

The influence of digital diplomacy on the conduct of Kenya's foreign policy

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ABSTRACT

The field of diplomacy has not been immune to the ongoing transformation in global communication brought about by digital technologies. Despite increasing use of digital diplomacy in Kenya's foreign policy today, it is still unclear how it has influenced the country's bilateral and multilateral diplomatic ties as well as the broad foreign policy pursuits. The study's main objective was to explore the influence of digital diplomacy on the conduct of Kenya's foreign policy. Specific objectives included the following: to assess the nature and type of digital diplomacy influencing Kenya's bilateral and multilateral foreign policy, to examine the effectiveness of digital diplomacy strategies in Kenya's foreign policy, and to evaluate the challenges and opportunities of digital diplomacy in Kenya's foreign policy. The study was guided by soft power theory and public diplomacy theory and adopted a descriptive research design to answer the research questions. The study's target population entailed 150 respondents comprising Kenya's Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials, such as diplomatic, embassy & consulate staff; Ministry of Foreign Affairs social media managers, public relations officers, and information technology [IT] personnel; and civil society organization representatives. Stratified purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample size of 109, calculated using the Yamane formula. A structured questionnaire and key informant interview guide were used for data collection. Data analysis was done using descriptive, inferential, and thematic content analysis methods. Analyzed quantitative data was presented using tables and figures, whereas processed qualitative data was presented using narratives and direct quotes. The study revealed that Kenya has progressively adopted various digital diplomacy channels, such as social media, government websites, and virtual engagements, which have greatly improved its bilateral and multilateral relations. It was also established that Kenya's digital diplomacy strategies have been instrumental in supporting its foreign policy objectives such as raising its national profile globally, creating partnerships, and advancing national interests abroad. The study concluded that digital diplomacy is an increasingly significant and influential aspect of Kenya's foreign policy, especially when it comes to raising awareness, fostering bilateral relationships, and increasing involvement in multilateral forums. However, due to operational and structural challenges, its full potential is still untapped. As such, the study recommended policy reforms, institutional capacity-building, and strengthening two-way communication strategies to encourage digital innovation.

Keywords: Digital Diplomacy, Digital Technology, Foreign Policy, Social Media, Strategies

I. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of digital technology in the twenty-first century has had a significant impact on international diplomacy, particularly how countries like Kenya handle their ties with one another (Petlach, 2023). Digital diplomacy is the strategic use of digital tools—like social media, websites, and virtual platforms—by governments and diplomats to manage international relations, promote national interests, and engage global audiences in real time. It helps countries communicate faster, build relationships, shape their image abroad, and respond swiftly to global events using technology (Oloo, 2023). Kenya has a long history of participating in both bilateral and multilateral diplomacy since it is a major actor on the African continent and a regional leader in East Africa (Oloo, 2023). The country has always prioritized regional peace and stability, economic growth, and the formation of solid multilateral alliances in its foreign policy. However, the emergence of digital communication technologies may have presented new dynamics in Kenya's diplomatic approach (Oloo, 2021).

Digital diplomacy is seen to have significantly revolutionized Kenya's diplomatic engagement processes. Oloo (2023) observes that Kenya can now communicate more efficiently and instantly with the international community as a result of digital diplomacy. Additionally, digital diplomacy offers Kenya a forum to convey its policies, project its image, and impact global dialogue. In order to interact with audiences both domestically and abroad, Kenyan government officials and diplomats are increasingly using social media sites like Facebook and Twitter. In addition to enhancing transparency, this has made it possible to engage in diplomacy more directly. Yet, despite digital diplomacy offering numerous advantages to Kenya, it also presents certain challenges for the country. This includes unequal access

to digital diplomacy information and efforts due to limited internet connectivity, and varying digital literacy levels which affects the effectiveness of online communication (Mboya, 2021).

Globally, digital diplomacy is now an essential part of foreign policy. Countries now understand how critical it is to use digital resources to further their diplomatic goals, interact with audiences around the world, and shape public opinion (Yifiru, 2024). Global powers such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and China have made significant investments in digital diplomacy, promoting their national interests and influencing global debate through the use of social media platforms, official websites, and online campaigns (Oloo, 2024). This global shift has led to a more integrated diplomatic environment where real-time communication, transparency, and public engagement are prioritized.

Like in many other regions across the globe, digital diplomacy is increasingly gaining popularity in Africa. According to Yifiru (2024), the increasing adoption of digital diplomacy manifest in the creation of a new mode of conducting international relations, with online communication becoming the most preferred foreign policy instrument across the world. In Ethiopia for example, the country is actively streamlining its diplomacy through integration of e-tools into its diplomatic practice and pursuit of foreign interests. This approach has also enabled Ethiopia to capitalize more on soft power while building its national and public diplomacy image and policy objectives.

Kenya faces both opportunities and challenges in its pursuit of digital diplomacy. On the one hand, Kenya's relatively advanced Information and Communication Technology [ICT] infrastructure and vibrant tech sector provide a solid foundation for digital diplomacy. On the other hand, issues such as cybersecurity threats, the spread of misinformation, and the need for capacity building among diplomats pose significant challenges (Ong'ong'a, 2022). Addressing these issues was crucial for Kenya to fully realize the potential of digital diplomacy in achieving its foreign policy objectives. While digital diplomacy offers numerous opportunities for enhancing diplomatic engagement, it also presents challenges that require careful management. Despite a promising future in foreign policy with the help of digital diplomacy, Kenya needs regular innovation and adaptability in order to be successful in the ever-evolving digital space (Oloo, 2024). Comprehending these dynamics is crucial in evaluating the whole effectiveness of Kenya's digital diplomacy strategies and pinpointing areas that require enhancement.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The field of diplomacy has not been immune to the ongoing transformation in global communication brought about by digital technologies. Digital diplomacy, which is defined by the use of social media, digital communication tools, and information and communication technology (ICT), has increasingly become part of how countries carry out foreign policy. For Kenya, as a prominent nation in East Africa and a voice for millions of people in Africa, digital diplomacy presents several opportunities as well as challenges (Oloo, 2024). While digital diplomacy is becoming increasingly important, there are scarce empirical studies on how specifically it affects Kenya's foreign policy. Kenya has made progress in using digital tools for diplomacy, but research on the efficacy and significance of these initiatives is still lacking (Ong'ong'a, 2023).

