

Research Article

Twitter and Public Diplomacy: An Analysis of Nigeria's Foreign Ministry and the President's Involvement (2020-2025)

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Abstract

Social media has brought revolution in the aspect of public diplomacy because the media has introduced a new dimension of practising diplomacy in the twenty-first century. The paper examines the impact of Twitter on the public diplomacy of Nigeria from 2020 to 2025 by comparing three primary Twitter accounts, namely, @NigeriaMFA, @NGRPresident and officialABAT. Qualitative analysis and digital ethnography are used in the study to analyse the social media posts, news stories, official press releases, and other documents in an attempt to establish the usefulness of Twitter in the diplomatic affairs of Nigeria. The paper explores the use of Twitter by non-state and state actors in shaping foreign policy, social movements and the discussion of issues concerning peace in the domestic and foreign contexts. Founding the results on the theories of network diplomacy and agenda-setting, it can be observed that Twitter has the prospects to enhance the image of Nigeria in the global arena, promote its values and interests, and address the international audience. The platform will enable real-time communication, provide Nigeria with more voice in the world discourse and direct access to different stakeholders. However, it is also in the paper that the proliferation of fake news, language, access issues, and lack of productive interaction also represent major challenges that can destroy the objectives of diplomacy. The results support the need for transparency, digital literacy, and strategic communication to ensure that Twitter becomes as useful as possible regarding the issue of public diplomacy. With such concerns, social media has the potential to expand the diplomatic sphere of Nigeria, build relationships with other countries, and create a path through the complexity of global communication in the digital age.

Keywords

Public Diplomacy, Digital Diplomacy, Nigeria, West Africa, Twitter

1. Introduction

Diplomacy has undergone significant changes due to the growth of social media and the global increase in internet users [28]. In contrast, information and communication technologies (ICTs) are widely used in every aspect of life in the twenty-first century [31]. Diplomacy is a crucial political

activity that enables states to achieve foreign policy objectives without resorting to force [4]. Over the years, governments from all over the world have employed diplomatic techniques. Many nations have utilised digital platforms, such as social media, blogs, and websites, to achieve their foreign policy

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objectives and present a positive image [1]. In Kenya, digital platforms are used to critique, educate, analyse and debate political issues.

Public diplomacy is described as the efforts undertaken by a government to directly reach out to foreign individuals to influence their sentiments and win strategic support. Using social media tools has substantially enhanced the public relations work of all kinds [27]. Public diplomacy has gained momentum with the advent of current technology, particularly through social networking sites, exemplified by Twitter's (X) ability to transmit information in real-time, facilitating direct communication with audiences worldwide [26]. In Nigeria, Twitter has become a significant tool for the government's narrative creation and dissemination, as well as its intervention during international crises [3].

The objectives of foreign diplomacy, as applied to the interests of the state, are to influence the foreign publics to create a favourable image that serves the national interests, like achieving economic allies, enhancing security alliances, encouraging cultural exports, encouraging foreign investment and encouraging a foreign policy point of view in the international forums [9, 17]. These goals are echoed in the attempts to make Nigeria one of the regional leaders among the West African countries, the war on terrorism by engaging in multilateral cooperation, fostering African unity, and fighting against negative stereotypes regarding the country and its governance issues [20, 23]. It has also been established that transparency, digital literacy, and strategic communication are essential to maximise the utility of platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) in the public diplomacy arena, allowing interaction with the global audience, remittances, promotion of national interests, and countering the adversarial narrative of competitors or critics [15, 6]. All these are reasons to consider how social media has helped to strengthen Nigeria in its diplomatic strategies, build international relations, and handle the intricacies of the digital realm of international communication [2, 19].

According to [4], the Ministry of Foreign Affairs emerged in Europe after the establishment of resident diplomatic missions around the 16th century. France is often credited with creating the first foreign ministry in 1589, but other candidates exist. By the 18th century, a recognisable MFA became common in Europe, with Britain establishing the Foreign Office in 1782. The MFA's roles include staffing missions abroad, providing policy advice, coordinating, and managing foreign diplomats in the country. The development of foreign ministries is an indication of the transformation of geographical to functional departments in reaction to the world concerns [4]. The Eastern Department of the British Foreign Office was especially prestigious before World War I. An early instance of a functional department was the Slave Trade Department of the British Foreign Office, which was established in the early 19th century. In the US, the prominence of functional departments came in the 1950s and 1960s, although there were staffing differences. The functional de-

partments are concerned with the technical skills and the prevailing problems in the international world, whereas the geographical departments are vital in cultural background and structuring [4].

