figure 15 above, it is clear that the promotion of the nation's legitimacy and authority is significantly more prominent in the nation branding content of the foreign embassy accounts when compared to the @SomalilandMFA account accounting for 60% and 28% respectively. Furthermore, the promotion of a unique national identity was prioritised notably more by the @SomalilandMFA account in comparison to the foreign embassy accounts (38% and 11% respectively). In both instances, capital generation represented the 'middle' dimension.

Looking closer at the content of the Tweets which fell into each category, firstly, the capital generation dimension primarily presented Somaliland as an economic and investment opportunity. Although it encompassed untapped oil and fisheries potential, the tweets which fell into this category primarily focused on Somaliland as a trading hub of the region, through the Berbera port.

The content of the second category, the promotion of legitimacy and authority, focused on Somaliland's legitimate democracy, ability to quash terrorism threats and its respect for human rights and law. The tweets that fell into the final category, the promotion a unique national identity, primarily focused on Somaliland's collective perseverance as a nation, to weather the storm of non-recognition and isolation.

Considering Manor and Segev's (2015) division between the level of the foreign ministry message and the second level of the foreign embassies allowing for the targeted messages demonstrates, these results may indicate an assumption by the foreign ministry that their efforts to promote Somaliland's legitimacy and authority is not required as much domestically, whereas promoting a national identity domestically is more important than promoting this abroad. Although there is no strategy document to back up this assumption, what is clear is that there is a different nation-branding strategy used by the @SomalilandMFA Twitter account, presumably targeting domestic public opinion, than that of the foreign embassies, presumably targeting the foreign public and policy makers of the respective host country.

5.4. Fundraising: How to Circumvent the Restrictions of Being Unrecognised

Another outlier theme in the agenda-Setting data that the author considered in need of closer attention is the use of Twitter by Somaliland for fundraising purposes.

In April 2022, Somaliland's main marketplace in the capital city, Hargeisa, burnt down overnight. The market supported many livelihoods and small businesses, and it was reported

that goods worth millions of dollars were destroyed in the fire (BBC News 2022). This tragic event provides an interesting small case study of the use of Somaliland's Twitter accounts to engage with the external world, particularly for the purpose of raising funds that are inaccessible by the Somaliland government through traditional donor organisations due to its isolated status.

A few days following the fire, the office of the President of Somaliland released an 'international appeal' which was shared via Somaliland's official Twitter accounts for a "combined US $2 billion" for urgent humanitarian and livelihood support.

Following the fire, many foreign governments took to Twitter to express their condolences including UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, whose tweet is presented below in figure 16.



Figure 16: Screenshot of Tweet by Boris Johnston, April 2, 2022. Source: Twitter

The president of Ethiopia similarly expressed his sympathies and commitment to "stand by [Somalilanders] in this difficult time" (see figure 17 below).



Figure 17: Screenshots of Twitter thread posted by @TheVIllaSomalia, April 02, 2022 (with translation). Source: Twitter.

Even the president of Somalia took to Twitter to declare that he had spoken to the President of Somaliland (see figure 17 above).

These sympathy tweets from international leaders present the idea that, regardless of their unrecognised status, Somaliland is not completely isolated from the international community and are able to garner support and financial contributions through Twitter.

Among other initiatives, a GoFundMe page[28] was created by a Somaliland diaspora living in the UK, Sir Mo Farah. The page raised the equivalent of $62 116,70 through 1.9K separate donations.

In addition to fundraising, the author noted a significant effort by the Somaliland Twitter accounts to promote investment opportunities. For example, some of the accounts published tweets with information and videos of the DP port construction with the hashtag '#investSomaliland'. The accounts have also been used to promote events on investment opportunities in Somaliland. For example, on May 18, 2017, the Somaliland mission in the UK hosted a panel discussion on investing in Somaliland and overcoming barriers. The event was aimed at attracting investments from Somaliland diaspora and provided a direct link to the 'WorldRemit' platform[29] to encourage donations and remittance transfers. The platform has exchanged frequently with Somaliland mission accounts on social media and has promoted on their own social media platform waivers of their service fees from transfers to Somaliland in solidarity during crises such as the Hargeisa fire. Thus, Twitter has provided a platform not only to promote means for supporting fundraisers but have led to the easing of the process of sending remittances and other donations.