Furthermore, whereas digital diplomacy provides a forum for increased participation and transparency, it also presents challenges like misinformation, cybersecurity threats, and the possibility of digital marginalization (Oloo, 2023). Mboya (2021) noted that despite increasing use of digital diplomacy in Kenya's foreign policy today, it is still unclear how it has influenced the country's bilateral and multilateral diplomatic ties as well as the broad foreign policy pursuits. While these previous studies by Mboya (2021) and Oloo (2023) focused on digital diplomacy within the Kenyan context, they did not specifically critically assess the influence of digital diplomacy on Kenya's foreign policy. This included evaluating the nature and type of digital diplomacy influencing Kenya's bilateral and multilateral foreign policy, determining the effectiveness of the strategies employed, and challenges of digital diplomacy. Addressing this problem provided valuable insights into how Kenya can enhance its digital diplomacy efforts to better achieve its foreign policy goals in the digital age.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To assess the nature and type of digital diplomacy influencing Kenya's bilateral and multilateral foreign policy.
- ii. To evaluate the effectiveness of digital diplomacy strategies in Kenya's foreign policy.
- iii. To examine the challenges and opportunities of digital diplomacy in Kenya's foreign policy.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

The study was anchored on soft power theory and public diplomacy theory. Each of these theories is further discussed below, highlighting their founders, tenets, and application in exploring the influence of digital diplomacy on foreign policy.

2.1.1 Soft Power Theory

Soft Power Theory was introduced by Joseph Nye in the late 20th century, and explains how countries use persuasive rather than coercive approaches to influence others (Nye, 1990). According to this theory, a nation's ability to draw in and use influence over others instead of using force determines how powerful it is on the global stage. The soft power theory's tenets revolve around culture, political values, and foreign policies of a nation (Nye, 2004). It emphasizes the use of cultural appeal, political values, and foreign policies to shape the preferences of other nations and international audiences.

In its application on the role of social media in shaping Kenya's diplomatic relations, soft power theory would consider social media platforms as powerful tools through which to project Kenya's cultural and political values, and foreign policy initiatives to the global community (Jaiswal, 2018). Soft power theory can further be applied to project Kenya as having the ability to influence opinions and establish connections with other governments through the skillful use of social media. Through social media initiatives, Kenya may bolster its soft power by exhibiting its thriving arts sector and encouraging tourism as examples of its cultural diplomacy efforts (Nye, 2012). Additionally, Kenya can garner support and promote constructive diplomatic relations by emphasizing its dedication to democracy and regional stability using social media sites like Twitter.

On the impact of digital diplomacy on Kenya's bilateral and multilateral engagements, the theory can project Kenya as a country skillfully using its persuasive approach to engage with other foreign countries and international organizations for its benefits. From the perspectives of soft power theory, Kenya may use digital platforms to communicate its foreign policy objectives in an open and inclusive manner, including involvement in peacebuilding initiatives in the East African region (Baniya, 2021). Moreover, Kenya may increase its influence and forge closer ties with other countries by promoting international cooperation on digital platforms, taking part in international debates, and sharing success stories. By doing so, Kenya can use its soft power to further diplomatic objectives.

Regarding effectiveness of Kenya's digital diplomacy strategies, soft power theory can be applied in assessing the extent to which Kenya is using its digital tools to project its cultural and political values, and effectively pursue foreign policy. However, digital diplomacy presents both challenges and opportunities, which soft power theory can be applied in addressing. For instance, unequal access to digital services tools can undermine Kenya's efforts and ability to address the challenges of misinformation and cybersecurity threats (Nye, 2012). Despite these challenges, digital diplomacy still has great potentials (Baniya, 2021), providing Kenya with the opportunities to engage in real-time communication and reach a wider international audience. In this sense, Kenya can boost its soft power through showcasing of its cultural and political assets.

2.1.2 Public Diplomacy Theory

Public diplomacy theory, as coined in the mid-1960s by Edmund Gullion, was developed in part to distance overseas governmental information activities from the term propaganda, which had acquired judgmental connotations (Gullion, 1965). The phrase "public diplomacy" was first used in 1965 to refer to the direct communication that governments have with foreign citizens in an effort to shape their perspectives and promote mutual understanding (Berridge, 2010). In assessing the influence of digital diplomacy in shaping diplomatic relations, the public diplomacy theory would project social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram as modern tools for public diplomacy (Almardonov, 2020). This means that the platforms can enable Kenya to directly engage with foreign countries, disseminate information, and create narratives that sustain its foreign policy objectives. In helping to explore the impact of digital diplomacy on Kenya's bilateral and multilateral engagements, the theory would provide a framework for understanding how the digital engagements, through official government websites, online forums, and virtual meetings happen and influence Kenya's standing in the international arena.

To evaluate the effectiveness of Kenya's digital diplomacy strategies, this can be done through the lens of public diplomacy theory to understand the level of success in enhancing the country's foreign policy efforts. The theory further suggests that the success of digital diplomacy strategies depends on Kenya's ability to engage in meaningful mutual communication, build trust, and sustain long-term relationships with foreign countries (Chitty et al., 2017). Public Diplomacy Theory also sheds light on the challenges and opportunities of digital diplomacy. These issues might be related to cybersecurity, managing misinformation, and reaching diverse audiences with varying levels of digital access. Conversely, the opportunities may entail the ability to engage with global audiences in real time, amplify Kenya's voice in international affairs, and use digital platforms to respond quickly to global concerns (Brooks, 2019). In addressing the influence of digital diplomacy on foreign policy, the conceptual relationship between the two theories and foreign policy enhancement can be illustrated as follows.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Digital Diplomacy Influencing Bilateral and Multilateral Foreign Policy

The impact of digital diplomacy on bilateral and multilateral foreign policy engagements in several countries in the world cannot be overemphasized. For instance, social media has a critical role in sustaining and strengthening diplomatic ties with foreign nations. It is a common tool used by embassies and diplomatic missions to interact with locals in their host countries, highlight bilateral relationships, and provide updates on joint initiatives (Oloo, 2021). According to Oloo (2023), social media provides Kenya with an opportunity to emphasize its membership in regional organizations such as the East African Community and the African Union, thereby promoting better multilateral partnerships. Ong'ong'a (2023) further observed that social media is very critical in shaping international public opinion, eventually influencing diplomatic relations. According to Odiemo and Okoth (2020), international public opinion is greatly influenced by social media, and thus has the potential to affect diplomatic ties.