The Nigerian Foreign Ministry has increasingly utilised X (formerly Twitter) between 2020 and 2025 to express its policy positions, promote cultural exchange, and engage with foreign organisations. Through its official X (formerly Twitter) handle, the ministry disseminates information regarding Nigeria's foreign policy objectives, including fostering regional stability, combating terrorism, and promoting foreign direct investment. It also uses the occasion to showcase Nigeria's contributions to international forums, such as the United Nations and the African Union, highlighting its dedication to multilateralism and global collaboration. By regularly engaging with foreign audiences on X (formerly Twitter), the Foreign Ministry hopes to develop trust, foster understanding, and create a favourable image of Nigeria in the world arena.

However, relations between X (formerly Twitter) and Nigeria remain challenging, particularly during the 2021 X (formerly Twitter) suspension, which followed the platform's removal of a post by Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari. This highlights the complex relationship between online platforms and nation-states, sparking debates on what Nigerian authorities expect from X (formerly Twitter) as a digital tool for public relations and diplomacy, as well as the challenges of utilising it effectively. This paper attempts to analyse the issues of diplomatic communication conducted via X (formerly Twitter) by the President of Nigeria and his Minister of Foreign Affairs. It further strives to examine overall perceptions of whether X (formerly Twitter) can impact international opinion and mobilise global audiences, while expressing some of the barriers and critiques of Nigeria's attempts at public diplomacy through the X (formerly Twitter) social media platform. The study hypothesises that X (formerly Twitter) can be strategically used by Nigeria's Foreign Ministry and Presidency to improve public diplomacy by increasing real-time contact with foreign populations and amplifying the expression of Nigeria's foreign policy narratives, despite existing issues of misinformation, lack of interactivity, and platform limitations.

2. Methodology

This study focused on the digital diplomacy output of Nigeria's core diplomatic actors. It employs a mixed-methodology approach, specifically qualitative content analysis with an emphasis on digital ethnography, to investigate posts on the X feed of the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs @NigeriaMFA and the President's official X accounts @NGRPresident and @officialABAT. It runs from 2020 to 2025 and covers large-scale events such as the EndSARS protests (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic, Twitter's rebranding to X in 2023, and Nigeria's 2023 elections.

Manual data collection was conducted through archiving of posts by searching with the advanced search features of X and third-party applications such as TweetDeck to monitor in real-time. One thousand two hundred and fifty-seven posts were gathered and examined: about 750 posts were by @NigeriaMFA, 300 by @NGRPresident and 200 by officialABAT. Posts were chosen according to their relevance to the field of public diplomacy, which is considered any posting that mentions foreign policy, international affairs, crisis contingent responses, or diaspora affairs. Non-diplomatic or domestic material only (e.g., regular greetings that are not mentioned in an international context) was excluded.

NVivo was used as the qualitative content analysis to code themes like level of engagement (measured in likes, reposts and replies), framing of narratives (e.g., positive image-building vs. crisis response), and network interactions (e.g., mentions of international actors). The coding process was also iterative, and a second researcher checked the inter-coder reliability (Kappa coefficient: 0.85). To place these posts in context, digital ethnography included a process of observing online discussions about these posts, such as reply threads and reposts by diaspora users, non-governmental organisations, and foreign actors.

3. Literature Review

This section offers a concise overview of the conceptual, empirical and theoretical framework of the research on the application of digital tools to public diplomacy.

3.1. The Concept of Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy refers to a state's efforts to engage foreign publics through communication and cultural exchanges, aiming to create support for its strategic objectives [27]. The concept of public diplomacy may be interpreted as a form of the public aspect of traditional diplomacy, whereby governments may act as well as individual persons or organisations to shape foreign attitudes and standpoints to influence the decision-making of foreign governments. It has been termed as government-to-people diplomacy wherein states engage in communication initiatives that tend to influence the elite and general opinion of target nations, which eventually leads to their alignment of policies with the national interests of the sender state [30]. With regards to state interests, public diplomacy is an instrument of achieving the aims of foreign policy based on soft power to influence foreign audiences to advocate or tolerate the strategic interests of the government, including national security, economic well-being, and international partnerships [12].