5.5. Online Conflict with Somalia: Positioning Somaliland as a 'reliable partner'

The relationship between a secessionist movement and its 'parent' government is important, especially considering that most previous research into digital diplomacy and de facto states indicate a trend of Twitter as a tool to incite violence between governments and de facto states. This subsection will discuss the few outlier cases in order to understand the implications thereof

[28] GoFundMe is an American for-profit crowdfunding platform that allows people to raise money for events.

[29] WorldRemit was started by a Somaliland migrant Ismail Ahmed, it is an online platform that allows the global money transfer by migrants to their home.

and assess whether the Somaliland-Somalia online engagements follow the trend identified in previous studies.

Only a small proportion of Somaliland's online content discussed Somalia and Somalia-Somaliland relations. Most of the mentions of Somalia published by the Somaliland Twitter accounts involved providing general information and updates on the dialogues between Mogadishu and Hargeisa. [30] However, this should not be discounted as insignificant, analysts have argued that one tool to legitimise secession may be to demonstrate that all possible alternatives have been exhausted. As Alex Ekeke and Nombulelo Lubisi (2019) argue, the Partition Plan for Palestine and the creation of Pakistan from British India for example all took into consideration that the groups "could no longer live in peace and security or fulfil their aspirations within the larger political sphere" (Ekeke & Lubisi 2019: 254). The consistent updates regarding the peace dialogues between Somalia and Somaliland may, in effect, be a way to prove that Somaliland has been willing to find an alternative solution to secession. It also aligns well with the dedication to peaceful pursuit of independence which is articulated as a core commitment in the Foreign Policy strategy document.

However, moving away from this trend there are several interesting outlier events in the online interactions between Somaliland and Somalia. For example, on 4 July 2019, the Somalia government made a statement, announcing that they are cutting all diplomatic ties with Guinea. This action by the Somali government was spurred by Guinea's decision to accord 'protocol of the head of state' to the Somaliland president during his visit to Conakry which Mogadishu claimed "[disregarded] callously all of the relevant resolutions of the UN and African consensus" (@MofaSomalia 04 July 2019). This statement was published by the various Somalia social media accounts and initiated an online rift between Somaliland and Somalia.

On 5 July 2019, the @SomalilandMFA account published a Tweet "in response to Somalia's deliberate offensive mischaracterisation and aggression against Somaliland foreign relations". The tweet raised concern about the Somali government's use of the phrases 'separatist movement' and 'in the North of Somalia' in relation to Somaliland in their press statement published the previous day.

[30] Somalia and Somaliland engaged in six rounds of dialogue in Turkey between 2012-2015, the two sides resumed talks in Djibouti in 2020.

Following the Somali government's statement, an alleged formal apology by the Guinean government circulated on digital platforms, however, the Guinean Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied the apology and claimed it was a "gross fake". He further stated that because Guinea was not informed through diplomatic channels of the ceasing of diplomatic ties by Mogadishu, they had not yet issued any response to Mogadishu (Barry 2019).

Hargeisa responded by defending "the proud nation and people of the Republic of Guinea" (Republic of Somaliland MFA 5 July 2019) against the "threat-based and divisive diplomacy" of the Somali government.

Another very similar online diplomatic rift played out in 2020, when Somalia severed diplomatic ties with Kenya following a two-day state visit by President Muse Bihi during which Bihi and the Kenyan president, Uhuru Kenyatta, pledged "unwavering commitment to deepen the cordial bilateral relations" (Al Jazeera 2020).

In response, the @SomalilandMFA account posted a tweet noting the "irrelevant statement" by the Somali administration and emphasised that the "Republic of Somaliland and the Republic of Kenya are two independent countries which have the rightful decision to strengthen their mutual relationship" (@SomialandMFA December 14, 2020).

The two above cases demonstrate how Somaliland was able to use social media to frame the narrative of the diplomatic rift between 'friendly' states - Kenya and Guinea- and Mogadishu. This allowed Somaliland to be presented as a 'reliable and respectful' partner state, in strong contrast to the 'divisive and fickle' partnership that Somalia had offered.

Considering that Somali and Somaliland officials are not often invited to joint diplomatic meetings or conferences, cyberspace, social media platforms provide a platform for Somaliland to build its reputation as a reliable partner and make a comparison between themselves and Somalia to 'partner' states. What these cases also may indicate is Somaliland's attempt to frame the rhetoric to match their vision of Somaliland's statehood, positioning itself as an alternative partner *state,* rather than an illegitimate rebel group which Somalian online accounts often argue.