According to Chacha and Malleo (2023), social media is very critical in helping nations communicate their national identities, values, and culture to a worldwide audience, which is an important part of public diplomacy. A country can bolster its soft power by showcasing its innovativeness, tourism, cultural legacy, and leadership in regional and global concerns through the creation and sharing of strategic content. This has a favourable impact on diplomatic relations by influencing how other nations and the global public views the country in question. The study utilized qualitative and secondary data, with simple random sampling applied to select 5 diplomatic missions and international organizations in Tanzania to participate in the study.

In Kenya, Muaka (2021) did a study on the role of social media in facilitating diplomatic engagement in East Africa, camping between Kenya and Rwanda. The findings revealed that proper application of social media enables states to be visible in the international stage through enhanced interaction with other countries. It was also established that social media has significantly enhanced public awareness in Kenya and Rwanda in relation to engagement in diplomatic practices. These views were reiterated by Obati (2023), noting that Kenya has greatly embraced social media as a powerful tool for public engagement and digital diplomacy.

2.2.2 Effectiveness of Digital Diplomacy Strategies in Foreign Policy

Social media plays a multifaceted role in shaping diplomatic relations among different countries (Ong'ong'a, 2023). This can be done through direct communication, enhancing public diplomacy, managing crises, building relationships, influencing public opinion, and promoting transparency and accountability. For instance, Oloo (2024) contends that Kenya can boost its global status, deepen bilateral and multilateral connections, and have a greater impact on foreign policy if it uses social media for diplomatic purposes. Through the use of digital diplomacy, governments may interact with audiences both at home and abroad more successfully and economically. Mboya (2021) noted that Kenya may promptly distribute information, make its foreign policy perspectives clear, and communicate with stakeholders by utilizing digital newsletters, websites, and social media. However, maintaining diplomatic relations and furthering foreign policy objectives depend heavily on Kenya's capacity to shape public opinion around the world and respond to international concerns in real-time.

Hedling (2023) and Ittefaq (2019) noted that there were disparities among different countries in terms of how much they have embraced social media in foreign policy relations development. For instance, comparing Pakistan and India, Ittefaq (2019) found out that Pakistan is not as organized and institutionalized as India in digital diplomacy. However, military public relations and press offices of Pakistan were more active than other government departments. The studies further showed that a common disadvantage of digital diplomacy was the transgression of boundaries of domestic public debate through online disinformation and populist campaigns. According to the findings by Hedling (2023), conventional notions of "the good diplomat" championed by the traditional foreign practices are coming under pressure from the needs of digital diplomacy.

In a study in Kenya on the use social media in foreign policy development during the covid-19 period, Ong'ong'a (2022) noted that being able to act quickly and decisively is essential in diplomatic situations. Kenya is able to handle international crises through the use of digital diplomacy by delivering timely updates, dispelling false information, and making its positions known in the international community. Kenya's ability to effectively utilize digital channels to express its position, interact with other countries, and garner worldwide backing can be crucial in determining the course of events in diplomatic disputes or regional conflicts. This strategy works well because it may steer the narrative and lessen the negative effects of unfavourable circumstances on Kenya's foreign relations.

The views by Ong'ong'a (2022) were reiterated by Obati (2023) in a study on the influence of social media diplomacy on foreign policy decision-making in Kenya, where the findings indicated that the capacity to act decisively and quickly is essential in diplomatic emergencies. Kenya uses digital diplomacy to effectively manage foreign crises by disseminating accurate information, promptly updating its positions, and refuting false information. Kenya's use of digital platforms to express its position, interact with other countries, and garner worldwide support, for example, might be crucial in determining the result of a diplomatic disagreement or a regional crisis. Controlling the narrative and

lessening the negative effects of situations on Kenya's foreign relations are key components of the effectiveness of this strategy.

2.2.3 Challenges and Opportunities of Digital Diplomacy in Foreign Policy

Digital diplomacy presents both challenges and opportunities to key actors in the sector (Ong'ong'a, 2022). According to Bhukya et al. (2023), digital diplomacy reduces the need for extensive physical infrastructure and face-to-face meetings, making it a cost-effective approach to international relations. Both Ong'ong'a (2022) and Bhukya et al. (2023) noted that using digital tools can enable a country to engage in diplomatic activities that using digital tools can enable a country to engage in diplomatic activities with minimal expenditure, reaching a global audience without the need for costly diplomatic missions or large delegations. This cost-effectiveness allows for the allocation of resources to other critical areas of foreign policy while still maintaining an active and influential diplomatic presence. However, sustaining digital diplomacy may not be very easy.

Studies have further shown that large volumes of data are available on digital platforms, which can be used to inform and improve foreign policy choices (Palit, 2018; Roumate, 2021). Vevera (2021) further noted that information and communication technology (ICT) has significantly developed among European countries, creating a huge impact in their international relations. The results of the study also revealed that several European countries, including Romania, are embracing online communication to promote their national and foreign policy interests. Countries embracing digital diplomacy have a great opportunity to evaluate the success of their diplomatic initiatives and modify their plans of action by examining social media trends, public opinion, and online debates (Duberry, 2023). Yet, there are equally several hurdles.