It incorporates such elements as listening to foreign people, promoting policies, cultural diplomacy to export values, exchange programs to understand each other, and international broadcasting to create stories [12]. As an example, in the Cold War, the United States utilised public diplomacy to sell

democratic values and capitalism over Soviet ones through broadcasts such as Voice of America to demystify the whole matter and create an audience to support American policies in Europe [24]. On the same note, public relations campaigns in Kuwait in 1990 served to win the American people to support the military action against Iraq due to its interest in the liberation and security of Iraq [24]. Therefore, the concept of public diplomacy is intrinsically linked with the interests of the state, and it constitutes the non-coercive tool that allows expanding the influence of a country, its fame, and capacity to attain goals without conflict [29].

X (formerly Twitter) as a Diplomatic Tool

The digital age has introduced new technologies, such as X formerly Twitter, which enable direct, real-time connections with worldwide audiences. Globally, many governments and leaders utilise X (formerly Twitter) for diplomatic purposes. For instance, U.S. President Donald Trump uses X (formerly Twitter) to announce policy moves and communicate directly with global audiences, often setting the tone for diplomatic relations and bypassing traditional media [11]. Similarly, other leaders (e.g., Mexico's President, India's Prime Minister, and the foreign ministries of the UK, France, and Arab states) also employ X (formerly Twitter) for public diplomacy. X (formerly Twitter)'s distinctive features, such as immediacy, accessibility, and public engagement, make it a powerful tool for diplomacy, commonly referred to as "Twiplomacy". Globally, examples include:

- 1) U.S.-Iran Engagement: In 2013, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry used X (formerly Twitter) to engage with Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, signalling a step toward successful nuclear negotiations.
- 2) Since 2019, Chinese diplomats have utilised X (formerly Twitter) to amplify China's perspective, despite local restrictions on the platform.
- 3) The U.K.'s Foreign and Commonwealth Office has harnessed X (formerly Twitter) for campaigns like the 2012 Olympics and the GREAT campaign, strengthening its worldwide image.

In Nigeria, X (formerly Twitter) has been utilised for policy announcements, disaster response, and diaspora outreach; however, its effectiveness is questioned due to challenges such as miscommunication and platform limitations [11].

Nigeria's Context

Nigeria's foreign policy has long been Africa-focused, emphasising regional integration (ECOWAS), African unity (African Union), and a leadership role in continental issues. Traditionally, Nigerian diplomacy relied on state-controlled media and official communiqués to broadcast its positions [13]. Since the 2010s, however, Nigeria has begun to embrace digital platforms. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Nigerian Diaspora Commission, and other agencies maintain social media accounts [7]. For example, [8] notes that the Nigerian President has an official X (formerly Twitter) handle and Facebook page and regularly tweets fellow heads of state

and foreign ministers.

Likewise, the Foreign Ministry "maintains an active presence on X (formerly Twitter), regularly sharing updates on diplomatic activities and engaging with followers [11]. Further empirical research on X (formerly Twitter)'s role in public diplomacy [16, 2, 10] underscores the platform's potential for fostering bilateral relations and international cooperation. Scholars claim that X (formerly Twitter) democratises information dissemination, allowing smaller nations like Nigeria to project their voices in global arenas effectively. Furthermore, the immediacy of communication through X (formerly Twitter) can facilitate prompt reactions to international situations, thereby enabling Nigeria to articulate its stance effectively. This tendency is particularly crucial in crises, where timely communication can help alleviate misconceptions or diplomatic tensions.

3.2. Theoretical Framework

Two key theories surround this study:

Network Diplomacy: The theory of network diplomacy [25, 10] recognises that diplomacy now operates within networks of multiple actors, not just state-to-state but also involving international organisations, NGOs, diaspora communities, and even private citizens. Digital platforms like X (formerly Twitter) are ideal for networked diplomacy because they allow real-time, decentralised interaction [18]. Rather than relying on hierarchical communication (e.g., embassy press statements), X (formerly Twitter) enables ministries to interact with journalists, foreign governments, diasporas, and civil society on an equal footing.