5.6. Commenting on geopolitics

Somaliland's status as being unrecognised as a legal member of the international community means that it is also not a member of major multilateral forums such as the African Union and

the United Nations. Furthermore, due to its unrecognised status, when Somaliland has been invited to be represented at multilateral forums, it has not always been well received by Somalia. For example, in June 2022, Kenyan President, Uhuru Kenyatta, hosted a diplomatic luncheon. Representatives of Somalia and Somaliland were both invited which caused Somalia's ambassador to Kenya Mohamoud Ahmed Nur 'Tarzan', to walk out of the diplomatic meeting (Mutambo 2022). Therefore, Somaliland has been largely muted in the global dialogue on international affairs.

However, digital diplomacy has enabled Somaliland to add its voice to the (online) conversation. The Twitter content falling into the 'commenting on geopolitics' category constitutes only a small proportion of the total content published by most of the Somaliland official Twitter accounts, however, the @SomalilandUSA account and the @SomalilandinET account posted 7.2% and 10.2% respectively within this category. Therefore, it warrants further investigation.

A tweet posted by the @SomalilandET account on 22 April 2020 set out to inform the United Nations, African Union and the European Union of the consequences of Somalia's actions, namely unveiling the Bahnaano social welfare program in collaboration with the World Bank which included three Somaliland districts. The Somaliland statement argued that the program would be a violation of Somaliland's territorial integrity. The @SomalilandET account also used Twitter to express the government's position on regional politics, including human trafficking in the region, security in the Red Sea and the United States withdrawal of troops from Somalia. Somaliland's official position on these issues were reiterated by the @SomalilandUSA account.

Although it is difficult to gauge if this method of commenting on geopolitics is effective, the point remains that social media has given Somaliland a platform to voice its positions on certain regional and global issues. Due to political isolation, this platform was not adequately afforded before.

5.7. Concluding remarks

This chapter has brought the analysis down to a microlevel, looking closer at small, outlier cases which were highlighted from the large data set analysis.

Through this small-case analysis, this chapter has highlighted several interesting phenomena.

Firstly, by looking closer at the most engaged with tweets of each account, the author found that, in the case of the foreign mission accounts, engagement spiked when tweets were posted expressing positive and growing relations with the host country or when projecting Somaliland in a positive light. However, engagement on the MFA account spiked when Somaliland controversially used the phrase “neighbouring country” in relation to Somalia, with the reactions resulting net negative. Interestingly, there was evidence that Somaliland officials may have noted and adapted their content to this negative reaction to the use of the controversial phrase.

Another observation of this chapter was the diversified approach to nation branding taken by the MFA versus the foreign mission accounts on nation branding, this is consistent with previous studies.

Finally, this chapter has highlighted the key advantages that social media can provide an isolated state such as Somaliland. These include raising funds and advertising investment opportunities and providing a platform for the government to voice their positions on geopolitics issues.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS: IMPLICATIONS/ POLICY SUGGESTIONS

6.1. Introduction

This chapter will discuss the findings of this report and propose some implications thereof. As emphasised throughout the research report, the purpose of this research was not simply to fill in a gap in the emerging literature on digital diplomacy but to additionally contribute to the understanding of the current digital diplomacy practice of de facto states and to investigate if there are key advantages of digital diplomacy for secessionist movements to pursue their (controversial) foreign policy *peacefully*.

6.2. Digital diplomacy: a tool for peace or war

As alluded to in chapter one, the few existing studies which focus on separatist and secessionist movements' use of digital diplomacy provide highly securitised outlooks. The literature has emphasised the use of sharp power through digital platforms (misinformation campaigns for example) by groups vying for independence. This emphasise has led to a deterministic assumption that the use of digital diplomacy by secessionist movements will inevitably lead to or exacerbate conflict.

Although this study does not wish to negate the findings of these works, it is the author's intention to interrogate this deterministic assumption, and pose the question: can digital diplomacy be a tool for peaceful secession instead?

It has been argued that social media and the increased digitalisation of the public sphere has pushed public discourse beyond Habermas's definition of public sphere, which is seen as a democratic construct, whereby public opinion is formed by the public, without coercion or manipulation by the government. In the digital age however, public discourse has shifted towards counter publics and oppositional discourse (Endong & Obi 2022: 122). It is this oppositional discourse which is used frequently cited in online contests between nationalist and separatist groups, often leading to an exacerbation of conflict.