Mkubwa et al. (2023) examined the advantages and disadvantages of using digital diplomacy in foreign policy in Tanzania. The study focused on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and East African Cooperation and its use of digital diplomacy in executing Tanzania's foreign policy. Qualitative data collection approach was used through interviews and documentary analysis, where they were interrogated using content analysis technique. The findings disclosed that there was political will for Tanzania to employ digital diplomacy in advancing its foreign policy since the ministry of foreign affairs was already actively using this approach. Nonetheless, the Tanzanian government was yet to formulate a specific policy on the use of digital diplomacy, particularly social media, to pursue its foreign policy objectives. Furthermore, the country's foreign affairs ministry did not have properly constituted infrastructure for handling digital diplomacy. The study recommended for the government to expedite a digital diplomacy policy for reinforcing implementation of foreign policy through social media infrastructure. Yet, coming up with a relevant policy required time and resources, as well as political mobilization. Moreover, Oloo (2024) noted that managing and countering misinformation and disinformation required proper communication strategies and constant vigilance of the information shared on social media.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The research employed a descriptive research approach to methodically investigate how Kenya's foreign policy is impacted by digital diplomacy. This design has been widely employed in quantitative and mixed-method studies in order to investigate phenomena objectively and without changing the variables (Aggarwal & Ranganathan, 2019). A mixed-method approach was used to gather both quantitative and qualitative data in order to determine the degree to which digital diplomacy has influenced Kenya's foreign policy.

3.2 Target Population

The target population for this study included diplomats and foreign affairs officials, such as Kenyan diplomats, officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and representatives from Kenyan embassies and consulates. Additionally, the study involved professionals involved in managing Kenya's digital diplomacy efforts, such as social media managers, public relations officers, and IT personnel within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For purposes of manageability of the study, the target population of the study comprised 150 officials from the different categories, as illustrated in table 1.

Table 1

Target Population

Categories	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Ministry of foreign affairs officials, e.g. diplomatic, embassy & consulate staff	55	37
Ministry of foreign affairs social media managers, public relations officers, and IT personnel	50	33
Civil society organizations representatives	45	30
Total	150	100



3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Given the diverse nature of the target population, stratified purposive sampling technique was employed in the study. Using this method, participants are purposefully chosen from each stratum after the population is divided into discrete subgroups (strata) according to study-relevant characteristics (Andrade, 2021). This approach guaranteed that the survey included representation from every significant group engaged in or impacted by digital diplomacy. To determine the sample size of the study, the Yamane (1967) formula was used in the calculation, as follows.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n stands for sample size, N population (sampling frame), and e level of precision or margin of error. In this case, N= 150, hence the sample size was:

$$n = \frac{150}{1+150(.05)^2} = 109. \text{ The sample size was therefore 109.}$$

Based on the target population of 150 as illustrated in table 1, the sample size is illustrated in table 2.

Table 2

Sample Size

Categories	Number (N)	Sample Size (n)
Ministry of foreign affairs officials, e.g. diplomatic, embassy & consulate staff	55	40
Social media managers, public relations officers, and IT personnel	50	36
Civil society organizations representatives	45	33
Total	150	109

3.4 Research Instruments and Data Collection Methods

A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from the identified respondents. The survey questionnaire comprised both closed-ended and Likert scale questions to capture the respondents' perceptions and attitudes, as well as statistical data on the influence of digital diplomacy on Kenya's foreign policy. The questionnaire was administered to the respondents through face-to-face interactions where they were approached in their places of convenience. Where necessary, blank questionnaires were dropped to or a Google questionnaire shared with some of the respondents for self-administering. KIIs were administered to selected respondents, recorded and interpreted along themes emerging from the study's specific objectives.

3.5 Data Analysis and Presentation

Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied for the quantitative data analysis in order to investigate the relationships between digital diplomacy and the improvement of foreign policy. Thematic analysis of qualitative interview data was employed to pinpoint recurrent themes and patterns, which was utilized to provide a detailed explanation of the ways in which digital diplomacy impacts Kenya's foreign relations.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Nature and Type of Digital Diplomacy Influencing Kenya's Bilateral and Multilateral Foreign Policy

The study's first objective was to assess the nature and type of digital diplomacy influencing Kenya's bilateral and multilateral foreign policy. Based on the 88 respondents that managed to participate in the study, this variable was measured using a 5-point Likert scale based on six statements, as illustrated in Table 3. The scale was 1=strongly disagree (SD), 2=disagree (D), 3=neutral (N), 4=agree (A), and 5=strongly agree (SA).

Table 3*Nature and Type of Digital Diplomacy Influencing Kenya's Bilateral and Multilateral Foreign Policy*

Statements	1-SD	2-D	3-N	4-A	5-SA	Total (%)
The Ministry of Foreign Affairs frequently uses digital platforms like Twitter and Facebook to communicate foreign policy messages.	3	6	14	44	33	100
Kenya's embassies and missions utilize official websites to engage with foreign publics and diplomats	5	10	22	40	24	100
The nature of digital diplomacy in Kenya encourages two-way communication with global stakeholders	8	16	26	32	18	100
Kenya's digital diplomatic efforts are more informational than interactive in practice.	7	13	20	34	26	100
Kenya consistently uses digital channels in both bilateral and multilateral diplomatic relations	6	8	18	39	30	100
The frequency of digital engagement reflects the priority Kenya gives to modern diplomatic tools.	3	9	16	42	30	100

Kenya's foreign policy engagements are shaped by the form and nature of digital diplomacy, as indicated by the distribution of responses across the six statements. The incorporation of social media into diplomatic routines was confirmed by the substantial majority (78%, 68) who agreed or strongly agreed that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regularly uses platforms like Facebook and Twitter to convey foreign policy messages. Similarly, 64% (56) of respondents, who acknowledged that embassies and missions actively use their official websites to interact with foreign publics, indicated that conventional digital presence is still a key component of Kenya's digital diplomacy.

It was further noted that only 50% (44) of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that two-way communication is important, whereas a significant portion (26%) (23) remained neutral and 24% (21) disagreed. This suggests that Kenya's digital diplomacy is still moving away from one-way messaging and toward more dialogic, participatory engagement. Furthermore, 60% (53) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with statement 4, which supports the idea that digital initiatives are still more informational than interactive. Furthermore, 69% (60) of respondents agreed that Kenya frequently uses digital channels for bilateral and multilateral relations, and 72% (63) agreed that the frequency of digital interactions shows Kenya's commitment to modern diplomatic tools.