Application to Nigeria's context: Nigeria's diaspora is active on X (formerly Twitter) and often amplifies or challenges official government narratives. For example, during #EndSARS, Nigerian diaspora activists tweeted directly at foreign governments, UN officials, and international organisations, shaping Nigeria's global image independently of official statements. The Nigerian government was compelled into reactive diplomacy through social media, illustrating the networked nature of modern diplomacy. In a more structured example, during COVID-19 vaccine diplomacy, Nigeria's MFA used X (formerly Twitter) to coordinate with multilateral organisations (e.g., COVAX, WHO), tweeting thanks or announcements about international cooperation-thus participating in a global diplomatic network via digital means.

Agenda-setting Theory: First articulated by [17], agenda-setting theory posits that the media doesn't tell people what to think but what to think about. By highlighting specific issues, media outlets (or, in this case, official X (formerly Twitter) accounts) influence public and policy agendas. In the context of digital diplomacy, agenda-setting refers to how governments utilise X (formerly Twitter) to highlight specific diplomatic themes-such as security, trade, climate change, or regional stability-thus shaping international conversations. When a country's foreign ministry tweets repeatedly about

specific topics, it prioritises these issues in the minds of global audiences and stakeholders.

Application to Nigeria's context: Nigeria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs often tweets about its role in peacekeeping in the Sahel, regional integration (e.g., AfCFTA), and its anti-corruption agenda. These recurring themes reflect an effort to set the agenda and position Nigeria as a regional leader. During crises (e.g., coups in Mali or Niger), Nigerian officials use X (formerly Twitter) to amplify ECOWAS statements, thereby asserting Nigeria's diplomatic position and encouraging international alignment [21]. However, the effectiveness of this agenda-setting depends on consistency and credibility. When official tweets are rare, reactive, or disconnected from follow-up action, Nigeria's ability to shape international priorities is diminished.

Challenges facing Nigeria's X (formerly Twitter) diplomacy

Nigeria's X (formerly Twitter) diplomacy faces significant hurdles. First, interactivity is low. As noted, officials rarely engage in public debates or respond to online queries, thereby limiting the platform's democratic potential. In the study of [8], he remarks that Nigerian digital diplomacy is often reactive: "Only when its house was on fire" did the government engage on social media. Second, inconsistency and personalisation can dilute official messaging. The President's account may take a personal tone or domestic focus, while the MFA uses formal diplomatic language. If messaging is not closely coordinated, it can confuse audiences about official positions.

Thirdly, the digital divide and censorship pose issues. The digital divide is a worldwide issue [5], but its repercussions are especially severe in developing nations and Africa [30]. With X (formerly Twitter) banned from mid-2021 to early 2022, official messages were unable to reach their intended audiences on the platform. Even after the ban, some Nigerians are sceptical or divided about their reliance on social media. Additionally, resource constraints and a lack of training may mean that diplomatic staff do not fully utilise X (formerly Twitter)'s tools (analytics, targeted campaigns), resulting in suboptimal use compared to more digitally savvy foreign ministries [14].

Misinformation is another significant issue. Nigerian social media is rife with hate speech and fake news (Imam, 2024) [11]. X (formerly Twitter)'s character restriction makes it challenging for diplomats to convey complex foreign policy concerns in brief tweets, which can be misinterpreted or taken out of context by global audiences [22]. This issue is complicated in Nigeria's multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, where internal conflicts can spill over into online narratives, making diplomatic messaging more difficult.

4. Results

Findings show that @NigeriaMFA posted dozens of times monthly during active periods, indicating a commitment to a digital presence [12]. The President's account posted sporad-

ically but on high-impact moments (e.g., "In a rules-based international order, states have the right of self-defence." Retweet and like counts (when available) show that issues resonating with Nigerians abroad or involving major global concerns (e.g., a tweet on coastal erosion aid) drew more engagement.

Digital conversations around Nigeria's tweets were also tracked. For example, after MFA tweets about COVAX vaccine deliveries, diaspora X (formerly Twitter) users often replied with gratitude or requests. During ECOWAS crises, foreign NGO accounts replied to MFA tweets, turning them into policy debates. This observation highlights how X (for-

merly Twitter) has become a site where state messages enter a network of international discourse.

In summary, the analysis reveals that Nigeria's official X (formerly Twitter) use is purposeful but still evolving. Tweets align with government priorities (ECOWAS, economy, national pride) but often lack sustained dialogue. The digital ethnographic view shows Nigerian diplomats using X (formerly Twitter) to "shape global narratives" [12], yet struggling with external amplifiers (diaspora media, foreign commentators) who often reinterpret their messages independently.