In many cases studied, this oppositional discourse begins with the designation of the group vying for independence which analysts and members and leaders of the groups themselves often term separatist or secessionist. In contrast, host governments frequently term them terrorist groups. This often creates an 'us' versus 'them' debate.

Another clear use of oppositional discourse is through online propaganda. For example, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in Nigeria have frequently used radio and social media platforms to spread their anti-Nigeria propaganda. These platforms have intentionally spread hate messages against the Nigerian government to argue for their independence. This oppositional discourse creates an inevitability 'pro-Biafra' which in effect is anti-Nigeria.

The IPOB has also used social media platforms in attempts to attract attention from foreign powers, primarily by presenting a narrative that the Nigerian government is committing human rights violations against its people and the Biafran people, even going as far as to accuse the Nigerian government of genocide (Endong & Obi 2022: 128). The Nigerian government has reacted to this oppositional discourse by labelling the IPOB and any other 'separatist' movements as terrorists. This has resulted in a perpetual loop of opposition and agitation that has played out on social media, with both sides continuously vying for the hearts and minds of the international community to support their cause and version of the story (Endong 2021). In January 2022 alone, the conflict between the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) and the Nigerian government claimed a total of 1486 victims (Ojewale & Onuoha 2022).

This current research report is relevant to the current wave of separatism that Africa is experiencing, which is intensifying regional instability (Oginni 2022).

The findings of this research report demonstrate that Somaliland has not overwhelmingly used social media to perpetuate oppositional discourse, referring to the Somalian government on very few occasions, mostly reactively or in relation to diplomatic dialogues. Additionally, the evidence demonstrates that Somaliland has used social media to perpetuate a strategic narrative of an independent, functioning state that has prospering relations with many international actors and is a sound investment and tourist destination, thus building a rhetoric of statehood. Using social media to broadcast this strategic narrative, Somaliland has attempted to legitimise its foreign policy and facilitate its acceptance in the international arena.

The findings of this report have highlighted that the basis of Somaliland's strategic narrative online is of a 'good citizen', able to form relations with international and regional actors, contribute to the security of the region by effectively combating terrorism, and respecting the human rights of its citizens by holding free and fair democratic elections (recognised by international observers).

The previous section has focused acutely on the outlier cases; however, it is important to consider what does not stand out in the data, in other words: what is purposefully omitted.

Although much of the research into digital diplomacy emphasises the use and manipulation of emotive messages and imagery in public diplomacy online, this was largely omitted in Somaliland's use of digital diplomacy, this omission may be intentional. Somaliland's Foreign Minister Essa Kayd noted that "all coercive or threatening measures to deny such collaboration between international partners... do little to promote the peace and security that the region and the world require" (DW 2022).

Thus, it is evident that Somaliland has purposefully used social media to project an image of itself as a state of good citizenry. This finding contrasts the oppositional discourse of 'us' versus 'them' that previous studies have highlighted as frequently used by groups vying for independence and international recognition, which often results in increased violence between the group and the host country.

Has this strategy worked?

In 2017, when pleading with the international community for aid to deal with Somaliland's hunger crisis due to extensive droughts, Somaliland's foreign minister declared that "[Somaliland] suffers from the syndrome of being the good child" he said, "naughty children get all the attention." (Wintour 2017).

Somaliland's narrative of being the 'good child' has been recognised by other observers, who have frequently noted Somaliland's unlikely success in the unstable region (Phillips 2020: 154-156). This sentiment is demonstrated by the results of an internet search which produced the following titles: "In Praise of Somaliland: A Beacon of Hope in the Thorn of Africa" (Tatchell 2007); "What Somaliland can teach the rest of Africa about peace and stability" (Emli 2016); "Somaliland is an unrecognised African success in a notoriously troubled region" (Mills 2022).

Looking at the track record of successful secessionist groups on the African continent since independence, it is clear that it is not the good children that are rewarded.

Explained succinctly by Stephan Krasner: "The international system is an environment in which the logics of consequences dominate the logics of appropriateness".