Regarding the effectiveness of the types and forms of digital diplomacy currently used by Kenya in enhancing international relations, the majority of respondents believed that Kenya's existing digital diplomacy strategies, including social media, official websites, and virtual exchanges, had improved international relations to a moderate degree. These instruments have enhanced diplomatic communication's speed and reach, raised its profile in international fora, and made it possible for more regular public participation. Many respondents however pointed out that although digital efforts are effective at disseminating information, they frequently fall short in terms of interactive discourse and audience targeting. To quote a civil organization representative interviewed by the study:

“Kenya has significantly improved in the nature and type of digital diplomacy influencing its bilateral and multilateral foreign policy, especially in the wake of increasing use of social media in diplomatic communication. However, to be more effective, Kenya's digital diplomacy should adopt more data-driven, audience-responsive, and participatory approaches that foster meaningful two-way engagement with both foreign governments and international publics”. (Civil Organization Representative 3, October 29, 2025).

According to the current study, Kenya conducts both bilateral and international contacts using a variety of digital diplomacy techniques, namely social media platforms like Twitter, websites, and virtual meetings. However, rather than dialogic, participatory diplomacy, these techniques are primarily utilized for one-way, informational communication. The study, which is based on public diplomacy and soft power theories, demonstrates that although Kenya seeks to use digital tools to influence people and change attitudes, its existing methods lack the participation components necessary for successful public diplomacy. These results are consistent with those of Barman (2024), who contends that strategic broadcasting, not genuine digital engagement, continues to dominate global digital diplomacy. Barman highlights that in order for digital platforms to be useful diplomatic instruments, governments must use them to engage and influence audiences around the world through cultural messaging, narrative, and reciprocal dialogue, where all these are areas in which Kenya has potential for improvement.

The results of the current study demonstrate that Kenya is expanding its bilateral and multilateral influence through digital tools such as social media and embassy websites. In line with this argument, Calderaro and Marzouki (2022) contended that internet diplomacy is a transformative force in the formation of international political arenas. Similar to Calderaro and Marzouki's assertion that the digital sphere is a disputed domain necessitating not only access but also strategic digital sovereignty, the current study found that Kenya's digital diplomacy is still developing and

limited by structural constraints. The present study's conclusion that Kenya's digital diplomacy would benefit from a more organized and policy-driven strategy, in line with the soft power principle of influence through attraction and values rather than force, is supported by their emphasis on the geopolitics of cyberspace.

In line with this study's finding that Kenya actively employs Twitter in its digital diplomacy, Ong'ong'a (2023) demonstrated how diplomatic actors in Kenya strategically use X (formerly Twitter) to engage publics, share foreign policy positions, and communicate directly with stakeholders both domestically and internationally. Its soft power potential is limited, though, as both researches concur that the involvement is frequently more symbolic than interactive. This highlights the significance of the public diplomacy approach, which holds that meaningful foreign policy participation depends on building rapport and having conversations with people abroad in addition to disseminating information. Thus, Ong'ong'a's demand for more intentional, interactive, and culturally sensitive digital communication strategies is supported by the current study.

The present study found out that encouraging critical thinking and trust among online audiences, particularly the younger generation, remains a challenge for Kenya's digital diplomacy. Oloo (2021) supports this argument by pointing out how false information and "fake news" reduce the usefulness of digital platforms in Kenya, especially for young people. Both studies agree that for digital diplomacy to be successful, media literacy and careful information selection are required. This reveals a serious weakness in Kenya's existing approach, where failing to address digital misinformation could damage its diplomatic credibility and impact, according to public diplomacy theory, which places an emphasis on establishing trust.

4.2 Effectiveness of Digital Diplomacy Strategies in Kenya's Foreign Policy

The second objective of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of digital diplomacy strategies in Kenya's foreign policy. This variable was evaluated using a 5-points Likert scale based on six statements, where table 4 provides a summary of the findings.

Table 4

Effectiveness of Digital Diplomacy Strategies in Kenya's Foreign Policy

Statements	1-SD	2-D	3-N	4-A	5-SA	Total (%)
Kenya has achieved notable foreign policy outcomes through digital diplomacy efforts.	2	7	19	43	28	100
Digital diplomacy strategies have enabled Kenya to attract international partners and investment.	3	8	20	39	30	100
The public actively engages with digital diplomatic messages shared by the government.	6	13	25	35	22	100
Kenya's digital diplomatic platforms receive high engagement (likes, shares, comments) from foreign audiences.	7	15	24	32	23	100
The use of digital diplomacy allows Kenya to respond to international issues in a timely manner.	1	7	20	41	31	100
Kenya's foreign policy messaging through digital platforms is quick and relevant during global events.	5	6	18	42	30	100

The responses' distribution points to a generally favourable opinion of how well digital diplomacy tactics work to further Kenya's foreign policy. Regarding statement one, 71% (63) (Agree + Strongly Agree) of respondents agreed that Kenya has used digital tools to accomplish noteworthy foreign policy achievements, indicating that digital channels have contributed to visible diplomatic victories. According to statement 2, 69% (60) of respondents believed that Kenya's use of digital diplomacy has helped the country draw in foreign investors and partners, demonstrating the growing strategic importance of economic diplomacy. Though a sizable percentage remained neutral or disagreed, responses to questions 3 and 4 reveal a more cautious attitude toward public and overseas audience participation, with just 57% (50) and 55% (48), respectively, agreeing or strongly agreeing. This draws attention to a perceived weakness in Kenya's capacity to produce widely engaging interactive or viral digital content.

Regarding responsiveness, a crucial component of successful digital diplomacy, more than 70% of respondents agreed with statements 5 and 6 that Kenya's messaging is pertinent and current in light of global events, demonstrating that flexibility and real-time communication are viewed as advantages. Overall, the responses show that although Kenya's digital diplomacy tactics are valued for their timeliness and focus on results, more robust audience engagement tools and interactive platforms are still required to optimize impact and reach in the implementation of foreign policy.