Table 1. *X (FORMERLY TWITTER) Usage Patterns by Nigerian Official Accounts (2020-2025).*

Account	Frequency	Primary Topics	Engagement
@NigeriaMFA	Regular	Diplomacy, ECOWAS, Economic Promotion	Low
@NGRPresident	Sporadic	National Policy, Crisis Response	Very Low
@officialABAT	Moderate	Economic Reforms, Security, Elections	Moderate

5. Discussion

X (formerly Twitter) has become a vital tool for Nigerian public diplomacy, enabling the country to promote its culture, democratic principles, and leadership narratives [10]. However, unpredictable strategic messaging and limited interactivity restrict its potential. While Nigerian officials have used X (formerly Twitter) to some extent, the 2021 ban and overall lack of interaction demonstrate an authoritarian attitude that violates the collaborative ideal of digital diplomacy [17].

The President and MFA do have an impact on conversation, particularly amid world events, which partially supports the agenda-setting theory. However, the lack of media amplification and reactive blogging limits its influence. Similar to how X (formerly Twitter) facilitates network diplomacy through diaspora contacts and NGO involvement, Nigerians' use of the platform is still primarily focused on information produced by the elite. Lastly, the site serves as a forum for international discussion of Nigerian policies. Nigeria's foreign relations are shaped, contested, and critiqued by citizens, the diaspora, and foreign governments on X (formerly Twitter). This demonstrates how diplomacy in the digital era is both revolutionary and contentious.

Although there are some limitations, the object of the analysis supports the research hypothesis regarding whether the Foreign Ministry and Presidency of Nigeria's use of X (formerly Twitter) can improve real-time communication with the foreign population and reinforce the narratives of Nigerian foreign policy, thereby having a positive impact on

the field of public diplomacy. Interaction levels and ethnographic evidence show more story amplification during crises (e.g., COVAX and ECOWAS reaction), which facilitates the maximisation of real-time communication. However, the non-interactivity (e.g., responding to queries infrequently) and such problems as misinformation are hindering overall performance, which implies that, as much as X facilitates fostering diplomacy, the beneficial outcomes will not be fully realised unless the limitations of the problems mentioned above are minimised.

6. Conclusion

X (formerly Twitter) has emerged as a significant tool for public diplomacy in Nigeria, transforming the way the foreign ministry and the presidency connect with varied stakeholders. Integrating multimedia content, such as films and infographics, can boost engagement and make messages more accessible to a wide range of consumers. Furthermore, creating partnerships with civil society and foreign organisations on social media campaigns magnifies Nigeria's diplomatic narrative and boosts its position on global platforms.

The paper gives some explicit conclusions after the qualitative research and ethnography, which are illustrated as follows:

Partial Enhancement of Engagement: X (formerly Twitter) enables sending foreign policy stories off the wire based on high-impact posts during a crisis; however, the interactivity is poor and does not allow for more deeply engaging audiences, which only somewhat supports the hypothesis.

Allegiance to State Interests: Authoritative posts can foster

Nigeria's interests in regional stability and economic development, but due to the lack of unity in their messages, they are ineffective.

Potential Network and Agenda-Setting: X (formerly Twitter) can then be employed to network and interact with diasporas and NGOs, agenda-fix by global events, which, however, reactive use has the adverse effect of confining Nigeria to the creation of proactive discourses.

Challenges that will remain: The problem of misinformation, the digital divide, and platform suspensions were barriers to the functionality of X (formerly Twitter), and should be managed tactfully with training and organising.

As Nigeria continues to tap into X (formerly Twitter)'s potential, a commitment to transparency, digital literacy, and strategic communication will be critical to maximising the platform's utility in public diplomacy. While it provides opportunities for involvement and reputation management, it also presents challenges that must be managed carefully. Looking ahead, the use of X (formerly Twitter) in Nigerian public diplomacy is likely to grow. The government's approaches must evolve to reflect the changing dynamics of social media, audience preferences, and technological advancements. The path forward is positive, but it will require a concerted effort to foster meaningful discourse, trust, and increased global engagement. The hypothesis is thus partially supported. X (formerly Twitter) enhances diplomacy, but it must counteract these obstacles to achieve success.

Abbreviations

AfCFTA	Africa Continental Free Trade Area
COVAX	COVID-19 Vaccines
COVID	Coronavirus Disease
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
UN	United Nations
WHO	World Health Organisation

Author Contributions

Victor Akinleye is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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