Until the African Union, and other multilateral organisations adopt a logic of appropriateness towards the process of secession, it is unlikely that the 'good citizen' narrative will result in peaceful secession. This report has not found evidence that the use of digital diplomacy has assisted in making this shift and furthered Somaliland's international recognition to any large extent.

However, this does not mean that the use of digital diplomacy for de facto states can be ignored. To the contrary, this research report has found evidence that there are several key advantages that digital diplomacy provides to these 'states' that traditional diplomacy does not allow.

6.3. Digital Diplomacy: A Loophole for De Facto States

Unrecognised states face significant challenges to their survival and prosperity owing to the limitations they experience in traditional diplomacy. These restrictions include lack of access to international aid, lack of a platform in the multilateral arena, restrictions on forming bilateral or multilateral relations among others which were discussed in chapter three of this research report. Considering these limitations, this research report set out to investigate whether digital diplomacy may offer unique advantages to unrecognised states, allowing them to bypass the restrictions of traditional diplomacy. This research report has identified three main advantages.

6.3.1. Escaping Economic Isolation

The **first** key advantage is providing a loophole to economic isolation. It was discussed in chapter three that one of the most significant disadvantages for a de facto state that remains unrecognised by the international community is economic isolation.

Although Somaliland's digital diplomacy did involve the promotion of international recognition, to the surprise of the author, this was not overemphasised above other categories. Rather, the various Somaliland foreign policy Twitter accounts promoted various activities and foreign policy objectives including fundraising, its ability to form partnerships with other states and their national brand as a democratic, peaceful and prosperous nation.

It could be argued that the most successful thereof, from the available evidence analysed in this report, was the promotion of fundraising which included crown funding, investments, and state level economic partnerships. With limited access to the IMF and other multilateral financial organisations for aid following the Hargeisa market fire in 2022, the Somaliland government took to Twitter. The international solidarity expressed on Twitter following the Hargeisa fire, produced markable financial pledges from international governments including the UK, Canada, the US and France.

Another example analysed in this report was the promotion of foreign investment in Somaliland's economic opportunities. As a 'state' with limited capacity to host or attend major multilateral investment conferences in the traditional diplomatic manner, Twitter provided a

less controversial platform to promote its investment opportunities to international investors, albeit individuals or governments. There is evidence that significant investment has since been received; a prominent example is the expansion of the Berbera port.

Finally, although remittance has always been a significant aspect of the Somaliland economy, social media has provided additional avenues for digital crowdfunding, expanding the base to diaspora and other sympathetic international observers.

6.3.2. Escaping Diplomatic Isolation

The **second** key advantage is providing a platform for building and maintaining (in)formal bilateral or multilateral relations. Through Twitter, the Somaliland government has strengthened and prioritised bilateral relations, albeit mostly in an informal manner, with several regional and some international partner states.

For example, the creation of virtual embassies through official Twitter accounts allows for continuous dialogue between Somaliland and these partner states that would otherwise be restricted by their de facto status. As discussed in the report, many states have refrained from sending permanent diplomatic missions to Somaliland for fear of retaliation by Mogadishu.

Diplomatic dialogue over Twitter does not seem to return the same retaliation as formal state visits between Somaliland and other states, considering the dramatic action taken by Somalia to cut diplomatic ties with Kenya and Ethiopia following diplomatic visits. The same reaction has not been seen when foreign states mention Somaliland as a partner on Twitter. Interestingly, even the Somali president referred to Muse Bihi Abdi as the 'President of Somaliland' in a Tweet presenting solidarity following the Hargeisa fire published by the official account of the Somali presidency.

Digital diplomacy also allows a cost-effective way of reaching out to potential international partner states without incurring the huge costs usually required for physically establishing a diplomatic mission. Although Somaliland has established several permanent physical embassies in various partner states, this report has found evidence that Somaliland is pursuing new diplomatic relations *online*. For example, the Somaliland government promoted better relations with the UAE, Uganda, Canada and South Sudan through their MFA account, these are states where no permanent mission exists yet.

Furthermore, this report has demonstrated that the geographic reach of the Somaliland Twitter accounts extends further than their diplomatic ties, thus expanding Somaliland's public diplomacy reach to new foreign publics.

Overall, this report found that digital diplomacy provides a platform for Somaliland to bypass some of the restrictions on traditional diplomatic engagement and therefore escape, to a certain extent, diplomatic isolation.