Although Kenya is active on social media sites like Twitter and makes good use of government websites, a number of respondents pointed out that the techniques frequently fall short in terms of audience targeting, content creativity, and two-way participation. Respondents recommended that Kenya implement a more audience-centric, data-



driven, and interactive strategy in line with changing trends in digital diplomacy in order to increase success. One of the respondents, a Ministry official had the following to say:

“While it is true that Kenya has achieved a lot in terms of digital diplomacy in its international relations efforts, using the digital platforms sometimes has a disadvantage in the sense that it is not always possible to track the reaction of other parties in this process. For example, communication true such platforms as Twitter or websites may seem more of a one-way rather than a two-way communication. This is because it is difficult to tell if the intended recipient of the messages has actually seen or received the message, or how they reacted to it. In my view, digital diplomacy should be integrated with traditional international relations channel” (Ministry Official, October 29th, 2025).

Although Kenya has implemented digital diplomacy strategies, the current study found that these approaches are not consistently coordinated, evaluated, or integrated into larger foreign policy frameworks. Similarly, Vevera (2021) noted that capacity-building, institutional alignment, and clearly defined functions are necessary for effective digital diplomacy at the national level, as demonstrated in the EU context. Both findings emphasize that systemic preparedness and strategic planning are just as important to effectiveness as a digital presence. In contrast to the EU, the Kenyan setting still has challenges integrating digital diplomacy into state structures, despite being guided by soft power theory, which emphasizes influence through competence and trustworthiness. The study's suggestion for a framework of digital diplomacy in Kenya that is driven by governmental and institutional support is reinforced by the Vevera (2021) lesson.

According to the current study, Kenya's attempts at digital diplomacy are still mostly informative and have few avenues for public engagement and input, which lessens their strategic significance. Khan et al. (2021) provide a useful framework for evaluating the effectiveness of digital diplomacy on Twitter by utilizing engagement measures, such as retweets, replies, and hashtags. Their study supports the existing findings by highlighting the significance of responsiveness, discussion, and two-way communication as the cornerstones of successful digital diplomacy. The current study, which is based on public diplomacy theory, emphasizes how audience engagement drives influence, reputation, and trust more so than content volume. According to both studies, in order to enhance its effectiveness in digital diplomacy, Kenya needs to move away from passive broadcasting and toward active, data-driven engagement.

Although Kenya has made meaningful strides in using digital platforms for diplomacy, this study found that it still lacks the targeted message and strategic coordination seen in more developed digital diplomatic powers. In his comparative study of the ways in which the US, UK, and China carry out digital diplomacy in Kenya, Oloo (2024) discovered that these nations use highly coordinated, well-resourced tactics that emphasize audience-specific content, cross-platform integration, and soft power projection. The disparity supports the current study's finding that Kenya's digital diplomacy strategies lack strategic coherence, messaging depth, and resource mobilization. The notion that digital diplomacy must transcend exposure in order to impact hearts and minds through persistent, culturally relevant, and strategic involvement is supported by both studies and is based on ideas of soft power and public diplomacy theoretical frameworks.

4.3 Challenges and Opportunities of Digital Diplomacy in Kenya’s Foreign Policy

The study’s third objective was to examine the challenges and opportunities of digital diplomacy in Kenya’s foreign policy. A 5-points Likert scale was used to evaluate this variable based on six statements, where table 5 summarized the findings.

Table 5
Challenges and Opportunities of Digital Diplomacy in Kenya’s Foreign Policy

Statements	1-SD	2-D	3-N	4-A	5-SA	Total (%)
Kenya’s digital diplomacy is limited by a lack of adequate technological infrastructure.	6	13	17	40	25	100
There is a lack of training among Kenyan diplomatic staff on the effective use of digital tools.	3	10	20	39	27	100
Existing institutional and legal policies hinder the expansion of digital diplomacy in Kenya.	7	11	22	36	24	100
Bureaucratic processes make it difficult to innovate Kenya’s digital foreign engagement.	8	14	23	33	23	100
Kenya has the potential to expand digital diplomacy through innovation and global partnerships.	0	5	14	47	35	100
Kenya’s digital diplomacy has successfully engaged the diaspora and youth abroad.	2	9	19	43	26	100

The responses show that although Kenya faces notable challenges to overcome, there are also a lot of opportunities in the field of digital diplomacy. For instance, 65% (57) (Agree + Strongly Agree) of respondents agreed with statement 1 that insufficient technological infrastructure is a major barrier to Kenya's efforts at digital diplomacy, making it difficult to improve reach and dependability. Similarly, 60% (53) agreed that institutional and regulatory impediments provide roadblocks, indicating systemic challenges in fully embracing digital diplomacy, and 66% (58) agreed that a lack of staff training in digital tools limits effective implementation.

Regarding bureaucratic limitations (statement 4), 56% (49) of participants concurred that internal barriers impede innovation in digital diplomacy, indicating the necessity for more responsive and flexible procedures. But when it comes to opportunities, the outlook is positive: 82% (72) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Kenya has a lot of potential for digital innovation and international collaborations, and 69% (61) confirmed the nation's success in reaching audiences in the diaspora and among young people, highlighting new areas of strength.

According to the current study, Kenya faces notable obstacles in the field of digital diplomacy, such as bureaucratic rigidity, a lack of ICT infrastructure, and inadequate training for diplomatic staff. The study did, however, also point out encouraging prospects in digital innovation, youth participation, and nation branding. Petlach (2023), who highlights that the digitization of public diplomacy is a powerful instrument for nation branding, especially in developing regions like Southeast Asia, significantly supports these findings. Kenya may increase its worldwide visibility and impact through deliberate digital branding, just as Southeast Asian nations have used digital platforms to mold their soft power and global image. Despite structural constraints, both studies, which are based on the theories of soft power and public diplomacy, support deliberate and planned attempts to influence perception and project values in the digital sphere.

In keeping with the current study's focus on the opportunities that digital diplomacy offers, such as strategic global partnerships and diaspora engagement, Petlach (2023) pointed out that interactive storytelling and engagement campaigns can be crucial in repositioning countries within global narratives. The current study's argument that Kenya has unrealized potential for leveraging digital diplomacy to attract foreign investment and attention strengthens Petlach's claim that a nation's soft power can be enhanced through smart digital branding. Nevertheless, the potential is left untapped in the absence of infrastructure to support such strategies and policy consistency. In practice, this mirrors the idea of soft power, which holds that a country's influence comes from its capacity to draw in, influence, and interact with audiences around the world through digital means rather than by external force.

According to the current study, Kenya stepped up its digital diplomacy during the COVID-19 epidemic, but most of this engagement was reactive and lacked a long-term strategic plan. This supports the claim by Mboya (2021) that, without a fundamental change in diplomatic thinking or policy frameworks, Kenya's digital diplomacy during the epidemic reflected the employment of an "old toolbox" with new tools. According to the findings of both research, digital diplomacy in Kenya has mostly been ad hoc, without institutional change and organized investment. This indicates that Kenya must move from utilizing digital resources as crisis communication channels to integrating them as essential components of its diplomatic identity and international engagement strategy, as seen through the prisms of soft power and public diplomacy theories.

4.4 Influence of Digital Diplomacy on the Conduct of Kenya's Foreign Policy

The overall objective of the study was to explore the influence of digital diplomacy on the conduct of Kenya's foreign policy. A 5-points Likert scale was used to explore this variable based on six statements, where the findings are summarized in table 6.

Table 6

Influence of Digital Diplomacy on the Conduct of Kenya's Foreign Policy

Statements	1-SD	2-D	3-N	4-A	5-SA	Total (%)
Digital diplomacy has significantly contributed to the achievement of Kenya's foreign policy goals.	2	5	19	47	27	100
Kenya's use of digital diplomacy has enhanced its relations with other countries	0	8	16	45	31	100
Digital diplomacy has positively influenced Kenya's global standing and reputation	3	5	24	40	28	100
Digital diplomacy has been effective in managing diplomatic crises and conflicts	7	10	20	35	27	100
Kenya's digital diplomacy efforts have strengthened its engagement in multilateral organizations.	3	6	23	40	28	100
Digital diplomacy has played a significant role in advancing Kenya's economic interests abroad.	6	7	18	39	31	100

According to the findings, respondents generally believe that digital diplomacy has a positive impact on Kenya's foreign policy, while opinions vary depending on the aspect. Strong support for the strategic value of digital tools in traditional diplomacy is demonstrated by the fact that 76% (67) of respondents acknowledged that digital diplomacy has improved bilateral relations (statement 2), and 74% (65) agreed or strongly agreed that it has helped achieve foreign policy goals (statement 1).

In the same vein, 68% (60) said that digital diplomacy had enhanced Kenya's reputation and standing internationally (statement 3), which is a crucial sign of the expansion of soft power. On Kenya's use of digital diplomacy in handling diplomatic crises, however, opinions were somewhat more divided (statement 4), with only 62% (55) agreeing and 17% (15) disagreeing. This suggests that although digital tools facilitate public communication during crises, their influence on conflict resolution is unclear or underutilized.

Kenya is rapidly using digital channels to increase its visibility in international forums, as seen by the favourable score of 68% (60) for engagement in multilateral organizations through digital platforms. Last but not least, a remarkable 70% (61) consensus on economic diplomacy (statement 6) indicates the expanding significance of digital diplomacy in luring investment and advancing trade objectives. To reinforce this argument, one of the diplomats involved in the study said the following:

“Digital diplomacy has generally played a very important role in foreign policy and international relations endeavours. Kenya today often uses its official social media pages to communicate important messages. Furthermore, Kenya has been able to keep up international contacts using digital diplomacy, particularly amid major world events like the COVID-19 epidemic. However, even though there has been improvement, more strategic collaboration, interactive participation, and steady investment in digital capability may have a bigger impact. Therefore, Kenya may need to work harder to realize its full potential in digital diplomacy” (Diplomat 2, October 27, 2025).

The current study claims that Kenya's capacity to convey policy stances, create narratives, and preserve bilateral and multilateral relationships has improved as a result of digital diplomacy. Barman (2024) backs this view up by emphasizing how digital platforms have a worldwide impact on statecraft that extends beyond official diplomatic channels. Both studies stress that digital diplomacy is an essential component of modern foreign policy conduct rather than only an ancillary tool. According to the current study, Kenya's experience shows how governments may use digital technology to increase their soft power, supporting Barman's argument for strategic digital engagement based on credibility and responsiveness in real time, two fundamental tenets of public diplomacy theory.

The results of the current study showed that Kenya's foreign policy has been impacted by its digital diplomacy, particularly through X (previously Twitter), which shapes online discourse and provides prompt responses to world events. The use of digital platforms by specific diplomatic players in Kenya for agenda-setting and narrative framing in addition to communication is supported by Ong'ong'a (2023). According to both studies, such instruments are now crucial in contemporary diplomacy, especially for nations with expanding regional clout like Kenya. Kenya's foreign policy activities are made more transparent and visible through the use of X, which exemplifies public diplomacy by facilitating direct engagement with diverse publics and soft power by enhancing national appeal and legitimacy.

4.5 Inferential Analysis of Digital Diplomacy on the Conduct of Kenya’s Foreign Policy

Prior to conducting inferential analysis, which is crucial for assisting in the derivation of significant conclusions and permitting the extrapolation of the results to larger, comparable populations, a number of diagnostic tests were conducted to ascertain whether the data was suitable for producing reliable outcomes after the analysis.

4.5.1 Normality Test

For a regression analysis to be done correctly, it is generally agreed that the residual or error term must be uniformly distributed. The validity of parametric regression depends on the residuals from a regression model being normally distributed, which was determined using the Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests, as illustrated in table 7.

Table 7

Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk Tests

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Unstandardized Residual	0.056	88	0.202	0.985	88	0.065
Standardized Residual	0.059	88	0.059	0.982	88	0.077

The Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests assume that the data is not regularly distributed if the p-value is less than 0.05. The standardized and unstandardized residual p-values for the Shapiro-Wilk test ($p=0.65$) and Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($p=0.202$) were both above the significance level (α) of 0.05, as indicated in Table 7. As a result, it was determined that the residual data had a normal distribution and could thus be used for inferential analysis.

4.5.2 Model Summary

As demonstrated in table 8, the coefficient correlation R and coefficient of determination (R^2) were calculated to establish the fit of the model in explaining the relationship between digital diplomacy and the conduct of Kenya's foreign policy.