6.3.3. Providing a Platform to Contribute to Discussions on Geopolitics

The **third** key advantage identified in the findings of this report is that digital diplomacy provided Somaliland with a platform to voice its views on geopolitical dynamics. As a de facto state, Somaliland is excluded from most multilateral institutions including the UN and AU. In an attempt to bypass these restrictions, this report found evidence that Somaliland has used its official Twitter accounts to contribute to the discussions on geopolitical dynamics. For example, Somaliland used the MFA account and the Somaliland in the USA account to voice its concern about China's expansion in the Horn of Africa.

This finding concurs with previous studies of diplomatically isolated groups. For example, Michèle Bos and Jan Melissen, focusing on rebel diplomacy, argue that "digital communication has enabled rebel groups to carve out more power on the international stage than they ever had before" (Bos & Melissen 2019: 1332). Key to Bos and Melissen's argument is power dynamics. As the audience that these unrecognised actors are able to reach broadens, their sphere of influence and power expands. Overall, this becomes integral to their survival.

6.4. Concluding remarks

The findings of this research report have demonstrated that Somaliland has not significantly used digital diplomacy to successfully and peacefully campaign for its international recognition.

However, the report has uncovered several key advantages afforded to the de facto state that have allowed it to bypass some of the restrictions of traditional diplomacy and thus peacefully enhance its prosperity.

Francis Owtram argued that “the first aim of these unrecognised states is survival - militarily, politically and economically - in the form of promotion trade, investment, or aid. Underlying all this is the search for recognition or engagement” (Owtram 2011: 136).

Somaliland's official foreign policy document tends to reproduce Owtram’s assessment, centred on the government’s campaign for international recognition. However, the results of this research report may provide an alternative perspective. Although international recognition formed part of Somaliland’s digital diplomacy content and engagement, it was not an overwhelming priority. The Somaliland official twitter accounts analysed in this report focus on projecting an image of statehood. Furthermore, through digital diplomacy, Somaliland has formulated and spread a strategic narrative of a good citizen, independent Somalia, even promoting itself as a better diplomatic partner than the latter.

Although this has not evidently furthered Somaliland’s pursuit of international recognition, with some observers arguing that its good behaviour has allowed its case to be neglected, this research report has made the argument that in some ways, digital diplomacy, to some extent, negates the benefits and therefore allure of formal recognition by the international community.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

This research report set out to understand if digital diplomacy provides any unique advantages or challenges to de facto states. As such, the report analysed Somaliland’s use of Twitter as a tool for conducting digital diplomacy. This research found that in contrast to the objectives in the Somaliland foreign policy strategy document, Somaliland has not overwhelmingly used Twitter to promote international recognition. Rather, the report found, Somaliland has used Twitter to bypass the restrictions it faces on its traditional diplomacy such as economic and diplomatic isolation in addition to using it as a platform to assert its position on geopolitical issues.

Social media platforms including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn among others have transformed traditional diplomacy, as Turianskyi and Wekesa (2021) put it: “diplomacy in the digital age varies greatly from past manifestations of diplomacy” (Turianskyi & Wekesa 2021: 343). Understanding the challenges and advantages of digital diplomacy allows policymakers to better utilise this emerging tool to achieve their foreign policy objectives.

This report analysed Somaliland’s use of digital diplomacy as a tool to achieve its foreign policy objectives. This study aimed to answer the following research questions:

(1) How has Somaliland used Twitter as a tool of digital diplomacy?

(2) To what extent has Somaliland's use of Twitter as a tool of digital diplomacy been successful in furthering its foreign policy goals?

(3) Do social media platforms such as Twitter provide de facto states a significant advantage over traditional diplomatic tools?

Employing Spry and Lockyer's (2022) triangulation method, this research report attempted to provide an applied evaluation of the use of digital diplomacy by Somaliland. The report began the analysis with a document review (chapter three) to understand Somaliland's foreign policy objectives and priorities. This chapter found that Somaliland's foreign policy remains centred on its bid for international recognition and sovereignty. Furthermore, Somaliland's foreign policy has several dimensions in parallel and in addition to its quest for recognition including building regional stability, economic development and trade and cultural cooperation with external actors. The chapter also noted changes in modes and methods of conducting diplomacy over the 31 years of de facto independence by each successive administration. With the rapid digitalisation of communication and diplomacy, it is unsurprising that Somaliland has begun to embrace the opportunities that digital diplomacy can provide. The key foreign policy objectives identified in this analysis formed the basis upon which the practice of Somaliland's digital diplomacy was compared.

Chapter four followed with a broad-picture approach, analysing the metadata of Somaliland's activity on Twitter, focusing on commonalities and trends. Three observations were highlighted. Firstly, there is no obvious, cohesive strategy employed by the various official Somaliland accounts. Secondly, there is a noticeable distinction between the MFA account and the individual foreign mission accounts. Thirdly, the promotion of Somaliland's independence and recognition was not prioritised, and, in most cases, it was overshadowed by other themes.

Chapter five provided an investigation of the final prong of the triangulation method, magnifying into small cases and microdata, focusing on outlier cases which did not follow the trends identified in chapter four. This chapter highlighted several interesting phenomena. Firstly, there was evidence that the use of the controversial phrase "neighbouring country" by the Somaliland MFA account referring to Somalia attracted the most attention, albeit net negative, this may have contributed to the absence of this phrase being used in the future. Secondly, similarly to the findings in chapter four, this chapter found evidence that the MFA account's approach to nation branding on Twitter differed to the approach taken by the foreign

mission accounts. Thirdly, this chapter highlighted the key advantages that social media can provide an isolated state such as Somaliland. These include raising funds, advertising investment opportunities and providing a platform for the government to voice their positions on geopolitics issues.

Revisiting the initial hypothesis of this research report presented in section 1.2, namely that Somaliland's digital diplomacy strategy would mirror the foreign policy objective of gaining international recognition and legitimacy by campaigning through its Twitter accounts. As discussed in chapter six and summarised above, the results of this report disprove this hypothesis to the surprise of the author. In contradiction to the expected results, I found that the Somaliland official Twitter accounts did not prioritise international recognition and rather focussed on other foreign policy objectives.

I note that this research report has several limitations. Firstly, the Twitter accounts analysed are limited. I note that there are numerous other accounts which could be analysed and contribute to the subject matter in question, for example the accounts of the various Somaliland diplomats and politicians. Secondly, the report's focus on Somaliland as a single case study is also limiting, as it limits the generalisability of the findings. Thirdly, during the closer analysis of individual cases in chapter five, the author identified several additional examples which could have lent themselves to the analysis, although each selected case has been justified, they are not exhaustive, and the analysis of additional cases may add to the present findings of this report. Finally, my decision to focus on the social media platform Twitter exclusively may have limited the generalisability of the results.

Regardless of these limitations, this research report aims to contribute meaningfully to the understanding of digital diplomacy and in particular, Somaliland's use thereof. These limitations provide possible future studies which could consider a different case study, broaden the scope of accounts analysed or select different small cases for analysis. A key question which emerges from this report is whether Somaliland is a trailblazer or are there other de facto states experimenting with digital diplomacy tools in their foreign policy? If we compare Somaliland to Taiwan in terms of the use of Twitter as a foreign policy tool, Somaliland's official presence predates that of Taiwan. The Taiwanese foreign ministry Twitter account was established in 2018, four years after the Somaliland foreign ministry Twitter account. Yet the following received by the Taiwanese foreign ministry account is more than five times that of Somaliland's foreign ministry account (409 000 followers and 79 800 followers respectively). It can be

surmised that one of the possible explanations the difference in online popularity could be domestic population, for example Taiwan's population is approximately 23 million[31] compared to Somaliland with an estimated population of only 4.5 million. [32] However, in order to sufficiently answer the question of is Somaliland a trailblazer or a digital diplomacy follower, further research is required for example comparing the digital diplomacy strategies employed by Somaliland and Taiwan longitudinally and even including a third case study.

Another possible are of future research which emerges from this research report could be into the theoretical transformations of the concept of de facto statehood and secession in light of digital diplomacy. Has the world become 'softer' on de facto states? Have digital platforms eased collaboration between formally recognised states and de facto states? If so, has this watered down the overall desire for formally recognised statehood? Is a new form of digital statehood emerging? Although some of these conceptual questions have been alluded to throughout this research report based on the present evidence, a comprehensive and cross-case study would be required to better understand these emerging ideas.

[31] World o Meter. 2023. Taiwan Population. https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/taiwan-population/.
[32] See: UNPO. 2017. Somaliland. https://unpo.org/members/7916.

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