Table 8

Coefficient of Correlation (R) and Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Model	R	R Square (R^2)	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.701 ^a	0.676	0.671	0.454

4.5.3 Foreign policy

Based on the statistics in table 8, there is a strong correlation between the predictor and dependent variables, with a coefficient of correlation $R = 0.701$. R^2 and adjusted R^2 for the model were 0.676 and 0.671, respectively, with these findings suggesting that the independent variables (x_1 - x_4) accounted for roughly 67.6% of the variation in the dependent variable (y), which is foreign policy in this case. These patterns also suggest that, in addition to digital diplomacy, which was the independent variable or predictor that explained or impacted 67.6% of Kenya's foreign policy, 32.4% of the explanation was probably due to other factors that were not included in this analysis.

4.6 Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for Regression Model

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the regression model was performed to ascertain the degree of significance of the association between predictor variables and the study's outcome (dependent variable). Table 9 provides a summary of the data.

Table 9

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (p-value)
Regression	1634.12	5	326.82	27.15	0.000
Residual Error	987.21	82	12.04		
Corrected Total	2621.33	87			

The findings in table 9 show that from the ANOVA summary, the F statistic ($1-\alpha$) (5, 82) at 95% confidence level was 12.04, which was less than the F calculated (27.15), and the p-value was less than the level of significance (α) ($p=0.000 < 0.05$). This therefore implied that the regression model was statistically significant in explaining the relationship between digital diplomacy and foreign policy. Furthermore, at least one of the independent variables (nature & type of digital diplomacy, effectiveness of digital diplomacy strategies, and challenges & opportunities) significantly contributed to the explanation of the variation in Kenyan foreign policy outcomes.

4.7 Multiple Linear Regression Analysis of the Variables

The multiple regression analysis was carried out to determine the degree of correlation between the predictors and the dependent variable.

Table 10

Regression Coefficients for Foreign Policy

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		β	Std. Error	Beta		
1	Constant	1.217	0.322	-	3.795	0.001
	Nature & type of digital diplomacy (X_1)	0.312	0.096	0.346	3.268	0.002
	Effectiveness of digital diplomacy strategies (X_2)	0.405	0.113	0.399	3.585	0.001
	Challenges & opportunities (X_3)	0.227	0.089	0.289	2.555	0.013

From the summary of the analysis of coefficients, the following model was established: $Y=1.217+0.312X_1+0.405X_2+0.227X_3$, where X_1 represents nature and type of digital diplomacy, X_2 effectiveness of digital diplomacy strategies, and X_3 challenges & opportunities. From this model, the constant was 1.217, suggesting foreign policy outcomes when all factors remained at zero. However, a unit increase in nature and type of digital diplomacy (X_1), effectiveness of digital diplomacy strategies (X_2), and challenges & opportunities (X_3), when all other factors remained at zero, would lead to an increase in foreign policy performance by 0.312 units (31.2%), 0.405 units (40.5%), and 0.227 units (22.7%), respectively.

The regression analysis further indicated that Kenya's foreign policy (the dependent variable) is positively and statistically significantly impacted by all the three independent variables: the nature and type of digital diplomacy (X_1), the effectiveness of digital diplomacy strategies (X_2), and the challenges and opportunities of digital diplomacy (X_3). All predictors have p-values of less than 0.05, confirming that their independent influence is significant in the model. The strongest positive influence is demonstrated by the effectiveness of digital diplomacy strategies ($\beta = 0.405$, $p = 0.002 < 0.05$), implying that Kenya experiences the greatest improvement in foreign policy outcomes as it refines the planning and implementation of its digital diplomacy efforts.

From the analysis, one important factor is also the nature and type of digital diplomacy ($\beta = 0.312$, $p = 0.001 < 0.05$), which may suggest that the use of appropriate and varied digital tools (such social media, virtual meetings, and official websites) greatly influences the development of international relations and foreign policy outcomes. Finally, even the challenges and opportunities ($\beta = 0.227$, $p = 0.013 < 0.05$) demonstrate a significant impact, suggesting that in spite of limitations, foreign policy can still be strengthened by taking advantage of opportunities such as innovation and diaspora participation. Overall, the model supports the conclusion that improving Kenya's international reputation and relationships requires a comprehensive, systematic, strategic, and adaptable digital diplomacy approach.

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

The study concluded that Kenya has embraced various digital diplomacy channels, such as social media, government websites, and virtual engagements, which have improved its bilateral and multilateral relations. However, their true and full diplomatic potential is limited because they are still mostly used for informational rather than interactive purposes. The impact may remain further limited unless Kenya transforms toward more targeted and interactive digital engagement strategies aligned to the evolving international diplomatic standards.

It was also concluded that Kenya's digital diplomacy strategies have supported foreign policy objectives like raising national profile, forming alliances, and advancing national interests with a modest level of success. However, their overall impact is constrained by irregular implementation, a lack of monitoring systems, and staffing shortage. Improving effectiveness will require strengthening institutional capability and coordinating digital initiatives with strategic diplomatic goals. Finally, the study concluded that despite notable barriers like poor infrastructure, insufficient training, and bureaucratic rigidity, Kenya has a lot of potential to grow digital diplomacy through innovation, diaspora engagement, and international partnerships. To turn these prospects into real foreign policy outcomes, it will be essential to address structural limitations and enhance investments in digital capabilities.

5.2 Recommendations

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should improve audience segmentation, cultural messaging, and two-way communication on all of its platforms in order to take a more focused and engaged approach to digital diplomacy. This can be achieved by creating a consolidated content strategy that is suited to both bilateral and multilateral diplomatic contexts, as well as by enhancing staff proficiency in digital engagement strategies.

In order to improve effectiveness of digital diplomacy strategies, the government should create performance indicators for digital platforms, regularly train diplomatic and communication personnel, and incorporate digital diplomacy into broader foreign policy planning. In order to guarantee timely, coordinated, and consistent messaging that supports Kenya's foreign policy goals, missions overseas should also be provided with the necessary resources and guidelines. The study recommended that Kenya should modernize ICT infrastructure, update regulatory frameworks, and remove bureaucratic bottlenecks that impede digital innovation in order to solve institutional and infrastructure impediments. At the same time, the government should take advantage of current opportunities, such as youth engagement, diaspora outreach, and international tech partnerships, in order to expand its digital diplomacy footprint.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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